

## WHAT LIES AHEAD? MICROSOFT UNVEILS FUTURE

In this month's column, Anglia Business Solutions' David Hurley outlines the key developments that arose from the Microsoft worldwide partner conference, and what implications they could have for the future of the industry

**MORE THAN 10,000** people flocked to Denver for the latest Microsoft worldwide partner conference. This annual event is a must for partners to attend to assess the latest market trends and new products from Microsoft. The following is a brief summary of some of the highlights.

Microsoft released more new products last year than in the past five, and the pace will continue to accelerate during the next year. We are now seeing the results of the software giant's \$7 billion (£3.4bn) annual investment in research and development. The company has just announced another sparkling set of results, and the over-arching message was that the IT industry will be busy rewiring the economy and transferring many paper-based applications on to electronic media. Microsoft's new products will play a key role in this.

They will include new releases of products across all aspects of their business sectors, from infrastructure to the home market. The key ones

include Windows Server 2008, SQL 2008, Visual Studio 2008 and the new release of Dynamics NAV Version 5.1. The first three are major releases of these products, which are due to launch on February 27, 2008.

However, they also announced a new low-end Dynamics NAV-based product called Entrepreneur, aimed specifically at the Sage market sector. They would have appeared to put considerable thought into this product, by making it extremely easy to deploy and use. It has also been priced very aggressively. The limitation is that it can only cope with up to five concurrent users and has limited supply chain capabilities.

Entrepreneur can easily be upgraded to the full Dynamics NAV solution as the company expands. It would therefore provide the ideal entry-level solution for smaller organisations wishing to automate their financial applications prior to upgrading to the full Dynamics NAV supply chain scenario. The Entrepreneur application is expected to be released in the UK within a

few months.

One of the emerging trends that was highlighted as a pointer to the future was what they called "Software + Services". Their first target is to take on Salesforce.com, the market leader that is already sold as a hosted service. This will be tackled by the Microsoft CRM Live solution.

The next big move in this area is going to be Office Live. This is where instead of purchasing Office as a product, it will be sold as a service. The hosting will be either through partners, service providers or Microsoft. This is a new business model that will become the new way to consume software in the future.

The prediction is that over the next five years, the business management systems market will go the same way. It is therefore perfectly feasible that customers will in the future operate software on a pay-as-you-go basis, rather than purchasing licences and infrastructure solutions. Once again, there is a long way to go before it becomes standard practice.

However, it is a taste of things to come and will inevitably happen as the trend becomes established with other applications.

Among the new products previewed were the new virtualisation facilities based on the Windows 2008 platform, a product called Silverlight that wowed the audiences, and some add-on solutions to the Dynamics range of products that will add huge value to the products. Some of these add-ons are quite extraordinary in their power and would beg the question of why any new company evaluating replacement systems would consider anything else. These will be due to appear on the market during the coming three to six months.

These were just a few of the highlights of a very informative conference. Anglia qualified for the Microsoft Dynamics President's Club at the event. The company was also short-listed for Global Microsoft Dynamics Partner of the Year at the event, but lost out on the night. Maybe next year... ○



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