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September 09, 2003



### ORACLEWORLD: Oracle grid strategy unveiled

By [Patricia Pickett](#)  
*IT World Canada*



SAN FRANCISCO — Oracle Corp. on Monday announced its database, application server and database management tool under the 10g name. Together, the products comprise integrated grid infrastructure software known as Oracle Grid Computing, the firm said.

During his opening keynote at the company's annual OracleWorld conference for database customers and partners, Chuck Phillips, executive vice-president of Oracle, told his audience about his company's new strategy designed to increase the efficiency of customers' IT investments.

"IT shops are inefficient because of how they're structured," Phillips explained, adding that often there is no way to balance the loads between different servers.

In other scenarios, "we use common sense" to deal with such problems, he said. For example, if a group of six people are planning to travel in two cars, "it's unlikely that you'll put five people in one car and one in the other, unless that person has something weird about them." Grid computing will enable IT systems to allocate resources automatically in much the same way, he said.

Phillips defined grid computing as the ability to pool resources — "the aggregation of resources in close proximity." Currently customers might be forced to configure their servers to be able to handle peak load capacity, which might only happen at certain times of the month — for example, during payroll time every two weeks. A company might have some servers operating at peak capacity only 10 per cent of the time, and sitting idle other times, while other servers might run at 90 per cent capacity all the time. Grid computing will

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allow companies to automatically balance the loads amongst their various servers, according to their own policies, Phillips said.

This translates into a utility model where "the client won't care where the grid or the computation occurs," as long as the service is there. For customers, grid computing also offers the benefits of being "fault tolerant" – where there is "no single point of failure" — and the ability to manage many components in a system in a unified way, he said.

John Snider, manager of data integrity at Victoria-based Abebooks.com, an online marketplace for used, rare, and out-of-print books, told ITWorldCanada.com that his company had already set up its own grid environment prior to Oracle's announcement.

The Oracle customer and attendee explained that his company has over 45 million books in its database — each one has a different SKU, ISBN and details such as publication date and who published the book. One per cent of those listings change every day, and the Web site gets more than one million hits per day and 50,000 book searches per hour during its peak hours, according to Snider.

"The crown jewel of what we do is all in our databases," he said. "If our Oracle databases are not available, we are out of business."

To keep things up and running, Snider said Abebooks.com replicates its databases. That enables the firm's peak operations to run on one database; the replicated databases are there as a back-up, and to keep the site running quickly.

"We love to wave our flag about this," he said, adding that the only drawback to Abebooks.com's approach to grid computing is that it is not automated.

Snider said 10g could allow his firm to scale horizontally, instead of "swapping out a server with another relatively big honking server." But he said Abebooks.com probably won't be one of the early adopters of 10g, and will most likely stick to its strategy of waiting six months to see how a new technology works before jumping on board.

"We live and die by our database; if we roll something in and something goes wrong, it would really hurt," he said. However, he added that when the time comes, he is confident that the migration to 10g will go smoothly.

Platform Computing Inc., a Toronto-based independent grid software supplier, makes the software that companies like Oracle and IBM Corp. use to take their grid offerings to market. At the conference, Ian Baird, chief business architect and vice-president of marketing and sales operations for Platform, told ITWorldCanada.com that Oracle is addressing one of the biggest barriers to grid model adoption: the lack of grid-enabled applications available to run on distributed environments.

"Oracle is saying 'the grid is real,' and in grid-enabling their applications, it is setting a benchmark by which others will be measured — it's saying there's a need to make other technologies grid-ready," he said, adding that IBM hasn't really focused on this space.

Now is the right time for Oracle to delve into grid computing, Phillips said. In order for grid computing to really take off, there needed to be an "unprecedented pressure to lower costs," which is what companies are experiencing at the moment — rather than speed to market, which was the main focus a few years back.

Inexpensive commodity blade servers, an inexpensive operating system — such as Linux — optimized for one to four CPUs, the fact that storage no longer has to be tied to a single server, and the prevalence of fast interconnect technologies have all set the stage for the grid model, Phillips said.

He added that grid computing is the culmination of the strategy Oracle has been working on for some time — turning software into a service.

Michael Dell, CEO and chairman of Rockwood City, Tex.-based Dell Inc., was also at the conference to deliver a keynote. He touched on the hardware side of grid computing, the trend toward "leveraging smaller, industry standard building blocks" rather than sticking to RISC-based proprietary machines, which he called "dinosaurs."

Since April, Dell and Oracle have been pushing Oracle9i Real Application Clusters running on Dell's two- and four-processor PowerEdge servers. "With the Dell solution, if one [server goes down] you're still running," Dell said, adding that the grid model combines performance and reliability. "When there's a problem, the system won't bother you about it - it will take care of itself."

Dell said 80 per cent of IT spending is typically spent on the foundational infrastructure, just to "[keep] the lights running," while only 20 per cent is spent on bringing new technologies in that could benefit the business. By integrating standardized technology into a company's foundational infrastructure, companies will now free up their resources for strategic infrastructure investments, he said.

Oracle also announced its Enterprise Manager to Go on Monday. [Please see [Oracle to announce remote management tool.](#)] The company is online at [www.oracle.com](http://www.oracle.com).



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