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GridApp Upgrade Boosts IT Automation Capabilities

By Jim Offner

"There are a lot of companies out there focusing on different aspects of data management, but GridApp is really the only one in the last six or 12 months that has realized there's a lot of work that can be automated at the day-to-day level. It's not very challenging work, and companies are always looking to figure out another way to do it," said Evelyn Hubbert, a senior analyst with Forrester.

With data security threats becoming more ubiquitous, the market for products that simplify the process of managing that information appears to be growing.

New York-based GridApp Systems is hoping to take a step in that direction with Clarity 4.5 database automation software that it is launching Monday.

The software -- it's compatible with a number of operating systems, including Linux, Windows, Solaris and HP-UX -- is an upgrade from the company's year-old 4.0 software and will be available at no extra cost to current clients, said Matt Zito, GridApp's chief scientist.

Customers have been asking for software that provides more automation features than before, Zito told TechNewsWorld. "Obviously, we're focused around the area of automation of what were manual day-to-day, very repeatable processes," said. "They know we've got the patching and provisions taken care of, but now they say they have all this other stuff about their database administration they want help with."

The automation of routine functions is not something to be feared, although some IT personnel do look on the technology with some trepidation, Evelyn Hubbert, senior analyst with Forrester, told TechNewsWorld.

Afraid of Automation

"The critical thing is that IT people sometimes are afraid of automation because they think this will take them out of their jobs," Hubbert said. "Actually, what it does is allow them to get away from the mundane tasks. It actually makes their jobs more interesting, because they can focus more on innovation."

Clarity 4.5 has taken extra steps in automating management procedures, Zito added. "A new framework allows database teams to automate any aspect of their day-to-day administration of their databases."

Changing passwords or tweaking systems in other ways sometimes required a lot of time, and the new software has targeted the time element, Jasmine Noel, founder and principal analyst with Ptak, Noel & Associates, told TechNewsWorld. "It's very flexible automation. For the first time, DBAs (database administrators) can change a password and distribute it to, say, the security team."

Empowering Customers

Larger companies with multiple databases often change security protocols regularly, and that's one area the new software will serve useful, Noel said. "Let's say a security team needs to change a password or code every 30 days or so. They make a request to the DBA and, in the old way, they'd have to do it individually."

That leaves plenty of room for error, she noted. "You ask, 'Did it all get done and consistently? Who knows? Did you do it? Yeah, sure, I did it.' Or, another DBA would go around manually after and check to see if the password was changed."

Clarity 4.5 automates that process, which is one of its chief assets, Noel commented. "It's done the same way every single time," she said. The procedure is automatically audited, with a report.

A number of large companies are GridApp clients, including General Electric, JPMorgan Chase, Epsilon, Carnegie Mellon University, EMI and TheStreet.com, and numerous others. The U.S. Veterans Administration also uses it in its Palo Alto, Calif., healthcare system.

"It's exciting, from our customers' perspective," Zito said. "Now, they're empowered to really take control of how they administer their databases in a secure automated fashion."

A Central Function

Automating routine tasks in a comprehensive fashion has become crucial, Noel added. "It's incredibly important. If you look at most of security breaches, why did they happen? Something wasn't patched properly. They might have had a policy but it wasn't followed. It's all over the map. So, if you have tools that automate those kind of tasks, you don't get that uncertainty."

Zito declined to disclose any sales figures to illustrate the company's growth, but he said the software upgrade enhances his company's position in an increasingly competitive data-management field. "I think the automation space in general is getting very competitive and you've got a lot of overlaps. You have storage companies selling storage automation. You have data security companies. I think where we really stand out is our laser focus on just the database tier.

"Why do people automate? For efficiency, for compliance reasons, for stability. In all those areas, the database is one of the most critical areas. In terms of sensitive corporate data, where do all these Social Security numbers and credit card numbers rest? On a database."

GridApp has found its niche in the management market, he said. "We're certainly not going to pretend we can do everything, but we can bring that critical tier of the database to the automated space. There are a ton of companies out there, and I think that's great, but I also think we're uniquely positioned."

Hubbert agreed. "There are a lot of companies out there focusing on different aspects of data management, but GridApp is really the only one in the last six or 12 months that has realized there's a lot of work that can be automated at the day-to-day level. It's not very challenging work, and companies are always looking to figure out another way to do it."