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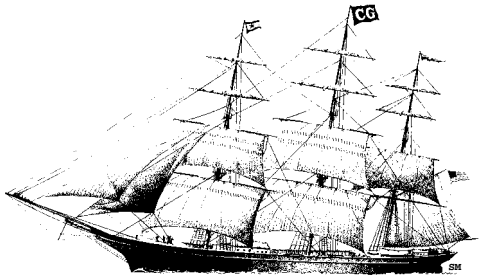
Captain's Log™



Navigating Information Technology Horizons℠

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Acsera 5 Dynamically Instruments Complex Environments

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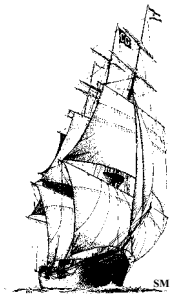
Management Summary

One of the problems with envisioning space travel by looking up into the night sky is that none of the pinpricks of lights seem meaningful. Even if you know them by name, and know which are near and which are inconceivably distant, it is hard to feel oriented. And a powerful telescope is not really helpful. It just shows an infinity of more. It is left to the seasoned astronomer to determine where and how to look to derive the data that can be analyzed into meaningful knowledge. And the knowledge inevitably includes other things to look for. It is a repetitive, and expensive process.

Enterprise architectures, particularly service-oriented architectures studded by J2EE-developed applications, modules, and the connective comet-tails of Web Services are as alluring as the night sky. They give the business process greater evolvability, and they appease the financial folks by letting resources be used more prudently. But when it comes to troubleshooting performance problems, these architectures are as unhelpful as the night sky.

We all understand the need for these flexible architectures. The IT community is building the consensus – and the open standards – to allow them to be deployed and operated, relying on failover scenarios if something goes wrong. But there is also a need for root cause analysis, and it is at this point that these architectures turn into starry skies, full of things that do not give the information you need to know. The aggregations instanced as red, yellow and green lights are not always meaningful. Composite applications can say green even though things aren't working, because they do not include all the dependencies, or do not show resource contention underneath the covers. Your live-code debugging brigade of low-level monitors and tools give a flood of metrics, almost as numerous as the stars in the sky. But, they do not have the scope of intelligence to link those metrics through the EJBs that spawned them on up to the dance of applications that support the business process in which there is the problem, in anything close to the real-time in which the problem needs to be solved.

Acsera Corporation has brought automation to bear on this problem. Its Acsera 5 applications analysis and introspection engine draws on many hardware and software information sources, including metadata and systems metrics, to discover the topography and relationships within applications, and to determine the relevant points of measurement and related points of control. The biggest application will have perhaps a hundred such touch points. The Acsera 5 product then monitors these points, creating a dashboard to translate the metrics into the business-process terms. This automated discovery takes minutes, not weeks. The engine remembers the characteristics of an application and will discover changes (like a new Web Service call for data) and adjust the metrics, links and dashboard accordingly. Its reference architecture is on the BEA WebLogic platform, but it will expand to cover Microsoft's .Net and IBM's WebSphere environments down the road. Pricing starts at $20K per processor.



The Acsera technology can be used in two product categories. It is a capacity planning tool for those who want to develop systems requirement for these amorphous composite J2EE applications. It is an application performance management tool for troubleshooters who don't need the stress testing. This is a customer-usable tool with no services attached. If you have consolidated your environment into fewer multi-tasking CPUs, and enmeshed your applications, or are facing the need to do so, this may be the tool you need right now. There's a demo on the Acsera's website www.acsera.com). Check it out.

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About the Author

Anne MacFarland **is Director of Enterprise Architectures and Infrastructure Solutions for The Clipper Group.** Ms. MacFarland specializes in strategic business solutions offered by enterprise systems, software, and storage vendors, in trends in enterprise systems and networks, and in explaining these trends and the underlying technologies in simple business terms. She joined The Clipper Group after a long career in library systems, business archives, consulting, research, and freelance writing. Ms. MacFarland earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Cornell University, where she was a College Scholar, and a Masters of Library Science from Southern Connecticut State University.

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