



## Symantec Research Labs — Keeping an Eye on Commercialization

Analyst: Michael Fisch

### Management Summary

At a recent technology showcase for industry analysts hosted by *Symantec Research Labs (SRL)*, Mark Bregman, Symantec CTO, and the Lab's team provided a glimpse into the workings of this 100-person organization. It included demonstrations of several next-generation technologies at different stages of development.

As one would expect, the role of SRL is technology innovation. It differs from Symantec's product development organization in that it takes a long-term view. Mainstream product development is concerned with near-term business. It executes product roadmaps and makes incremental advancements, such as developing the next version of *NetBackup*. On the other hand, SRL focuses on tomorrow's business by developing technologies that may become part of future products. In information technology, there is always a danger of perfecting the current technology while someone else develops *the next thing* that eventually displaces it. Think of client/server computing over mini-computers and mainframes or laser jet printing over dot matrix. **Therefore, SRL focuses most of its research on this proverbial next thing, to help ensure Symantec's long-term viability.** It is a riskier but necessary part of R&D, especially in a larger organization.

Symantec is careful to keep this research relevant to the business. Part of this is accomplished through vetting and project management, and part by exposing its researchers to the context of the business. It has been fashionable among some companies to operate research labs as cloistered monasteries, in a sense, and keep researchers separate and undisturbed by business operations. However, Symantec takes the opposite approach. It distributes researchers among R&D sites globally, so they can intermingle with product development engineers, customers, etc., and absorb the overall context of the business. In this way, they are more likely to develop ideas and technologies that line up with Symantec's vision and priorities. It is a sensible and commercial approach.

The technology demonstrations were intriguing, though specific details are confidential, unfortunately. In general, they covered database security and auditing, application availability and fault tolerance, distributed file systems, and virus simulation. The technologies were practical and largely productizable – meaning that they have potential to become real products, as opposed to esoteric science projects. In fact, one is currently in early beta tests at a few customer sites. I would characterize these technologies as *next-generation*, though not quantum leaps on the order of light bulbs versus candles. Their futures depend on how well the development and testing process fares, but certainly some will become new Symantec products and/or product features one day.

What does this mean for Symantec customers? IT infrastructure is a mid- to long-term investment, so enterprises want to feel their vendors of choice will remain viable, long-term partners. An established history and solid product roadmap adds to this credibility, and next-generation research, like that which SRL performs, is icing on the cake. **A software vendor with 14,000 employees ought to do some research, and Symantec seems smart and focused in its execution.**



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### **About the Author**

**Michael Fisch** is Director of Storage and Networking for The Clipper Group. He brings over ten years of experience in the computer industry working in sales, market analysis and positioning, and engineering. Mr. Fisch worked at EMC Corporation as a marketing program manager focused on service providers and as a competitive market analyst. Before that, he worked in international channel development, manufacturing, and technical support at Extended Systems, Inc. Mr. Fisch earned an MBA from Babson College and a Bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the University of Idaho.

- ***Reach Michael Fisch via e-mail at [mike.fisch@clipper.com](mailto:mike.fisch@clipper.com) or at 781-235-0085 Ext. 211. (Please dial "211" when you hear the automated attendant.)***

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