



GroundWork Open Source — A New Approach to IT Operations Management

Analyst: Anne MacFarland

Management Summary

Tools for the management of IT operations have been sold, for the most part, by the folks that built the hardware. In the early days of Data Processing, this was essential, for each piece of hardware was peculiar in many ways. However, this tight association has had consequences. More asset-specific features became the bulk of the product's evolution. The management interface had brand power. It was tempting to keep it brand-specific.

We are now at a point where IT environments consist of many more pieces to be managed. More importantly, due to pricing constraints of the market, all of these pieces have a lot more commonality, at least from a management point of view. In the hardware, commonality is found in things like chipsets and disk drives. Open standards have been making IT elements (of all sorts) more manageable in the aggregate. Linux has brought an opportunity for a common operating system across hardware platforms. Open Source software adds still more elements of commonality. Networking capacities and the containers of hardware partitions and virtual machines have made the idea of application portability, and evolution by a swap in/swap-out, feasible. The desire for system resilience and quick adaptation to business conditions has made these ideas attractive. Nevertheless, the clumsiness of hands-on management style has made these dreams, for many, a nightmare.

To date, the way to simplify management has been to limit your environment to elements from fewer vendors – a strategy that broadens the risk of a hardware- or software-specific problem. It also limits innovation by limiting the exploration of what is possible to the visions of a few companies. Moreover, even within the draconian constraints of simplification by subtraction, achieving the comprehensive vision to make change easy is, itself, difficult. Building to completeness, if you were not built to address the whole from the start, is an endless task. The “halfway there” approach, mathematically, never gets there, and the sum of the parts can be overwhelming.

GroundWork Open Source Inc., a company based in San Francisco, CA, takes a fresh approach. It has started with *Nagios*, an open-source monitoring tool, and has augmented Nagios' capabilities, integrating other complementary open-source management tools, to provide a low-cost, comprehensive monitoring solution. These elements can monitor anything – open source, proprietary, or custom. Over the next two years, GroundWork will build out more elements needed to manage an entire IT environment to support change, using open source. It will keep its components separately architected to reduce the bulk and avoid evolutionary overhead of the large framework approach. GroundWork's approach is focused at the same comprehensive scope and easy-of-use ideal that all management products and services are working towards, but it comes at it from a different angle. For more details, please read on.

GroundWork Foundation

GroundWork started with *GroundWork Foundation*, an aggregation of Open Source management elements that captures metrics of hardware and software elements, normalizes that data into XML schemas, and presents it via a portal¹.

The first module, *GroundWork Monitor*, was launched late last year. This version is based on Nagios Open Source software, and is limited in its functionality. With this product, the benefit GroundWork brings is the support and maintenance. GroundWork already has 135 paying customers, including familiar names like VMWare. It has distribution relationships with Novell and Unisys, two companies who do not tolerate fools gladly.

GroundWork Monitor Professional Edition, released in March, adds professional profiles (the roles that filter the metrics into easy usability), best practices, and plug-ins of other Open Source components to extend the functionality and fill in where Nagios is weak. These add-ins include *MRTG*, an Open Source component in HP Open View, and others. *Professional Edition* can incorporate information from third-party management applications

GroundWork's Roadmap

Over the next year and a half, GroundWork will add more modules, each developed as a separate, but collaborative, entity so that the code base does not grow too complex. The already-released Groundwork Monitor and Monitor Professional Edition will be joined later this year by *GroundWork Monitor Enterprise*, a module that will support distributed monitoring, centralized administration, and high availability (redundant active/active) environments. With this groundwork done, GroundWork will add several more elements, all based on ITIL, in 2007 and 2008.

- *GroundWork Service Level Manager* builds on the performance monitoring of the Professional Edition to support service level management. This includes managing to business goals using the metrics of performance and availability.
- *GroundWork Configuration Manager* will provide decision support for change scenarios, including modeling and discovery of the full range of dependency ramifications. It will integrate with third party Service Desk products.
- *GroundWork Service Desk*, the next module, will take all of the above and add new functionality, digitizing service desk functionality, to begin to articulate the next order of aggregate management. It will record, classify, assign, and close incidents. It will build documentation of request and incident lifecycles to let administrators easily characterize the vulnerabilities of an environment and analyze long-term trends.

Finally, and based on all the above, GroundWork will deliver its *Change Manager*, something that will go the final distance to make change rapid, rational and low-risk.

Conclusion

If you are having trouble getting beyond our manual operations management, and find no good way to get “thead” from “heah”, take a look at GroundWork. Its design assumption of comprehensive scope may be just what your organization needs to start forward, and the incremental nature of its build may match your desire for incremental adoption.



¹ The portal is supported by salesforce.com. Its AJAX architecture lightens the network load of monitoring, while its PHP presentation lets the metrics be tailored to the role of the viewer.

About The Clipper Group, Inc.

The Clipper Group, Inc., is an independent consulting firm specializing in acquisition decisions and strategic advice regarding complex, enterprise-class information technologies. Our team of industry professionals averages more than 25 years of real-world experience. A team of staff consultants augments our capabilities, with significant experience across a broad spectrum of applications and environments.

- ***The Clipper Group can be reached at 781-235-0085 and found on the web at www.clipper.com.***

About the Author

Anne MacFarland is Director of Data Strategies and Information 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.

- ***Reach Anne MacFarland via e-mail at Anne.MacFarland@clipper.com or at 781-235-0085 Ext. 128. (Please dial “128” when you hear the automated attendant.)***

Regarding Trademarks and Service Marks

The Clipper Group Navigator, The Clipper Group Explorer, The Clipper Group Observer, The Clipper Group Captain's Log, The Clipper Group Voyager, and “*clipper.com*” are trademarks of The Clipper Group, Inc., and the clipper ship drawings, “*Navigating Information Technology Horizons*”, and “*teraproductivity*” are service marks of The Clipper Group, Inc. The Clipper Group, Inc., reserves all rights regarding its trademarks and service marks. All other trademarks, etc., belong to their respective owners.

Disclosure

Officers and/or employees of The Clipper Group may own as individuals, directly or indirectly, shares in one or more companies discussed in this bulletin. Company policy prohibits any officer or employee from holding more than one percent of the outstanding shares of any company covered by The Clipper Group. The Clipper Group, Inc., has no such equity holdings.

Regarding the Information in this Issue

The Clipper Group believes the information included in this report to be accurate. Data has been received from a variety of sources, which we believe to be reliable, including manufacturers, distributors, or users of the products discussed herein. The Clipper Group, Inc., cannot be held responsible for any consequential damages resulting from the application of information or opinions contained in this report.