



TECHNOLOGY ANALYSIS

Domino vs. WebSphere

By Ron Herardian

One of the most hotly debated topics today in Lotus software circles is that of Domino versus WebSphere. Some argue that the products are essentially unrelated: they have different features, different development tools and developer communities, different customers, and different uses. Others argue that Domino represents the culmination of a technology category that began in the 1980's and whose time is now past. Does the debate make sense?

One thing that everyone agrees on, especially in the Lotus software Business Partner community, is that the success of IBM software customers is the most important thing. Another area where there is general agreement is on the idea that the scale of a solution is a key factor. Large-scale Web applications may be best implemented using WebSphere while smaller solutions may be perfect candidates for Domino. There isn't agreement, however, on what words like "large-scale" and "smaller" mean.

Is there any real overlap between Domino and WebSphere? In my opinion the answer is "Yes." Here are some of the parallels:

- **Application Server:** Domino was the first application server product, and WebSphere is an application server.
- **Web Development:** Although Domino offers a range of tools and APIs, Domino is a Java Web development environment and WebSphere is a Java Web development environment.
- **Middleware:** Domino is a middleware platform, (i.e., DECS and third-party products like NotesPump or Percussion's Notrix, at <http://www.percussion.com/products/notrix/features.htm>) and WebSphere incorporates a middleware platform.
- **Workflow:** Domino practically defines workflow, and the WebSphere platform incorporates a workflow engine.
- **Intranet portals:** Domino is an important intranet portal solution, but the WebSphere platform also includes a portal offering.
- **Content management:** Domino has third-party content management solutions like FatWire (at <http://www.fatwire.com>), and the WebSphere platform includes content management.

What about the differences? Fundamentally, Domino is an internal IT infrastructure solution. This means that Domino has several features that don't fit in with the solutions that WebSphere is designed to deliver:

- **Calendaring:** Domino includes group calendaring allowing business users within a company to coordinate their schedules.
- **Directory services:** The Domino Directory is a powerful and often overlooked corporate directory solution that can be used as a meta-directory, authentication system, or provisioning system in conjunction with other IT infrastructure products.
- **Email:** Domino is a world-class email solution with many unique and superior features compared with

other offerings.

- Notes: Although Web browsers have come a long way, the Lotus Notes client still offers advantages to developers and to users, especially power users who take advantage of easy-to-program Agents.
- Replication: Domino is totally unique in its ability to neatly distribute, circulate, and synchronize subsets of corporate data across applications and throughout the enterprise.

On the WebSphere side, there are many capabilities not found in Domino. At last count the WebSphere platform incorporates approximately ninety different products. One thing that sets these products apart is that they are all industrial-strength software designed for use in large-scale, massively scalable solutions.

Domino can best be leveraged as an IT infrastructure solution for internal email, directory services, calendaring, and distributed groupware applications. If we consider how extensively Domino customers use Domino for departmental and workgroup applications it's inconceivable that these numerous, rapidly developed, and low-cost applications can or should be provided by WebSphere. To understand where Domino stands relative to WebSphere we have to step back from intranets and internal IT infrastructure.

Some of the key areas in the future of the Web and e-business are application servers, middleware, Java, and Web Services. Sun and Microsoft are fighting for control of Web Services with Microsoft pushing .NET on one side and Sun pushing Sun ONE on the other.

The .NET platform aims to dominate enterprise Internet, extranet, and intranet infrastructures with Microsoft servers and tools. Aside from control of the Web and e-business, what's at stake is the future of Java. If Microsoft were to dominate Web Services without Java technology, the future of Java would certainly be in doubt. In fact there are only three significant threats to Microsoft outside of anti trust litigation, and they are (1) Java, (2) Linux, and (3) Open Source software in general.

Sun's Sun ONE platform is a Java-centric point-by-point competitor to .NET but as a company Sun doesn't have the software savvy or the market muscle to beat Microsoft directly--all that Sun can do is drive Java technology and support their strategy through alliances and industry initiatives. Like many other companies, Sun is currently focusing on their core business-selling server boxes-in a struggle to stabilize the company in the face of adverse economic conditions. As a result, IBM is the de facto champion in strategic technology competition with Microsoft, and Java is the key to breaking Microsoft's hold on developers: proprietary development tools and APIs tied to Windows.

In terms of application and database servers and Java, IBM has everything they need in WebSphere and DB2, but the Lotus software community can rest assured that IBM's suite of core IT server products comes in a yellow box with just one product name: Domino. At the same time Domino is certainly not the IBM platform for Web services, nor is it a Web and e-business platform equal to the task of competing with .NET and Sun ONE.

We can conclude that a simple "Domino versus WebSphere" debate does not make sense insofar as there really isn't any question about where Domino is not the appropriate solution compared with WebSphere. The two products have unique strengths and are therefore complementary, but this conclusion doesn't address the question of how Domino and WebSphere might be merged, (i.e., Domino could become another component of the WebSphere platform or be integrated, moving forward). It would make sense for IBM to present a coherent software strategy and a consistent e-business platform to the marketplace. But does this make sense for customers?

Next time, we'll talk about integrating Domino and WebSphere.

Product availability and resources

For more information on Percussion's Notrix, visit <http://www.percussion.com/products/notrix/features.htm>.

For more information on FatWire, visit <http://www.fatwire.com>.

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