ERIC LUNDQUIST: UP FRONT

Taking the measure of IT

NETWORKS SHOULD BE KEEPING AN EYE ON POWER SYSTEMS

THE OPENING OF THE **Microsoft Worldwide Partner Conference** in Boston on July 11 was delayed as attendees were caught in a traffic jam due to a Big Dig crisis. The crisis was tragic (resulting in one death), as some huge chunks of concrete crashed from the ceiling to the roadway in one of the access tunnels. Despite spending $14.5 billion on the project, there is apparently no warning system that can detect when abnormal stress in the tunnels reaches the breaking point.

Why is it that tech vendors continue to focus on the financial and digital systems of businesses while missing the opportunity to tie in the physical systems (including electrical, heating and cooling) on which companies depend? By happenstance, the fallen concrete and Partner Conference delay illustrated how not just Microsoft, but lots of vendors, are missing the next big thing in technology. Microsoft is so busy taking on **Google** in search, **Cisco Systems** in unified communications, **SAP** in integrated ERP (enterprise resource planning) and **Salesforce.com** in hosted CRM (customer relationship management) that the company finds itself looking in the mirror to gauge its progress. While Microsoft is busy characterizing itself as a people-ready business, the most important IT developments involve making businesses ready for people to make decisions.

I don't know why the 3-ton concrete tiles fell to the roadway, but I'm sure the tunnel inspectors will find those 40-by-20-foot slabs succumbed to pressures that had been building for years but were undetected. Both the public and the private infrastructure are largely uninstrumented and not part of any IT network. The strain gauge was invented about 60 years ago, but a simple way of tying those gauges into IT systems remains elusive.

I had started thinking about a column on the chasm separating technology systems and the basic business systems—including electrical, heating, cooling and plumbing—following a conversation with **Mike Frost**, CEO of Site Controls, in Austin, Texas. Frost's company is in the business of selling energy management and equipment automation systems for retail chains. I'll be writing more about this company, but to summarize—through a combination of open-source software, software hosting and simple heating, electricity and air-conditioning controls—the company allows a chain store or convenience store owner to measure and manage power consumption over a widely dispersed set of locations.

Is one store using more air conditioning than another in a similar location? Can you turn down the electricity used by the store as the sun comes up? Can you provide a report that shows how, by managing the power consumption, you can add financial points to the bottom line? Tying machine-to-machine communication into the overall IT network is much more beneficial to businesses than building a better search engine than your competition.

And getting those heating, cooling and electrical systems into the IT network is where much new business resides. According to researchers at **MIT**, less than 1 percent of all commercial and industrial companies use advanced technology to measure and manage energy spend. On the other hand, nearly 100 percent of companies use advanced technology to measure and manage telecommunications spend.

THE U.S. ANNUAL SPEND IN ELECTRICITY IS SAID TO BE ABOUT $270 BILLION.

Now consider that, according to the MIT researchers, the U.S. spend in electricity is about $270 billion per year while the U.S. spend in telecommunications is about $125 billion per year. Does your company know down to the fraction of a minute how your telecommunications bill is derived? Probably, and you can probably produce pages of reports showing spending by person, department and project. Would you save a whole lot more by knowing at an even more detailed level how the spending is taking place? I don't think so.

Can you also break out by building, department, project and individual worker how your electrical bill is derived? Or your heating bill? Or your air-conditioning bill? I doubt it, but that is where your next round of cost savings resides. I think the next mantra for the IT community is: Instrument, measure and manage the systems that underpin your own company.

Editorial Director Eric Lundquist can be reached at eric_lundquist@ziffdavis.com.

WEBLOG

ERIC'S PICKS FROM eWEEK BLOGS

go.eweek.com/weblog

@ ED CONE

Dell starts a blog

Much of the blogging world is unimpressed. Jeff Jarvis: "It's a blog in content management system name only." But Nick Carr is unimpressed by such responses: "For a company, a blog is a tool, not an ideology." **7/11/06**

@ DAN BRIODY

Google's trends

Google Trends allows ordinary people to see broad trends in the terms people are searching for. It only goes back three years, and there are no actual statistics to speak of, just line graphs that show the ups and downs of search volume, but the idea behind it is pretty powerful. And the company vows to add more detail as time goes on. **7/10/06**

@ STAN GIBSON

SCO smackdown

It does seem inexplicable that a litigant could initiate a proceeding and slog it out for three years without ever owning up to the responsibility of naming just what it's accusing the defendant of stealing. Chutzpah makes the world go round. Instinctively, one wants to cheer for David versus Goliath, and SCO is, if nothing else, much smaller than IBM. But sometimes David is exposed as an opportunistic poseur. **7/7/07**

Copyright of eWeek is the property of ZDNet and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.