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Gartner ITxpo 2008: The top 10 IT products

Summary: *Over 100 IT vendors did their dog-and-pony show for the 2008 ITxpo at the Gartner Symposium in Orlando. We scoured the show floor and came up with this list of top 10 most interesting products for IT leaders.*

By **Jason Hiner** for **Between the Lines** | October 20, 2008 -- 01:45 GMT (18:45 PDT)

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This article was co-authored by Bill Detwiler, TechRepublic's Head Technology Editor.

Over 100 IT vendors did their dog-and-pony show for the 2008 ITxpo at the Gartner Symposium in Orlando on October 13-16. TechRepublic scoured the show floor and came up with our list of top 10 most important products.

Gartner Symposium ITxpo is now one of the largest and most influential trade shows in the IT industry due to its focus on IT decision-makers, Gartner's popular thought leadership sessions such as its list of the top 10 technologies to watch over the next three years, and its keynotes from top technology executives such as Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer and Cisco CEO John Chambers.

On the show floor, Bill Detwiler and I looked at nearly every one of the vendors in order to find the solutions with the most potential to impact businesses and IT departments. We put a special emphasis on products that were new within the last couple months or are scheduled to be released within the next couple months. In a few cases, the most interesting products were not new, per se, but were new to us and not as well known across the industry.

1. Qualcomm Gobi

Qualcomm's global mobile Internet solution allows users to access multiple cellular carriers from a single device. The embedded Gobi WWAN chip (right) supports EV-DO, HSDPA/HSUPA, and GSM/GPRS/EDGE cellular networks. It also provides GPS functionality. Although HP was on hand showcasing one of their Gobi-enabled laptops, Gobi chips are also available in several manufactures, including Dell, Acer, Lenovo, Panasonic and others (see chart below).

Laptops using the Gobi chips will be a real boon for business travelers, especially those traveling internationally, and it makes it much easier for IT to deploy because there are no cards to manage and the same laptop SKU can be provisioned to all road warriors, no matter which 3G cellular carrier they use.

2.LANDesk Asset Lifecycle Manager

LANDesk has long provided a popular suite of network management tools. At the 2008 ITxpo, LANDesk unveiled the newest member of the suite: Asset Lifecycle Manager. This is a tool for tracking, maintaining, updating, and assigning hardware assets during their full life in the enterprise, from purchase to disposal. In addition to providing an important tracking mechanism for managing regulatory compliance, this tool can help IT get a handle on licensing, get the right information to the right people, and proactively identify failure trends for equipment and components.
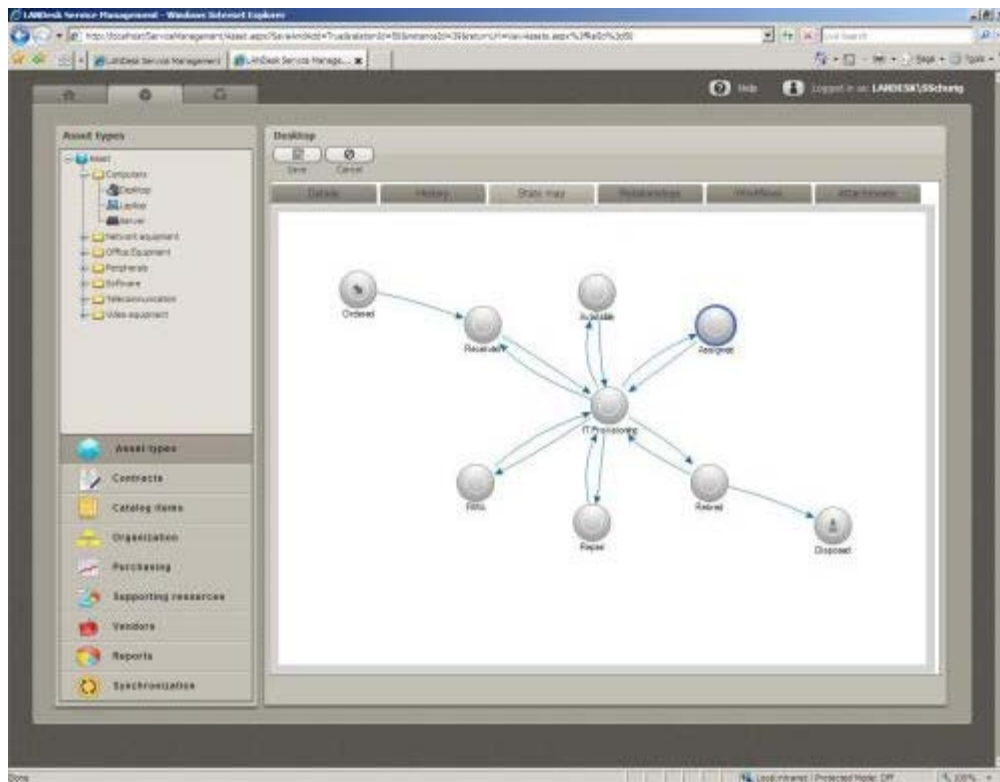
3. BlackBerry Bold

The Research in Motion booth was one of the most popular spots on the show floor as attendees crowded around to try out a prototype of the BlackBerry Storm, RIM's first touchscreen device is expected to be released by Verizon Wireless and Vodafone before the end of 2008. We were not very impressed by the Storm -- let's hope the final product is faster and more responsive -- but we were very impressed by another new BlackBerry that is supposed to be released by the end of the year: the Bold.

The Bold has a great color screen, a processor that's twice as fast as current models, Wi-Fi, GPS, and a quad-band 3G cellular radio. It also has a sleek new interface, although the underlying software is still just the classic BlackBerry operating system. That's ultimately a good thing. While the Storm does not feel like a good business phone, the Bold feels like a great business phone -- one that extends and expands on the BlackBerry Curve, the company's current flagship smartphone. Apparently, RIM and AT&T are still working out some bugs before releasing the Bold, but once they do we expect it to become the hardcore business user's BlackBerry of choice.

4. ASG MetaCMDB

At this stage of enterprise tech it's very easy to collect data but it's difficult to rapidly turn that data into useful charts and dashboards that can enable fast and confident decision-making. Too often, the average professional has a difficult time getting the kinds of reports and dashboards that they need to do their jobs at the highest level. For IT pros, ASG Software makes a solution called MetaCMDB, that's Configuration Management Database (a component of ITIL). MetaCMDB pulls in data from a ton of different systems, aggregates meta data from the most important data points, and then streamlines the creation of dashboards that IT and business professionals can use to quickly analyze data.

This product really stands out in the way that it quickly and efficiently combs through corporate systems and data from diverse sources and makes it easy for the average professional to assemble reports from that data to quickly drive IT alerts and decision-making.
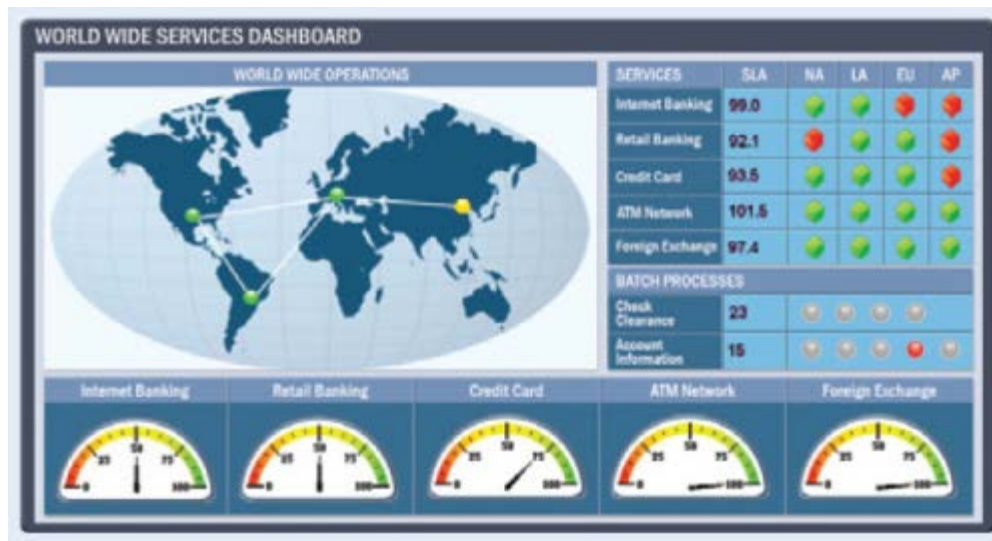
5. Motorola TEAM VoWLAN

Motorola has been a traditional powerhouse in wireless business communications, especially outdoors. The company also has long-established strength in the phone handset business. Now, Motorola is combining those two strengths and bringing them inside the enterprise with its VoWLAN solution. Over the past couple years Motorola has been making significant progress as a trusted WLAN provider. With the VoWLAN option Motorola wants to untether the desk phone and turn it into a powerful and highly portable office communications device that includes PBX telephony, push-to-talk, PIM (e-mail, calendar, and address book), text messaging, Internet access, and line of business applications. And for those who want to take this functionality outside the corporate campus, Motorola is ready to extend the same functionality to Windows Mobile phones such as the Moto Q.

6. Dell Latitude E-series laptops

Dell recently released its new line of business-class Latitude E-series laptops. The lightweight E4300 and E4200 are designed for road warriors concerned about weight. E5400 and E5500 are heavier, desktop replacements more suitable for carrying to

and from the office, but not necessarily through an airport.

The bread-and-butter of the E-series line is the E6400, which Dell claims can get up 19 hours of battery life. There's also the ruggedized E6400 ATG and the E6500. Overall, we liked what we saw in Dell's new E-series line. Being Dells, the machines are highly configurable and customizable, and the ones we tried felt quite sturdy. Perhaps, the ThinkPad line has a new competitor.

7. HP Performance-Optimized Data Center (POD)

Definitely the largest exhibit on the show floor, the Hewlett-Packard POD crams a complete data center into a standard 40-foot shipping container. According to HP, the POD is designed for companies who need to add capacity without building new brick-and-mortar structures or want additional capacity while they wait for new facilities to be built.
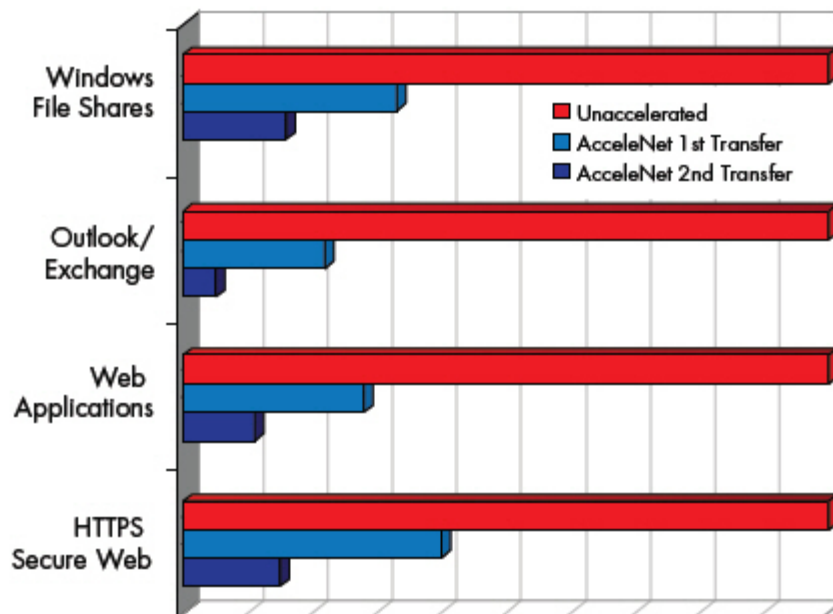
The POD comes configured with racks, power distribution, cooling, and fire detection systems. Customers can load the unit with HP or third-party servers. The POD offers 3,500 compute nodes, or 12,000 LFF hard drives. After a guided tour of the POD, I was impressed with HP's ability to cram so much computing power into such a small space. I was also impressed with the price. Without any IT equipment, the POD will set you back $1.2 million.

IT folks checking out the wiring behind the racks.

8. AcceleNet WAN acceleration

I've previously talked about WAN acceleration (which I sometimes refer to as WAN caching) and mentioned one of the industry leaders in the category, Riverbed. I still think Riverbed is an excellent solution -- especially for speeding up WAN transfers between the headquarters and the branch office. However, at ITxpo 2008 I discovered another WAN Acceleration vendor called AcceleNet that can also speed up WAN connections but does it with software rather than an appliance and has a solution that is aimed at small businesses and mobile workers. In some instances, AcceleNet can also speed up links that other WAN Acceleration products can't help, such as some satellite networks. The chart below shows some of the speed increases that users can expect to see.

Legend:
- Unaccelerated
- AcceleNet 1st Transfer
- AcceleNet 2nd Transfer

Categories: Windows File Shares, Outlook/Exchange, Web Applications, HTTPS Secure Web

9. Google G1 smartphone

After the BlackBerry Storm, the smartphone that drew the most attention from the crowd was the Google G1, which was being displayed by HTC, the company that built the G1 hardware. We were not impressed with the hardware. It is serviceable but certainly not anywhere near as stylish or slick as the iPhone or even the Storm. The software, on the other hand, was excellent. This smartphone is fast and fairly user-friendly.

But, like the Storm, we don't see the G1 as a business phone since it doesn't offer any type of Exchange sync in this case. The G1 only integrates with Google Apps. Of course, it was recently announced that Washington D.C. is going to save about $3.5 million per year in licensing by switching its workforce from Microsoft Office to Google Apps. So, Google Apps are starting to gain momentum in the market. The G1 will only help, and it should definitely be viewed as a viable solution for small businesses.

10. Panasonic Toughbook U1

The Toughbook U1 was definitely another attention getter on the show floor, particularly when the Panasonic reps were dropping it on the floor. The Thoughbook U1 is a ruggedized, ultra-mobile PC that runs Windows Vista Business (with XP downgrade option). The device has a 1.33GHz Intel Atom Z520 processor, a 5.6" LED touchscreen, a removable 16GB or 32GB solid-state drive, a backlit QWERTY keyboard, and built-in Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/draft-n support.

You can get the unit with several integrated options, including a fingerprint and barcode scanner, 2MP camera with dual LED light, GPS, and 3G mobile broadband connectivity. All these features packed into a rugged case don't come cheap. The unit's price starts around $2,200 and goes up depending on the options you add.

Topics: *Laptops*, *CXO*, *BlackBerry*, *Networking*, *Mobility*, *IT Priorities*, *Hewlett-Packard*, *Hardware*, *Google*, *Dell*, *Smartphones*