Fiorano's Tifosi

If JMS represents the pipes, Tifosi is the complete plumbing

BY ANDREW BINSTOCK

Vendors of Java Message Service (JMS) middleware, who once used to battle each other with great ferocity, have become a rather docile group of late, principally because JMS has become commoditized. As a result, the vendors compete on the basis of add-on functionality. For example, Sonic is pursuing Web services and EAI, while Spirit-Soft continues its focus on pure messaging technology, and Talarian was swallowed up by TIBCO.

This leaves Fiorano Software Inc., which has developed an interesting layer of enterprise messaging infrastructure called Tifosi. (About the names: Fiorano is where Ferraris are built, while Tifosi is the name given to die-hard Ferrari fans.)

Tifosi is billed as "a fully distributed, peer-to-peer platform with a layered architecture." This is approximately correct. Tifosi is a server-based routing layer that manages messaging efficiently. Typically, deployments consist of client groups that are handled by a Tifosi Peer Server. All traffic within the group—think of it as a network segment—is handled by the peer server. These servers, in turn, speak to each other (the peer part of the story).

This arrangement enables easy scalability without performance degradation. In addition, two client end points can share messages without going through a central enterprise routing mechanism.

The whole network is watched over by Tifosi Enterprise Servers, which track what is going on between peer servers and respond when one goes down or when notification of an offline client arrives. As such, they perform failover and load balancing. In addition, they handle security issues (who can log on, who can receive certain data, and so forth), as well as standard housekeeping chores like scheduling, logging, exception-handling and the like.

Both the peer and enterprise servers are written entirely in Java and have been tested on the usual extensive gamut of platforms. The messaging system runs on Fiorano's high-speed JMS implementation, although the company is quick to point out that any JMS implementation could be used for the underlying plumbing.

In many ways, Tifosi is a software messaging layer that mirrors the hardware hubs and switches of traditional networks. This design targets sites that want to use JMS but need a turnkey system to get enterprise-level services, security, reliability and performance. This is Tifosi's compelling story: If you think of JMS as the piping, Tifosi is the complete, installed plumbing system.

Fiorano (www.fiorano.com) markets the product for integration. To this end, it offers several interesting add-ons, including adapters for relational databases, flat files, enterprise applications and Web services. The company also supports other transports, such as messaging middleware like IBM's WebSphereMQ (formerly MQ Series) and TIBCO.

Tifosi also comfortably handles other kinds of interfaces not commonly thought of: FTP, POP3 and SMS. Special handlers can interact with XSLT and perform XML transformations. If you want to integrate stovepipes using a high-speed infrastructure without the bottleneck of hub-and-spoke EAI, Tifosi should be on your list of candidates.

I was particularly impressed with the bundled tools. Everything is laid out graphically. Drag and drop client nodes in real time to different servers. Need data transforms at a certain node? Do it graphically with tools that recognize, say, XML data streams, by pointing and clicking at the changes you need, then use the mouse to route the data. Developers also can interact with Tifosi through C/C++, Visual Basic, Perl and Java, of course. Tifosi also works seamlessly with C# and .NET.

The management console is all graphical and similar to the type seen in large management packages like Computer Associates' Unicenter. Alarms and thresholds are identified, performance metrics are maintained, and—a rare feat—messages can be tracked individually during the entire course of their life. This is critical for network management and especially for debugging applications that interact directly with Tifosi.

Tifosi is a compelling story for enterprises that want to standardize on JMS and need robust enterprise features plus comprehensive integration with existing applications and protocols. I was impressed by Tifosi, even after learning that it's priced at US$40,000 per enterprise server, $10,000 per peer server—and a whopping $10,000 per developer seat. ∎

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