HOW GREEN IS YOUR SOA?

The trend for environmentally sound IT is surprisingly relevant to SOA teams, reports Graham Oakes.

Graham Oakes: an opportunity for SOA to prove itself

Green IT is trendy. Five years ago, did you see power consumption in the data centre as the stuff of headlines? It is now. So IT companies are falling over themselves to show off their greenery.

Cisco, for example, recently announced that it is handing out carbon budgets to its managers (www.greenbang.com/1816/cisco-to-trial-carbon-rationing/). As well as juggling finances to hit their end-of-period targets, they will now have to eke out their carbon quotas. Opinion as to what good this will actually do is divided, but it's certainly in line with the current fashion.

So where does SOA fit into all this? I think this is an opportunity for SOA to prove itself. Not by playing around with virtualisation and server consolidation – that's important, but there are plenty of people attending to it now. Rather, look at the implications of carbon budgets higher up the application stack.

For example, look at the tools Cisco's managers will need. They'll want to see which aspects of their operations are consuming the most carbon. They'll want to understand the carbon-intensity of the services they sell. "How can we adjust our product mix to reduce our carbon footprint while maintaining margins?" they'll ask.

Substitute 'money' for 'carbon' in those questions, and our ERP systems can probably do it all already.

We have the basic services in place now. New instances need to be created, and tweaked to handle carbon instead of cash. They may need to be connected up in slightly different ways, reflecting the different routes by which carbon flows through our companies. But these are differences of detail, not the fundamental architecture.

How quickly could you re-configure your systems to accommodate a carbon economy that parallels the financial one? There's every chance you're going to be asked to do it someday.

Early movers like Cisco may be doing it for the glowing publicity as much as the warming globe, but some of them will find real advantage in the efficiencies their carbon-consciousness brings. And anyway, the regulators may well force it on us.

Scenarios like this could be the real test of an SOA. Maybe it won't be the carbon economy that hits you. A shift in people's tolerance for sharing private data, perhaps? Or emergence of a Web 2.0 application that actually does something useful? Have you thrown scenarios like this at your SOA? How would it cope?

One final thought: will we start getting memos saying 'Turn up all the heaters – we've got carbon left in the budget and if we don't use it, we'll lose it'? Unintended consequences indeed.

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