

# Infoblox Acquires Nectordia, Takes Aim at Network Infrastructure Automation

## Event

On May 4, 2010, Infoblox announced it had closed the acquisition of Nectordia, provider of the NetMRI family of advanced Network Change and Configuration Management (NCCM) solutions. Infoblox, a leader in the DNS/DHCP/IPAM (DDI) sector, will keep the Nectordia team intact and plans product integrations to advance the state of the art in DDI solutions through improved discovery, compliance, and automation. Infoblox will also introduce the NetMRI solution to their existing global customer and channel base.

## Context

Infoblox is a fast growing provider of solutions for some of the most basic and essential enabling services in the network – Directory Name Service (DNS), Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP), and IP address management (IPAM), collectively referred to as DDI. If DDI is working properly, the network works and applications and services flow smoothly. But if DNS is taking too long to return results, DHCP neglects to serve addresses, or IP addresses collide, everything comes grinding to a halt. Consequently, Infoblox has put great efforts into making their solutions highly robust, secure and reliable, removing risk from the operations equation. Along the way, they have aligned their solutions to be easily deployed as part of the network, via a virtual machine deployment model or on application blades in edge routers.

Nectordia is the largest independent provider of Network Change and Configuration Management (NCCM) solutions, under the NetMRI brand. Nectordia has also been growing fast over the past several years, as IT organizations large and small embrace the need for rigorous, consistent approaches to planning and managing changes made to the network infrastructure. Nectordia has put particular emphasis on expanding basic NCCM functions such as discovery, audit, and roll-backs, to include infrastructure automation, intelligent analytics for correlating change with network health/performance, and a broadly featured set of policy compliance monitoring and management capabilities. Nectordia has also been adapting to the new world of virtualization, adding features for managing virtualized environments as well as offering an option for deploying NetMRI itself as a fully configured virtual appliance for VMware environments.

These two worlds, DDI and NCCM, are typically parallel areas of concern and responsibility for the network engineering and operations team, and are converging around the need for broader network infrastructure automation to effectively deal with runaway rates of change. A primary catalyst behind the new dynamic reality is the onslaught of new IP-addressable endpoints and virtual network elements resulting from the fast-growing adoption and deployment of virtualized server technologies. Not only are single servers now turning into multiple servers, but those servers are added and dropped much more rapidly than ever before and can move from one host to another on a regular, even frequent basis. Another driver is the move to cloud services, where access to remote resources depends on precise network provisioning as well as highly reliable addressing.

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There is little if any hope for manual processes to keep pace with the rate of change introduced by server virtualization and cloud services – the only reasonable answer is automation. In this case, network managers could benefit greatly from tighter automation and control around IP address management as an essential aspect of maintaining a highly functional, highly performing network.

## Key Implications

Many immediate functional integration opportunities exist between the Infoblox product suite and NetMRI which the company intends to pursue:

- The NetMRI discovery functions can be leveraged to populate and update the IP address database
- DDI events can enjoy closed-loop response, such as blocking unauthorized/unmanaged IP addresses
- Change management controls within NetMRI can be applied to DDI
- Audit and policy compliance management features within NetMRI can be applied to DDI
- Network device configuration steps required as part of normal DDI administration, such as defining helper addresses on routers, can be added to automated NetMRI workflows
- IF-MAP support, a focal point for Infoblox, can be added to NetMRI

The combination of the companies will also bring additional benefits to NetMRI customers, in terms of additional development resources to accelerate product expansion/enhancements plus broader global distribution and support.

## EMA Perspective

This acquisition will catch many in the industry by surprise. Most of the NCCM sector consolidation has happened at the hands of large management platform/suite vendors, such as IBM, BMC, EMC and HP. But it would be a mistake to underestimate the potential of this combination merely on those grounds. There is a degree of common purpose and synergy here which far surpasses what in some cases has been little more than a land grab to cover and control network management budgets.

Much focus has been placed over the last few years on what is happening in the upper layers of the stack – layers 4 through 7 – where all of the applications and services live. And there are certainly some serious challenges to keeping up with changes and virtualized application technologies like Web2.0, SOA, and distributed computing. But the recent move to virtualization of servers has reanimated problems down in layers 2 and 3 of the network which were long ago solved – IP address and even MAC address conflicts – which can only be ignored at great peril. It's time to focus on these needs once again.

Infoblox will clearly benefit from the combination by adding valuable automation and change/config control capabilities to its well-established DDI portfolio. The NetMRI team gets to expand its solution breadth and global reach, as well as see their product roadmap substantially accelerated. In the end, the winners will be all of their existing customers, who will have new capabilities to look forward to, as well as the market in general, which stands to benefit from this important, industry-leading step towards assuring that networks remain reliable, robust, manageable and predictable.

### About EMA

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