

Zimory considering virtual independence for cloud database business

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After many years of fine-tuning, Zimory's Scale database-virtualization software is now fully generally available as a complement to its IaaS management software. The company is considering setting up the Scale database-virtualization software as a subsidiary to exploit increasing interest in enabling database elasticity.

The 451 Take

Zimory Scale has had something of a stop-start history. We anticipated interesting things from the technology back when it was announced as Spree, but everything went a bit quiet as the company refocused. While we still believe that the reliance on dedicated infrastructure for database deployments will continue for some time to come, we are seeing increased interest in database elasticity, and the technologies to enable that have matured in recent years. Zimory Scale promises to increase database scalability while reducing software and hardware costs. What it needs now are referenceable customers to demonstrate that promise.

We have been following cloud management software provider Zimory since it was spun off from Deutsche Telekom in 2008, and its database virtualization efforts since it began discussing them in mid-2009. When the company launched what was then known as Zimory Spree in October that year, we wondered whether it might be ahead of its time in attempting to abstract the data layer from the database infrastructure, given the reliance on dedicated infrastructure for database deployments.

While most of the relational database vendors had already made their products available on cloud-computing platforms (mainly Amazon) by that time, adoption of databases in the cloud has largely been limited to development and test and isolated projects since then. Zimory's database virtualization software – now known as Zimory Scale – has been available to some extent in the intervening period. But it was relaunched in October 2011, a year after Zimory settled on a strategy focused on three products: Zimory Manage for IaaS management, Zimory Connect for resource management and Zimory Scale.

Zimory Scale is designed to solve the problem of scaling the database layer alongside the presentation and application layer in cloud environments. It acts as a 'propagation layer' that sits below the master database and replicates the data to satellite databases on virtual machines across the cluster, enabling elastic scalability of the database as and when it is required. Along with hardware cost savings, Zimory also enables database license savings since the satellite databases can be MySQL or PostgreSQL (or Oracle) instances, replicating data from an Oracle master.

Zimory Scale also includes a query-routing proxy that routes queries away from the master database to satellites, reducing the load on the master database. Although this query routing only works for simple read traffic (writes or queries exploiting stored procedures are directed to the master), Zimory estimates that up to 80% of the database traffic can be moved to virtualized satellite databases. The company cites a number of use cases, including activating or creating new satellite databases in response to increasing demand; using satellites for dedicated reporting applications that feed of the operational database; and distributing content across multiple datacenters by partitioning the data across distributed satellites.

The Scale technology complements Zimory Manage and Zimory Connect, but Zimory is aware that database elasticity is something of a niche problem at this stage, and has set up a separate division within the overall company to focus on Zimory Scale. The division has 10 employees and works closely with Zimory partner SkySQL, which signed up in May last year to resell and support the Zimory Scale software. Once the Scale software is deployed in a number of large accounts, Zimory said it will consider spinning it off as a subsidiary to raise its own funding and invest in expanding its support to other databases.

Zimory itself is currently on the lookout for new funding. The company initially ran on seed funds from Deutsche Telekom, plus some US angel money, but raised a €4m (\$5.1m) series A funding round in 2010 led by Creathor Venture, High-Tech Gruenderfonds and VC Fonds Technologie Berlin (the vehicle of the IBB Berlin bank), T-Venture and KfW Bankengruppe (the bank of the German government), as well as Deutsche Telekom. It is now in the process of raising another round to aid its expansion beyond Germany into Europe and the US.

The company tells us it generated revenue of €3.2m in 2011, below the €4.7m it told us it was heading for, although roughly 10x what it generated in 2010. Although Deutsche Telekom is one of 10 Zimory customers, it is responsible for about 60% of that revenue, thanks to a five-year IaaS services agreement announced in January 2011 with Deutsche Telekom subsidiary T-Systems. Zimory is aiming to triple revenue in 2012, and based on a healthy pipeline of potential deals believes that Deutsche Telekom will represent one-third of total revenue by this time next year. The company is also looking to expand its headcount, from 40 today to 60 by the end of the year.

Competition

Zimory claims there is nothing else on the market quite like Zimory Scale. It may well be right. The closest thing we have come across is Delphix, which virtualizes copies of the production database, although that is targeted mainly at reducing the storage requirements for testing, development, production, reporting, training and other uses, rather than cloud scalability. Other early database virtualization attempts struggled to gain traction and were acquired (for example xkoto which was acquired by Teradata) – although, as was the case with early incarnations of Zimory Scale, they were perhaps somewhat ahead of their time.

We would expect Zimory Scale to be compared against database clustering and replication technologies from the likes of Continuent, Schooner Information Technology, GenieDB, Codership and Percona. The cloud management competitors for Zimory are many and numerous, but the company cites the likes of Eucalyptus and Nimbus as its closest competitors in enabling the management of heterogeneous clouds. Zimory's biggest differentiator, it adds, is the carrier-grade capability that was designed into its products from day one, thanks to its relationship with Deutsche Telekom and T-Systems.