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CA to add smarts to net management

Neural network agents to detect network patterns, predict failures and issue alerts.

By JEFF CARUSO
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NEW ORLEANS - Using its systems management background, Computer Associates in the coming months will try to beef up its network management software with neural network technology and a variety of new control functions.

CA will point its neural network agents, called Neugents, at network data. Neugents can look at any kind of data over time and attempt to glean patterns and predict future behavior, according to CA. In a network setting, a Neugent would be able to tell network managers when a router was about to fail, for instance.

Other enhancements on tap include a module for governing access to network resources and virtual LANs, and another for helping to determine the root causes of network failures. These functions will be offered as add-on modules for NetworkIT Pro, CA's stand-alone network management software, and for Unicenter, the company's unified systems and network management suite.

A Neugent would run at a network management station, which collects data from Remote Monitoring

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and SNMP agents around a network. Examining CPU utilization, throughput and other metrics collected from the agents, the Neugent would create a model of typical behavior for a network device and generate an alert if the device started behaving abnormally.

Neugents are what will take CA's product beyond the reactive management it performs today, says Yogesh Gupta, senior vice president of product strategy at CA. "With Neugents, the system truly becomes preventative," he says.

Neugents will be able to watch only a limited number of devices, however. CA says it doesn't know how many devices a Neugent can handle, but the company demonstrated the software monitoring eight devices at the CA-World trade show in New Orleans last week.

Another Neugent limitation might appear if a user's network changes rapidly, says John McConnell, president of McConnell Associates in Boulder, Colo. "If your environment is too dynamic, then once a Neugent learns about it, [the environment] has already changed," he says.

"Neugents would be good for trend analysis," says Ron Seggio, divisional vice president of information services at PaineWebber.

At this point, Neugents remain largely untested, as they are only available for monitoring server performance. Network Neugents will appear later this year.

In the next couple of months, CA plans to release NetworkIT Pro 2.0, which adds support for Unix and ships with CA's Ingres database so users don't have to purchase a separate SQL database.

Soon after, CA will ship the network access policy option, which will let network executives set policies about who will have access to which VLAN. The software will work with Cisco Catalyst switches and 3Com switches, says Imran Anwar, product marketing manager at CA.

The root-cause analysis function will follow, probably as an option, he says. The software will use Neugent technology and knowledge management tools to analyze data and figure out from where a network problem might be originating.

Also on tap are enhancements to the frame relay service option for managing networks that are running voice and data.

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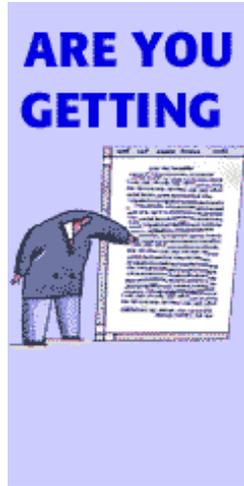○ Fewer articles on this topic

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