Architectures: Objects, Middleware & Components

An OTM primer

August 1998/By Max Dolgicer

What exactly are Object Transaction Monitors (OTMs)? In short, OTMs are a new category of middleware that should incorporate much of today's "best-of-breed" middleware technology features. Products in this category should support the object model without compromising the scalability, stability and performance characteristics offered by transaction processing (TP) monitors. OTMs should also combine support for the synchronous communication model (found in most of the middleware categories, such as Corba and COM) with support for the asynchronous communication model [found in message-oriented middleware products such as Microsoft Message Queue Server (MSMQ) and IBM's MQSeries].

Additionally, OTMs should be scalable and support useful middleware services "out of the box." Services such as transaction management, load balancing, automatic failover and session concentration are simply part of the commercial offering, eliminating the need for their development in-house.

There are a number of OTMs on the market today, although the exact number offered is not clear -- it depends on who is doing the talking and whether a product is generally available or in beta release. The veteran in the OTM market is Microsoft Transaction Server (MTS) from Microsoft Corp., Redmond, Wash., which began shipping in late 1996. M3 (formerly known as "Iceberg"), from Sunnyvale, Calif.-based BEA Systems Inc., was launched this June, with general availability of its first release scheduled for late July. The status of IBM's OTM offering, Component Broker, is unclear. Depending on whom you talk to at IBM, the next version of Component Broker is either in the early beta or late beta phase.

OTMs are one of the most important middleware categories, and the stakes are very high as to which supplier will dominate this market. A few Corba vendors, such as Inprise Corp. (formerly Borland

International Inc.), Scotts Valley, Calif., and Iona Technologies, Dublin, Ireland, want to dominate this space with their offerings, VisiBroker Integration Transaction Service (ITS) and Orbix/OTM, respectively. However, this brings up an interesting question: Is the transition from basic Corba to OTM more or less difficult than going from transaction processing monitors to OTMs that support Corba?

OTMs provide a comprehensive platform for development, deployment and management services. But they should provide more services than simply supporting distributed database-independent transaction management. MTS is no exception. Since support of distributed transactions is just the tip of the iceberg among the additional middleware services that MTS supports, the name does not do justice to its important capabilities.

 One Apple Hill, Suite 301, Natick, MA 01760
(508) 652-1100 FAX (508) 652-1210 e-mail:general@spgnet.com http://www.adtmag.com