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IBM Partners with Amazon EC2: What It Means To Your Cloud Plans

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By Bernard Golden

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This week brought the very interesting news that **IBM** is making **some of its software products (database and middleware, primarily) available on Amazon's EC2**. IBM is also offering **Amazon** Machine Images (AMI) preconfigured with its products, ready to begin running in EC2. The products and AMIs are, for today, only available for development, not production, but IBM and Amazon plan to offer production versions available on a per-hour of use basis in the near future. Furthermore, if you have existing IBM licenses, you can transfer them to EC2 and begin using the Amazon instances for production immediately.

This announcement strikes me as intriguing for a number of reasons:

1. IBM recognizes that Amazon EC2 is becoming an important computing platform and wants to stake a claim to be part of it. If one believes that cloud computing is going to be a fundamental building block for IT in the future, not moving aggressively to be part of it poses the risk of becoming obsolete. It also serves as an endorsement of EC2 by a tried-and-true enterprise vendor, making Amazon seem less risky.
2. It's likely that IBM will make its pricing competitive for people wishing to use its products in EC2. Given that IBM already makes it DB2 available for free for production purposes in smaller machines, it's likely that the pricing on EC2 will be low as well. That offers good opportunities for application builders who prefer a commercial database rather than the open source alternative, **MySQL**.
3. It offers the extremely intriguing possibility that IBM might offer IBM-powered systems as EC2-based "cloudburst" capability, enabling companies with IBM-based systems located within their data centers to dynamically expand applications into EC2. As I **noted in my earlier analysis of IBM and HP's cloud announcements this week**, IBM's promise that it will support dynamic cloudbursting to public clouds carried a very limited definition of "public;" it seemed to imply that outside cloud providers who based their offering on a complete IBM software stack, including Tivoli system management were the only options available. This announcement would seem to hold the potential that EC2 system management calls could be wired into Tivoli, enabling it to manage a mix of internal and Amazon instances. Nothing in the announcement stated or even hinted at this, but it seems like a possibility.

This offering seems quite visionary and indicates the increased traction cloud computing is gaining among leading vendors, and indicates that traditional IT infrastructures are transforming rapidly.

Bernard Golden is CEO of consulting firm HyperStratus, which specializes in virtualization, cloud computing and related issues. He is also the author of "Virtualization for Dummies," the best-selling book on virtualization to date.