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Oracle Unveils Collaboration Software

By [Matt Hicks](#)

REDWOOD SHORES, CALIF.--Oracle Corp., as expected on Wednesday, moved further into e-mail and groupware applications with a new software suite aimed at battling Microsoft Corp.'s dominance in the space.

The Oracle Collaboration Suite, announced during the company's analyst day here, includes e-mail, calendaring, voicemail, file system and search applications. The focus for Oracle isn't on replacing users' client applications for accessing capabilities such as e-mail and calendaring but on taking over the back end, which Microsoft dominates with its Exchange server, said Larry Ellison, Oracle's chairman and CEO.

"You keep using Outlook, and this is the beauty of this system," Ellison said. "You unplug the Microsoft server, but you keep the Microsoft client."

His pitch to customers is that Oracle's 9i database and application server, included as part of the suite, can better manage e-mail and collaborative applications at a lower cost. He emphasized improved reliability and better security of e-mail running from an enterprise database and said that the collaboration suite licenses would be one-third the cost of comparable Exchange licenses.

A perpetual license for the Oracle Collaboration Suite, available at the end of August, will be \$60 per named user, and Oracle also is offering a one-year license and an outsourced offering.

While Oracle officials say they are targeting the new software broadly, others say they see existing Oracle customers being the most likely to consider handing e-mail and collaboration to Oracle.

"If you're using Oracle already then it might make sense to do this," said Douglas Scherer, president of consulting company Core Paradigm, which implements Oracle software. "I'm not sure you'd go out and buy Oracle to do (collaboration)."

The new collaboration suite isn't Oracle's first attempt at challenging Microsoft in the space. Ellison a year ago was pitching replacing Exchange with Oracle's database and application server. Ellison said what

has changed is that Oracle is offering a more complete suite.

Analyst Jonathan Penn of Giga Information Group said he agrees that this is Oracle's biggest effort to tackle the collaboration market, but wonders if it's too little, too late.

"Oracle has been trying to get into this market with varying degrees of enthusiasm over the years, and they have a credibility issue to overcome," said Penn, in Santa Clara, Calif.

Ellison said one of the biggest hurdles Oracle faced in offering a replacement to Exchange was calendaring. The Outlook client doesn't allow access to its calendaring capabilities when back-end servers access it using the IMAP4 protocol rather than Microsoft proprietary protocol, Ellison. To overcome the hurdle, Oracle in late June acquired calendaring vendor Steltor Inc., of Montreal, Canada, which offers a connector into Outlook for calendaring. That capability is incorporated into the collaboration suite.

Along with calendaring, Oracle has incorporated a one-year-old feature called Ultra Search from its database and application server into the suite. It allows for searching across e-mails and files such as Word documents in the database as well as Web sites through a single query.

The file system technology comes from Oracle's existing Internet File System feature. The collaboration suite also can take over voicemail, which become stored as WAV files.

By the first quarter of 2003, Oracle plans to introduce a Web conferencing application called iMeeting to the suite.

Beyond Outlook, the suite provides access from other IMAP4 or POP3 clients such as Lotus Notes and includes support for Web, wireless, voice and fax access, officials said. But Microsoft is the main target.

"We think IBM is kind of irrelevant in this market," Ellison said. "Lotus is just a dying animal."

Oracle also is counting on the timing being right as Microsoft customers are in the middle of upgrading to Exchange 2000 and might consider alternatives. Many users, as Penn noted, also are frustrated with Microsoft licensing.

"There's more there now than there ever was in (Oracle's) offering," Penn said. "But is it too late?"

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