

The Big Picture: In Focus

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Scalix: We know what you send

BY CHRISTINA KOUKKOS

“E-mail historically has been called the ‘killer app,’” says Scalix founder and CEO Julie Farris. “But up to this point, there has been no expectation that it be as reliable as the phone system. That’s ridiculous.” Years ago, as a messaging architect at BellSouth, she was the first customer to use HP’s Unix-based OpenMail in a 100,000-user environment. When HP dropped it, she “saw a great technology that was going to die on the vine.”

Farris continued to work in messaging and collaboration, working on cc:Mail at Lotus and co-founding and selling three companies: unified messaging service onebox.com, enterprise portal software developer 2Bridge, and Portola Systems, an Internet-based enterprise messaging system. She then joined Mayfield as entrepreneur-in-residence, where she saw a convergence of factors creating a unique opening in the ossified e-mail market. First, Linux was becoming more widely adopted. Second, “e-mail, calendaring and messaging are more important than ever, but the underlying infrastructure is more stressed than ever. The previous generation of technology is not as scalable as we need it to be. OpenMail was designed to be enterprise-class – even ISP-class – and it has had lots of ‘bake time.’”

So she acquired the OpenMail technology, hired most of its original development team as well as a number of people from cc:Mail, and founded Scalix. “Scalix was an early bet that Linux plus Intel was going to have a profound effect on infrastructure,” Farris continues. “A lot of companies use old platforms because the cost and complexity of changing is so great. But you could run the [Scalix] platform on everything from low-end Intel hardware to a mainframe, and everything in between.” She gives the example of one client that has 5000 user accounts on one HP ProLiant server. “You can’t get anywhere near that with the leading mail products in the market today,” she says.

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The conversation starts here.

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The Scalix back end, which uses the Unix/Linux file system, allows customers to run any desktop operating system and use any e-mail client software on client machines. Scalix also has integrated Web services that let customers tie the messaging back end to any other enterprise application or service – a directory, an anti-spam system, CRM software, and so on. “You have an inherently better starting point,” says Farris.

Are there any anti-spam measures built into Scalix? we ask. “According to some estimates, there are more than 170 anti-spam companies out there,” answers Farris. “We decided being 171 is not a good use of our time.” But, she predicts, the market will move toward an authentication and white-list approach, and mail systems and standards will evolve to support that approach.

The company’s target customers are large enterprises that are moving applications to Linux and that want the rich messaging, integrated calendaring and other functionality of Microsoft Exchange. . . though the company won’t be competing directly with Exchange. “We are focused on the Linux market,” Farris says. “There is a growing sector of the market that wants an open solution. In that segment, Exchange is not an alternative.” The alternatives are Oracle, Sendmail or SunONE, which don’t offer functionality as advanced as Scalix’s. The company has completed four successful pilots, with several more underway. One of the two pilots has resulted in a customer commitment from the city of Bloomington, IN, for a 1000-user environment. Farris says the company also has seen pent-up demand from ISPs and ASPs, from small- and medium-size businesses and from companies in Europe and the Far East.