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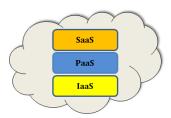Senior Editor
IT Newswire

Microsoft Azure Platform due February 1

What was announced?

Microsoft announced in a blog on January 7, 2010 that Windows® Azure™ platform will be commercially available on February 1. It is encouraging its Community Technology Preview (CTP) accounts of the Windows Azure platform (i.e., Windows Azure, SQL Azure and/or Windows Azure platform AppFabric) to upgrade to paid commercial subscriptions. Azure was first announced by Microsoft at PDC 2008.

What is this?

Windows Azure is a comprehensive cloud platform that Microsoft is aggressively positioning against Amazon EC2 and Google App Engine. If one looks at the traditional three layers of Cloud Computing (CC) (Figure 1), Microsoft currently offers Business Productivity Online Services as software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions and SQL Azure and integration technology as infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS). Windows Azure fills the gap of platform-as-a-service (PaaS).

Figure 1. Cloud Computing Layers

Windows Azure (Figures 2 and 3) consists of three main components: the Windows *Azure operating system*, formerly codenamed Red Dog, a scalable, manageable Windows environment allowing both .NET and native development, including support for CGI, PHP, and other technologies; *SQL Azure*, a replicated, fault-tolerate, high-performance version of SQL Server; and *AppFabric* (formerly known as .NET Services and codenamed Zurich), a collection of Web services providing reliable asynchronous communications, message queuing, and other glue infrastructure useful for interoperating with the cloud.

Developers can build applications on Azure using Eclipse, .NET, Java, Ruby on Rails, PHP, Python, and other languages. Microsoft plans to offer an admin model allowing developers access to the virtual machine, although they will not have to manually allocate hardware resources as they normally do with a traditional infrastructure-as-a-service offering such as Amazon's EC2. The platform also includes SQL Azure, Microsoft's relational database in the cloud, and .NET Services built on the Azure OS. The Azure platform offers SLAs of 99.9% storage uptime and 99.95% compute uptime.
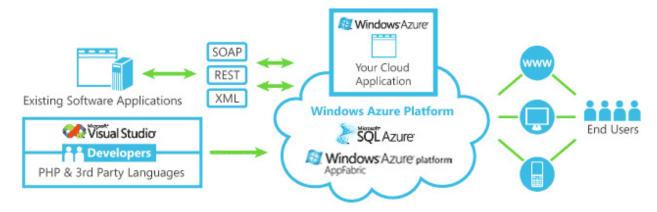

Figure 2. Windows Azure: Microsoft Version
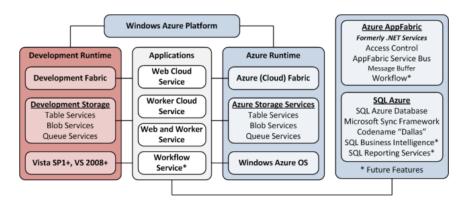
Source: Microsoft

Figure 2. Windows Azure: Consultant Version

Source: OakLeaf Systems

Why was this done?
Microsoft CTP subscribers currently have free access to test the Azure Platform. Come February 1, they have to pay so Microsoft can generate revenues, although they have up to March 1 to upgrade their accounts.

What is the impact?
Critics have been hammering Microsoft for being late to the Cloud Computing (CC) ball and that it (Microsoft) is afraid CC will cut into its revenue streams. In fact, Microsoft acknowledges CC is less profitable, albeit its pricing is competitive:

- Compute = $0.12/hour (half a cent cheaper than Amazon)
- Storage = $0.15/GB stored/month
- Storage transactions = $0.01/10,000 transactions, which are movements of data within the stored material
- Data transfers = $0.10/GB of inbound and $0.15/GB of outbound data

Microsoft recognizes the IT world is undergoing revolutionary changes with CC, virtualization, multicore and ever-shrinking chips, and faster networking, and it either dance to the tune or be left without a date at the ball. Sure, Amazon and Google appear to lead in CC these days, but Amazon's EC2 revenue is estimated to be just $220 million, about 1% of its annual revenue. Google's CC revenue is a well-kept secret. Expect Microsoft to aggressively market Azure in CC, a market that is estimated to grow from $46.4 billion in 2009 to $150 billion by 2013 (Gartner) or $160 billion by 2011 (Merrill Lynch) globally.

More importantly, HP and Microsoft just announced they will spend $250 million over the next three years in more tightly integrating HP's hardware (server and networking gear) and Microsoft's software (Exchange, Hyper-V, SQL Server). They will also have 11,000 sales people peddling their ware. Surely, VMware won't be too happy HP selling Hyper-V, and Cisco, Dell, and IBM won't be pleased with Microsoft pushing HP's server, storage, and ProCurve products. Hey, this is business; you have no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests!