

Microsoft, Kasenna Address IPTV Middleware Challenges

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It doesn't scale well. It's not supported on many platforms. It's proprietary. It's difficult to write applications for. These are just the top complaints about IPTV middleware from all corners of the video services industry, many of which have ambitious deployment plans.

IPTV software for set-top boxes contains far more functionality than middleware, which in the enterprise world is the glue that sticks things together, making the term a misnomer. The packages include compression, encoding, security, digital rights management functionality and more.

Two top IPTV software providers – Microsoft Corp. and Kasenna Inc. – announced efforts aimed at some of the criticism at the National Association of Broadcasters show in Las Vegas.

Microsoft TV announced additional suppliers with technologies that support its IPTV Edition software. Those include AMD, Intel Corp., Pirelli Broadband Solutions, Sun Microsystems Inc. and Thomson.

Microsoft said the support by the five IPTV ecosystems vendors "illustrates the accelerating growth of the IPTV industry and Microsoft's commitment to working with a broad range of solutions providers to ensure ongoing industry innovation."

The companies will help with server processors, encoding platforms, set-top boxes and servers and storage.

Microsoft has continued to evolve the role of the IPTV package, having announced plans to integrate it with the company's popular Xbox 360 gaming console. It added messaging capabilities to the system just last week.

But the company's IPTV software has been criticized by some for an alleged lack of scalability and cited as having a slowing affect on IPTV deployments such as U-verse by AT&T Inc.

Addressing the more pressing scalability criticism, Kasenna has teamed with Hewlett-Packard Co. and Intel, among others, to benchmark its IPTV software to support widespread deployments.

The vendor said it has teamed with those companies to complete a 1 million IPTV subscriber benchmark test for broadcast television and bandwidth-intensive video-on-demand services. The test proved that its IPTV infrastructure can support that many subscribers, the Kasenna said.

The IPTV-infrastructure test bed, built around Kasenna's Portal TV product suite, consisting of the LivingRoom middleware platform and MediaBase video server software, utilized industry-standard HP ProLiant servers powered by Intel Dual-Core Xeon processors. The test was conducted in a simulated access network environment at the HP Communications, Media and Entertainment Solution Center in Grenoble, France.

Kasenna said as part of the certification process, the center stress-tested the PortalTV infrastructure using a traffic model that subjected it to traffic patterns typical of Friday or Saturday evening consumer viewing.

The test bed is designed to allow service providers to test the infrastructure for their own user-generated traffic patterns.

The setup can also accommodate a variety of stand-alone, centralized and distributed-content distribution architectures as a means of proving the resiliency and scalability of the IPTV infrastructure before deployment.

Kasenna added the network supports a multi-user configuration in which multiple HP ProLiant DL380 G5 or BL480c servers running LivingRoom middleware software support up to 120,000 active subscribers.

"As service providers gear up to offer broad-ranging IPTV services, they are increasingly concerned about the scalability of the IT components of their IPTV infrastructure and whether they will support the anticipated ramp-up of subscribers," said Peggy Dau, worldwide director of CME Broadband & Media Solutions for HP. "HP, Kasenna and Intel worked together to define a model to test and prove the scalability of the Kasenna LivingRoom and MediaBase applications on HP ProLiant servers. We believe this benchmark will provide confidence to service providers that are deploying IPTV services."

AMD www.amd.com