AppZero takes Windows application migration up to 11 (or, more precisely, Win12)

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AppZero sees itself as the fastest and easiest way to move server applications from on-premises infrastructure to the cloud. The thing is, the same technology can be used to move applications from old operating systems to new ones. In its latest release, v5.2, AppZero features what it calls 'up-level OS application migration,' letting organizations move their apps from Windows Server 2003 to Windows Server 2008, or even Windows 2012. AppZero extracts apps from their production environments and packages them for movement to any other environment, without requiring any changes to the app.

The 451 Take

Microsoft's end of life for Windows Server 2003 is approaching. Migrating custom applications from it to newer replacements is never what you would call fun, and the longer companies postpone the chore, the more onerous it becomes. What AppZero can do is extract an application from its operating system and wrap it in a neat package. That package can then be run on later versions of the same operating systems – or in another datacenter, or on a hosted cloud. It's an ingenious use of a technology that's been around awhile.

Context

In 2013, application virtualization has become a pretty mature and robust approach to the problem of migration. AppZero first launched in March 2009. In September 2010, it acquired the assets of its

onetime rival, Trigence. CEO Greg O'Connor was formerly the cofounder and president of Sonic Software. CTO Giovanni Boschi was an architect of BMC's BladeLogic automation framework. Today, AppZero has 25 employees and claims 20 paying customers. There are offices in Andover, Massachusetts, and in Kanata, Canada.

Strategy

The task of on-boarding enterprise server applications – whether to an upgraded OS, a new datacenter or a public cloud – is an exercise fraught with difficulty. Until quite recently, greenfield applications, development and test environments, and Linux ruled the public cloud. Enterprise cloud adoption is now turning its sights to existing applications (which outnumber native cloud applications by about a thousand to one). Existing enterprise applications mostly run on Windows. So migration is far from straightforward, which means it is expensive.

Technology

What AppZero brings to the table is the ability to make applications stack-independent. It extracts the application from the source machine and creates what it calls a Virtual Application Appliance. This VAA can be provisioned and run natively on any OS, machine or cloud.

AppZero 5.2 hit general availability on January 7, 2013. Besides up-level OS migration, the new release includes better support for Microsoft IIS, user and group migration, and support for Win2000, Win2003, Win2008 and Win2008(R2). Service Pack 1, slated for a February 25 release, will add support for Win2012. AppZero is priced at $500 per VAA. Customers can use the VAA on any number of test or production servers for a one-year period.

Customers

David McCluskey, president of Cloud-Migrators, used AppZero to migrate a custom legacy Microsoft application from the Pabst Blue Ribbon datacenter to the Rackspace cloud. That's neat, but what's neater is that the migration took less than an hour. McCluskey estimates that without AppZero, the same project would have taken one to two weeks.

Competition

AppZero plots workload movement on a quadrant whose axes are desktop-to-cloud and machine-to-application. VMware, Xen and Hyper-V, for example, virtualize at the x86 layer, far below the application itself. Migration tools like PlateSpin, Racemi and CloudSwitch provide their

abstraction layers closer to the server operating system.

AppZero more closely resembles its application virtualization siblings: VMware's ThinApp, based on its acquisition of Thinstall, and Microsoft's App-V and Server App-V, based on its acquisition of Softricity. Where AppZero differs from these is on the desktop-to-cloud continuum: ThinApp and App-V are designed for use with desktop apps. Server App-V handles server apps, but AppZero aims to handle both server and cloud apps.

The approach has been tried before. RPath was one of VMware's early ecosystem vendors, and a pioneer of using x86 virtualization to create virtual appliances for more portable applications. In December 2012, SAS Institute bought what remained of that company. Cohesive Flexible Technologies, another virtual appliance pioneer, is still in business, and in recent months has been joined by a new wave of cloud migration ventures, including CliQr, CloudVelocity and Ravello Systems.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

AppZero's approach is more mature than that of some rivals, and its ability to turn its hand to OS as well as cloud migration speaks to its flexibility.

Weaknesses

While the technology is mature, the customer base remains in low double figures. AppZero needs the Win2003 end of life to bring it new business.

Opportunities

Enterprises do need to modernize their applications – if not by embracing the cloud wholesale, at least by moving them off operating systems that are no longer supported.

Threats

Microsoft built its reputation, and maintains its following, by providing coherent upgrade paths to its most loyal users. Server App-V is a strategic product, and one that is likely to graduate to cloud migration.