

Network Instruments challenges a new class of competitors with Link Analyst 5

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Sector: Networks & Media

Event summary

- Network Instruments has released Link Analyst 5, a new version of its high-level monitoring product. Link Analyst can monitor devices and routes, perform active discovery, produce dynamic reports and notify appropriate users with instant alarms.
- Link Analyst elements can be configured into clusters called Business Groups, which align associated devices with particular business processes so that indicators, events, reports and monitoring activity correspond to fault and performance issues.
- Link Analyst is integrated with Observer, the Network Instruments application and network analysis tool, and with GigaStor, the company's retrospective full-traffic storage and analysis product.

The 451 take

While Network Instruments has undergone steady growth since its inception, it appears to be facing significant opportunities as its competitors get acquired or distracted. We could readily imagine an IPO if the company takes full advantage of these breaks. If it is to compete head-to-head with service-level management (SLM) and business services management vendors, it will need to catch up with modeling and configuration management database (CMDB) functionality.

Details

The big addition to **Network Instruments'** Link Analyst in version 5 is Business Groups, the ability to create subsets of network devices according to geography, business size, device type or any arbitrary basis. The Business Groups can be employed to segregate device displays, reports and inventory among users responsible for business functions. They can track device inventory. At the most basic level, Business Groups can expose network and application managers to just the network elements in their purview.

Link Analyst now has the ability to poll devices, identify them and monitor availability. With these functions, it can identify problems before end users are aware of them. It uses Simple Network Management Protocol (SNMP) and Windows Management Instrumentation to discover and monitor network devices. It can also identify routes and IP services, and assess their availability. Dynamic

Reporting lets users on the network define customized reports and view them over the Web. User access can be password protected. Inventories can be done automatically, and are aware of removable hard drives and software installed within devices.

Link Analyst is priced at \$8,000 and is integrated with Observer and GigaStor. Observer can provide greater detail on devices, probes or SNMP agents with a right-click. Similarly, GigaStor data can be used to identify problems with a simple drill-down.

Competitive landscape

As a network protocol analysis tool and as a **TiVo**-like retrospective traffic capture product, Network Instruments most often encounters **NetScout** (including its **Network General** acquisition).

WildPackets and **Fluke Networks** remain in the market, though Fluke lacks retrospective traffic capture. Our sense is that Network Instruments is in second place, and that NetScout has a big integration task to perform, and without that accomplishment it may be in danger of losing momentum to Network Instruments.

As a business services management (BSM) tool employing Business Groups, Network Instruments will encounter service-level management vendors such as the object-oriented **Managed Objects**, the software-as-a-service-deployed **Nimsoft** and the agentless **Akorri**. Network General acquired NetVigil and began integrating it before NetScout acquired Network General, but it is our impression that NetScout won't continue that project. Business Groups are rudimentary in comparison, though Network Instruments is well prepared for internal development, which may permit it to catch up sooner than might be expected. Network Instruments hasn't traditionally extended its product line with acquisitions, though it might be prudent to consider SLM and CMDB acquisition.

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