

Eye on Sun

SMCC enters high-end server market

This month, Sun will ship its highest-end server ever. The SPARCcluster 1 is a dedicated NFS file server consisting of a

cabinet that houses up to four SPARC-server 10 pizza boxes, each holding up to four 40-MHz Texas Instruments' Super-SPARC microprocessors for a maximum capacity of 16 processors. The units are linked together by a modified Kalpana Etherswitch.

The entry-level price is about \$90,000 for a system with two uniprocessor SPARCservers, SMCC said.

The motivation behind the SPARCcluster 1's creation was the "discovery that the problem of NFS was suited for a type of architecture," according to SMCC's manager of server product marketing, Carl Stolle. "It has to do with the nature of the NFS protocol. It can be distributed nicely. Clustering gives you the ability to scale NFS cluster throughput."

The closest competitor is Auspex (Santa Clara, CA), Stolle said, with whom Sun will compete "head-to-head." He also commented that HP, IBM, and a DEC (Alpha) offer high-end servers like the SPARCcluster 1, but Auspex is the "most comparable system."

Last spring Network Appliance Corp. (Santa Clara, CA) announced an NFS server "appliance" called FAServer (see "NFS file server 'appliance' does one thing cheaply and well," *SunWorld*, June 1993); like the SPARCcluster 1, its only function is NFS. But Stolle claimed there is no overlap between FAServer and the SPARCcluster 1. FAServer works in a single-network environment with a small number of clients, a relatively small amount of required disk storage, and a small workgroup.

By contrast, the SPARCcluster 1 is meant for larger workgroups and is meant to handle big networks with high bandwidths. It is designed for users who "have lots of powerful network clients and file-server performance," according to Stolle. Potential customers include software-development environments, where large software-development teams who need common access to source code work together. Universities are also prime candidates for buyers.

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What is clustering, anyway?

The model for clustering dates back to the Digital Equipment VAXs of the late seventies to early eighties. Clustering increases available processing power by linking whole systems together with spe-

cial wiring. Sun's innovation is to use multiprocessor systems, thus presumably combining the scaling advantages of clustering with those of multiprocessing. Paul McGuckin of the Gartner Group said clustering has traditionally increased scalability by adding boxes.

— *Shalini Chatterjee*