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New Server Blades Pack More Punch

By [Jeffrey Burt](#)

Blade servers, initially thought of as stripped-down alternatives to traditional servers, are gaining more performance enhancements and management tools and, with these, the attention of enterprises.

Top-tier manufacturers Dell Computer Corp., Hewlett-Packard Co. and IBM over the next few months are each planning rollouts of hardware and software features for their blade families that offer enhanced flexibility.

Meanwhile, smaller developers such as Egenera Inc., of Marlboro, Mass., whose BladeFrame technology is targeted at high-end applications and data centers, are also expanding their product families. For example, early next year, Egenera, whose servers now run only Red Hat Inc.'s Red Hat Linux, will support Microsoft Corp.'s .Net, according to officials.

Blades, or high-density servers, which typically are less expensive than traditional servers or mainframes, save precious space and reduce the amount of cable snaking across data center floors. They also reduce power consumption and heat and improve failover protection. International Data Corp., of Framingham, Mass., estimates blades could be a \$3.47 billion business by 2006. IDC estimates this year's figures will be \$115.5 million.

For users such as Robert Warner, the more flexibility he can bring to his data center, the better. Warner, network administrator for the Nebraska Department of Roads, said he is considering Dell's new Power-Edge 1655MC blade server to help conserve space and more easily manage his server needs. "It's not only about space but also storage," said Warner, in Lincoln. "Much of what we want to purchase around our servers [we could] just get it and pop it in."

Dell, of Round Rock, Texas, this week will release the 1655MC, the first of its modular, or blade, servers. The server can pack up to 12 Intel Corp. Pentium III chips. Features such as SCSI hard drives with integrated RAID and redundant power supplies, cooling fans, and Ethernet switches are all shared across six blade servers in an enclosure to reduce operating expenses, said Darrell Ward, senior product manager for Dell's PowerEdge. The server also comes with new OpenManage Remote Install software, and the enclosure includes an Embedded Remote Access Module, both designed to let users monitor and maintain them from any location. Over the next year, Dell will roll out two-way, four-way and eight-way servers powered by Intel Xeon chips, Ward said.

HP, of Palo Alto, Calif., which in August announced its ProLiant BL p-Class two-way and four-way blades using Pentium III chips, will roll out in the first quarter of next year blades featuring two or four Xeon chips and storage area network capability, said Paul Miller, director of HP's Industry Standard Server Platform Division.

HP is also upgrading its integration configuration tool sets—SmartStart 6.1 and SmartStart Scripting Toolkit 1.9—to support Microsoft's .Net Server 2003 RC2 and updated ProLiant Support Packs. HP is releasing the ProLiant Essentials Rapid Deployment Pack 1.22, which enables remote installation, configuration and deployment of its servers.

IBM, which this fall launched its dual-Xeon BladeCenter server, will roll out a four-way Xeon server in mid-2003 and a blade server based on the company's Power chip technology in the second half of the year, said Jeff Benck, director of product management of IBM's eServer xSeries, in Raleigh, N.C. Also, in the first quarter of next year, IBM will add cluster systems management capabilities for large Linux users to its IBM Director server management software.

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