

## Customers Need a Platform to Build On

By Bob Tarzey, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

Quocirca's most recent round of grid computing research shows how important businesses consider the strength of the underlying platform that supports IT. While the platform is there only to support the applications and processes that drive the business, getting the platform right can be critical.

Any organisation that has multiple servers has the potential for rationalisation and better sharing of server resources. Grid computing was initially aimed at enterprises with large data centres, but it is becoming relevant to mid-market and even some smaller companies. This is an opportunity for VARs to help customers to derive better performance from IT platforms.

There is often confusion over the nomenclature used for grid computing. The popular press often talks about the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence – better known as SETI – program that runs on huge community grids where people donate unused CPU cycles. But in the commercial world, the grids promoted by the likes of Hewlett-Packard, Oracle, and IBM to drive data-centre efficiency are something quite different. These are often referred to as cluster grids or distributed enterprise grids.

A reseller talking to an average mid-market company about this might get some funny looks. The end-point of full-grid computing cannot be reached overnight, and only a small number of businesses would claim to be there. But it is an end-point: the end of journey with many stops en route, and many of these will be of value to mid-market IT managers.

Grid is built on a foundation that many businesses are adopting without the end-point in mind. Three of the areas where businesses can see immediate short-term benefits are: server standardisation, consolidation and virtualisation. VARs need to talk to customers about putting these in place first. At a later date the idea of switching to grid-based computing will then seem less daunting.

This foundation readiness is one of the indices that Quocirca measures as part of the grid research programme, along with knowledge and interest and the adoption lifecycle. All three add up to an overall grid index. Monitoring these allows for comparisons about the progress of achieving the IT platforms promised by the vendors of grid computing.

As is often the case with technologies driven by US vendors, North American business are the most advanced, but Europe is not that far behind. The indices measured by Quocirca are a score out of 10. So if the adoption lifecycle in Europe reached 10, all businesses of a certain size in Europe would be committed to going down the grid route.

The value for Europe measured in September 2005 was 3.2. But the value for foundation readiness is much higher at 6. This means more businesses are investing in the underlying technology. It is not a time for resellers to be sitting on their laurels. Between April and September 2005, globally the foundation readiness index increased from 5.8 to 6.7.

Smaller enterprises are lagging slightly behind the larger ones. So if a VAR thinks any customers with remotely complicated server environments could benefit from any of this, it is time to start talking to them.

### **About Quocirca**

Quocirca is one of Europe's leading independent industry analyst firms. One of its biggest assets is the core team of highly experienced analysts drawn from both the corporate and the vendor communities. This team prides itself on maintaining a bigger picture view of what's going on in the IT and communications marketplaces. This allows all of Quocirca's activities to be carried out in the context of the real world and avoids distractions with fads, fashions and the nuts and bolts of specific technologies. Quocirca's focus has always been the point of intersection at which IT meets "the business".

### **Quocirca Services**

The insight and experience that comes from working as an industry analyst as well as a practitioner allows the Quocirca team to contribute significantly to IT Vendors, Service Providers and Corporate clients. To this end, it provides a range of consulting and advisory services. Details of these, along with some of Quocirca's latest analysis, may be obtained by visiting <http://www.quocirca.com>.

Quocirca also provides bespoke primary research services through its daughter company QNB Intelligence. This involves interviewing thousands of senior decision makers on a quarterly basis.