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Old databases never die and some won't even fade away....

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Those like me who are bit long in the tooth may remember Relational Technology (RTI), the original developers of the Ingres relational database management system (RDBMS) that ultimately lost out to Oracle in the RDBMS wars of the early 1990s. Ingres never actually died, it got bought by a company called Ask Corporation in 1990 which itself was bought by CA in 1994.

Never comfortable in the CA stable, Ingres eventually extracted itself in 2004 and re-emerged as an open source company. When meeting with the current management team this week, my comment that "if you can't sell it, give it away" was countered with a list of more positive reasons for the move. Such as the fact that Ingres would be further ahead of open source rivals technologically than it could ever hope to be of its commercial ones (which amounts to pretty much the same thing).

Perhaps the main benefit was for CA itself, which retains a share in Ingres. Many of CA's other products had been adapted to use Ingres as the underlying database. Customers who already had and RDBMS objected to having to buy Ingres as well, but things became more palatable if the database component was free.

Whatever the background, if the numbers are to be believed, Ingres is doing OK. Its mantra seems to be that (very) mature technology that is now free (apart from service charges aka Red

Hat Linux etc) can't be bad. Even better since your developers, alongside Ingres' in-house team of 100, can see the code and make changes to it too.

Its customers seem to agree. Ingres always was, and still is targeted at the high end database users. This includes many legacy enterprise users that have expanded their use of Ingres and as well as some new customers. Ingres is courting the ISV market too, its business model especially suited to those considering a move to SaaS (software as a service) who might find the CapEx required for an enterprise Oracle investment just too much. Here it will find competition from Microsoft SQL Server and Sun's MySQL, and may encounter another old sparring partner - Progress software.

Ingres' revenue doubled from 2006 to 2007, albeit from a relatively low base. However some of that appears to be down to cross-company accounting as it eased its way out of CA. CA retains 20% ownership, but it has backing from Garnett & Helfrich Capital who own 60% of the rest.

Once in place, databases are hard to shift, so Ingres is not about to knock Oracle of its perch any time soon. However, Ingres is back on the menu for those in a position to review their database technology.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

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