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Virtualisation – relevant attributes, questions and performance issues
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Virtualisation can be used to cover a variety of issues, from abstraction of application coding to logical partitions for operating systems; from consolidation of lightly used single-application servers to SANs and LANs. It is also touted as an enabler for utility computing, in conjunction with auto-provisioning, to yield an agile IT solution.

For most people, however, virtualisation is all about VMware (or possibly Microsoft Virtual Server, Xen or similar) and server consolidation to address the problems caused by autonomous systems distributed across the enterprise to meet local needs, but only running single applications at a system utilisation of, for example, 5-10%.

Whilst virtualisation may well be very suitable for consolidating lightly used small boxes and good for ease of roll-out of systems and for separating development/ test/ QA/ pilot/ production users and for supporting stable systems running on old versions of infrastructure, it may be less relevant for RDBMS and heavy I/O applications, and for new systems being implemented from scratch. Thus, before taking the virtualisation route, there are questions to be asked, performance issues to be addressed and attributes to be assessed.

Clearly virtualisation is a potential minefield, and needs to be tackled in a considered way. Fortunately, there is real and valuable experience out there, which is why performance practitioners are gathering at a UKCMG Forum at the Hilton Hotel, Olympia on 26 November 2007, to share information and ideas, and to learn the latest practical information on virtualisation. The day will offer a dedicated track of five sessions, including two from VMware, with real experience of how to assess VM performance.

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