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BNP Paribas Bolsters Grid Project

LONDON - BNP Paribas (BNPP) has recently expanded the processing power of its London-based grid computing project by adding 150 dedicated, Intel-based servers, says Dipak Shah, head of structured credit IT for the bank.

Shah says further that the first phase of the project, which included 100 hardware platforms and their CPUs on the grid, went live in July 2004. "The second phase went live in March of this year," Shah says. "We added another 150 servers—that's another 300 CPUs [in total]."

Currently, BNP Paribas is looking to bring its non-dedicated hardware into the grid environment, and is considering whether or not to expand its London-based grid into a global project, officials say.

Shah says that the project he is leading in the structured credit space has been driven from London. He adds that, "Right now [in my department] we're focused on expanding from dedicated servers into non-dedicated hardware, which has always been tricky."

BNP Paribas currently has 150 dedicated, dual-processor Intel-based servers connected to its grid, which is managed by DataSynapse grid server technology. DataSynapse officials confirm that BNP has been a client for approximately one year.

Whether or not to use dedicated hardware on the grid can be a balancing act, says Shah. "The problem you have is that you need some dedicated hardware. Otherwise, if it's completely shared, you can't guarantee that your reports will complete. So, you need some dedicated and some non-dedicated hardware," says Shah.

Connecting BNP Paribas' non-dedicated hardware onto the grid could increase its power significantly without additional investment. "Even if you discount the old low-capacity units, we've got between 500 to 1,000 processors that we can use," Shah says.

Using non-dedicated hardware on the grid, such as desktop personal computers (PCs), can be a challenge, say industry observers. The benefit of using this type of hardware is that an organization can leverage existing compute resources that may be under utilized. However, the balancing act encountered by users of grid technology is to make sure surplus processing power can be captured without impacting the machine's ability to perform its core functions. This is particularly true for machines whose primary function is to support trading applications.

BNPP currently submits approximately 30,000 compute tasks per day to its grid. "With over 600 logical engines, it's pretty much working flat out overnight," says Shah.

Although BNPP's interest rate derivatives team is looking toward its own grid project, that division and the structured credit group are considering sharing their environments to create a global grid, Shah says. "We're looking at sharing the whole grid infrastructure between the two business units. That's the goal, which is achievable over the next six months realistically speaking," he adds.

A global grid project is likely to include compute centers in London, New York and Tokyo, Shah says.

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