

Movers & Shakers Interview

Shunra Software



"We Accelerate Growth"

A Movers & Shakers Interview of Les Murphy, CTO, Shunra Software by Olga Yashkova, Industry Analyst/Program Leader, Frost & Sullivan.

Olga Yashkova (OY): Shunra is an important participant in the application performance management and monitoring & test automation industries. How would you describe the current state of these markets?



Les Murphy
CTO of Shunra
Software

Les Murphy (LM): They have been evolving to implement widely accepted best practices. The goal is to gain the ability to provide a more proactive approach to delivering application services to end-users. IT Operations used to have a narrower charter focused on basic infrastructure; such as making sure that the servers and network were up and running. Now more than ever, IT is being challenged with optimizing service delivery and operational productivity. The key challenge organizations are facing is how to make sure that business critical applications are available and performing from the end-user perspective.

The IT industry continues to be challenged with efficiently delivering applications and services. A constant stream of new applications is being deployed into production and the newer applications have increasing complexity and are intertwined with multiple existing applications. At the same time, IT budgets are based on using existing head count to support the growing set of needs. Many projects such as data center consolidation or virtualization are driven by the ROI and efficiencies to be gained. However, IT has to be sure that they minimize the risk associated with these projects as it is absolutely mission-critical that service interruptions do not occur.

These market dynamics drive the need for a formalized pre-deployment testing capability. Without proper testing, IT Operations teams are still faced with risk and uncertainty as new applications are deployed. Test automation is a proven way to help improve testing coverage and efficiency, but is only effective when used as part of an overall deployment readiness strategy.

OY: What is your opinion on current market or technological trends in the test automation and APM markets?

LM: First, I see a trend towards taking a holistic approach to testing, where continuous testing is performed throughout the application lifecycle. Pre-deployment testing is leveraged to enable appropriate production monitoring. Testing and performance management are being redefined to tackle application convergence, where voice-based solutions are now a growing part of the application mix, fixed-mobile convergence is a hot topic, and video is also coming on strong. From the IT network perspective these trends will result in a pretty significant set of challenges. Second, I see an organizational trend towards convergence in IT groups and functionality, where a higher level of collaboration across domains has become essential as networks and applications become more complex. IT used to be much more 'siloes' where development was not incented to be concerned about issues such as how well the application will perform once deployed on the production network, and operations was not given any capability to ensure that applications being deployed would be able to do so successfully. Growing evidence, backed by analyst research and customer success stories is showing that goal alignment across teams is essential. The best performers in the industry have implemented organizational capabilities that focus on developing, testing, and deploying applications that will run smoothly in production with acceptable costs by sharing information across teams during the entire application development lifecycle.

OY: Currently there are a number of large SPs that still have this so-called ‘siloes’ approach. That makes selling integrated testing tools, for instance, integrated triple play solutions to be very difficult because of such a structure.

LM: It’s a key issue. These silos exist for a reason. You’ll find a lot of domain expertise and years of industry know-how in each silo discipline. The pain for these groups is getting acute enough and teams are realizing that they have to get on the same page to succeed. Each specialty has unique technological needs and Shunra certainly is playing its part to support those requirements when it comes to having applications run well on the network. Initiatives such as ITIL and TL 9000 are helping to get the industry to focus on the processes and best practices that should be used. In the past, when teams were evaluating a technology or new test equipment, each team may have come to a different decision as to which tool they needed. The result was a “tower of babel” where tests were not reusable or leveraged, and test results could not be easily correlated and interpreted. Increasingly, both SPs and Enterprise testing teams are realizing that testing tool decisions should not be made in a vacuum.

The bottom line is that all testing tools must support same core goals: will applications perform well, will they be reliable and stable, will they perform efficiently with low cost of ownership, and can they be managed effectively. Failure to achieve success on these core goals means failure to meet fundamental businesses objectives. Buyers need to choose tools that will play well together and share information in order to meet the needs and goals of the business.

OY: Shunra has coined the phrase, “Think globally. Test locally.” and the concept of creating “network aware” applications. Can you talk about main technological trends in the application performance management and monitoring industry that this speaks to?

LM: First of all applications are in general becoming much more global. More and more applications are being deployed to remote branches, are being accessed by partners and customers; including consumer self-service applications. We coined this phrase to raise awareness of the importance of the network and how it interacts with each application. Traditional approaches to network-aware testing were very inefficient and largely ineffective because of how complex and cumbersome they were to implement. Our mission at Shunra is to make network-aware testing so easy and affordable that it becomes ubiquitous and is applied as part of the testing for all new applications. We continue to build market awareness that when building an application you have to consider the environment it will be deployed into. This is the network perspective.

Historically, the motivation to consider the impact that the network has on an application was absent during development. If anything, there was a fleeting effort to ballpark how much bandwidth would be needed. Shunra has thousands of customers who have incorporated a better way to test applications before they are deployed into production. We enable customers to prevent potential scalability issues as they are building applications without requiring that developers or QA teams learn all the gory details of network configuration and analysis. We are raising the level of industry awareness and demonstrating that it is very easy these days to test locally within a single physical test lab and emulate and accurately predict how the application is going to perform when it’s deployed globally. There is no longer any need to defer testing until just before an application is deployed (when it may be too late), or to send people or test equipment out to remote locations for testing.

OY: Who are the main end-users of Shunra’s products?

LM: Enterprise IT organizations comprise the bulk of Shunra’s focus these days. We also service some of the largest and well known Service Providers and network equipment manufacturers who use Shunra products to

make sure that their services and equipment will perform well in the live customer environment.

We have a wide range of solutions that span from software based products that can be installed on developer's desktops or VMware test images, to our flagship appliance-based product line that is used in performance test labs and QA as well as network engineering and operations. Our users span the range of IT professionals from development and QA to network engineering and production operations.

OY: What major challenges does your company currently face? How are you addressing those issues?

LM: We are helping customers more efficiently deliver applications. The mantra is 'better, faster, and cheaper'. We are trying to help customers to achieve that goal when it comes to application performance over the network. Also, IT is faced with the growing complexity of these applications. They are getting richer user interfaces, much more integration across various work flows, or technology, knowledge management, data, and video. All of which are intertwined. The complexity is substantially growing but budget and staff remains constrained. Vendor success in this market environment requires agility and responsiveness to meet the evolving needs of our customers.

A core part of our strategy is to extend our underlying testing capabilities in ways that will make it even easier to test how applications are going to perform in production. 'Eco-system', is the word I like to use to summarize our strategy. This means that we will invest to further improve the way we fit into the tools and processes that users are already working within. We have already delivered on this strategy and continue to do so. For example at HP Software Universe earlier this year we announced our integration with market-leading HP LoadRunner. Late this year we will release integration with Microsoft Visual Studio to enable Microsoft developers to validate network performance within the IDE. We are also members of the VMware alliance, to ensure our solutions work well within a virtualized environment. We are a part of Ixia's test alliance for IP service verification. We believe these activities are the right strategy for Shunra and are right for helping our customers.

OY: What do you think are the key concerns that end-users have regarding application performance management and test automation?

LM: The end-users we are talking about (IT teams) want to make sure that they have capabilities to gather factual data to allow decision making based on a common understanding of application performance. Vendors, such as Shunra, help end users understand what may cause an application to perform poorly over the network and address issues at the right point in the lifecycle, before it is too late and actual business users are impacted.

Secondly, they want to make sure that new tools they invest in do not become shelfware. Shelfware is caused by products that are too hard to set up, too difficult to use, or prove too hard to generate actionable results. Customers want tools that can quickly and easily fit into their existing environment. They want new capabilities that integrate into their existing tool set and can be automated within the testing framework they are currently using.

OY: As we all know, this industry today is highly competitive and dynamic. What do you do in order to stay competitive in this market place?

LM: From our inception, Shunra has been an innovator in the network-emulation and testing space. We continue to provide leadership in a number of areas. The reasons for our success start with our executive team's commitment to delivering value to customers. Our engineers, sales team, product marketing and

management, and professional services are all aligned and focused on meeting customer and market needs. Shunra is a successful, stable, and rapidly growing company. We constantly refine and hone our efforts to make sure we stay on top of understanding what the customers are really trying to accomplish and how we can best serve them.

From the R&D side, we have an agile development process which allows us to adapt quickly to changing requirements. We continue to incorporate customer feedback and respond to market needs in every new release.

OY: What application performance management and test automation solutions have you introduced or plan to introduce in the future and what are their advantages?

LM: We have introduced a number of new things this year. We are adding significantly upgraded capabilities into Shunra's VE Suite. VE Suite is based on our award-winning test appliances which now include capabilities such as Deep Packet Inspection and 10 Gigabit line rate processing. We have extended VE Desktop, our software-based platform to add HP integration certification for interoperability with HP LoadRunner. We are moving forward with additional integration with HP QuickTest Professional and HP Performance Center. In the future you will see us continue to work through the application lifecycle specifically focusing on application developers and accuracy of network performance testing. We are working to provide actionable reporting and service-aware solutions that help our customers deliver reliable applications.

OY: What are Shunra's key strengths as a company?

LM: First of all, our people. We have a strong and committed team, with some of the best and brightest in our industry. Shunra has a great company workplace. Our people and their relentless focus on serving our customers are our key strengths. From the market perspective, we are the leader in the WAN Emulation market; we have the market leading solution with internal processes and resources in place to maintain our lead. We have great customers that rely on our products every day. As a result we receive a lot of invaluable feedback from our customers, which we incorporate via an iterative development approach. The company has been self-funded through most of its history. We are financially very secure, which gives us an opportunity to selectively take advantage of new opportunities that come our way.

OY: Which markets do you consider to be Shunra's primary markets and why? What international markets do you consider for current and future growth?

LM: The Global Fortune 2000. These companies tend to have complex networking needs as well as distributed employee and customer/supplier base. In addition to the North American market, we have made a lot of strides in Western Europe and Asia Pacific. I think our current and future growth will continue to come from Fortune Global 2000 companies. We expect to see a lot of growth to come from Asia.

OY: There has been an ongoing trend in communication test and measurement industry towards forming strategic partnerships. How has your relationship with your partners been and how has it benefited your company? Just recently, you announced partnerships with HP, and VMware, can you tell us more about these partnerships and the added value your customers will receive from these alliances? What are some other technologies that you consider well aligned with Shunra's tools?

LM: We are always looking for ways to integrate with other tools that our customers are using, and pay close attention to the tools our customers are using in conjunction with Shunra's technology. We are also focused on

working with partners to incorporate our capabilities as part of the evolution in the way that applications are developed and delivered. The alliances with HP LoadRunner, VMware, Microsoft, and Ixia are all based on serving the customer better by delivering an integrated solution set.

In regards to customer benefits from these partnerships, the key point is that the customer does not have to make the extra investment to figure out how to make multiple vendors tools work together and thus become the de-facto systems integrator. Our partnerships provide pre-tested interoperable solutions that perform well with other solutions. This takes the burden and risk away from the customer and gives them the assurance that the solution will work as needed. This is the core benefit from our partnerships and alliances.

A secondary benefit is by partnering to bring best-of-breed joint solutions to the market, we can provide best practices on how to use the products alongside each other. Shunra's professional services and training capabilities also help speed our customers time to value in a multi-vendor test environment.

OY: What is your view on the competition? What makes Shunra different from them? Who do you consider to be your direct competitor?

LM: Shunra remains the leader across metrics such as customer base, financial stability, the most comprehensive solution in the market, and innovation. The narrow technical definition of WAN emulation as a market is a limited one – we view our market within the context of the much larger application performance management and quality market.

Our primary market is the Global 2000 Enterprise. In this market, to have a complete solution, one must have the technical capability to offer WAN emulation to all phases of the application development lifecycle. From the developer's desktop to the performance test lab, the solution must enable development of network aware applications and testing of those applications. In this paradigm we have many competitors but none have a complete solution. There is Apposite, which has a solution used for simplistic testing, not very sophisticated albeit a good solution for that specific need. Another is Itrinigy which is based in the UK. They have a software desktop solution and appliance but they lack the sophisticated reporting, analysis and network capture that defines our solution. Shunra's tools capture actual network impairments to design our virtual environment. Opnet could be viewed as an indirect competitor, but they are focused on application analysis once you have deployed the solution and are almost always used in a synergistic way alongside Shunra. While Shunra is best at quickly telling users what will happen when an application is deployed Opnet is best at helping users understand what happened when the application is in production. What customers want is a proven best in class solution, something that will help them guarantee or optimize their success. Shunra is known for providing this on a worldwide basis.

We view our most important competitor as the overall adoption rate, not one of our point product competitors. More companies do not build WAN emulation into their processes than do at this point. That is where we continue to make inroads. We help our customers see the value of including the WAN into the earliest stages of development. They consider this proactive step as a competitive advantage, and one that saves a company a lot of headaches and resources. The opportunity cost of not doing WAN emulation pre-deployment can be staggering and we are on the cusp of this realization hitting home with a broader market.

OY: What would you, as a new CTO of the company, like to accomplish in the next couple of years? How would you define success for yourself and for Shunra?

LM: Great question! The answer goes to the core of why I joined Shunra. Inside Shunra we are building and growing a team with a sense of purpose and alignment to our core values. My goal is to take the strong base

that we have and accelerate our expansion into new markets and new products over the next couple of years while we continue to provide capabilities that are not easily attained today by customers. Shunra is very well positioned financially, has a great team, and is well-positioned to capitalize on the market dynamics and trends pushing a growing need for what we provide.

I would also like to make sure that our R&D team continues to earn industry recognition for producing market-leading products. We have been an innovator in various areas and we have been known as the vendor that pushes the envelope in terms of how to build applications that perform well over the network and test them in an effective manner. We want to make sure that Shunra helps organizations roll the upcoming wave of “web 2.0” applications such as rich, highly interactive and multimedia applications into production smoothly and that they meet performance expectations. Shunra is well positioned to make sure that our customers can deliver new applications successfully. That is how I define my success, and the success of Shunra in the next few years. We have a pipeline of things in the validation stage now and I want to make sure that our products help the industry as a whole to move forward in terms of its capabilities.

One final closing comment – I believe there are elements of both science and art within the software business. The art is the ability to listen to a customer and perceive the underlying issues, see what others don’t, and address those requirements, both stated and unstated. My role at Shunra includes making sure we have the insight to anticipate new customer needs and address them in a way that helps our customers and results in continued growth for Shunra.

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