

Product Intelligence Report: **Progress Actional 8.0 Brings Continuous Quality to SOA Management**

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Analyst: **Meehan, Michael**

Market: **Application Infrastructure**

Standard View

Summary

Analytical Summary

Progress Software's Actional 8.0 Enterprise is very threatening to competitors because it merges a mature Web services management (WSM) solution with competitive standalone SOA quality tooling. It is the first such single offering to do so in the SOA marketplace. The quality software comes to Actional via the summer 2008 acquisition of Mindreef, and the company has spent months integrating the two solutions into a unified product.

The first joint Actional-Mindreef release came in January with the free Actional Diagnostics tool (See [Progress Leverages Mindreef SOA Quality Tooling with Actional Diagnostics Release](#), January 30, 2009). That product allows developers to see the gravity of the problems created by unchecked service dependencies. Actional 8 puts powerful tools in the hands of IT staff to manage and govern those services.

No other WSM competitor has been able to infuse continuous quality functionality into its solution to this extent to date. Actional 8 also reaches far beyond SOAP-based Web services to manage complex transaction flows across the application tier. It can tap into application logging mechanisms and apply policies, which creates a method to fine tune applications for regulatory compliance. With a single click, users can get a full graphical view of a transaction path, complete with a timeline of topology changes. Techniques have also been added for managing distributed services as they enter system nodes where management agents cannot be placed.

A challenge for Progress will be to sell this product in a market segment, next-generation application management, that has resisted definition. It puts the onus on the vendor to explain the differences between itself and seemingly similar, but often complementary products. Actional's status as a full participant in and manager of the cloud remains unclear. Marketing Actional's quality assessment capabilities for use during the deployment phase by developers will also be difficult until the product can be modularized via OSGi to fit into common build tools.

Yet Actional 8 marks a significant step in the maturation of the WSM market into continuous quality assessment, well beyond the borders of basic Web services protocols. Since acquiring Actional in early 2006 (See [Progress Buys Actional, Adds SOA Management to Its Sonic Suite](#), January 19, 2006), Progress has done an excellent job of building on that functionality and growing its market footprint. With Actional 8, which will be generally available on April 6, Progress threatens to make even more significant gains in the SOA governance and management space.

Positives and Concerns

Strengths

- Full integration with Mindreef testing and validation tools infuses quality throughout the management process for Actional. No other WSM solution has folded competitive standalone SOA quality software into a unified package. In addition, deployment phase tools have been notably absent from SOA registry-based governance solutions, opening up multiple partnership opportunities for Progress. Most importantly, Mindreef is not an addendum to Actional. Rather it is fully integrated functionality within the product.
- The management capabilities of Actional 8 extend well beyond SOAP-based Web services, something Progress

is stressing with marketing around the concept of “business transaction assurance.” Support for REST and POX has been added as well as new support for integration platforms from TIBCO, Software AG and Oracle. Actional has followed in hot pursuit as distributed applications have moved beyond basic Web services protocols. The product now focuses on complete application layer management.

- With Actional 8, Progress has upped the ante in terms of the depth of visibility available in the market. New in this release, for example, is the ability to tap into logging mechanisms, such as log4j, to view every log related to a transaction with a single click. This enables the solution to apply policies on top of the logs, which creates a method to fine tune applications for regulatory compliance. Also exceptions may be examined and corrected using Mindreef tooling.
- With a single click, users can get a full graphical view of a transaction path, complete with a timeline of topology changes. The product tracks how the transaction flow has changed over time, separating the transaction flow from the underlying infrastructure, which is increasingly being virtualized. A rich user interface is also provided for service monitoring purposes. The ability to tie complex management functionality into a clean, rich user interface is becoming an important differentiator in the governance and management space.
- Actional is packaged into three different versions: a free Actional Diagnostics product, Actional Application Development and Actional Enterprise. The development version offers the pre-production Mindreef deployment tools starting at \$20,000. The full enterprise version starts at \$100,000. This gives users a clear upgrade path for Actional from free metrics, to design time quality tools to full runtime management.
- Also new in Actional 8 is the ability to “fingerprint” messages that flow into and out of systems where Actional cannot place a management agent. The software then logs the changes in the messages as they exit those systems. Policy may also be applied around such agentless systems, a recognition that various third-party, custom and legacy systems have become increasingly part of the distributed service management loop.

Weaknesses

- Actional fits into an odd space in the overall application infrastructure market, which will create a marketing challenge for Progress. Its only direct WSM competitors are AmberPoint and SOA Software. IBM, HP, Oracle and TIBCO all have application tier management offerings that contain some of the functionality of a WSM solution, but all are materially different enough to resist categorization. That largely forces Actional to define this segment of the market for would-be users and explain the differences between itself and seemingly similar, but often complementary products.
- Progress’ overall cloud and virtualization strategies are still unclear, despite the fact that Actional is among its most important products to prepare for that coming wave. Agentless management upgrades in Actional 8 improve the manageability of cloud applications, and Actional can is architected to work across multiple instances of a service node, yet those are product features and not a uniform strategy on how the product will participate in and manage the cloud.
- With the addition of Mindreef, Actional offers good design time tools for developers, but that has not been the native audience for this product in the past. Actional Diagnostics is a step in the right direction, but an OSGi architecture that allows developers to incorporate Actional functionality with their build tools would go a lot farther in reaching that audience in the long-term.

Product Metrics

Metric	Value
Operating systems supported	Microsoft Windows, Red Hat Linux, Red Hat Enterprise Linux, Solaris, HP-UX, IBM AIX
Databases supported	SQL Server, Oracle, DB2, PostgreSQL, MSDE
New platform/protocols supported	REST, POX, SAP Netweaver, TIBCO BusinessWorks, webMethods Integration Server, Oracle Service Bus, Iona Artix, Apache CXF, Apache Camel

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Current Analysis, Inc.

21335 Signal Hill Plaza, Second Floor, Sterling, VA 20164

Tel: 877-787-8947

Fax: +1 (703) 404-9300

Current Analysis, Inc.

2 rue Troyon, 92316 Sevres Cedex, Paris, France

Tel: +33 (1) 41 14 83 17

<http://www.currentanalysis.com>