

HRG Assessment: Sun's FTR (Floor Tile Ready) Program

Sun's FTR program simplifies the selection, purchase, installation, configuration, and implementation of Solaris based IT solutions for business. FTR is a good fit for businesses with an ongoing requirement for server replication (read as scaling out). FTR program solutions are based on a standardized set of building blocks comprised of Sun servers, storage, and software. This program provides the potential for reduced TCO, enhanced ROI, and decreased time to revenue (read as enhanced cash flow).

Turnkey Solutions

Turnkey solutions have been around for decades. Traditionally provided by VARs and Systems Integrators. They can range from PC / Workstation based vertically focused solutions all the way up to mainframe class solutions. They are traditionally the result of make vs. buy decisions made based on the experience, expertise, and reputation of VARs and SIs. In many cases turnkey solutions were developed by consultants as custom one of a kind solutions for large vertically organized companies. These same consultants realizing the value of this solution to other companies, then struck a deal with their initial client which allowed them to then offer this solution to other members of that vertical market. This has worked well resulting in the development of a number of ISV's, VAR's and SI's. However, the clear majority of these turnkey solutions come with a hefty price tag.

Turnkey solutions are a good alternative to building your own custom solution which requires hardware selection, configuration, testing, and custom in-house software development. However, a turnkey solution is in most cases more expensive than buying a standardized hardware platform and shrink wrapped software solutions. Enter Sun's FTR program offerings.

HRG performed first hand review of Sun's Floor Tile Ready Program. Based on interviews with selected FTR users and other non-FTR Unix server users HRG gives Sun high marks for being in touch with their customers and for aggressively working to provide solutions and benefits customers need to succeed in business. Sun's FTR Program deserves a closer look from businesses looking for highly leveragable Solaris (Unix) based IT solutions.

Sun's Floor Tile Ready (FTR) Program

Sun's new Floor Tile Ready program delivers all of the benefits of Turnkey solutions with none of the headaches and at a significantly reduced cost. FTR is available on a worldwide basis either direct from Sun or through one of Sun's iForce Partners. Customers can take delivery of new FTR systems and quickly have them up, running, and doing useful work. HRG fully expects that the majority of Sun's FTR Program customers will very quickly benefit from increased ROI, and improved time to revenue.

- Less time spent on installation, set-up and configuration = lower TCO.
- Quicker deployment time = faster return on investment.

Sun's FTR program delivers systems that are architected to meet the needs of IT professionals in an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing environment. Sun's Floor Tile Ready program offers ready to deploy combinations of racked or rack ready systems designed to meet the Just In Time delivery and capacity requirements of some of Sun's most demanding high-growth mid-market clients many of whom do business on the web. In particular for those business that need to be able to scale up their compute resources to keep pace with unscheduled increases in consumer demand for their services Sun's FTR offers what appears to be a painless solution.

Time & Money

FTR can reduce time to revenue for both new and existing applications. Reduced time to revenue means that you can realize the increased revenue from new business opportunities sooner. Sun's FTR program offerings are designed from the outset to be quick and easy to install, implement, and configure. This means that you will be able to have your new systems up and doing useful revenue generating work sooner than previously was possible. FTR systems are assembled, and tested by Sun before they are shipped to the customer. This can include the integration of servers, storage, OS, applications, data base and customer data. When such a system is uncrated and plugged in at the customer site, the system can be brought on-line and put in use quickly. The impact is that for new applications, and for those existing applications that need to be scaled out, the benefits of enhanced return on asset and increased productivity are quickly realized.

According to interviews conducted by Sun, *“early FTR customers have experienced a 90 to 95 percent reduction in deployment times and an 80 percent reduction of early-life system issues due to decreased handling in a factory-controlled environment.”*

The Floor Tile Ready systems program allows Sun customers to stay focused on their business and on servicing their customers without getting distracted by new system installation, configuration, integration, and implementation issues. Within most businesses computers, networks, storage, and software (read as IT) are tools to be used to

facilitate the business by creating efficiencies, expediting, and accelerating sensible business growth, return on assets and, cash flow. Towards this end anything that makes the selection, purchase, installation and configuration of IT platforms within a business simpler, faster, and more trouble free is good for the business.

Why FTR?

According to Sun *“The goal of the Floor-Tile Ready (FTR) systems program is to ship ready to deploy systems to businesses, where they can be immediately installed on the floor tiles of data centers.”* Before Sun implemented the FTR program they conducted researched into their customer’s requirements and discovered that most customers have either all or some of the following needs and concerns:

- System customization based on standard system configurations
- Ease and speed of deployment
- Improved quality and reliability
- Ability to reorder common configurations quickly and easily
- Cash flow sensitivity, improved time to revenue.”

Building Blocks

Sun’s FTR program leverages a building block approach based on the following standardized product configurations:

- Sun Enterprise 220R, 250, 420R, and 450 workgroup servers
- Sun Fire 280R and V880 workgroup servers with 900-MHz processors
- Sun Enterprise 4500 and 6500 midrange servers
- Sun Fire 3800, 4800, 4810, and 6800 midframe servers with 900-MHz processors
- Netra t1 200, X1, t1 1125, and t 1405 servers
- Netra st D130 storage
- Sun StorEdge A1000, D1000, A5200, and T3 storage arrays
- Sun StorEdge 3900 and 6900 storage subsystems

FTR systems are assembled to customer requirements in Sun’s ISO 9002 certified manufacturing and assembly facilities. These can be delivered either as racked or rack ready units for installation into existing racks at the customer site.

TCO / ROI

Hardware purchasing decisions are based on more than price and performance. HRG has developed a methodology, based on extensive primary research, to accurately calculate Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) and Return On Investment (ROI). HRG's TCO/ROI model captures metrics for procurement, installation, operations, downtime, and more. HRG has observed that operational, including installation and downtime, costs traditionally represent from 50% to 80% of the TCO, depending on configuration size, complexity and planned system life span. For this reason, human resources, installation, and downtime costs must be key areas of focus when working towards a reduced TCO.

FTR is a non-application specific integration capability offered by Sun that can help customers control their operational issues and therefore reduce TCO in the following ways:

- Simplifying installation and configuration.
- Providing improved reliability and reduced early life system failures / problems.
- Providing a ready to use fully configured seamlessly integrated compute platform.

Who uses FTR?

One example of a current Sun FTR customer is a large ISP that has specific requirements for servers, storage, and applications. These applications are used to service their customers. In this case Sun worked with the customer to determine the rack lay out – how the servers are to be positioned and connected. Once Sun built the first rack a part number was assigned to each of the application images and now whenever the customer needs more capacity they can call up Sun and order a part number and server combination. The customer then gets exactly what they need and the result is always predictable and consistent.

Most large customers have their own ways to install application software on top of Solaris. In many cases these same customers need to have each application server identically configured in order to reduce the complexity and operational cost of managing large numbers of such servers. Customers like these know what they want and in many cases will have dedicated jump start environments in house used to configure each new application server and make it identical to all of the other existing application servers within that organization. They install the system image that they have designed specifically for their applications by overwriting the existing OS and other software that is not preconfigured to their exact standards. This allows the new servers to be brought on line in a production environment in very short order. These types of customers will use the same methodology to configure application servers and data base servers for use in their production environment.

Who should consider using Sun's FTR program?

Where ever there are repeat orders in a data center for the same types of systems FTR can provide maximum benefit to customers. Of course the customer's applications need to be running on Solaris and Sun Servers because FTR is not a migration or conversion service. However, for those sites looking to change from a non-Sun hardware and OS platform to Sun's compute platform the Sun professional services group is available for a fee to help migrate data and applications as required.

Golden Image CD

If a customer can provide Sun with a CD (called a Golden Image CD or Customer Provided Software Image) of the system image that is used on their jump start server to configure each new Sun server running Solaris then Sun can provide that service for the customer for a nominal fee. In this way a customer can take delivery of an FTR system and in some cases have the system up and running in a production environment the same day it is delivered at their data center. In cases like this the customer is normally responsible for taking care of the last mile connections such as power hook ups, tuning, setting up IP addresses, etc. However, if a customer already knows their IP addresses then those can be included as part of the system image that is burnt onto the Golden Image CD.

A Golden Image CD should have an image of Solaris setup to meet the customers unique requirement and can also include a combination of either home grown applications and or shrink wrapped applications such as Oracle or SAP which will be installed on top of the Solaris operating system. In these cases customers are required to have all of their software licensing in order (this is clearly stated in the FTR contract). There is a fixed fee for installing such a system image at the Sun Factory. The current fee is \$295.00 per server and capped at \$995 per rack.

On an as needed basis Sun can have their professional services organization work with customers in order to determine the best / most efficient way to configure and install the software on a Solaris box and from that develop a Golden Image CD.

What does FTR Cost?

According to Sun FTR's price is a fixed price per server and fixed price per rack but in general it amounts to 5% and in some cases less than 5% of the total system cost. On average this is the integration fee.

One significant advantage FTR provides to Sun customers is that it can be used to quickly and cost effectively configure and replicate systems to scale out their compute infrastructure in order to meet unexpected capacity requirements due to increased customer demand.

FTR is good for the Environment!

FTR also makes good sense from an ecological perspective in that when you take delivery of a rack mounted preconfigured system you have only one shipping container to deal with as compared to perhaps 100's of boxes if you are installing and configuring systems within your own rack. This makes particularly good sense in urban areas where trash removal can be problematic.

Conclusion

In preparing to write this HRG Assessment HRG visited Sun and performed first hand review of the Sun Floor Tile Ready (FTR) program. Additionally, based on interviews conducted with selected FTR users and other non-FTR Unix server users HRG gives Sun high marks for being in touch with their customers and for aggressively working to provide solutions and benefits customers need to reduce their TCO and succeed in business. In HRG's considered opinion Sun's FTR Program deserves a closer look from businesses that require highly leveragable Solaris (Unix) based IT solutions.

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