



Contribution ID: 59

Type: **Oral contribution**

Grid Computing and Online Games

Thursday 2 March 2006 16:30 (30 minutes)

With the fast growth of the video games and entertainment industry - thanks to the appearance of new games, new technologies and innovative hardware devices - the capacity to react becomes critical for competing in the market of services and entertainment. Therefore it is necessary to be able to count on advanced middleware solutions and technological platforms that allow a fast unfolding of custom made services.

Andago has developed the online games platform Andago Games that provides the technological base necessary for the creation of online Games services around which the main entertainment sites will be able to establish solid business models. The platform Andago Games allows to quickly create online multiplayer games channels with the following services for the final user:

- Pay per Play/ pay per subscription
- Reserving of gaming rooms or servers and advance management of games
- Advanced statistics
- Automatic game launch
- Clans
- Championships, downloads, chat, etc.

However, the platform requires important investments by operators and portals, limiting the number of possible customers. Grid computing will reduce dramatically the amount of these investments by means of sharing resources among different operators and portals. Also, Grid computing offers the possibility to create virtual organizations, where operators and portals could share games and contents, and even their user's base. Technically, the goal is to be able to share expensive resources between providers and to allow billing based on usage. From a business perspective our goal is to open new commercial opportunities in the domain of entertainment.

A common problem with online games is that operators, portals and games providers would like to share resources and aim at sharing the costs to optimize their businesses. Yet business entities are generally required to play all business roles. The European market is still too fragmented and it is hard to reach the critical mass of users needed to make online games businesses profitable and to ensure resource liquidity. Having a Grid infrastructure makes it possible to divide tasks among different actors and in consequence each actor could concentrate on the business it knows best. Application developers provide the applications, portal providers create the portals to attract users, and Telcos/ISP will provide the infrastructure required. Such Virtual Organisations allow for profitable alliances and resource integration. The outcome of a grid enabled online games platform will be to provide the middleware to make this collaboration happen. The Grid ensures not only decreasing costs for businesses, but allows for creating a global European market as applications, infrastructure and users can be shared independently of political and social borders, smoothly integrated and better exploited.

There are also big advantages for users. For example, they will have a larger offer, better quality of service and certainly cheaper services. Grid centralized portals would provide thousands of games and entertainment content from different providers. Today, if one buys a new game and wants to play it online, the user has to connect to a server (possibly) in the USA, unless a local server was set up. Having a Grid infrastructure would largely ease that process. Users will simply connect to the Grid, play and join the international community of users.

An online games scenario implies strong requirements on QoS for the provision in real-time of distributed multimedia content all over the world. Also usage monitoring is quite important due to the user profiling and its matching with the content (underage access to inadequate contents). Privacy, billing and community building are other properties relevant for online games and entertainment.

Summary

Adago plans to extend its Online Games platform to use grid middleware to solve common problems found in online games portals. Technically, the goal is to be able to share expensive resources between providers and to allow billing based on usage. From a business perspective our goal is to open new commercial opportunities in the domain of entertainment.

Author: Mr GARCIA LEIVA, Rafael (Adago Ingenieria)

Presenter: Mr GARCIA LEIVA, Rafael (Adago Ingenieria)

Session Classification: 2c: Special type of jobs (MPI, SDJ, interactive jobs, ...) - Information systems

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