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Where will Microsoft's green path lead?

For months now, many of the hardware technology heavyweights -- HP, IBM, Sun, Dell, AMD, Cisco, and Intel, for example -- have gone to great lengths to highlight their green products, plans, and corporate visions. Now the software behemoth Microsoft has stepped forward to loudly proclaim its support for the sustainable IT movement.

By Ted Samson

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For months now, many of the hardware technology heavyweights -- **HP**, **IBM**, **Sun**, **Dell**, **AMD**, **Cisco**, and **Intel**, for example -- have gone to great lengths to highlight their green products, plans, and corporate visions. Other green IT benefits not withstanding, this strategy makes sense from a marketing standpoint: By demonstrating and accentuating the greenness of their wares, they're better positioned to sell processors, PCs, servers, and other gear to customers hungry for leaner, greener operations.

Now the software behemoth Microsoft has stepped forward to loudly proclaim its support for the sustainable IT movement. The company's off to a good start: Beyond a list of notable green credentials already under its belt, Microsoft has a newly appointed chief environmental strategist in Rob Bernard, charged with guiding and promoting the evolution of the company's green agenda. The company's newly released server platform Windows Server 2008 is **garnering praise** for its energy efficiency. The company is even starting to share, for free, its best practices for datacenter management.

By shining a green spotlight on itself, Microsoft is calling attention to the fact that it understands the role that it -- and the software and platform industry as a whole -- has to play in the complex green-tech ecosystem. What remains to be seen is how that seemingly newfound green religion will manifest itself in future product offerings, particularly, in my mind, with respect to the successor to Vista.

Green in Redmond
Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer used the Cebit stage to not only tout the energy-efficiency features loaded in Windows 2008 Server and other Microsoft products; he **told the world** that the company would soon release a set of best practices for datacenter management, drawing on energy-saving strategies the company has adopted in its own operations. The first set of best practices, in fact, is **already available for download**.

Microsoft's interest in green tech has been evident for a while. Beyond the green features the company claims in Vista and Windows 2008 Server, Microsoft was among **the first members** of The Green Grid, a consortium of high-tech companies looking to holistically address the challenge of curbing power consumption in the datacenter. It's also a part of the **Climate Savers Initiative**, which aims to increase energy savings in computers and servers. Moreover, the company **reports incorporating green practices** in developing its facilities in India and Quincy, Wash. Microsoft also **joined forces** with the Clinton Foundation last year to develop