EMA Radar™ for Workload Automation (WLA): Q2 2012

Flux Profile

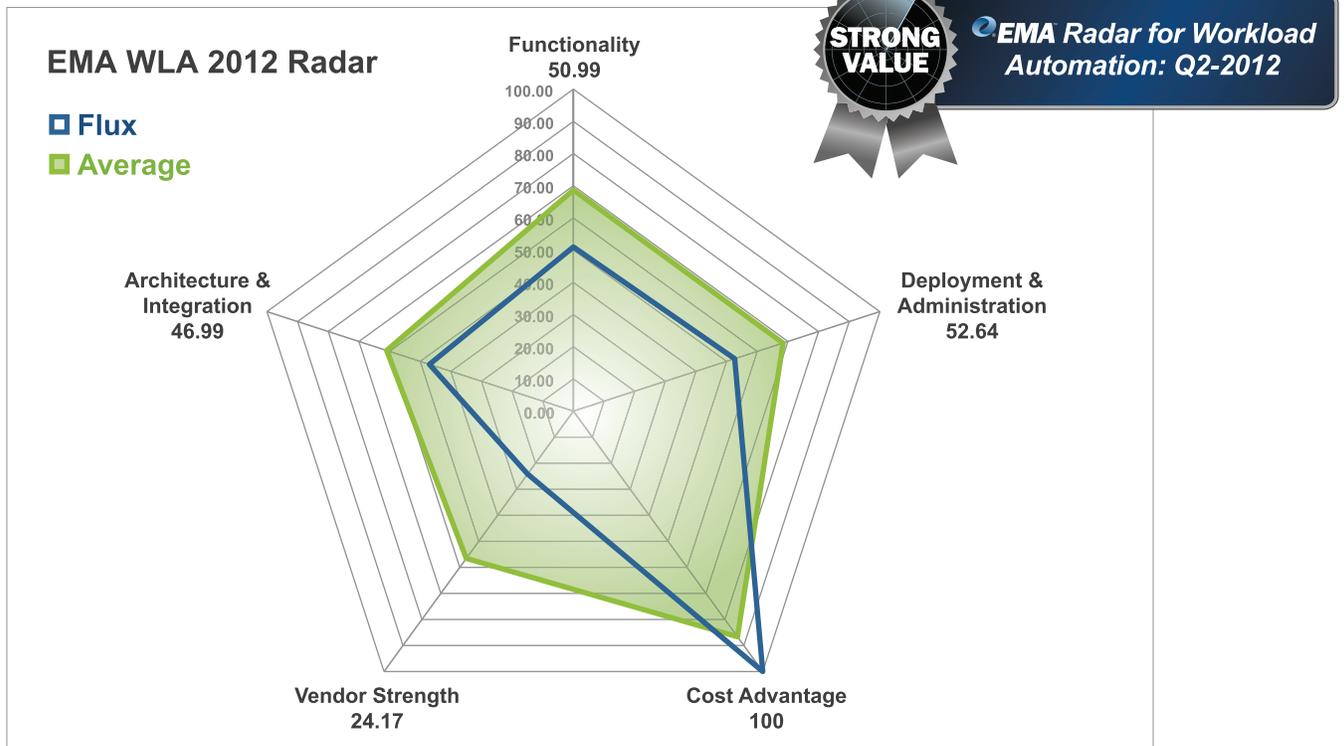By Torsten Volk, Senior Analyst
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Flux Profile

EMA WLA 2012 Radar

☐ **Flux**
☐ **Average**

STRONG VALUE

*℮*EMA *Radar for Workload Automation: Q2-2012*

Functionality
50.99

100.00
90.00
80.00
70.00
60.00
50.00
40.00
30.00
20.00
10.00
0.00

Architecture & Integration
46.99

Deployment & Administration
52.64

Vendor Strength
24.17

Cost Advantage
100

Introduction

Founded in 2000 in Las Vegas, Nevada, Flux offers a lightweight, fully Java-based, cross-platform workload automation solution, with focus on managed file transfer. Flux clients praised the company's customer service and the simplicity of the product. Flux has recently launched Floify, providing most of Flux' workload automation and file transfer capabilities in a SaaS format. Floify is currently offered for free at www.Floify.com and definitely worth evaluating.

Flux does not directly compete with traditional workload automation vendors, but should rather be seen as a unique tool for advanced managed file transfer, with considerable workload automation capabilities. EMA believes that organizations with mainly file transfer – especially ETL – requirements should take a good look at Flux, as the software could be a cost effective alternative to a more complex workload automation solution.

Architecture & Integration

Flux is based on a peer-to-peer architecture, with automatic high availability and load-balancing (see Figure 12). The software is founded on a single code-base that works on any operating system with a Java runtime environment, including mainframe. Native load-balancing and high availability are standard features in higher-priced solutions, but must be mentioned as rare in a low-cost scheduler such as Flux. Flux customers especially like the comprehensive and well-structured API and the visual real-time debugging ability of the software. Conceived in 2000, the software comes with very little legacy overhead and therefore is able to offer a clean and easy-to-use architecture and design, ideal for SOA deployments.
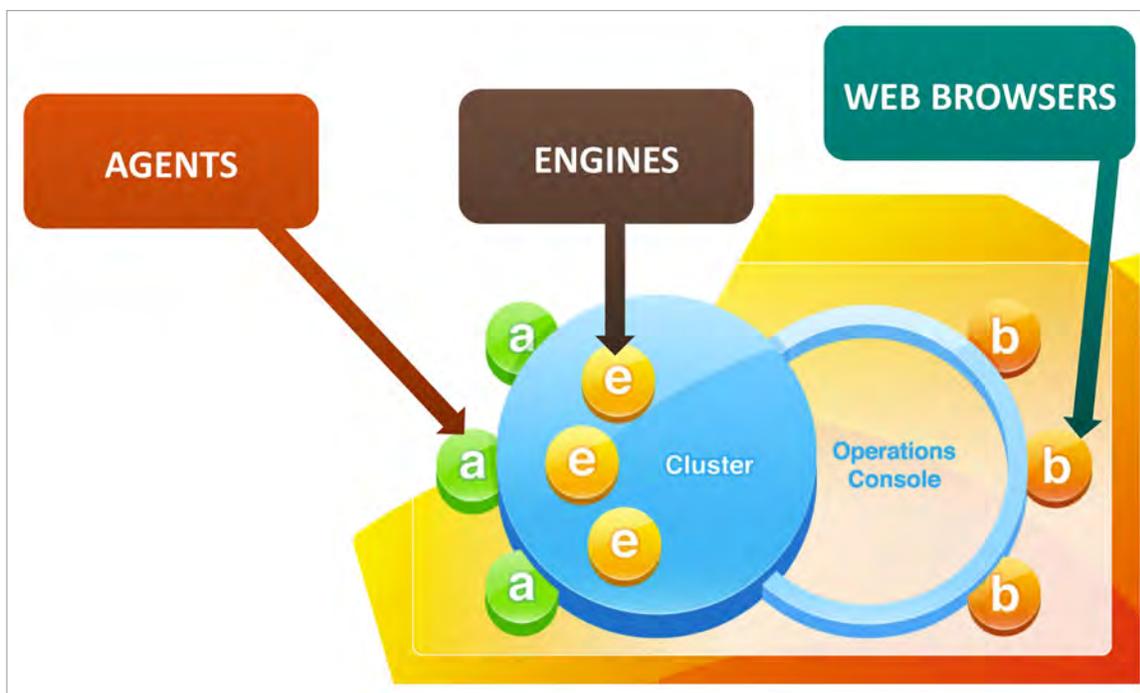
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Figure 12: Flux Architecture

Flux integrates with numerous databases, such as DB2, Oracle 11g, Microsoft SQL Server, mySQL, and PostgreSQL and business intelligence tools, such as Cognos and Informatica. In addition to accommodating agentless scheduling via SSH and the ability to group agents into pools, Flux allows the administrator to assign individual servers to specific workloads. This latter feature comes in handy when specific customer workloads need a set of particular software or hardware elements to be present.

Functionality

Flux offers a modern and easy-to-use administration interface that is AJAX-driven and therefore able to update workload progress in real time, even from within the development environment. Workflows are created and edited via drag & drop and workflow performance reports are simple and clean. Workload audit reports are complete and easy to read. Flux clients praise the company's help resources, documentation, and customer support.

Workload triggers can be set based on a wide range of events, including file actions, email properties, database values and message queues, or on optimal run times based on preset thresholds to optimize resources and performance. While Flux does not offer advanced SLA tracking or predictive analytics-driven root cause analysis, customers mentioned the ability to track down issues using the Flux real-time debugging environment as a major advantage of the software.

Managed file transfer constitutes another one of Flux' feature highlights. Flux watches availability and performance of remote FTP servers and ensures encryption. Orchestrating files to ETL solutions is a central strength of Flux. The software handles the archiving of these files onto corporate file systems, as well as the transfer to the ETL tool.

Deployment and Administration

Flux can be deployed as a standalone application on any server with Java support, or it can be used within an SOA environment, as part of a custom application. The software is lightweight – 35 MB – and easy to deploy. Conversion utilities are only available for Cron, but not for any of the traditional workload automation tools in this EMA Radar. Flux does not directly compete with these tools, but provides a lightweight alternative to customers with requirements that are file-transfer centric. As a testimonial to the ease of deployment, Flux offers a free trial directly from its Web site, without the need for registration.

Flux allows the administrator to configure automated error response workflows and alerts. These error handlers can be templatized and re-used throughout the Flux deployment, making the software more resilient over time.

Cost Advantage

Flux is licensed per physical server, no matter how many virtual machines are hosted on this server. While an additional task-based pricing model would be desirable, the fact that Flux allows customers to host numerous virtual servers for the cost of a single license, often leads to very attractive project pricing. Implementation, training, and maintenance costs for Flux are low, as the software – user interface and API – was designed from the ground up based on a best practice approach.

Company Strength

Flux' core strength is its vision and its commitment to providing customers with a solution that works. Flux is engineered in a way that is extensible and allows customers to build their solution around a rock-solid set of file transfer and workload automation features. The launch of Floify shows that the Flux team is able to think outside the box to provide customers with innovative new functionality that further takes the complexity out of workload automation.

Strengths & Limitations

Strengths

- **File transfer and ETL Orchestration:** If your challenges align around file transfer and ETL orchestration within a mid-sized environment, EMA recommends you seriously consider Flux.

- **Ease of use:** The Flux user interface can be described as intuitive and cleverly designed. Flux caters to workload beginners, as well as very advanced users taking advantage of the Flux engine via SOA architecture. The administrator's ability to easily create additional error remediation templates is a significant icing on the cake.

- **Peer-to-peer architecture:** The Flux peer-to-peer architecture, with up to eight Flux engines in one cluster, provides native failover and load balancing. This inherent resilience makes Flux a viable solution for mission critical workloads.

Limitations

- **SLA and Analytics:** Flux does not offer advanced analytics or service level management. While job priorities can be manually defined when designing each job stream and life performance reports are available, Flux does not allow customers to connect job stream performance with their corresponding business goals.

- **Narrow feature set:** In some cases Flux constitutes a true alternative to the much larger workload automation solutions. However, Flux has not set out to compete for higher-end deployments with complex workflows consisting of hundreds of thousands of jobs. In other words, Flux is a simple, yet powerful tool that is hard to beat when it comes to automating file transfers.

About Enterprise Management Associates, Inc.

Founded in 1996, Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) is a leading industry analyst firm that provides deep insight across the full spectrum of IT and data management technologies. EMA analysts leverage a unique combination of practical experience, insight into industry best practices, and in-depth knowledge of current and planned vendor solutions to help its clients achieve their goals. Learn more about EMA research, analysis, and consulting services for enterprise line of business users, IT professionals and IT vendors at www.enterprisemanagement.com or blogs.enterprisemanagement.com. You can also follow EMA on Twitter or Facebook.

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