

## J2EE Touted for Large Pool of Trained Developers

By Barbara Bowers, senior associate editor, Best's Review:  
Barbara.Bowers@ambest.com

PHILADELPHIA September 30 (BestWire) - Insurers debating the use of J2EE, or Java 2, vs. .NET should recognize that J2EE is a proven platform that will be bolstered by the support of an estimated 4 million Java-trained developers by the end of 2003, a software provider told technology professionals.

Both .NET and J2EE have been available for nearly a decade, but choosing which of the two technology platforms to go with still can seem daunting to insurers.

"There's no Door No. 3 choice here—companies have to pick one or the other," said Randy Wheeler, founder and chief executive officer of Valley Oak Systems Inc., San Ramon, Calif., a national provider of claims-management software, services and support. "But remember, with J2EE you're not the one breaking ground from a scalability viewpoint." He and colleague Ritza Vaughn, vice president of strategic accounts at Valley Oak, spoke at E-Fusion 2003, A.M. Best Co.'s 15th insurance and technology conference, wrapping up its third day on Sept. 30.

J2EE is Sun Microsystems' Java 2 Platform, Enterprise Edition, a programming standard that uses Java language to support applications that enable enterprise programs to reach suppliers, customers and employers via Internet browsers. It was developed within the Java Community Process, led by Sun Microsystems and with participation by other companies that included Hewlett-Packard Co., IBM, BEA Systems Inc. and Oracle Corp. Currently, there are 500 participants in the community development and 220 standards under development or use. Companies in the consortium create their own application server products using J2EE.

Microsoft's .NET helps companies build enterprise Web services and is newer to the market than J2EE. Proponents say it's a cheaper and relatively simple programming model

that allows various programming languages to communicate with one another.

As Wheeler emphasized, J2EE is a standard, not a product. A standard explains how to develop an application, then vendors produce application products that follow the standards. The Java community/vendors and customers create the specifications to perform functions that are compatible with Java technology standards.

For Valley Oak, the choice was clear: J2EE was the better way to go. The company's client base includes insurance carriers, self-insured employers, public entities, risk pools, reinsurers and third-party administrators. These clients shared three main needs, Vaughn said. "They wanted a secure environment, elimination of the need to deploy using middleware, and the ability to adhere to internal IT standards," she said. "Each had a hot button they were trying to address and we found that J2EE was best in accommodating that diverse client base."

Valley Oak also determined that J2EE was the ticket because it ranks higher in open systems architecture, is flexible to both internal and external users and is more mature, scalable and fully compatible to clients, Wheeler said.

The company's latest product replacement, the iVOS solution, offers advanced business rules automation and is built on Java architecture.

Wheeler offered this advice to insurers facing a choice of J2EE or .NET:

- Decide who the target customers are both inside and outside the company.
- Decide what platforms must be supported.
- Decide what existing code can be reused.
- Decide what are the key integration needs.
- Decide what vendors the company wants to partner with for development tools, application servers, tools and components.