In December 2002, IBM entered the fledgling blade server market space with the first IBM eServer™ BladeCenter® offering. Since then the blade server market has become the fastest-growing segment of the Intel microprocessor-based server market, and IBM's revenue share in blade servers reached 50% by the end of 2004. It is rare for a new server architecture to be embraced rapidly by the IT communities of a broad set of industries, and yet that is just what happened with the BladeCenter architecture. With blade servers currently comprising only 10% of the Intel server market, opportunities for future growth are bright.

IBM's entry into the blade server market brought a level of IBM technology innovation, enterprise-based design principles, and mainstream Intel dual-processor integration that had not been delivered by any competitors. While other competitors' offerings focused more on edge servers, IBM set its sights firmly on providing the vision and execution for true enterprise computing. The success of the BladeCenter system is based on its strategic vision for data center integration, an open system environment, and infrastructure and industry solutions, in addition to technology advantages.

For blade servers, IBM has led the way in integrating the data center infrastructure. IBM BladeCenter systems offer the broadest set of blade adapters, networking switches and advanced networking functions, SAN storage switches, InfiniBand® clustering, and integrated management software. Core partners such as Intel, Cisco, Nortel, Brocade, Qlogic, McData, and TopSpin have worked with IBM to provide their leading-edge technology and expertise, enabling the IBM BladeCenter system to offer high-value data center infrastructure integration in a simplified blade design point. IBM also offers the broadest technology choices for 32-bit and 64-bit computing, with Intel, PowerPC, and AMD processors for the blades.

Beyond these core partners, IBM and Intel opened the blade, switch, and adapter designs to the industry in September 2004 in order to further encourage innovation and adoption of the IBM BladeCenter design point. Since then, more than 250 partners have downloaded the hardware specifications and are currently developing or marketing products.

Finally, the creation of IBM BladeCenter solutions for both infrastructure and industry vertical applications has enabled the BladeCenter system to be broadly adopted by clients in all industries. The notion of integrating vertical applications in each blade has had strong appeal with offerings such as "Bank in a Box," "Retail Store in a Box," the Integrated Platform for Telco based on the BladeCenter T chassis, or the BladeCenter Business Express for small and medium businesses. The IBM BladeCenter Alliance program has enlisted more than 350 software partners to participate in these solutions, with the goal of enabling clients and business partners to use IBM BladeCenter technology and solution reference designs to create meaningful business value.

In summary, the IBM BladeCenter team has demonstrated an ability to create customer-differentiated value in a typically industry-standard and commodity-component market. Their innovation and inventive spirit are part of the exciting story that is the subject of this issue of the *IBM Journal of Research and Development*. It is my pleasure to be a part of this great team.

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