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AnsibleFest 2022: Red Hat Ansible Expands to AWS and into Event-Driven Automation, Project Wisdom Looks to the Future of AI

October 28, 2022

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IDC's Quick Take

Recently, Red Hat held its annual AnsibleFest event with more than 450 companies in person in Chicago, with many more companies attending virtually. The event featured keynotes and general sessions from Red Hat, IBM Research, and Rockwell Automation. Attendance levels and sessions demonstrated the importance of automation, a focus of many enterprises as budgets tighten. In tighter economic times, only investments with the highest return on investment (ROI) will be approved. Furthermore, IDC found that most automation projects had an ROI of fewer than 12 months.

With this in mind, Red Hat announced several new capabilities to make adopting automation more accessible. The day one highlight was the unveiling that the Ansible Automation Platform is now available in both AWS and Azure marketplaces for customers' easy deployment to their cloud environments. Day two spotlighted previews of the new Event-Driven Ansible capabilities of the Ansible Automation Platform and the new Project Wisdom, a jointly developed natural language coding extension with IBM Research.

Event Highlights

Day one of AnsibleFest's focus was on a hybrid open cloud. Red Hat is a long-time contributor and supporter of open source projects. The emphasis on open source continues, as evident by many of Red Hat's announcements at AnsibleFest shows. IDC believes most enterprises will still run on-premises workloads past 2025, even as they continue migrating to the cloud, so there is a need to support a hybrid model with modern automation tools. Red Hat's tight relationship with the open source community adds an openness element to its open hybrid cloud theme.

The first announcement acknowledges many customers' dual strategy to move to the public cloud and use automation to drive business value quickly. Red Hat announced that the Red Hat Ansible Automation Platform is expanding to the Azure Marketplace as a managed solution. Previously, it was available in Azure as a private offering only after directly contracting with Red Hat or Microsoft sales. Now in a frictionless model, it is publicly available to all with pricing and instant access upon accepting the terms and Azure billing. Customers can be up and running in minutes once the infrastructure auto-deploys to their Azure instance. Support comes from Red Hat directly, as with any other customer, and billing is integrated as part of monthly Azure invoices.

The second announcement on day one was the new AWS offering for the Ansible Automation Platform. It is now part of the AWS marketplace as a self-managed solution. Billing is part of a customer's monthly AWS invoice and support comes directly from Red Hat. The Ansible Automation Platform infrastructure is automatically deployed and available in minutes to the customer's AWS instance. The key difference between AWS and Azure offerings is Red Hat has direct, secure access to Ansible Automation Platform infrastructure for Azure customers. This access allows Red Hat to collect logs and apply patches for the

customer. AWS customers use a more traditional support model where Red Hat support asks the customer to send logs and directs customers to apply the appropriate patches themselves.

Day two continued the stream of new announcements with the unveiling of Event-Driven Ansible for the Ansible Automation Platform in developer preview. Developer preview means the software is available in GitHub for end users and technology providers to test and provide feedback. In addition, Event-Driven Ansible introduces the concept of the Ansible Rulebook, which is built upon the traditional Ansible Playbook and adds some new capabilities like "if-then." The rulebook allows Ansible Automation Platform customers to listen to a data feed from sources like Kafka, Splunk, Dynatrace, DataDog, and others – then act based on a predefined solution. Rulebooks use the same YAML-format code Ansible Automation Platform customers use in their Playbooks today.

The final preview announcement was around a joint development between Red Hat and IBM Research. Named Project Wisdom, this preview aims to bring artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language technology together to simplify the process of creating IT automation. By making automation developers more efficient, Project Wisdom hopes to help enterprises realize the goal of full end-to-end automation. IBM has invested significant resources to build the AI models, including dedicating 1,400 NVIDIA A100 GPU processors and a team of research scientists working with Red Hat engineering to build and train the model. Project Wisdom is a plug-in for Ansible integrated development environment, like Microsoft Visual Studio. Red Hat demonstrated by entering one line of code, Project Wisdom can write and predict the following lines needed to execute this code section. Plans include optimizing code to reduce errors and enhance security. In addition, newer Ansible users could use natural language to do everyday tasks without needing an IDE or playbook.

IDC's Point of View

AnsibleFest 2022 returned to in-person proceedings, where the number of attendees nearly matched pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. The combined in-person and virtual attendance numbers show strong interest in automation as a hybrid virtual conference. With uncertain economic times and IT budgets under more pressure than at any time in the past 10 years, IT automation is a way to provide business value and reduce costs.

Red Hat is quickly adding to its list of public hyperscalers offerings. The offerings now include AWS and Azure marketplaces. These frictionless methods of getting new Ansible Automation Platform customers up and running in minutes use the cloud resources of the customer's tenant. This quickstart method helps address a common barrier to automation. The obstacles include a lack of skilled expertise, time, and the up-front costs of standing up the prerequisite automation infrastructure. IDC welcomes this step toward a full software-as-a-service (SaaS) approach and hopes Red Hat will consider this as the next step in the journey toward quicker adoption of IT automation.

If adding new hyperscaler marketplaces addresses the speed and effort of new automation projects, then adding natural language–driven AI should help address the efficiency of IT automation developers. For example, IDC attended demonstrations of the new Project Wisdom, where a developer wrote one line of code and Project Wisdom, via a plug-in, completed the section with additional 6–10 lines needed to execute the objective. The demonstration was successful in several different types of automation playbook code sections with limited or no human editing. With additional model training by the open source community and IBM/Red Hat, this could dramatically improve the efficiency of automation coding.

Finally, the preview of Event-Driven Ansible shows how IT automation can finally realize the vision of full automation beyond just day zero or day one. Event-Driven Ansible focuses on the day two operations and helps build what IDC has advocated as self-driving autonomous digital infrastructure. By having the Ansible Automation Platform monitor logs and other data feeds, enterprises can develop proactive responses to outages and other incidents. By applying tested resolutions to these issues in seconds, IT can deliver a better customer experience and real value to the business.

IT Executives Recommendations

- IT executives already using AWS or Azure public cloud and looking to jump-start their automation initiative should consider using the marketplace. Enterprises can access the marketplace and select Ansible Automation Platform to be up and running in minutes. It is important to note that you can automate any public, private, or hybrid cloud from AWS or Azure-hosted infrastructure.
- For enterprises with both AWS and Azure, you will need to select one with the best support model for your organization. AWS is self-managed support, similar to any on-premises customer using Ansible. Azure has the extra capability to allow Red Hat direct access to research and apply fixes for you.
- Project Wisdom is in early release developer preview but worth evaluating for existing customers. This unique capability could dramatically improve your automation team's efficiency. In addition, as the AI model is trained and expanded, automation coding for new team members should be more accessible.
- Event-Driven Ansible is a possible game changer for digital enterprises needing to provide a highly resilient and consistent customer experience. In addition, IT executives who need to move to a more proactive response to incidents will find Event-Driven Ansible a complement to existing observability solutions. By triggering off observability or other monitoring solutions, Event-Driven Ansible can take action in real time to resolve issues.
- Current customers that have not upgraded to the Ansible Automation Platform should consider moving soon. The most recent release is version 2.2, with version 2.3 coming by year-end. Customers need to be on the Ansible Automation Platform to take advantage of future capabilities like Project Wisdom or Event-Driven Ansible. In addition, customers will likely benefit from the reengineered cloud-native architecture and other ease-of-use improvements.
- Customers tell IDC that automation leads to better security through reporting, tracking, and configuration standardization (reduced drift). These advantages and the high ROI of many IT automation projects can help control costs. With today's challenging workforce and skills shortage, automation can also help augment your staff. IDC recommends you organize your people and processes around this approach.

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