AnsibleFest 2021: Red Hat Ansible Automation Platform 2 is re-architected for speed and ease of use
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IDC's Quick Take
Recently, Red Hat held its annual AnsibleFest with more than 23,000 registered attendees for the two-day virtual event. The event featured keynotes and general sessions from Red Hat, IBM, and its multiple Ansible Automation Platform partners. Customer presentations included United Airlines, Discover Financials, USG Insurance, ANZ Bank, JP Morgan Chase, RBF Credit Union, Sapphire Health, U.S. Bank, Twitch, and others. The day one highlight was unveiling the new Ansible Automation Platform 2, which Red Hat believes breaks down silos within IT and is the next evolution in enterprise IT automation.

Product Announcement Highlights
Red Hat says its goals for the new Ansible Automation Platform 2 include better management of hybrid cloud infrastructure. These include providing tighter integration with both on-premises VMWare and public cloud providers. Red Hat plans to help customers automate existing IT operations and people-driven processes, which will drive automation adoption. Some of the key enhancements include:

- Ansible Automation Platform 2 is now delivering a more consistent user experience for everything and everyone touching automation.
- It was re-written to be cloud-native and container-based. In essence, Red Hat is automating the automation tool.
- New developer tools to 'shift left' the automation function from solely operation teams focus to now include a developer's automation content creation. Developers can now fully participate in writing, testing, distributing, and managing automation.
- Edge is another focus where Red Hat is driving automation. Containers can be quickly and automatically created to scale up to the velocity needed by today's modern IT shops with the more frequent release cycles. Over 90 pre-certified and tested collections containing tens of thousands of individual modules in the new content collections module.
- Ansible Automation Platform 2 has several new naming conventions as well.
  - Ansible Tower is renamed the new automation controller, where you can find a central control plane for the User Interface, APIs, workflows, and DevOps integrations.
  - Ansible engine is now called the automation execution environment. All executables, such as Python, are kept in this separate environment.
  - Red Hat Insights replaces the former automation analytics. In addition, Insights now contains a new 'advisor,' 'drift,' and 'policies' capabilities that many customers may want to explore further.

Ansible Automation Platform 2.1 is scheduled for general availability in November 2021. Ansible Automation Platform 2 Early Access is available now to existing customers and prospects.

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IDC’s Point of View

Based on the tremendous number of registered attendees for this fully virtual event, it appears both automation and Ansible itself are growing areas of interests for enterprises globally. Insurance, banking, and airline customers have adopted Ansible Automation Platform for their IT automation solution. These industries typically invest heavily in IT and have challenging requirements to scale out across tens of thousands of servers and end points. One large financial customer, discussed their approach to "extreme automation" that includes "town halls to share key wins and future goals of extreme automation, while encouraging input across the enterprise." This bodes well for other industries and enterprises which may have comparatively smaller technology footprints or requirements. They too can be successful in implementing a cross-function IT automation program and are confident the solution will scale as their business grows. Other customers tell IDC, they realized a 58% reduction in downtime after implementing an automation solution. This coupled with cost and efficiency savings is piquing the interest of many organizations.

Red Hat worked to fully re-engineer Ansible Automation Platform 2 to be cloud native. This should allow the rapid scale out required by many organizations for quick deployments. Enterprises are forced to adapt to a quickly changing world with new opportunities and threats alike. Cyber criminals may exploit a vulnerability or incorrect configuration in seconds. Automation tools are needed to quickly push out changes to respond to a known threat. Gone are the days when IT had hours or even days to test and push out security fixes. With containers now part of Ansible Automation Platform 2, customers can have their automation distributed across the enterprise, including all the way to the edge. Configuration changes and security fixes can be deployed in minutes or even seconds using predefined content and playbooks. One customer noted, "The direction of Red Hat Ansible Automation Platform enables us to execute automation in containerized environments, supporting new strategies for innovation in the business. Now, we can scale automation systematically across the enterprise with consistency and as demand requires to hit those two priorities with fewer barriers, using a platform that’s already integrated into our workflow."

The splitting of Ansible Tower into two new components (i.e., automation controller and automation execution environments) enables you to have execution running outside of the control node and it makes it easier to have your automation deployed into hybrid cloud and container-native environments. An additional forthcoming feature will provide for what Red Hat is calling an automation mesh. This will essentially be a replacement for the isolated nodes in Ansible Tower and should help with automation at the edge.

IDC projects that more than 500 million new business applications will be created by 2023. As these applications grow in scope and complexity, developers and the IT operations and infrastructure teams that support them will need to better manage and compress application delivery cycles. Accordingly, advanced capabilities and tools that foster developer productivity are also rapidly gaining acceptance in the marketplace. Ansible Automation Platform 2 is designed to address these challenges by providing an array of tools needed to implement enterprise-wide automation at scale. Red Hat added new tools to assist developers in being part of the solution by allowing automation content to be more easily created on the left side of the DevOps equation.
Finally, Red Hat has worked to address some of the past concerns related to the ease of use of Ansible Automation Platform. By creating a more consistent user interface across modules and separating execution from content, customers can more easily push adoption into new areas of their organization.

Others have pointed to Ansible's imperative approach to public cloud automation as an issue. Ansible Automation Platform 2 is still imperative but Red Hat has invested in making deprovisioning much smoother, attempting to minimize the downside and optimize the positives of a declarative approach. This can be seen in Red Hat Insight where root cause investigation of provisioning automation failures can be quickly identified.

**IT Executives Recommendations**

- Red Hat offers new and existing customers a two-week free automation assessment. This includes a readout on the current state, areas for improvement, and missed opportunity areas for automation. More importantly, a full plan to accelerate your automation adoption is developed. Customers must apply to get approval for this free engagement. Customers should strongly consider this to ensure smoother deployments.
- Current customers of Ansible Automation Platform should evaluate Ansible Automation Platform 2 as the next generation in their automation journey. Customers will likely benefit from the re-engineered architecture and ease of use improvements.
- IT and business executives looking for a full-service automation solution should consider putting Ansible Automation Platform 2 on their short list of possible solutions. Ansible Automation Platform 2 supports a single pane of glass to provision/deprovision all the major public cloud hypervisors, plus on-premises hybrid clouds of VMWare, and containers based on Red Hat OpenShift or Kubernetes running anywhere.
- When adopting IT automation, it is important to begin with quick easy wins that can be shared across teams. Build on these wins by including input from front line IT staff and key business partners. Training on the new tools is an important step that should not be overlooked and when all groups share the same automation tool, such as Ansible Automation Platform 2, synergies and greater adoption rates are more likely.
- Using pre-certified content collections in Ansible Automation Platform 2 will help jump-start new IT automation projects. Red Hat Insights now provides analytics across a customer’s entire organization. It should provide actionable recommendations and reduce efforts around audits and compliance.
- Customers tell IDC that automation leads to better security through reporting, tracking, and configuration standardization (reduced drift). This can lead to more innovation by freeing up staff time to do more value-add tasks, instead of repetitive manual processes. With today’s challenging workforce and skills shortage, automation can help augment your staff. IDC recommends you organize your people and processes around this approach.

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