EMA Vendor to Watch: FixStream

FixStream's Unique Value Proposition

FixStream's Meridian Operational Analytics and Visualization Platform is targeted at managing and optimizing cloud data centers with strong top-down insights into key business planning requirements. It also offers advanced analytics to support a wide variety of cross-domain roles relevant to managing a full mix of public cloud, private cloud, and non-cloud infrastructures, along with the applications and business services residing on them. This includes the new and emerging areas such as software-defined data centers and OpenStack-supported environments.

The vendor highlights four key use cases: planning, troubleshooting, optimization and change management—all of which are closely interrelated in the dynamic world of hybrid cloud. FixStream's Meridian does all this through strong investments in eclectic data collection (across Layers 2-7 of the OSI stack), application discovery and dependency mapping, advanced operational analytics, and what the vendor aptly describes as a "real-time CMDB." The solution is designed as an open platform to support integrations with third-party tools to extend its reach in data collection and/or for sharing its reports and visualizations.
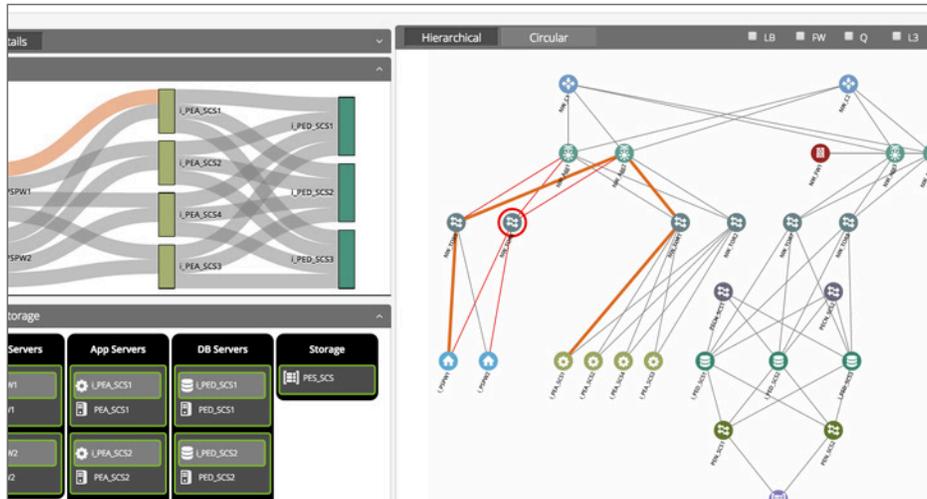

Figure 1: FixStream's Integrated Map of Application and Network (IMAN) view highlights how Meridian discovers and visualizes application-infrastructure groupings with flows, active paths, metrics and faults.

A closer look at Meridian's feature set shows the following capabilities:

- **Discovery** – Meridian discovery is agentless but can leverage third-party agents through its APIs. Its native data collection includes support for SNMP, configuration data, CLI output, system-specific data, packet capture, inventory, and log data. Meridian can collect and assimilate millions of data inputs per second and can scan at fixed intervals (every hour, for example, or even as frequently as every five seconds), or run selective (on-demand) scans.

- **Application Dependency Mapping** – Meridian can track applications, web servers, middleware, application servers, and databases, as well as network, storage, and server infrastructures. It can also map which applications are running on which devices and track interactions between application components, including full application-infrastructure topologies for multi-tier applications. These application maps can in turn be exported to more global business process views through what the vendor calls "business process widgets."

- **Analytics** – Meridian offers true "big data" for IT with a wide range of analytic options, including a correlation framework, its rules engine, real-time streaming analytics, batch analytics, and machine learning. While still in beta, these deliver extremely fast root-cause analysis, with just a few mouse clicks. Current focus is on performance

and diagnostics with some capacity insights leveraging the solution's strong visualization and application/business service maps. In next-phase capabilities, the vendor expects to support if/then analytics for more advanced prescriptive capabilities.

- **Dashboards** – FixStream has targeted executive IT and service provider users with well-thought-out options for visualization, drill-down, and reporting. Executive IT can look across the full cloud mosaic to understand critical application and business service impacts in terms of performance and capacity planning—both in real time and through "flashbacks" that show history and historical trends. Service providers hosting cloud data centers have access to a number of key data points, including a global map of data centers, bandwidth links between sites, capacity indicators, subscribed resources by tenant, inventories of physical and virtual assets, etc. Meridian also offers tenant-oriented dashboards that provide insights into users, roles, and business process scorecards.

EMA Perspective

FixStream's Meridian not only addresses many of the critical requirements surrounding the optimization of cloud and hybrid environments—its compelling design does so in a way that capitalizes on some of the more advanced, innovative, and cloud-relevant technology trends that EMA has witnessed to date. These include big data and advanced analytics for IT (often referred to as "IT Operations Analytics"), highly dynamic capabilities for application dependency mapping, CMDB-like insights into change across the virtual and non-virtual world. They also include dashboard visualization that enables linkages between infrastructure, applications, business processes, and other business outcomes, such as more effective cost-related planning and resource optimization. Their dashboard designs are well targeted with application-infrastructure insights for enterprise IT, and tenant-aware dashboard views for service providers.

One of the most telling requirements that Meridian addresses is the need to support true cross-domain collaboration—a requirement both for cloud optimization and for effective and responsible service management overall. Multiple EMA research efforts continue to underscore the need for a more cross-domain way of working in support of cloud adoption.[1] Not only does Meridian address this need, it does so in a way that can actively engage IT and service provider executives in supporting a more cross-silo way of working, which can be so very critical to evolving IT cultures and processes.

Another compelling FixStream Meridian feature is its balanced support for cloud service providers and IT clients, promoting more effective data sharing between the two. As EMA research consistently validates, this type of data sharing is a critical requirement. In one analysis, 88% of IT respondents had some type of data sharing with their service providers. More than a third had committed service-level agreements (SLAs) for service response and availability, and proactive support for shared monitoring across their public/private cloud investments.

It should be pointed out that FixStream is new, and Meridian, still in early beta,. In that sense, FixStream is a "vendor to watch"—and watch very closely—as it emerges onto the marketplace. But its founders, with strong histories in analytics, cloud data center infrastructure, and OpenStack, are more than credible. And Meridian's design and focus are so compelling that EMA believes that now is the time to begin to pay attention to Meridian as a future resource that, to use a much overworked term, could truly be "transformative." FixStream promotes Meridian as "game-changing," and the adjective would very much seem to fit. If you're a CIO, VP of operations, or a line of business leader wanting deeper insight into how cloud is impacting your applications and your business, you should consider putting FixStream on your radar. EMA looks forward to watching FixStream's market presence grow to a point where Meridian can help to render the fragmented management of cloud infrastructures a thing of the past.

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[1] *Ecosystem Cloud: Managing and Optimizing Business Services Across the Full Cloud Mosaic*, EMA, 2013.
Obstacles and Priorities on the Journey to the Software-Defined Data Center, EMA, 2014.