

Novell turns its focus toward growth

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When Ron Hovsepien was named chief operating officer of Waltham's Novell Inc. in November, investors were already calling for the ouster of then-chief executive Jack Messman. In June, Messman's critics got their wish, and Hovsepien got one of the toughest jobs in the software industry. Hovsepien recently spoke with Globe reporter Hiawatha Bray on how he expects to meet the challenge that defeated his former boss.

Q: What prompted the Novell board to oust Messman and put you in charge?

A: I was not in the board meeting so I don't know the flow of conversation. What was shared with me was what the company needs to do is accelerate itself.

What I translated that to is we've got to have a real good sense of urgency about what we're going to get done for our customers, what we're going to get done for our shareholders, and hold the proper level of delivery between those two dimensions.

We need the customers. They're the ones who are the lifeblood of the company. They make our shareholders happy. That allows us to then have the employees be happy. We don't get great customers and have great customer experiences without happy employees.

Q: Novell was once the world's dominant maker of networking software for desktop computers. Today, with its networking business ravaged by Microsoft, Novell struggles to reposition itself as a vendor of the popular open-source operating system Linux. But Novell so far hasn't announced any major strategic shifts. Aren't you continuing Messman's policies?

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