

Towards Ubiquitous EWS-based Network Management

Hong-Taek Ju and James Won-Ki Hong
DP&NM Lab.



Dept. of Computer Science and Engineering
POSTECH, Pohang Korea
Email: {juht, jwkhong}@postech.ac.kr
<http://dpmn.postech.ac.kr/>



Abstract

Most Internet networking devices are now equipped with a Web server for providing Web-based element management so that an administrator may take advantage of this enhanced and powerful management interface. On the other hand, for network management, an administrator normally buys and deploys SNMP-based network management platform to be customized to his network. Each management scheme has mutually exclusive advantages; consequently, two schemes coexist in the real world. This results in both a high development cost and a dual management interface for administrator. We propose an embedded Web server (EWS)-based network management architecture as an alternative to an SNMP based network management and to leverage on already existing embedded web server.

We extend EWS-based element management architecture to the network management architecture. Our proposed architecture uses HTTP as a communication protocol with management information and operation encoding. Further we designed a management system on the basis of our proposed architecture that supports basic management functions.

Introduction

- World-Wide Web (WWW) is one of the most widely used Internet applications
- Web-based Network Management is the use of this technology to manage networks and systems
- Key technologies
 - HTML, HTTP, Web Browser & Servers, Java, CGI, XML, etc.
- Industry Standards for Web-based Network Management
 - Web-Based Enterprise Management (WBEM from DMTF)
 - Java Management eXtension (JMX from Sun)
- Benefits of Web-based Network Management
 - Reduced development costs by using open technology
 - Unification for separated management platforms
 - Simplification by ubiquitous and standard user interface

1. Introduction

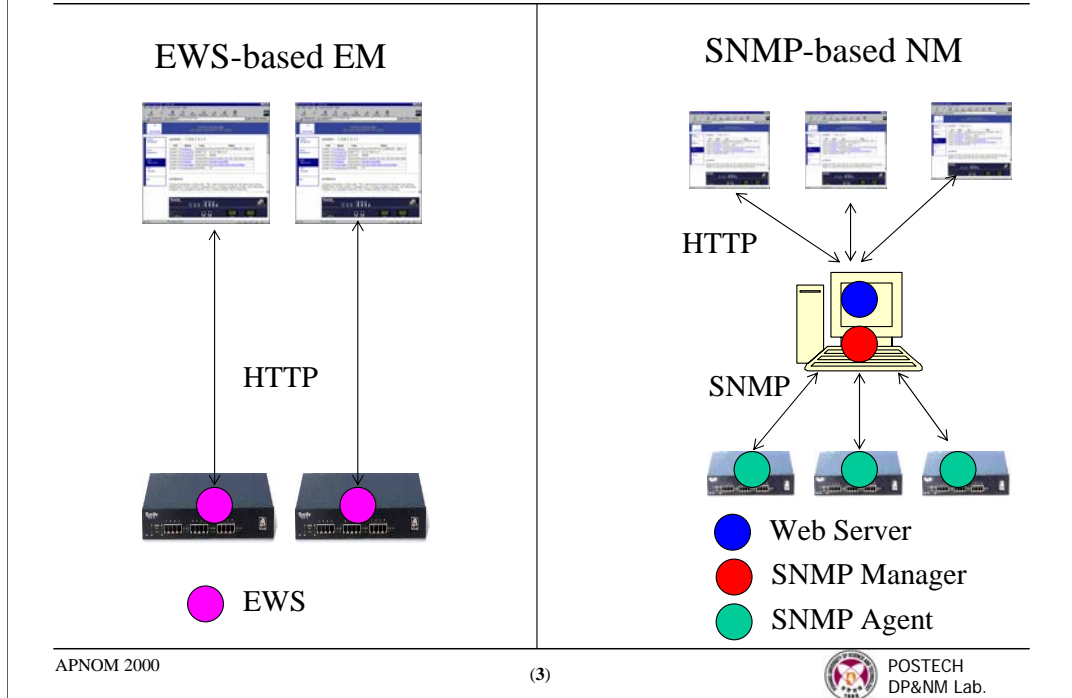
World-Wide Web (WWW) is one of the most widely used Internet application [3]. The technology is very rapidly penetrating many social and business areas. The system and network management are no exception. Web-based network management is the use of this technology to manage networks and systems.

The HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol)[5] is the primary transfer protocol used by Web and the HTML (Hypertext Markup Language)[6] is a platform-independent document description language. Typically in Web-based Network Management, HTTP is used as the transport of management information in HTML format between communicating entities: Web server and browser. One of the key technologies in Web is the Java that has high portability and code mobility. These unique features of Java make it a challenge for building new management solutions. The eXtensible Markup Language (XML)[14] are designed to add structure and convey information about documents and data. Management information represented in the form of an XML document can be useful for passing data between management applications. All of these HTML, HTTP, Java, XML and the other Web technologies are playing an important role in Web-based network management and recent advance in this technology astonishing; in fact, experts cannot predict improvements beyond several years in Web-based network management [5, 6, 10, 14].

Two principal industrial bodies are playing a leading role in contributing standardization to Web-based network management: the Web-Based Enterprise Management (WBEM) [8] and the Java Management eXtension (JMX) [9]. The WBEM from Distributed Management Task Force (DMTF) is an initiative based on a set of management and Internet standard technologies developed to unify the management of enterprise computing environments. WBEM provides the ability for the industry to deliver an integrated set of standard-based management tools leveraging the emerging technologies such as XML [14] and CIM [15]. The JMX is based on Java technology so it draws on Sun's experience with Java management. JMX provides the tools for building Java based solutions for managing devices, applications and service-driven networks.

There are three primary benefits in applying Web technology to network management. The first is that development costs can be reduced by using open technology; plenty of open source and supporting tools. Further, the platform-neutral feature of Web technology makes it possible to unify the network and system management for separated management platform. Finally, the Web browser is ubiquitous, so that Web-based management user interface is easy and simple for most, if not all, operators.

Typical case of Web-based element and network management



2. Typical case of Web-based element and network management

2.1 HTTP-based element management using Embedded Web Server

Network devices can be equipped with Web server to provide Web-based element management. This type of Web server is called an Embedded Web Server (EWS) [1, 2, 4]. Most commercial network devices, such as routers, bridges, and hubs, are equipped with EWS. For the EWS equipped devices, administrators point their Web browsers at the home page residing within the devices in order to configure, monitor and control the network device.

This element management scheme provides an administrator with a simple but enhanced, more powerful and ubiquitous user interface. Moreover, there are no porting and distribution efforts for user application program since the Web browser of administrator's computer is enough for managing network element.

2.2 SNMP-based network management using front-end Web Server

The SNMP manager program runs as an application program over the operating system in general computer and collects management information from network and system devices based on the SNMP framework [7]. When a user points his or her browser at the Web page provided by front-end Web server of the SNMP manger, aggregated management information is relayed to the browser.

This network management scheme can leverage the capabilities provided by the host operating system, such as increased memory, processing power and storage space. A more important point is that this mechanism provides management information for network level that was aggregated, processed by a SNMP manager.

This type of Web access serves as a useful addition to existing management platform, particularly those based on SNMP. The leading providers of management platforms, such as Cabletron, Computer Associates, IBM/Tivoli, Hewlett-Packard and Sun equip their products with Web-extensions.

Target Domain

- Closed target network
 - Results from standard bodies are still immature
 - There are few commercial devices conforming to the standards
 - Outputs from EWS varies in format and are hard to manipulate
- Enough computing resources in device
 - Recently, great advancement in hardware technology made it possible for a device to have plenty of computing resources
 - This advantage must be of benefit to EWS-based NM
- No SNMP integration
 - To avoid duplicated investment in closed targets
 - Devices are equipped with EWS only (i.e., SNMP Agent not necessary)

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3. Designed Architecture

3.1 Target domain

As mentioned earlier, our goal is to develop an EWS-based network management system (NMS). The management system assumes that all devices are equipped with EWS. And it must provide all the functionalities and information that SNMP-based NMS provides and more. Moreover, low development cost and reduced development time must be considered in management system development. After all, powerful, user-friendly, ubiquitous, flexible and scalable management interfaces will be offered to the administrator.

There are some issues involved in selecting a target domain. The first issue concerns the organization of the target network. A management target network can be classified into two categories: closed (homogeneous) and open (heterogeneous) network. A closed target network is composed of the same functional devices from different vendors or different devices from one vendor. Usually, a management system targeting open network is developed as a family of products for managing a single vendor's device. An open network is composed of devices having different functionalities or made by different vendors. Usually, a management system targeting open network is deployed for managing an enterprise network as a management platform. Intuitively, it is easier to apply an EWS technology to the closed target network than the open target network.

A second issue concerns the extent of device's computing resources. Network devices have different computing resource levels, such as speed of CPU, size of RAM & ROM, etc. The functionality of a device is very important factor in architecture design. Differences in device's functionality have effect on functionality assignment.

A third issue deals with integration with an SNMP. SNMP is a very important legacy protocol in the systems and network management application. Even though the target device for management is equipped with EWS, most development features, such as design and implementation, depends on whether the devices have SNMP agent. Another point to be considered is whether devices having SNMP agent only must be included or not in the target managed network.

Considering these, we narrow down the target network domain into a closed network with rich computing resources in the device and no integration with SNMP. Results from standard bodies that are introduced before are still incomplete. There are few commercial devices conforming to the standards. Outputs from EWS varies in format and are hard to manipulate. With respect to interoperability, it is more realistic to select closed network as a target domain. Recently, great advancements in hardware technology make it possible for a device to have richer computing resources. This advantage must be of benefit to EWS-based network management development. To avoid duplicated investment in closed targets, we assume that devices are equipped with EWS only.

Architecture for EWS-based NM

- Extended version of EWS-based element management architecture: POS-EWS
- Thin-Client & Fat-Server paradigm
- Two model: 2-tier and 3-tier architectures
- Uses Java technology
- Communications using HTTP
- Operation & Information Encoding
- Supported basic management functions
 - Notification, Data collection, Agent discovery, Data setting

3.2 Design concept

With the defined target domain, we designed the architecture for an EWS-based network management system. In the previous work, we proposed an element management architecture having an EWS as a core component. We have developed an HTTP/1.1 compliant embedded Web server (called POS-EWS) that supports our proposed architecture [4, 13]. We also extended the EWS-based element management architecture to the network management architecture.

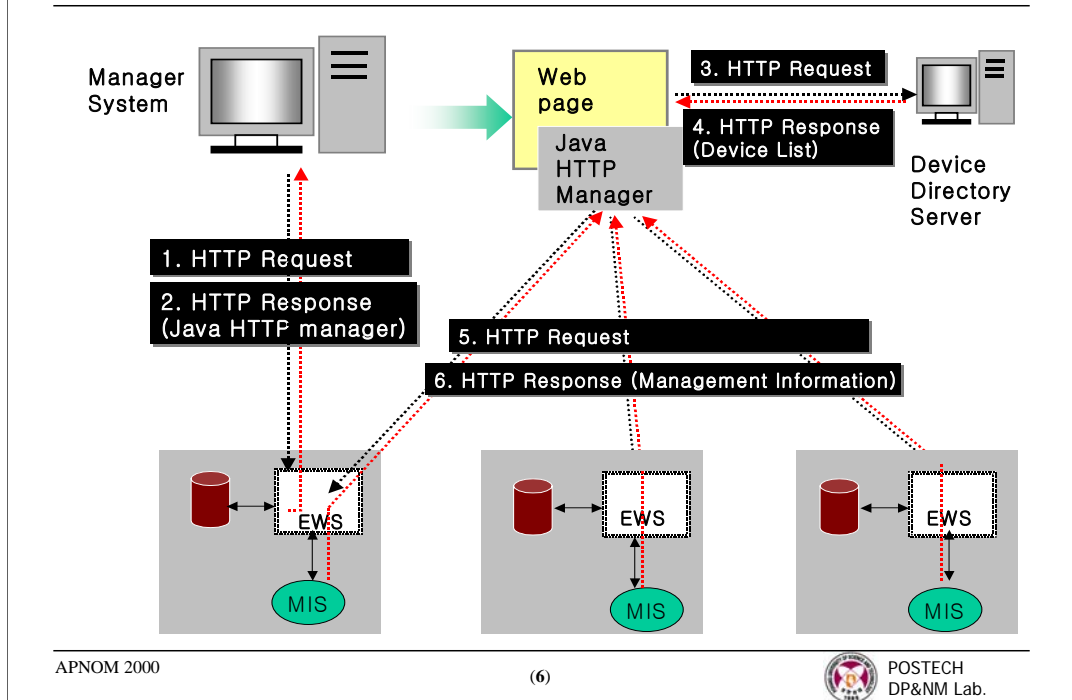
We applied the thin-client and fat-server paradigm to the architecture. From numerous computing resources in the device, we deduced this design concept. The first extended version from element management architecture is 2-tier architecture, thereafter modified to a 3-tier architecture as a provision for the lack computing resources in device.

We use Java technology, especially the Java applet. The Java applet is downloaded from the Web server and run on a Web browser. The Java applet is a mobile code over the Internet. They are stored in Web server and executed on the browser. There is no Java execution environment on devices. The Java applet has an inherent security problem: it is restricted in accessing local disk, executing another program and network connection to other hosts by Java applet security mode (Sandbox model) [10]. Code signing extends applet capabilities to make network connection with other hosts.

HTTP is used as transport protocol between EWS-based agent and management station. We defined an information encoding scheme for management data. The encoded message is encapsulated into HTTP message. With the encoding scheme, management operation such as get and set are encoded into URL that is part of HTTP message [5, 11].

Our EWS-based network management system supports four basic management functions: notification, data collection, agent discovery and data setting. Notification determines which events in device occurs on the basis of the event message and customizes the event message to notify administrator. Data collection gathers management data from the device and stores the data it collects in the database. It also performs threshold monitoring and generates threshold events. Agent discovery polls an EWS agent to initially discovery EWS equipped device and then detects configuration and status changes in the network. Data setting provides an administrator a mechanism for changing management information of a device.

Two-Tier EWS-based NM Architecture



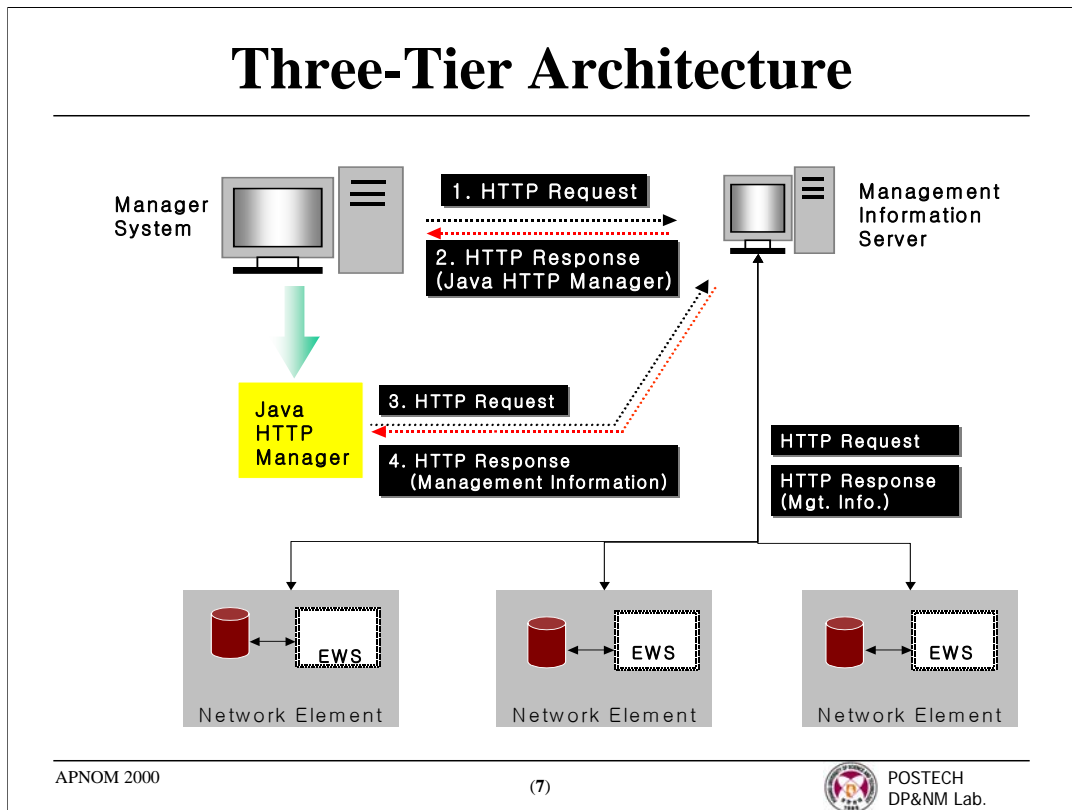
3.3 Two-tier EWS-based NM architecture

HTTP is a client-server scheme. One of its side effects is that first Web page is served from a Web server to a Web browser, and subsequent Web pages cannot be included in the Web display except for image. For a network management system, this is very strict limitation. Network management system must gather management information from multiple devices, and formatted management data from multiple devices can be placed in the same page. This is why Java applets are used [10, 12].

Java applets are downloaded by a browser. Once the applet is loaded, it can control the location from where it receives its data and how to display or manipulate that data. Java applets by nature are cross-platform and act the same within any browser. Fortunately, it is a straightforward task to design an applet to make connections with multiple devices if Java applets are programmed on the basis of a Java security model and signing utility.

Java implementation of an HTTP manager is a key component in a 2-tier architecture. The Java HTTP manager source code is written and compiled to produce a Java HTTP manager applet. This applet is stored in a network device and is transferred by the EWS to the browser over the network at run time. After loaded on the JVM of a browser, the Java HTTP applet communicates with EWS agents in the network and enables the administrator to control and monitor the network devices using HTTP [5, 10, 12].

An administrator starts the management task by making Web browser connection to one of the managed devices. The connected device responds with a Java HTTP manager applet. First operation of the Java HTTP manager applet is to retrieve registered device list from the Device Directory Server. After retrieving device list, The Java HTTP manager communicates with devices specified in the list to perform a management task. Management Information Server (MIS) responds to the Java HTTP manager request. It performs basic management functions explained before: Notification, Data collection, Agent registration.



3.4 Three-tier architecture

We modified the two-tier architecture into a three-tier architecture by removing the management information server from the device and putting it into a stand-alone system. A two-tier architecture assumes that the network devices have enough computing resources so that they can support most management functions with the management information server. But this assumption is not always true and the administrator may prefer a three-tier architecture to have a more stable manager system.

A module acting like a browser must be attached to the Management Information Server in order to request raw management information from the network element. The communication scheme between Management Information Server and network element is in the same way as two-tier architecture, as well as between Java HTTP manager and Management Information Server.

Management Information Server performs the predefined basic management tasks as usual using HTTP. When an administrator points his Web browser at Management Information Server's Web page, he can retrieve the aggregated or processed management information and controls a device through the provided Web page by the Management Information Server.

Conclusion & Future Work

- Most commercial network devices are equipped with EWS
- It is used for element management only
- We proposed EWS-based Network Management
- It is currently under development

- Validation by applying this architecture to a closed (homogeneous) target and an open (heterogeneous) target network of EWS-enabled devices

4. Conclusion and Future work

There are lots of benefits in applying Web technology to network management. Most commercial network devices are equipped with EWS, which are used for element management only. We have proposed an EWS-based network management architecture. We assume that the target network is composed of the same functional devices from different vendors or different devices from one vendor.

We have applied the thin-client and fat-server paradigm to the architecture and used Java technology, especially the Java applet. HTTP is used as transport protocol between management entities. On the basis of proposed architecture, we are currently implementing the management system. Our future work involves enhancing our architecture for application to an open (heterogeneous) target network.

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