



ChefConf 2021 – New Post-Acquisition Investments in the Chef Platform

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IDC's Quick Take

The annual Chef conference - [ChefConf 2021](#), held September 7-9, 2021, was the first ChefConf since the acquisition by Progress Software in October of 2020. The virtual event featured three days of sessions ending with a hackathon to wrap-up the conference. ChefConf attendees included both users of Chef's commercial software products and those more closely aligned with the open source Chef project. As part of the conference, Progress made several key announcements regarding updates to Chef's product portfolio.

Event Highlights

Progress CEO Yogesh Gupta addressed the acquisition of Chef straightway in the conference kick-off. The acquisition, finalized in October 2020, was Progress's first foray into the DevOps space and its first time sustaining such a large open source product with an active and vocal community.

Progress structured the product keynote around three development priorities: improving security and compliance, creating a unified experience, and making Chef products easy to use and adopt. Several key announcements were made about Chef products:

- **Chef Compliance Automation for Cloud Resources** – Expanded Chef Premium Content that allows users to scan assets across well-known cloud providers (i.e., AWS, Azure, and GCP).
- **Chef Enterprise Automation Stack (EAS)** – This release of Chef's full-stack automation platform includes:
 - Chef Infra Compliance Phase enhancements that integrate with Chef InSpec compliance checks, bringing compliance and infrastructure automation closer together.
 - Improvements to features of Chef Workstation and Test Kitchen to streamline test-driven application development.
 - More powerful infrastructure management dashboards allow users to connect Chef Infra Servers to Chef Automate to view and edit all the connected server's objects, including nodes, roles, and policy files.
 - A beta release of secrets management integration for AWS Secrets Manager and Azure Key Vault in Chef Infra.
- **SaaS-based Product Access** – Chef SaaS, currently in a limited beta, is a new offering for customers wanting to utilize Chef software as a cloud service. No specific timeframe was provided for general availability.

Also announced was:

- Newly launched Chef Managed Services allows customers to engage Chef experts in administering their Chef deployment, including product upgrades, feature updates, reporting, and more.
- Cloud customers can more easily purchase Chef products as the software is now available on the AWS and Azure Marketplaces.

IDC's Point of View

IDC saw one of the potential challenges of the Progress acquisition to be supporting Chef's open source community. It is the company's first attempt at managing a software business built on an active and tight-knit open source project community (see *Progress' Acquisition of Chef Strengthens the Company's Positioning as Provider of Modern Application Development Tools*, IDC #US46890220, December 2020). It was reassuring to see the Chef community and Progress' commitment to nurturing it were of particular focus in the kickoff session.

Gupta held a candid conversation with two external community members about their experiences through the acquisition period. The community members mentioned initially they had concerns about the loss of key Chef engineers and communication missteps. However, both commended Progress for giving neglected product features that needed attention, noting the increased focus on Chef Test Kitchen. The intended takeaway was that Progress is heading in the right direction with both the Chef product and the community. Gupta shared that he feels that Chef has helped to create more of a startup culture within Progress, a 40-year-old software company.

A couple of product announcements at ChefConf 2021 were decidedly in line with Progress's efforts to enhance the security and compliance capabilities of the Chef products as organizations look to accelerate their DevSecOps journeys:

1. The Compliance Phase, which brings Chef InSpec and Chef Infra closer together, can help DevOps teams shift left by embedding compliance scanning natively in the configuration management process. Policy-based configuration allows teams to catch and remediate compliance problems earlier in the development cycle. The Compliance Phase replaces the legacy audit cookbook and gives users the latest compliance capabilities without managing cookbook dependencies. Additionally, this coupling could allow organizations to simplify the toolchain in their CI/CD pipelines. IDC survey data has shown that catching security issues earlier in the cycle while maintaining velocity is a primary driver for adopting DevSecOps (*DevSecOps Adoption, Techniques, and Tools Survey*, IDC #US47597321, April 2021).

2. Chef Compliance helps organizations efficiently maintain compliance standards and avoid security incidents. Progress expanded the Premium Content available to support compliance efforts for organizations with hybrid-cloud and multi-cloud environments. Progress has also bolstered their on-premises content and cloud-native content for Azure Policy. Broadening the available Premium Content demonstrates the company's focus on the complexity of security policy management among disparate cloud providers, one of the most frequently cited security gaps in IDC's *DevSecOps Adoption, Techniques, and Tools Survey*.

To increase deployment ease and flexibility, Progress announced Chef Managed Services for its EAS customers and the launch of a SaaS offering. IDC believes this follows suit with the company's 2019

business model pivot to driving enterprise adoption (see *Chef Pivots Business Model with Launch of Chef Enterprise Automation Stack*, #lcUS44996219, April 2019). Chef Managed Services furthers this aim by shifting the onus of administering a Chef deployment off an organization. This allows for the adoption of the Chef suite with a reduced investment of time, infrastructure, and without the need for maintaining Chef administrative skills in-house.

Similarly, a SaaS-based offering may bring smaller cloud-based, resource-limited organizations as new customers to Progress by lowering the overall operational and maintenance burdens. Sundar Subramanian, Chef's General Manager, stated in the product keynote that Chef users already see their products as a platform, so delivering the Chef products as a unified SaaS offering will help solidify this view. While many organizations still prefer on-premises solutions, IDC forecast data show an overall market shift toward more SaaS-based DevOps offerings (*Worldwide DevOps Software Tools Forecast, 2021–2025*, IDC #US48052021, July 2021)

Key Takeaways

- Being owned by Progress is providing Chef with more financial capital to invest in neglected parts of the platform such as Test Kitchen, research, and development of new areas such as Chef Compliance as well as providing new ways of consuming the Chef platform such as the new SaaS offering and the managed service option.
- Chef's policy-as-code based product enhancements, along with expanded Chef Premium Content, will make them a stronger player in cloud security posture management (CSPM). However, while this is a growing area there are quite a few players in this space already, such as Zscaler, Styra, and others.
- Content is king, and under Progress ownership the company has continued to expand and enhance the Center for Internet Security (CIS) compliance content available in the Chef Compliance solution. This is critical towards easing and justifying adoption, as well as being essential for competing in the competitive CSPM domain.
- While existing Chef customers should be pleased with post-acquisition investments into the Chef platform, they must continue to monitor evolving product roadmaps to evaluate how planned product updates align with their own business and technical priorities.
- Although ChefConf focused on meeting the needs of existing customers, it was clear that investments in newer product areas such as Chef Compliance and Chef EAS are equally directed at acquiring new prospective customers as well.

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