

Large food company streamlines business processes with IBM WebSphere solution and SOA.

Overview

■ Challenge

Streamline business processes by integrating enterprise applications to provide information integrity

■ Why IBM?

IBM was able to provide proven software for implementing the customer business solution, services for faster implementation, skills transfer, an end-to-end solution from inception to completion and a customer SOA roadmap

■ Solution

“Build-as-you-go” SOA which can be implemented one application at a time to integrate information and applications

■ Key Benefits

Managers have trusted information which helps them maximize sales, exert more timely control over capital expenditures and streamline the supply chain for faster processing and delivery of products; IT administrators spend less time monitoring databases and save overhead costs from duplicate entries, also minimizing error; IT developers' time is spent productively writing business logic instead of interface and connectivity logic



When a large, Philippines-based food company needed to efficiently integrate its applications to make the organization more efficient, it turned to IBM for an SOA solution.

Candy, snack foods and soft drinks are little treats, but big business in many countries such as the Philippines, where one IBM customer reigns as one of the largest branded food product companies. Like many enterprise-scale organizations, the Philippines-based food company has over the years acquired several “best-of-breed” solutions focused on addressing its business requirements. Such solutions include SSA Baan for enterprise resource planning (ERP) and SAP APO for integrated supply chain planning. Other solutions exist such as in-house

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—CIO of large food company

Providing trusted information to help maximize sales

Key Components

Software

- IBM PM4Data
- IBM WebSphere® Adapters for SAP Software and JDBC
- IBM WebSphere Everyplace Access
- IBM WebSphere HATS
- IBM WebSphere Integration Developer
- IBM WebSphere MQ
- IBM WebSphere Portal
- IBM WebSphere Process Server

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developed Encore for sales order processing and billing, Cognos for sales information and business intelligence, and various online workflow applications.

The company depends on innovation to stay ahead of its competitors, and whether they're selling noodle cups or noncarbonated soft drinks, its managers thirst for information to keep their results growing steadily. The big challenge for the company, however, is efficiently integrating its applications so it can maximize its sales and make the organization more efficient.

In the past, the company's integration efforts have been solution-specific, meaning expertise had to be developed for every new solution and technology acquired. The process involved the tedious maintenance of mapping data between applications, requiring programming for every change in the business process.

The results did not meet the high standards of the CIO of the food company. “What we want is not just for information to be available but for it be deployed effectively to the different business users in the company,” she says. “For instance, our top management wanted to use mobile devices to get daily information about sales. They closely monitor sales, especially during the last week of the month, and the sales management team has to know what to do before the end of the month comes.”

IBM shows its expertise in SOA

The company heard that the best solution for leveraging information was a service oriented architecture (SOA)—breaking down business processes into repeatable business services. IBM invited the company IT team to an IBM SOA event in Macau. The staffers learned all they could about SOA technology and what it could do for the company. IBM demonstrated WebSphere software for building an SOA architecture and followed up with another event in Vietnam continuing the discussion about business process serving and modeling. “IBM showed that the flexibility of an SOA can make a business more agile, more responsive to its customers,” says the group business systems manager, “and that IBM has the expertise to provide the roadmap with its products.”

To solve the immediate problem of developing a portal with up-to-date sales and revenue data accessible through mobile devices, IBM performed a proof-of-concept using IBM WebSphere Everyplace Access, IBM WebSphere Portal and IBM WebSphere Adapter for JDBC. Constructed on an SOA architecture, the

portal extracts data from the ERP system and consolidates it with several in-house workflow applications along with the sales order processing application and the corporate performance monitoring and business intelligence tool. WebSphere Everyplace Access makes it possible to extend e-mail, workflow applications and sales information to mobile devices. The result is a view of information which is personalized and consistent with data presented elsewhere.

“Not only do business managers get their information where and when they want it,” says the CIO of the food company, “thanks to IBM WebSphere software and SOA, there’s only one view of the data even though it can be presented in different ways. There are no differences of opinion over what the right figures are, which often happened when department managers were extracting their own data and putting it into their own contexts.”

The portal provides sales information and workflow approval, enabling executives to approve transactions. This institutes more timely control over capital expenditures. The management team also has a human resources application enabling them to file for vacation and sick leave, a major convenience for those who are frequently traveling.

Building an SOA, one solution at a time

IBM introduced the company to the IBM SOA Reference Architecture, providing a view of existing IBM solutions that would aid the company into achieving its desired SOA maturity level. These capabilities can be implemented on a “build-as-you-go” basis, allowing project-level solutions to be easily added when new requirements are addressed over time.

The company has many projects lined up, and it wants to accomplish them using SOA for optimum flexibility and agility. “Our plan is to add more dashboards into our sales information portal and make critical information available to our management across the supply chain,” says the CIO of the company. “We also wanted our supply chain processes aligned with our operating plans across the region and internationally. WebSphere software proved to be the foundation for tackling this challenge.”

The first obstacle was integrating the company’s SAP APO integrated supply chain planning with its SSA Baan ERP solution. Previously, the two systems were not perfectly synchronized. This introduced redundant tasks and the possibility of error.



IBM delivered a proof-of-concept to provide the food company’s sales staff with a portal showing up-to-date sales and revenue data accessible through mobile devices.

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The company integrated the two systems using IBM WebSphere Process Server, IBM WebSphere Integration Developer, and IBM WebSphere Adapter for SAP and WebSphere HATS. The company used SAP Adapter and HATS to update data between SSA Baan and SAP. "One of the key benefits we derived from implementing WebSphere Process Server is that we were able to eliminate data duplication," says the CIO of the company. "Also, by creating composite applications via WebSphere Process Server we were able to plug in human tasks to complete the business process.

"Now that we are keeping information in our ERP system without having to maintain any intermediary databases, we've reduced database maintenance time and don't require any other staff members to monitor the database. From the IT perspective it's less work for the business users. It's also less work because previously they had to create a purchase order manually in SSA Baan instead of it being integrated directly through SAP, so with this we hope to streamline the process and integrate the data more properly."

Experience with SOA drives future projects

Other projects are also lined up. The company plans to use IBM PM4Data with IBM WebSphere MQ to integrate its centralized sales and distribution system with its warehouse management system. "With the help of IBM and SOA, we will be able to process and deliver orders in a more timely fashion, keeping customer satisfaction high," says the CIO of the company, "which is what we need to continue being a market leader. We're now total believers in SOA."

For more information

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