

Norwich Union General Insurance
Gavin Keely: Head of IT

Norwich Union is an organization that has come out of a mega merger that happened around about the millennium where basically three largest insurance groups came together to form what is now the Norwich Union Company in UK. And with that we brought in an awful lot of technology. We basically in our portfolio had every piece of technology from every major vendor that's existed for the last three decades. So actually we were presented with quite a big challenge.

SOA brought two things for us I mean we have this huge portfolio of inventory. There were two things we needed to do with it: one was actually to switch a load of it off, which we have been quite successful at...But the stuff that we are left with we are now undergoing service orientation across that legacy platform and in fact we have got a 35 year old system that we have now XML-enabled and we have got XML messages going in and out of a platform. So one of the things which we have actually proved is even oldest technology can be given a second lease of life.

The whole thing around reuse isn't a new principle, it's just that SOA allows us to do it at a whole different level. We are reusing huge bricks instead of tiny little pieces. And that's the fundamental shift we got here and for once the technology is actually up for doing it and actually allowing it to run in a real business environment

And one of the things that we found was applying some common thinking and some common approaches. We managed to take the performance of the best and made that the other performance of everybody and we got some absolutely dramatic returns on our initial investments there.

What we are talking about here is integrating across a massive heterogeneous environment...we are looking at how we can leverage this technology to actually integrate across our organizational boundaries and reach directly into the technology of our partners and our distributors so we can get a seamless end to end technology platform...

We very much wanted to buy into a vision of the strategy and the capability...And IBM were actually fantastic, we had a complete open-book approach to that, they allowed us full access to all of their development teams

I think it was one of the best [returns?] 20:30 of any project we've ever run...You know we are talking about going from days to seconds on some of the various different business transactions that we can now operate. So we are very much open for business, and now we've put our first few products out into the market...but what we have created behind the scenes is an infrastructure that can scale and can meet the needs of all of our business units in all of the channels in which they operate and all of the products that we sell. So we very much designed a platform for the future.