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IBM WebSphere Portal 5.1 quickly delivers the value of on demand business

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Why is IBM WebSphere Portal leading the rapidly-growing portal market? Two reasons, says Tim Thatcher, IBM Director of Workplace and Portal Products. First, WebSphere Portal has the greatest breadth and depth of capability — much of which it gets from leveraging research and development being done in all areas of IBM's software portfolio.

"In fact, a lot of the technology in WebSphere Portal is technology IBM had been investing in before the advent of portals," says Thatcher. "These are ongoing investments in application integration, user interface technology, security, support for mobile devices, and so on. WebSphere Portal leverages all of this and the result is real feature breadth and depth, functionality that goes beyond enabling an attractive portal screen."

Second, WebSphere Portal delivers value while withstanding the rigors of enterprise-class computing — because it has enterprise-class roots. "WebSphere Portal was developed as a natural extension of WebSphere Application Server, the most feature-rich and successful Web application server on the market," says Thatcher. "It inherits all of WebSphere enterprise-class performance, scalability, reliability, and ability to integrate with disparate enterprise systems. It's the portal that customers can trust to handle critical business processes involving any combination of employees, partners and customers, over the Internet, intranet or extranet."

We talked with Thatcher about what makes the just-released WebSphere Portal 5.1 IBM's most capable, enterprise-ready portal to date — and about the role it will play in bringing customers closer to the ideal of business on demand.

Business process integration: Speeding up process execution
Among the new features in WebSphere Portal 5.1 getting the most attention is *business process* integration capability, which customers can use to infuse portals with workflows that guide users from one area of the portal to the next, until a particular process is complete.

"Say I'm a procurement officer and need to approve a bid from a supplier" says Thatcher. "That is a high-value yes or no decision that requires information from different applications – applications like quality reports, inventory levels, and sales forecast. WebSphere Portal can alert the user to the need to make the decision and then present all the information needed

"The improvements in WebSphere Portal 5.1 make the on demand interface more productive, let it incorporate more applications and capabilities, and make it easier and less expensive to deploy. It's going to let more customers realize more benefit from on demand computing."

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to make a smart business decision quickly. When they approve or deny the request, it's automatically moved on to the next person in the process so they can quickly act on it"

"WebSphere Portal is the *front end* of on demand. The user interface provides access to the *applications, information, business processes and people* users need to respond with speed to customer demands, market opportunities and external threats.

Powered by Process Choreographer — a component from the WebSphere Application Server product family — business process integration will enable portal applications that drive even faster end-to-end execution of processes, and greater end-user productivity.

"Up to now, WebSphere Portal has been able to increase productivity just by putting the applications and information a person needs in one easy-to-access place," says Thatcher, "but it was still up to the user to navigate those resources in the correct order. Business process integration removes that burden from the user, and eliminates delays in the process, by literally moving the user from one step to the next."

Dynamic page assembly: Eliminating clutter, confusion, errors

A related new feature, called *dynamic page assembly*, helps a portal user work faster by displaying only the applications or information the user needs to complete the particular task at hand.

"Say you're using a portal application for completing an expense report," says Thatcher. "The application includes a currency converter, but because you travel primarily within the US, you don't usually need it. So instead of displaying the converter all the time, with dynamic page assembly the application can tuck it away, and display it only when you enter particular information that indicates you need a currency converter."

Screening out irrelevant applications avoids confusion, increases productivity, and may even reduce a company's help desk volume. "Lots of help desk calls result from users getting into an application they shouldn't be in, and then making a mistake," says Thatcher. "That's precisely the type of problem dynamic page assembly can prevent."

Portal virtualization: More portals, less cost

WebSphere Portal 5.1's new *portal virtualization* capability lets an organization deploy multiple portals from a single instance of software and server hardware — which naturally reduces the cost of deploying and managing multiple portals.

"Lots of companies or departments want to deliver different portals to different lines of business or groups within the company" says Thatcher. "In the past, the company or department would have to install a separate instance of WebSphere Portal on a separate server for each portal. With portal virtualization they can install WebSphere Portal just once, on one server and set of hardware resources, and deploy each of the portals from that single installation, with less wasted hardware capacity and a lot less administrative effort. It's a better utilization of computing and human resources and delivers value to new communities."

Greater Web content management integration, flexibility

The latest WebSphere Portal integrates IBM Lotus Workplace Web Content Management, Lotus' end-to-end Web content management solution introduced last year.

"WebSphere Portal integrates with Workplace Web Content Management at both the UI and infrastructure levels," says Thatcher. "This will deliver value to portal users, because tight integration at the UI level lets organizations offer Web content authoring and management tools as part of a consistent portal environment. It also delivers value to IT, because tight infrastructure-level integration lets IT manage access to those content management tools as part of the overall portal enrollment and authorization scheme. The net result is that your portal is up-to-date, accurate and in control." Thatcher adds that although it's being integrated into WebSphere Portal, Lotus Workplace Web Content Management will continue to be available as a standalone product.

WebSphere Portal 5.1 also includes an embedded version of the enterprise-class IBM Content Management Repository capability; customers can access this capability through the emerging, open JSR (Java Specification Request) 170 standard. "By integrating via an emerging open standard," says Thatcher, "we're ensuring that over time customers will be able to combine the content management application and content repository they prefer, whether each comes from the same vendor or not."

A more productive on demand UI

In IBM's componentized software development approach, products are no longer only products per se — they're are also technological resources from which other products can draw. This is especially true of WebSphere Portal, which also serves as the underlying user interface technology for the IBM on demand environment in general, and the IBM Workplace in particular.

"WebSphere Portal is the front end of on demand," says Thatcher. "The user interface provides access to the applications, information, business processes and people users need to respond with speed to customer demands, market opportunities and external threats.

"The improvements in WebSphere Portal 5.1 make that on demand interface more productive, let it incorporate more applications and capabilities, and make it easier and less expensive to deploy. It's going to let more customers realize more business value from on demand computing."

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