



Oracle delivers platform for application and process integration

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Oracle's recently announced Application Integration Architecture serves both to integrate Oracle's own diverse portfolio of applications and to better position the vendor to address the demand for business processes that flow across heterogeneous application environments. The initiative gives customers an incremental way to approach Oracle's next-generation Fusion applications and – although based on open standards – should advance Oracle's goal of tying customers even more strongly to its middleware and applications.

In mid April, Oracle announced its Application Integration Architecture (AIA). This standards-based platform is designed to facilitate business processes that flow across Oracle's own enterprise applications and, potentially, across other vendors' applications as well. The AIA initiative includes pre-built Process Integration packs that link various combinations of Oracle's E-Business Suite, Siebel, PeopleSoft and JD Edwards application modules. In addition, Oracle is using the AIA as the foundation for fielding application-independent business-process models and common business objects.

Oracle's AIA illustrates how the competition in the enterprise applications market is shifting from head-to-head face-offs of one vendor's application versus another's, to infrastructure-based offerings that provide easy integration of applications and support process flows across application silos and brands. The core functionality of the applications still matters of course, but the field of competition is increasingly geared towards solutions that deliver high-level, cross-application process flows.

As with its major application competitors, SAP and Microsoft, Oracle is able to leverage a product line that includes both middleware and application elements. In Oracle's case, it has tapped its multi-element SOA Suite to provide a range of functionality for the AIA. Among the SOA Suite components that the AIA exploits are the:

- BPEL Process Manager, for orchestrating process stages using the standard Business Process Execution Language
- Enterprise Service Bus, for routing content to the appropriate applications and facilitating SOA-based loose coupling between service requestors and service providers



- Business Activity Monitoring, for realtime visibility into the operations and performance of business processes and services
- Web Services Registry, for discovering and managing services throughout their lifecycle
- Web Services Management, for enforcing authentication and authorization policies on services across applications.

Oracle's Process Integration packs build on these SOA Suite elements to provide standards-based combinations of its application modules. The vendor has announced plans for ten of these packs, but is initially releasing only two:

- **Oracle's Siebel CRM On Demand Integration Pack for Oracle E-Business Suite**, which is intended to support the opportunity-to-quote process and includes auto conversion of opportunities to quotes and quotes to orders
- **Oracle's Siebel CRM Integration Pack for Oracle E-Business Suite Order Management**, which is designed to support the order-to-cash process lifecycle, including capabilities for complex product configuration, inventory availability, automated order processing, price synchronization and realtime order status.

Oracle expects that its ISV partners will use the AIA platform and technologies to create pre-integrated packs that link their applications to those of Oracle. Oracle also anticipates that its major systems integration partners (SIs) will create integration combinations and process flows that leverage Oracle and third-party products. In particular, the SIs are likely to be the main source of AIA-based solutions that integrate Oracle applications with SAP and Microsoft applications, since neither Oracle nor these primary foes will be inclined to offer such combinations themselves.

Meanwhile, customers and other vendors will also be able to extend the pre-packaged integrations – as well as the reference models and common business objects discussed below – to meet specific needs. Oracle considers this extensibility to be one of the 'crown jewels' of its AIA approach.

Beyond Oracle's Process Integration packs, the other key element of its AIA is the vendor's plan to offer best practice-based reference models for key business processes. Oracle plans to propose reference models for both horizontal as well as vertical processes, particularly those in the financial services, high technology, telecommunications and consumer-packaged goods industries. The vendor says it is working with customers, SIs and its own professional services consultants to define these models, and is using the Oracle Business Process Analysis Suite (based on the ARIS Design Platform that Oracle is OEMing from IDS Sheer) to build and test them.

Furthermore, Oracle intends to create standard versions of common business objects such as 'customer' or 'sales order'. By this standardization, Oracle wants to eliminate the many problems that can occur when different applications define such business objects differently. For instance, not every application shares the same meaning for a 'sales order', a fact readily evident, say, in the distinction



between a sales order for a telco and a sales order for a manufacturing company. With a library of common business objects, an application's native object definition can be converted to the common object definition and, if necessary, then translated to another application's usage.

Ultimately, Oracle envisions that a wide range of applications will standardize on the common business objects it develops. In its own case, Oracle says, it will use these common objects for its next-generation Fusion applications. By using the same business objects, individual applications can evolve without affecting the business processes that flow across them and the other loosely coupled applications that also support the processes. Again, other vendors and customers will be able to extend the core business objects as necessary for their specific needs.

The AIA's business process models and business objects are intended to be application and technology agnostic at a low level, meaning they will have no core dependencies or links to Oracle's own applications. However, at the higher levels of the models, Oracle and others can build links to the APIs and feature sets of their own product lines to, for instance, identify the business objects involved in a process or to list key performance indicators.

In building out its AIA offerings, Oracle is working closely with its own applications product teams to ensure that the APIs and services the applications expose are at the proper level of granularity. Oracle says it is making its business-logic services coarse-grained enough so that developers can include them in multi-stage business processes without too much work and without requiring too many web services calls.

Oracle has expanded its PartnerNetwork Applications Integration Initiative to accommodate the AIA technologies, processes and objects. Certified Partners and Certified Advantage Partners in the Oracle PartnerNetwork will now be able to develop validated business services that can be plugged into the Oracle Process Integration Packs. (In tandem with its AIA announcement, Oracle also announced a new collection of ISV Solution Maps that depict how customers can deploy specific business processes by leveraging combinations of Oracle and ISV partner products.)

In some ways, one long-standing challenge for Oracle – the scope and diversity of its acquisition-heavy and not-always-compatible applications portfolio – should now play to the vendor's advantage as it rolls out its AIA solutions. This is because many existing Oracle customers will be drawn to the AIA Process Integration Packs, reference models and common objects that allow the multi-brand Oracle products to better interoperate with one another. Oracle's large partner community is also likely to adopt the AIA approach fairly rapidly, especially since doing so will ensure automatic compatibility with Oracle's next-generation Fusion applications.



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