

Technology Infrastructure

Butler Group Subscription Services

E-mail Management

TECHNOLOGY AUDIT

Oracle

Oracle Collaboration Suite Release 2

Abstract *Oracle Collaboration Suite is a next-generation collaborative environment that has been designed to bring together the hitherto separate worlds of structured and unstructured information. Available as a fully-integrated suite or as individual modules, this solution is able to provide organisations with a robust, reliable, and scalable collaborative messaging platform that is based on one of the IT industry's most respected technology platforms. Utilising the Oracle Database and the Oracle Application Server, this solution brings together e-mail, calendaring and scheduling, file and document management, Web conferencing, wireless and voice access, and enterprise search. This solution-set still lacks Instant Messaging technology and the Web user interface is a little clunky, but overall Oracle Collaboration Suite is just what information workers are looking for. The solution is available on a variety of platforms, and does not require organisations to have existing Oracle infrastructures, as run-times are included. Contact Oracle or one of its many partners for a demonstration.*

KEY FINDINGS

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|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ | Treats e-mail as a managed information source. | ✓ | Accessible from a variety of devices and desktop clients. |
| ✓ | A standards-based product that runs on all major platforms and ably supported by a network of partners. | ✓ | Oracle's strategy with this product is to bring together structured and unstructured information. |
| i | Ships with run-time versions of the Database and Applications Server. | ✗ | Currently lacks Instant Messaging facility, and Web interface is clunky. |

Key: ✓ Product Strength ✗ Product Weakness i Point of Information

LOOK AHEAD

The company has plans to release Oracle Collaboration Suite 10g later in 2005, with emphasis falling on more granular security, delegated group administration, role-based access and security, Records Management, presence, Instant Messaging and multi-site management.

► FUNCTIONALITY

Oracle Collaboration Suite brings together e-mail, voicemail, calendaring, Web conferencing, and document management in an integrated collaborative environment that sits on top of Oracle's application and database technology. Having recognised the changing pattern in e-mail usage over the last few years, Oracle has opted for a collaborative solution that combines synchronous and asynchronous collaboration technologies with its unstructured content management technology – Oracle Files.

Product Analysis

It is estimated that as much as 80% of an organisation's intellectual property and business 'know how' is stored in unstructured formats, and even though these corporate assets tend to be less information 'dense' than their structured counterparts, they still, never the less, represent around 50% of an organisation's intellectual capital. Moreover, because e-mail has become the primary exchange mechanism for this information, organisations estimate that their corporate e-mail system may hold up to 80% of the organisation's useful information.

The e-mail inbox has clearly become the new 'C-Drive', and as a result some organisations are seeing message stores doubling in size every 18 months. In addition, many organisations are now concerned that vital documentary evidence relating to business transactions and operations may well be inadvertently stored in private e-mail folders rather than in a controlled content store – i.e. document management system.

Underpinned by the company's enterprise database technology, Oracle Collaboration Suite integrates e-mail management with content management in a single product offering. Currently, enterprise e-mail management sits outside of the Enterprise Content Management (ECM) domain, but Butler Group contends that this state of affairs cannot last much longer. If organisations are to truly manage all enterprise content then e-mail must be brought into the ECM fold.

Believing that both structured and unstructured information should be treated equally, Oracle argues that the underlying repository should be one and the same, and so the company's integrated collaboration and messaging solution is the first to successfully utilise a relational database to securely, reliably, and cost-effectively combine e-mail management with information management. Despite being relatively late to the enterprise e-mail market, we believe that Oracle is now in a strong position. Both IBM and Microsoft have embraced the idea of using a relational database to store e-mail, but it is Oracle that has the head-start ahead of its competitors.

Figure 1 shows how the Oracle Collaboration Suite adds value by consolidating the typical information used by a knowledge worker into a single repository. The architecture of this solution permits organisations to consolidate multiple servers onto a central configuration, or, if geography and network topology suggest otherwise, to distribute the solution as best befits the organisation.

Because Oracle Collaboration Suite is built atop Oracle's proven Application Server and the Oracle Database, organisations can gain additional value from this solution through integration with Line-Of-Business (LOB) systems and enterprise applications such as, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Financials, and Supply Chain Management (SCM).

Oracle is the first mainstream vendor to deliver a collaboration suite that utilises a relational database. Oracle Collaboration Suite does this securely, reliably, and cost-effectively, by simplifying and consolidating IT infrastructure; this in turn is able to reduce hardware, software, and administration costs. Figure 1 details the Oracle solution, and from this, one can see that unlike traditional corporate e-mail systems, Oracle Collaboration Suite provides a single, cohesive, collaborative environment that can be integrated into business applications as appropriate. Organisations not currently running Oracle technology should know that this solution ships with run-time versions of the Oracle database and application server. To encourage adoption and to make the migration from other vendor's solutions as easy as possible, Oracle offers implementation and migration services and tools for sites currently running Microsoft Exchange or Lotus Notes/Domino.

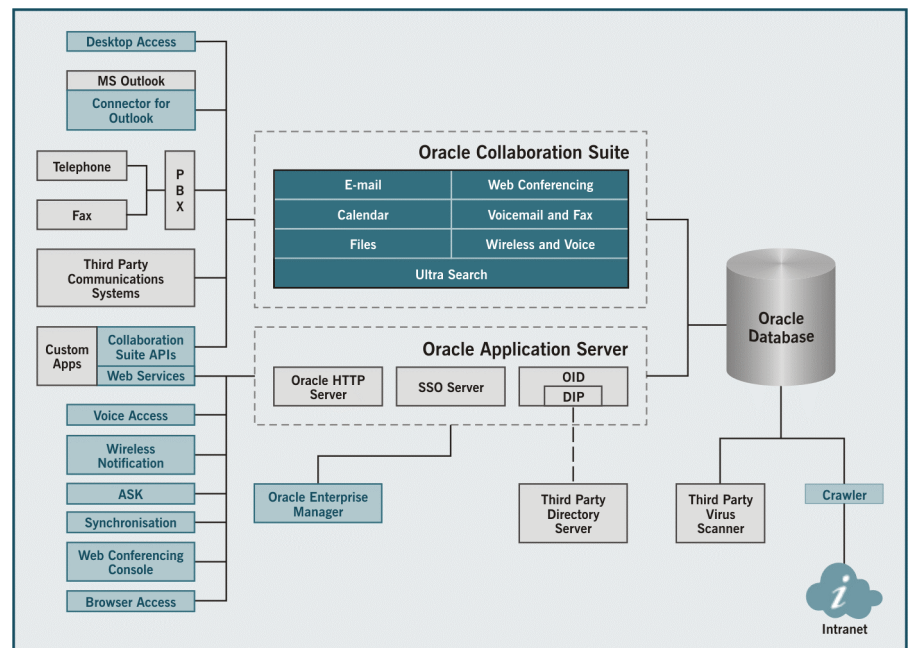


Figure 1: Oracle Collaboration Suite Architecture

Missing from the current release of Oracle Collaboration Suite is an Instant Messaging (IM) function. IM is fast becoming an important alternative to e-mail, as information workers buried by an avalanche of e-mail messages seek alternative, more appropriate forms of communication. Butler Group would also like to see the company extend the Oracle Files module to provide basic Records Management functionality, thereby addressing issues and concerns surrounding regulation and compliance.

Oracle came late to the corporate e-mail and collaboration market; however, this clearly afforded the company with an opportunity to design the information worker solution of the future. While Oracle may be ahead of the pack in terms of clarity of solution, the company still has to acquire market share and credibility. The next version of Oracle Collaboration Suite is scheduled for release mid-2005, and promises to deliver better access management controls, policy-based library services, workflow, and Records Management features. Looking ahead, Oracle's long-term goal with Collaboration Suite is to bring together the structured world of Business Intelligence (BI) with the unstructured world of ECM – a strategy Butler Group whole-heartedly applauds.

Product Operation

Oracle believes that Collaboration Suite Release 2 represents the next generation of enterprise messaging and collaboration systems – a sentiment Butler Group is inclined to agree with. Built around a three-tier, Java 2 Enterprise Edition (J2EE) platform (Oracle9i technology), the solution consists of a storage layer, an application layer, and a presentation and interaction layer. Designed by Oracle to overcome many of the limitations it perceives as being inherent in legacy enterprise communications systems, the company argues that Oracle Collaboration Suite can help organisations decrease costs, improve information security, increase user productivity, and streamline business processes. Oracle Collaboration Suite Release 2 attempts to achieve all of this through a number of modules: E-mail, Calendar, Files, Web Conferencing, Voicemail and Fax, Wireless and Voice, and Ultra Search.

E-mail

Taking advantage of the company's core technology, Oracle Collaboration Suite (or Oracle E-mail and Calendar) uses the Oracle Database to secure and store e-mail messages. While e-mail purists might argue that a Relational Database Management System (RDBMS) is not the best place to store e-mail messages, Butler Group is inclined to agree with Oracle's view that corporate e-mail should be treated differently to personal e-mail, and that storing it alongside other business information – BI if you will – makes much more sense than creating yet another information silo. As IBM and Microsoft also appear to be coming to the same conclusion, we reckon that the RDBMS will eventually become the standard repository for all business information – including that which just happens to be communicated through electronic messaging systems.

Oracles e-mail solution supports all of the usual standards: Post Office Protocol 3 (POP3), Internet Message Access Protocol (IMAP), Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP), and Secure Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions (S/MIME) V3 and V2, etc.

Although rather clunky, the Webmail interface does include a spell checker (English, Brazilian Portuguese, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish), and can be accessed over a secure connection. Oracle Collaboration Suite also supports a voicemail telephone client (using text-to-speech technology) and a facsimile client (in-bound only), for times when the user does not have access to a PC, Web browser, or Internet connection.

E-mail hygiene is provided through integration with products from Symantec, although the current version lacks the level of filtering controls found in other solutions. Server-side rules can be created by the administrator to ensure that in-bound/out-bound e-mail messages are retained (Ultra Search can then be used for discovery); however, Butler Group would like to see delegated administration of this feature provided in a way suited to business, rather than IT, users.

Calendar

Oracle Calendar provides calendaring, scheduling, and personal information management through desktop clients, the Web, or any mobile device. Oracle calendaring can be extended into Line-Of-Business (LOB) applications, thereby providing an opportunity for business process optimisation where the process is user-centric and/or requires manual intervention.

The calendaring feature of Oracle Collaboration Suite sits equally well with the Web client or Microsoft Outlook client, and integration with the Web Conferencing module is seamless.

Synchronisation Markup Language (SyncML) is an industry-wide effort to create a single, common data synchronisation protocol optimised for wireless networks, and is supported by Oracle Collaboration Suite. This enables mobile or deskless workers to synchronise events and contacts with no desktop dependency.

Files

Oracle Files enables information workers to store and organise unstructured information in the same Oracle database as their e-mail. The inclusion of this lightweight document management functionality within Oracle Collaboration Suite clearly highlights the company's understanding of good information management. Today, unfortunately, many of us use our e-mail folders as a pseudo or surrogate C-Drive, and as a result we are depriving our colleagues from utilising the valuable information contained within. Oracle Files re-introduces the concept of controlled document and file management – something that has gradually disappeared over the last decade, and a feature we believe to be critical to the future of corporate information management.

Oracle Files supports versioning, integrated workflow, and approval processing, and the Ultra Search module can be utilised to carry out free-text searches as well as metadata queries. This feature will, we believe, make Oracle Collaboration Suite highly appealing to organisations in regulated industries.

Web Conferencing

Oracle Web Conferencing provides users with a real-time collaboration facility, thereby enabling employees, customers, and partners to meet on-line in an environment that can support rich, dynamic collaboration. This module supports a variety of on-line meeting types, including 'Webinars', training and education, and employee help desk scenarios. Features and functions include: co-browsing, presentations, white-boarding, desktop sharing, voice streaming, polling and voting, annotation, and chat. It is also possible to record and playback Web conferencing sessions.

Voicemail and Fax

Oracle Voicemail utilises the Oracle E-mail infrastructure to provide familiar voicemail and fax capabilities. Voicemail and fax applications are built on standard interfaces while the messages are stored in the same Oracle database as e-mail.

Wireless and Voice

Oracle Collaboration Suite includes wireless and voice access to e-mail, calendar, files, address book, and corporate directory from any mobile device, thereby providing mobile or deskless employees with the ability to retrieve and reply to their e-mail. Notification capabilities also allow users to receive alerts for important messages or meeting reminders as an e-mail message, mobile phone text message, or voice alert.

Ultra Search

Oracle Ultra Search is a Web-based search engine solution that searches across multiple repositories: Relational databases, HTML documents, Oracle9iAS Portal, files on disk, and IMAP e-mail servers. According to Oracle documentation, the search module is based on "Federator" technology – a system that acts like a broker by bringing together other information sources from across multiple applications and search engines.

Oracle Connector for Microsoft Outlook

The Oracle Connector for Outlook enables users of Microsoft Outlook (98, 2000, 2002, and 2003) to integrate with the Oracle Collaboration Suite back end. It fully integrates e-mail, calendar, contacts, and task functionality, and it can also extend the capabilities of Outlook to other Collaboration Suite applications such as, Web Conferencing and Voicemail/Fax. Oracle Connector for Outlook supports 'Out of Office' notifications and server-side rules, and also enables users with PDAs, such as Pocket PCs, to use Microsoft ActiveSync (version 3.7) to synchronise these devices.

Product Emphasis Oracle has clearly set out to address an entire range of information worker collaboration scenarios, and so does not place any particular emphasis on any one module; however, the company's strategy for Collaboration Suite is very clear: the integration of structured and unstructured information in a dynamic, collaborative environment. In comparison with the rest of the market, Oracle's strategy appears to have a slight edge over its closest competitors (IBM and Microsoft). Compared to other solutions in this space, Oracle Collaboration Suite is still relatively new, and has yet to make any significant impact in the corporate market. We believe that Oracle has the potential to play a significant role in the collaborative e-mail/information worker market, and look forward to seeing Oracle Collaboration Suite 10g later in 2005.

► DEPLOYMENT

Oracle continues to work hard to make Collaboration Suite an easy product to install and deploy. The current release of Oracle Collaboration Suite requires very few manual steps and is ably supported by excellent documentation. Oracle Collaboration Suite Release 2 also includes improved System Management via Oracle Enterprise Manager and each of the Collaboration Suite component administrative consoles. The product can be installed in a couple of days for a work group of about 100 people, with larger enterprise implementations requiring more time by way of planning and testing. This is very much a modular solution, and can be deployed either as a single integrated system or as a set of modular components, each being deployed separately.

Oracle provides a well documented methodology to aid deployment, and is backed by a responsive and very capable network of partners and solution providers. Oracle Collaboration Suite is also available as a hosted solution. Organisations without Oracle administration skills should consider bringing skills in-house, training existing employees, or using Oracle On-Demand – an alternative where Oracle will handle all aspects of installation and maintenance as a service.

The Oracle's own system recently absorbed an additional 10,000 users during the Peoplesoft acquisition without the need for adding any additional administrative overhead, and so organisations should not fear any onerous administrative burden for this product. Oracle is able to provide training for both administrators and end-users, along with technical support and operational expertise. More than 4,000 support engineers are available worldwide, and are able to provide 24x7 support should this be a requirement. Oracle offers a variety of services contracts to meet specific customer business needs.

Oracle Collaboration Suite is available on multiple platforms, including: Linux Red Hat Advanced Server 2.1, HP-UX 11.0, Solaris, Windows 2000 Server, IBM AIX, and Compaq Tru64.

One of the key strengths of the Oracle Solution is scalability. The company's own internal implementation of Oracle E-mail runs on a consolidated database, ranking it 4th among Winter Group's 2004 Linux OLTP databases. Oracle's internal implementation of Oracle Files currently contains approximately 25 million documents spanning over 7 TB on a single instance of the Oracle database, and so it is probably safe to say that Oracle Collaboration Suite is well suited to large organisations – albeit those with significant Oracle DBA expertise. The system inherits all of the fault tolerance features that are available in the Oracle Database and the Oracle Application Server, and is also able to utilise Oracle's Real Application Cluster (RAC) technology for clustering and redundancy making the system highly fault tolerant.

► PRODUCT STRATEGY

Oracle Collaboration Suite is targeted at mid-sized and large organisations in both horizontal and vertical markets through the company's own sales force and that of its partners. Oracle maintains key relations with system integrators like BearingPoint, Capgemini, T-Systems, and Deloitte Consulting. In addition, to large System Integrators (SIs), Oracle maintains key relationships with regional SIs to provide regional support and specific subject matter expertise. Oracle depends upon SI partners to provide business consulting support, change management expertise, and implementation expertise.

Oracle Collaboration Suite can be purchased as an integrated suite (US\$60 per user perpetual) or as three separate components: Oracle E-mail & Calendar, Oracle Web Conferencing, and Oracle Files. Butler Group would point out the obvious and argue that the value of this offering is as a suite – even though some gaps do exist in the current version (e.g. Instant Messaging).

Oracle Collaboration Suite Options	Oracle Collaboration Suite	Oracle Files	Oracle Web Conferencing	Oracle E-mail and Calendar
E-mail	✓			✓
Calendar	✓			✓
Files	✓	✓		
Web Conferencing	✓		✓	
Voicemail and Fax	✓			
Wireless and Voice	✓			
Ultra Search	✓			

Table 1: Oracle Collaboration Suite: Product Editions

Both the Collaboration Suite and component parts are available to be deployed and run in house or can be outsourced to Oracle or a certified partner. The product is priced on a per user basis, and that price includes all software necessary to implement the system, including run-time licenses for the Oracle Database, Real Application Clusters, the Oracle Application Server, and all voice and wireless access technologies.

Specific technology partnerships exist with all major server and storage vendors as well as: Symantec for anti-virus/anti-spam; Alliance Systems, Lucent, and VoiceGenie for voicemail; Nokia, Consilient, Extended Systems for wireless; and lilumin, Sigaba, Voltage, PGP, and Entrust for e-mail security.

The company has plans to release Oracle Collaboration Suite 10g later in 2005, with emphasis falling on more granular security, delegated group administration, role-based access, multi-site management, Records Management, policy-based declaration of content, presence/availability, IM, VoIP, collaborative workspaces, improved Web access, and Web service API's across the entire suite.

Oracle is clearly intent on providing Microsoft and IBM with stiff competition, and in moving to a unified workspace, Oracle Collaboration Suite seeks to bring together more of the 'stuff' that information workers use on a daily basis to do their jobs.

The promise of Oracle Collaboration Suite is to bring together the separate worlds of structured and unstructured information – BI and ECM. In Butler Group’s opinion, this is exactly where collaboration vendors should be heading. Within the next three to five years, Butler Group expects corporate e-mail solutions to become part of ECM suites, as the information contained within corporate e-mail systems is clearly of immense value to the organisation. This information should not be left languishing around inside users mailboxes; it should be managed and preserved in a system that permits others within the organisation to exploit it.

► COMPANY PROFILE

Oracle Corporation (NASDAQ:ORCL), headquartered in Redwood Shores, California, and with offices worldwide, is the world’s second largest independent software company. Oracle specialises in information management, and its products, solutions, services, and technologies span across the entire software spectrum. Oracle is best known for its database products, business applications software, and development tools; however, the company also recognises 19 discrete industries, with solutions ranging from Supply Chain Management in the Retail sector to Operation Efficiency solutions for the Healthcare sector.

Founded in 1977, the company claims its technology can be found within 98 of the Fortune 100 companies, and there are reported to be 260,000 customers using Oracle products, technologies, and solutions, around the world. Oracle is also a services company, providing consulting, education, support, financing, and hosting services to a variety of industries and business sectors. Of the 50,000 employees working in more than 100 countries, nearly a quarter are involved in research and development.

Revenues and Net Income for the last three financial years ending 31 May were as follows:

	2004 (US\$ million)	2003 (US\$ million)	2002 (US\$ million)
Revenue	10,156	9,475	9,673
% Change on previous year	7%	-2%	-11%
Net Income/(Loss) after tax	2,681	2,307	2,224

► SUMMARY

The Oracle Collaboration Suite exploits the Oracle Database and Oracle Application Server to deliver a standards-based collaboration platform that integrates e-mail, calendaring, Web conferencing, file sharing, workflow, search, voicemail, and fax. The wireless and voice components of this solution enable users to access information from any telephone or wireless PDA, which in turn extends this corporate messaging system to field workers and deskless employees. Rich desktop clients are available for Windows, Mac, Linux, and Solaris, together with synchronisation support for Pocket PC, Palm, and the Sony Ericsson P800/P900. The Oracle Connector for Microsoft Outlook delivers a unified inbox for e-mail, voicemail, calendaring, fax, and Web conferencing.

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