ORACLE WEDS CLOUD UI WITH SIMPLE AND FLEXIBLE

THE BOTTOM LINE

Like other vendors in the enterprise applications space, Oracle has touté its new user experience and interface design as a key differentiator. Oracle intends for its user experience to mirror how a user works throughout the day, regardless of location and device. Nucleus examined Oracle’s user interface (UI) strategy and principles and how they align with the Dark Cockpit. We found that, as the UI is rolled through Oracle’s product suite, customers can expect increases in productivity as well as a likely increase in overall employee work time for those embracing Oracle’s mobility principles.

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OVERVIEW

Since Nucleus started writing about the design principles of Dark Cockpit in 2013, many vendors have unveiled new user interface (UI) design strategies and principles, with varying degrees of success. Infor has taken the Hook&Look approach with an in-house design-driven firm and released its new interface as the front end of many of its acquired and new applications; Microsoft has sought to bring the intuitive nature of Office to its enterprise applications as well. Oracle has taken a somewhat different approach by making a significant investment in usability design and testing efforts, and outlines its principles at a high level as simplicity, mobility, and extensibility.
GLANCE, SCAN, COMMIT

Just as Nucleus has observed Oracle’s implementation of the Dark Cockpit principles in prior products released for the cloud (Nucleus Research o53 – A closer look at Oracle Sales Cloud), the UI for Oracle’s latest cloud products continue to strive to make the user experience simple, focused, and automated. The UI attempts to present the right amount of information to its user to simplify decision making, highlight the most important tasks for the user to ensure focus, and provide real-time updates, machine learning, and intelligence software, thereby achieving a high level of automation.

Oracle’s design philosophy can be distilled down to “Glance, Scan, Commit” which seeks to allow the user to work at the appropriate level based on what is most pressing.

- “Glance” gives users the top-level picture of what’s going on. It is meant to reassure the users that everything is going well and there are no action items that require attention.

- “Scan” brings the user down one level and provides more targeted information about whatever has caught the user’s eye. The information is still relatively simple and easily digestible, meaning that the user is still not spending much time at this stage before performing a quick task or moving on to the next task or batch of information.

- “Commit” refers to when the user accesses information at a granular level. At this stage, the user is presented with a more complex task or an action item that requires greater attention. The interface leads the user directly to the application that he or she needs to get a comprehensive view of the situation and complete the necessary task. This level of investigation is only meant to be done when it is necessary, saving the user time by avoiding overcomplicating the workflow.

The philosophy tries to make it easy for users to work at the appropriate level of granularity. Throughout all the levels of its design philosophy, Oracle intends for the UI to reduce the cognitive burden on its user by getting them from point A to point B with as few frustrations as possible and delivering the right tool in the right context at the right time.
SIMPPLICITY, MOBILITY, EXTENSIBILITY

Oracle intends for the usability of their platform to translate to the different ways in which someone works throughout the day. For instance, Oracle wants the user experience and functionality to be consistent from the moment a user wakes up in the morning and checks his or her phone. As a result, Oracle designed the UI to transfer seamlessly between different access points from phones to tablets to laptops and desktops even in the middle of a work task. In order to ensure Oracle’s “Glance, Scan, Commit” workflow comes to fruition, the UI team focused on three areas: simplicity, mobility, and extensibility.

SIMPLICITY

Through the cloud platform interface design, Oracle seeks to achieve simplicity, which it defines as a balance between too much and too little information for the user. Failure to find that balance results in hunting for the right tool or application because it is either not readily apparent or is buried amongst other information. Along with supplying the right amount of information, Oracle seeks to ensure that the interface does not lose functionality by simplifying too much.

MOBILITY

Oracle sees the transition between different devices as adding flexibility to the cloud platform. Oracle is pushing to allow greater mobility in their UI so that the type of screen that is being used does not limit user functionality. The expanded connectivity inherent in the cloud allows for applications to be accessed from mobile users almost anywhere. Oracle believes this is the direction that the industry is headed, with access and functionality no longer tethered to a geographic location.

EXTENSIBILITY

Oracle wants users to integrate the cloud UI into their organization’s DNA by personalizing the user experience. For example, with minimal effort, administrators can upload company logo, change color schemes, customize text, and add or remove pages and applications to create an interface that contains the desired functionality and aesthetics. When discussing business process applications, “customization” has a strong negative connotation due to the difficulties that customized code presents when trying to update software. Oracle’s platform stores user personalizations at the metadata level, which means any changes are unaffected by updates and upgrades. By designing the UI with extensibility in mind, Oracle ensures that users’ avoid the IT costs typically associated with customization, thereby reducing the barriers to adoption.

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EXECUTION

With the breadth of the Oracle Cloud application portfolio, as well as its numerous organic and acquired products, Oracle has also outlined its strategy for harmonizing the users experience across all its apps while taking a gradual phased approach to reduce disruptions to users:

- Where possible Oracle applies its design philosophy to acquisitions and customers’ existing technology in order to avoid service disruptions
- Move applications to Fusion Middleware on a non-destructive timeline to deliver UX benefits to customers
- Apply new UX innovations using Fusion Middleware progressively across releases.

In the case of Cloud Customer Experience (CX), for example, Oracle delivered the first simplified UI in 2013, brought RightNow onto the first phase of the next UI in 2014, delivered new simplified design patterns in 2014, and continued work on harmonizing CPQ and Service Cloud in 2015. Today, views can be changed by group or role by the administrator with out-of-the-box configurations b role. It remains to be seen how Oracle will enable existing customers to remain with their old familiar interface if they wish to avoid the disruption (as Infor has done with a number of its ER offerings).

Regardless, this phased approach is a step in the right direction to drive Oracle users toward greater usability while managing the human barriers to adoption. Most customers will likely see clear productivity gains by taking advantage of Oracle’s UI investments.

CONCLUSION

With usability as one of the core drivers of value across enterprise applications (Nucleus Research m106 – Understanding the Value Matrix October 2012), it behooves all vendors to make investments in usability, as an intuitive modern UI has become table stakes for any new ERP or CRM evaluation. As Nucleus has continued to follow Oracle and others’ UX and UI strategies, we’ve found that simplification – at the core of Oracle’s approach – is a strong first step. Logistics of delivery and harmonization aside, most Oracle customers will see significant changes in UI over the course of the next 12 to 18 months (if they haven’t already).
Although mobility is an important focus area, Oracle’s strategy is informed by the notion that constant connectivity and a 24-hour workday is the expectation of most Oracle users. Those with a different work-life strategy may find the glance-scan-commit paradigm less valuable. It remains to be seen how Oracle will respond to those customers for whom the always-on, always-available nature of the cloud platform does not enhance its value proposition. However, all customers are likely to benefit from the broader investments Oracle has made in adopting Dark Cockpit design principles and leveraging the intelligence of its software to simplify the user experience and drive greater productivity.