

Application Integration at an Astonishing Speed! A Case-Study for an Outsourced Infrastructure Management Project

Application integration has always been difficult and expensive; quite often it results in a highly frustrating experience for many companies. This is primarily due to the many complexities of the integration process itself. Added to that, vendor's promises that middleware can magically connect applications do not often come true, resulting in expensive, lengthy, and time consuming programming to make two or more applications talk to each other.

This case study is about an application integration between two help-desk systems demonstrating that the above statement scenario is wrong in every aspect when using eTXIntegrator, an XML-based application integration tool developed by eTransX, Inc.

Background

A multi-billion dollar French financial institution wanted to reduce costs and improve the operation of its infrastructure management area. It chose one of the top three computer vendors in US to provide and maintain (Outsource) its entire infrastructure management globally.

Some of the services that any Outsourcer must provide include desktop computer and server maintenance, as well as help desk support to all of its client's users. Staff within the US division of the subject institution relied upon Computer Associates' Advanced Help Desk (AHD) system that had been in use over the years. To reduce disruptions, the Outsourcer was required to use the client's existing helpdesk software (software the Outsourcer was unfamiliar with), while continuing to provide all the services that is expected in the contract. To solve its dilemma, the Outsourcer subcontracted the helpdesk support to another organization which used People Soft's Vantive help desk application to provide the required level of service.

The Outsourcer has committed to its client that it would have the integrated help desk support in place by January 2003. The original contract was awarded during July-August 2002.

Challenge

The challenge to the Outsourcer was to continue to allow the users of its customer (i.e. the subject financial institution) to use its existing help desk system (AHD) to request for service, yet allow the subcontractor to provide the required service using its preferred software (i.e. Vantive). This meant that the information entered in AHD had to be integrated in REAL TIME with Vantive in order to provide the service, while the technicians of the subcontracted help desk company obtained their work orders from Vantive only.

Options Considered

To accomplish its goal the Outsourcer reviewed several options, including using off-the-shelf software, and developing custom software. It scheduled a meeting with its help desk support subcontractor to discuss the options. eTransX accompanied the subcontractor (eTransX was the subcontractor's integration partner) at the meeting. During the meeting, eTransX proposed a complete architecture system for the integration of AHD and Vantive. After discussing all options, the Outsourcer decided to use its Professional Organization to design and develop an interface between AHD and Vantive. This decision was made in October 2002; eTransX did not get a chance to provide the integration services at that time. Three months elapsed, but the Outsourcer was unable to complete the integration even though it was contractually committed to do so by January 2003. The Outsourcer finally decided that its only choice was to engage eTransX to help meet its obligations.

eTransX Challenge

The Outsourcer called eTransX on December 21, 2002, and asked to complete the integration between AHD and Vantive by January 31st, 2003 (little more than five weeks). The process involved integrating the problem tickets and support notes between AHD and Vantive systems. eTransX accepted the challenge, and promised the Outsourcer that it would enable the integration between AHD and Vantive by the stipulated time. eTransX knew that it could deliver because of the flexibility and versatility of its tool set, eTXIntegrator.

eTransX Accomplishment

eTransX worked extensively throughout this period (including Christmas and New Year holidays) and designed and developed a custom adaptor for AHD that addressed the numerous transaction types. The adaptor was ready for testing by January 10th, 2003 (within two and one-half weeks). eTransX completed a series of unit and integrated test procedures, as well as user acceptance testing. The integrated systems went live on February 7th 2003 (which presented a one-week delay because of the delay in acquiring the requisite servers. Prior to the integrating the systems, the Outsourcer employed a "swivel chair" operation, where the help desk analysts would enter information on both AHD and Vantive systems manually. This resulted in multiple errors and mismatched information between the two systems. Once the integration was completed, the errors were considerably reduced, resulting in higher productivity and more accuracy.

Once the system was operational, it was processing 7000-8000 transactions per day bi-directionally between those two systems. The Outsourcer, its client, and the help desk support subcontractor were extraordinarily pleased with the outcome of eTransX' accomplishments.

Just a few weeks ago, the Outsourcer was concerned about its ability to keep the commitment to its customer and improve the level of service delivery. Once they put eTransX and eTXIntegrator tool set into action, within a few weeks it was not only able to meet the commitments to its client, but the Outsourcer realized it could also save significant costs (\$10-\$15K) that it was paying the help desk subcontractor to maintain its "swivel-chair" mode of operation. In the end, eTransX and the eTXIntegrator helped the client, the Outsourcer, and the helpdesk subcontractor meet each of their requirements and their obligations at a fraction of the prior costs, and in record time. This is but one example of a successful application integration completed at an astonishing speed.