

Standardizing on SOA

The next generation of IT is not just about the competition or the bottom line. It's about the future of the business. With 90% of an IT budget going to simply maintaining the current IT environment, the decisions made today around modernizing the legacy environment can provide the stepping stone for any business on a successful path to a Service Oriented Architecture (SOA).

SOA is the modernized IT. SOA is critical to helping businesses respond more quickly to changing market conditions. Because it simplifies interconnections, SOA can ensure the best use of IT assets going forward – until today, reuse of assets has been an unrealistic goal for many companies. With SOA, the key becomes evolution instead of revolution. Taking a thoughtful approach with the current legacy environments can ensure the SOA initiative is not only cost-effective, but also a productivity booster.

IT modernization, in support of initiatives such as SOA, must provide the ability to rapidly deliver new capabilities while also providing mainframe-class performance, reliability and quality of service. Through the modernization process, enterprises need to be able to build a flexible and manageable environment that can take full advantage of a SOA and shared IT infrastructure, enabling IT to respond to change with speed and agility, reduce operational costs, and also make the best use of a company's most valuable resources – its people and information.

SOA and the Business User

The goal of a Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) is increased IT adaptability, reduced cost of application development and maintenance, and better alignment between IT professionals and business users. The ultimate benefit of a SOA is better information – and better information benefits business users.

Done right, a SOA can help business users shift their focus from merely running the business to maximizing the performance of their business. Not only will they be able to lower infrastructure costs, they can optimize their organization's key assets – information, customers, and brand.

Through SOA, companies can effectively bridge the gap between business and IT and provide business users with a broad view of the organization and better more timely information. Recent advances in SOA technologies have targeted the business user; helping to improve the speed and effectiveness of business operations by raising the awareness of important issues earlier.

Defining a Service

A service is a mechanism to enable access to one or more capabilities, where the access is provided using a prescribed interface and is exercised consistent with constraints and policies as specified by the service description. A service is provided by an entity – the service provider – for use by others, but the eventual consumers of the

service may not be known to the service provider and may demonstrate uses of the service beyond the scope originally conceived by the provider.

A service is accessed by means of a service interface, where the interface comprises the specifics of how to access the underlying capabilities. There are no constraints on what constitutes the underlying capability or how access is implemented by the service provider. Thus, the service could carry out its described functionality through one or more automated and/or manual processes that themselves could invoke other available services. A service is opaque in that its implementation is typically hidden from the service consumer except for:

1. the information and behavior models exposed through the service interface
2. the information required by service consumers to determine whether a given service is appropriate for their needs

The consequence of invoking a service is a realization of one or more real world effects. These effects may include:

1. information returned in response to a request for that information
2. a change to the shared state of defined entities
3. some combination of (1) and (2)

Note, the service consumer in (1) does not typically know how the information is generated (e.g. whether it is extracted from a database or generated dynamically); in (2), it does not typically know how the state change is effected.

Role of the SOA Architect

In IDC's "SOA-Based Service Buying Trends: A 2006 Survey of U.S. Companies", Marianne Hedin noted: "Companies which will try to implement SOA on their own... will soon discover that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to successfully roll out a large or corporate-wide SOA initiative without outside help". So what should you look for in a SOA Architect?

SOA Architects **must** possess a strong understanding of the enterprise from a business perspective. Only then will they be able to assist your staff in developing SOA principles and best practices that guide planning, development, integration and management of application infrastructures. Action items should include:

- SOA Readiness Assessment: establishing a SOA roadmap by assessing the enterprise's current state and readiness for SOA
- SOA Business Case Analysis: work closely with the business owner(s) to demonstrate the value of a SOA in their environment
- SOA Application Analysis: work closely with the Information Systems group to identify which of their applications should form the basis of a SOA

Whether a company is migrating application design practices and tools toward a style that creates shared, reusable and distributed services or building new SOA applications and solutions in an enterprise, XWebServices, Inc.'s SOA Consulting Group assists companies achieve their SOA goals. Contact us today – there is absolutely no obligation.

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