

WHY IS IT INTEGRATION PROBLEMATIC?

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Why is integration so problematic and how can organizations significantly reduce the cost, complexity and risk associated with integration projects? This Article looks at the traditional approach to integration and contrasts it with a new approach that dramatically reduces the time, complexity and cost of integration projects.

THE INTEGRATION CHALLENGE

When it comes to technology projects there is one stark statistic that should make you take notice. Organisations are finding up to 70% of the cost of any software project can be soaked up by integration with existing IT assets, according to Gartner. Even more worrying is the fact most of these 'integration' projects go over budget, are not delivered on time and many even fail.

Medium and large-size organisations generally adopted software platforms (such as the IBM mainframe systems) in the past for good reasons that still hold true today. Over the years they have developed multiple applications to represent the data and business logic that have become the core assets of their business.

AN OUT-DATED APPROACH TO INTEGRATION

The reason for major problems and headaches when it comes to integrating new software with existing IT systems is very much down to the traditional approach to software integration.

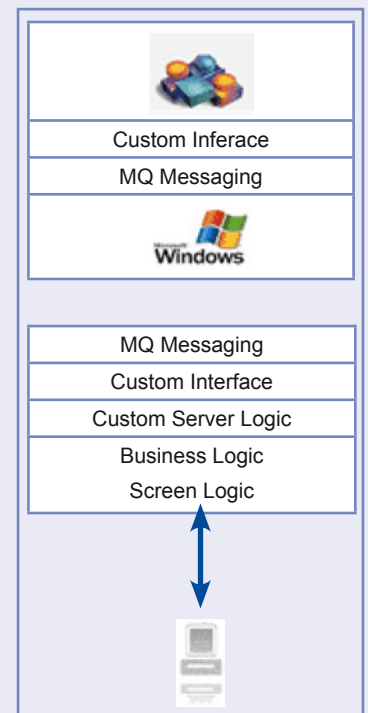
Take a typical scenario where some existing, monolithic business logic on a core platform needs to be reused as part of a Microsoft Visual Basic application. The traditional method of dealing with this would involve the following steps:

1. Designing and agreeing an interface that will be used to enable the VB client and the business logic to communicate.
2. Installing a messaging system, such as MQ series, to enable the VB client to communicate with the business logic.
3. Ensuring customer server code enables the acceptance of messages from the VB client to invoke the business logic and return the response to the VB client.

While in theory, it is a simple enough exercise to handle messages from one client, the reality is that this code must be in a position to handle requests from a multitude of clients at the same time thus making this logic infinitely more complex than a normal 'batch type' application.

4. Writing and testing the VB client, but only when the above has been completed.

These steps characterise projects that are generally high in both risk and cost. This has driven the search for an alternative. Today that search is over, with the launch of the SOA Gateway.



SIMPLIFYING INTEGRATION

The SOA Gateway product removes a massive degree of the effort and risk associated with traditional integration.

So forget the traditional approach and imagine utilising the following streamlined, effective and efficient steps when it comes to your integration project:

1. Install the SOA Gateway solution.
2. Use a configuration wizard to wrap and make business logic available in minutes.
3. Write and test the VB client application against a real server.

This straightforward, no-fuss approach offers the following major advantages:

- Significant reduction in cost due to less custom code.
- Risk is limited or abolished, as the logic is made available immediately.
- Software does not need to be installed on the client system.
- Both unit and integration testing can take place immediately
- Communication between client and server may be secured with the standard SSL protocol.

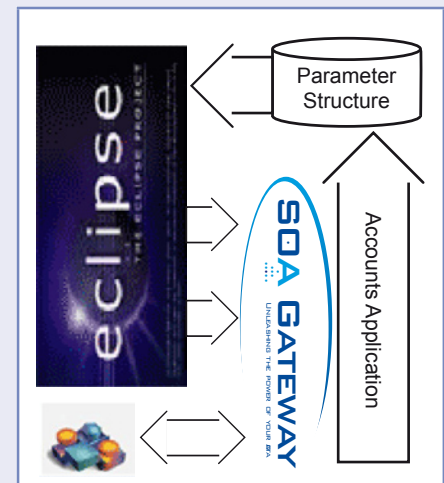
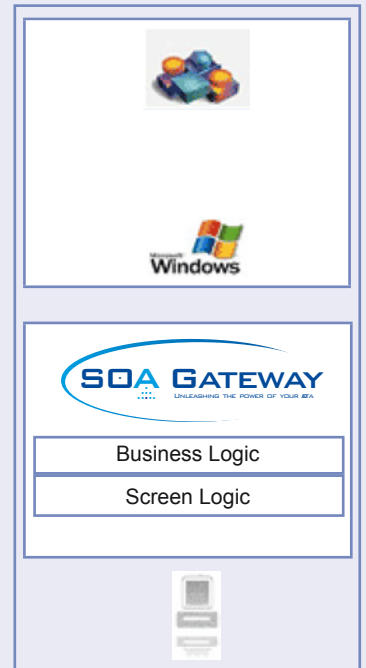
THE SOA GATEWAY EXPLAINED

So how is it possible to simplify the integration and legacy modernization challenge? Given the SOA Gateway installation is a once-off event on a given platform, the steps required to wrap a single piece of business logic are easy:

1. The structure(s) identifying the inputs and outputs to the business logic is identified and imported into an Eclipse based tool.
2. The fields in the structure are marked for 'input only', 'output only', or 'input and output'.
3. The definitions are exported to the SOA Gateway Server.
4. The service is published and is now available to the client.

ACCESSING DATA THE TRADITIONAL WAY

There are also occasions when an integration effort requires access directly to data in an existing database. As with the exposure of business logic, getting access to the data in the traditional way is expensive, time consuming and fraught with difficulties.



Assuming a Java client running on Windows wishes to access some core data, the following would generally be the traditional approach:

1. Designing and agreeing an interface that will be used to enable the Java client to talk to a custom data server.
2. Installation of a messaging system, such as MQ series, to enable the Java client to communicate with the custom server.
3. Enabling custom server code to accept messages from the Java client, to access the database and return the response to the Java client.

As with the previous example, this custom code must be in a position to handle requests from a multitude of clients at the same time thus making this logic infinitely more complex than a normal 'batch type' application.

4. Writing and testing the Java logic, but after the above steps have been completed.

HOW IS THAT SIMPLIFIED BY THE USE OF THE SOA GATEWAY?

1. The structure of the database table or file can be determined from the database and imported into an Eclipse-based tool.
2. The definitions are exported to the SOA Gateway Server.
3. The service is published and is now available to the client.

As shown in the diagram, the new SOA Gateway eliminates the need for writing any code on the database side.



EASY ACCESS TO CORE DATA ASSETS

Using the SOA Gateway gives equivalent integration characteristics to business logic integration, as in the earlier example, while offering the following benefits:

- Integration with existing database and business logic assets can be achieved in hours instead of weeks or months.
- Services may be reused again and again.
- Unit testing can be simply done with off-the-shelf tools.
- Integration testing is less time consuming as it clarifies where information is being sent and what information is being returned.
- Projects can be delivered on time and within agreed budgets.
- Integration costs are reduced by 35% plus.
- Programmers can focus on creating valuable business applications instead of spending up to 70% of their time working out how to get to the legacy information.

Organisations adopting the SOA Gateway for their IT integration projects can rest assured they will no longer be one of those organisations wasting their software budgets on time-consuming, hard-to-manage integration problems.

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