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SOA Business Value

by Rich Barndt

Here is one of the many burning issues that have come out of the SOA discussion – IT organizations are assembling teams of architects with the goal of building architecture for the future that will be in place for the next 10-15 years. Most architects intuitively understand the value of building a SOA, but they are struggling with how to associate the business value of building it, and explaining that to the business managers who control the budgets and provide that little matter of funding for such initiatives. While there doesn't seem to be one good answer that fits everyone, the various discussions seem to reduce it down to these main points:

- ◆ Enterprises need the business agility to react to ever-changing business requirements, and continually implement new programs to attract and retain customers.
- ◆ In support of this, business processes need to be automated, streamlined, refined, and measured.
- ◆ The underlying IT infrastructure which supports those business processes needs to be flexible and capable of adapting to change. Continued measurement of success means that the change needs to happen in real time and results need to be measured in real time.
- ◆ IT systems contain lots of existing functionality in the form of in-house business logic that represents domain expertise that is pertinent to the particular business you are in. Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS) applications contain business logic that automates common business functions, such as HR management, Accounting, and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP). Most installations of these systems represent heavy investments in

licensing, installation, consulting, and custom tailoring to meets the individual needs of an organization.

- ◆ The key to realizing the business benefits of building a SOA is to recognize the ability for a SOA to be able to leverage existing application assets, and expose them using service level abstractions that are loosely coupled, and standards based. New automated business processes can be built more rapidly by stitching together composite applications that invoke these services and combine them with new business logic that is also exposed through service level interfaces. This is what forms the basis of a SOA.

The key to tying this back to the business benefits is how well the SOA infrastructure is capable of being configured, streamlined, and measured. Implementing new programs to react to competitive pressures can only be effective if they can be done in a timely manner. New initiatives to attract and retain customers usually have a direct measurable impact on the business. These programs can only be proven successful if they are capable of being measured in real time for their effectiveness, and also capable of rapid course corrections based on the results of the measurements.

Explaining the business value of SOA to business manager is not so much a conversation about how to extract business value from SOA, its more about how to extract value from the assets that you have in place. A SOA can be the architectural approach to help make that happen. That's the net/net of the discussions on this subject so far. In several future installments, we will discuss the technical benefits of SOA, how to be successful in implementing SOA, and SOA Governance.