

Collaborative Portals: Better Communication, Better Results

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Brian:

I'd like to welcome you and thank you for taking the time to listen to this pod cast on Collaborative Portals and how IBM's new Collaboration Accelerator for WebSphere Portal helps organizations deliver rich, collaborative user experiences. I'm Brian Chaput from IBM and joining me today is Jason Anderson, IBM's Product Manager for IBM's Collaboration Accelerator. Jason thanks for your time today.

Before we discuss the Collaboration Accelerator and its value in more detail, can you first provide the listeners a brief overview of the IBM Accelerators WebSphere Portal?

Jason:

Sure, Brian. I'd be happy to as it will provide a good foundation for listeners as we dive deeper into the Collaboration Accelerator. Quite simply, accelerators are integrated packages that easily snap on to the WebSphere portal server. It helps dramatically shorten implementation time and ultimately speeds up time to value. They're really good to be solution-specific offerings that align with business scenarios that our customers are most often commonly deploying which are things like performance dashboards, employee self-service, and of course collaboration.

Brian:

Okay, so you've mentioned dashboards and employee self-service and, of course, we're going to talk about collaborations. I assume there are others, but just how many of these specific offerings or accelerators are there?

Jason:

There are five accelerators for WebSphere Portal. The first is IBM dashboard accelerator for the delivery of portal-based real time performance dashboards and score cards. The self-service accelerator is primarily driven towards employee manager self-service in the Human Resources aspect. The content accelerator is geared to deliver powerful on-line web content creation and management pushing that down to the line of business user as opposed to being managed by Central IT. We're going to talk about the collaboration accelerator more, but the last accelerator is what we call the Enterprise Suite Accelerator which offers an array of capabilities from the other portal accelerators plus some offerings from the WebSphere Portal family. Over time we expect to introduce more accelerators into the market.

Brian:

As you mentioned earlier, the accelerators are in effect solutions that integrate web and snap on to the WebSphere Portal server. I assume that means the customer can leverage

Portal Server as a single platform to serve different requirements by snapping on accelerators as required. Is that right?

Jason:

That's exactly right. With the approach we're taking now, customers can easily create high-value composite applications on Portal, tailor them and deliver them on demand to each and every user. For example, content accelerator helps dynamically deliver a content ridge, personalize the web experience to different communities and constituencies. Combined with the collaboration accelerator, you can seamlessly add integrated communication techniques such as real time chat, on-line meetings, and deliver that all within a unified web interface delivered through the portal. Perhaps later they'll want to add dashboards etc. With the accelerator, they have the flexibility to add more capability to WebSphere Portal whenever they need to on their own terms.

Brian:

That is a really unique approach, and I think it is great news for organizations considering WebSphere Portal to know that both it can scale and also be added on to as the needs of the organization change. So, let's talk specifically about the IBM Collaboration Accelerator and give our listeners a summary of exactly what that is.

Jason:

The IBM Collaboration Accelerator combines with WebSphere Portal to deliver an interactive web-based platform for collaboration. It provides people with more effective and cost-efficient ways of accessing information, sharing ideas, communicating and working together, all the context of their role, their processes and activities, via our personalized interface.

Brian:

So, when you say it provides a more effective way to access information, share ideas and communicate, are you simply talking about things like instant messaging?

Jason:

Of course, instant messaging is part of it, absolutely, but that's only one part of the overall collaboration picture that we provide within the Collaboration Accelerator. It's really a rich state of capabilities to help organizations operate, compete and perform better in their changing marketplace. For example, surveys we've conducted with our customer base and our direct experience with the customers tells us that collaborating and teaming faster and more productively is a key objective for many of these executives as they move from the days of pure cost containment to growth through innovation. Some of the big reasons that are supporting our reason to take the Collaboration Accelerator to market are the overall growing economy, which is telling companies to have both internal and external resources, and really deliver, as well as execute, in different markets around the globe.

All of these new competitive forces have really changed the intensity with which companies are doing business across geographic and even organizational lines. With all

that growth happening in these new markets, companies need to also be able to access expertise and to respond quickly to new business opportunities. What that often means is that business models begin to change, evolve or even be created anew, where companies now need to partner with others more and work together to create more value as demanded by their customers. Many times that also requires reaching across organizational lines, or reaching through organizational lines to other organization to access expertise and deliver capabilities to the market quickly. All of this together requires a whole new degree of innovation and creativity from businesses.

What really starts to happen in the competitive marketplace is that innovation has become the key driver as opposed to efficiency and cost containment, as I said before. Therefore, by building an environment that fosters that type of collaboration among all of these different communities that an organization interacts with, we think that it help them, ultimately, derive competitive advantage and continue their objective toward growing the business worldwide.

Brian:

What are organizations doing today to not only be reactive to these trends, but more importantly, proactive and really exploiting them as opportunities?

Jason:

The organizations that are doing something seem to be deploying a lot of different types of things. They may have deployed a technology for document management, they may be using software as a service provider for e-meeting type of access or conference access, and they've basically deployed a mishmash of these tools to deliver a complete collaborative solution based on their requirements. The problem is that a lot of these services aren't interconnected, and therefore, a lot of time is spent working in one, then moving to the other, and this results in gaps between them in terms of integration and so you've got a lot of people copying and pasting things or redoing things over and over again. It just doesn't seem to provide a cohesive solution. It's good that they have these solutions, but certainly the way they've been deploying them lately is not necessarily as cost effective as they would like. A lot of our customers and companies are coming to us and saying that they really need a complete range of collaborative capabilities including instant messaging, and the people access meetings and the team spaces, document sharing and even some of that new, what's called social networking technologies all in one place and interconnected with each other in a single interface. The other thing that they require on top of this is that there needs to be some sort of level of security so that user roles are respected and responsibilities are respected. When we bring all this together into one single environment, it's quite a powerful thing and that's something we like to call Collaboration in Context.

Brian:

I like that term. Can you explain further what you mean by Collaboration in Context, and maybe give us an example?

Jason:

Certainly I would, so let's just start with the basics. A portal is a great platform to deliver these types of solutions because what it delivers is a secure, dynamically generated unique personalized composite web experience. When you take that foundation from WebSphere Portal server, add the collaborative capabilities into it within that same interface, it allows people to put the collaboration services, if you will, in the context with the user-specific work activities, applications that they are working in or even functions they're performing, or potentially even a process or some sort of transaction.

Let me give you an example. Let's say we have a performance dashboard that's based in the portal, which is fairly common. We have a lot of customers who use dash boarding today, and within it are alerts that inform me of a problem condition in my area of responsibility. Maybe in a manufacturing scenario, there could be an excessive rate of defects at one of my plants. One way we could react is to send an email to the Plant Manager and say: hey, what's going on? Another more effective approach would be to identify if the Plant Manager was online, and if so, initiate a real time chat, potentially even create a team room with specific team members assigned to take care of certain tasks and activities, to really get to the heart of the matter and figure what are the best quality practices to improve the situation. That ability to identify a problem, and take advantage of the situation, and create an environment for people to start working quickly, in a very rapid fashion, in terms of getting something up and running and enabling them to do that, is a very powerful thing. That is a really good example of what we call Collaboration in Context.

Brian:

I see, so collaboration delivered in a portal, or again as we would refer to it, as a collaborative portal, is what allows for effective contextual collaboration that can lead to improved organizational performance.

Jason:

That's right, the IBM Collaboration Accelerator provides combines IBM WebSphere Portal to help deliver that interactive portal solution into that experience. On top of that, we provide three major capabilities which are based upon proven IBM technologies.

First on the list, is the instant people access via presence awareness, instant messaging, and the online web conferencing? Secondly, we provide a team space environment which allows members to manage their own space, do project management tasks, share content, files or even share web feeds within the context of the specific application. Third, and what is most leading edge for us, is that we're delivering a set of web tools, social networking tools and services, and that includes a powerful set of personal profiles, community memberships so you can do some adhoc community awareness or expertise type of situations, it has a blogging capability, a social book marking capability and it has an ad hoc task management type of capability. All of these things make it easy to search for and find the experts and knowledge of your user community, be that internal or external to the organization.

Brian:

To summarize then, it's the combination of those capabilities that have a primary benefit delivered by the Collaboration Accelerator in that it helps users communicate in team fashion more effectively.

Jason:

Yes, exactly, the better and faster the collaboration, the more effectively we can enable that for an organization, and they will discover that they're going to be able to get efficiency and productivity increases, it's going to help them reduce their overall costs and, frankly, the extended outcome of all this, is the fostering of better and greater innovation opportunities for companies to take advantage of. When we extend that outside of the organization, to partners and customers and other communities, let's say a government community, overall satisfaction of working with that particular organization could very well be positively impacted in terms of just strengthening the bond between these various areas that are supported by this collaborative tool.

Brian:

Jason, this is a great overview of the power of collaborative portals and, specifically, how the IBM Collaboration Accelerator for WebSphere Portal can help deliver them. I want to thank you again for your time today. For our listeners, if you'd like much more information about the IBM Collaboration Accelerator or any of the other Accelerators that Jason mentioned earlier, please visit IBM on the Web at IBM.com/websphere/portal. Thank you all for listening.