

Welcome to this brief podcast in which we'll discuss best practices for building and deploying employee self service solutions. I'm Pete Schutt a business solution professional and our human capital management practice at IBM's global business services. And joining me today is Marty Lechleider. Product manager for self service portal solutions, from IBM software group. Marty thanks for spending a few minutes with us today.

Marty:

My pleasure.

Pete:

Ok so let's jump right in. Marty what kind of self service solutions are we talking about?

Marty:

Well employee self services is a broad category which can include different areas. The focus is typically on delivery of organizational services to support things like HR related activities, expense management training, *inauduable* and much more.

Pete:

So what are the reasons for growth we're seeing in employees self service?

Marty:

Initially the justification was to gain efficiencies. By putting information and transactions on line employees can help themselves instead of depending on staff. This trend continues but the focus has shifted somewhat to include a new set of self service applications. This new set is targeted at managers and helps provide strategic value to organizations.

Pete:

Can you expand what you mean by the shift and maybe give us an example?

Marty:

Yes in the human capital management area we saw the focus initially on helping the employees do things on their own. Simple things like look for an answer to a question update an address select the appropriate benefits. These areas of self service continues to grow, but now we're seeing a new set focused on things like talent management learning employee motivation and even performance management. What's exciting is that this self service technology is being used in new innovative ways to help make organizations more effective in addition to driving efficiencies.

Pete:

You're right Marty. But what if some of the challenges you see with this next phase is self service.

Marty:

Well first it's got to be easy for self service to be successful. Employees and managers have to want to use it. This means user interface needs to be simple and intuitive. What you don't want is for employees and managers to see self service as new work being forced on them. They need to see the value in it. They need to see that it's easy and how it will help them be more productive.

Pete:

Yes and we've got to make sure that just putting a pretty interface on a transaction requires more.

Marty:

Absolutely, the solution needs to adapt to the employer the manage. For this I mean it should be personalized and focused on helping them do what they need to accomplish. It has to guide them through all the steps necessary to complete the task at hand. It has to include everything the employer manager needs all in one single simple interface. This is particularly true with strategic uses of self service, which often need to integrate different systems together.

Pete:

Exactly, can you provide another example Marty?

Marty:

Yeah a great example is employee on boarding. If you think about it, in speed in which a manger is able to onboard a new employee, and make them productive is critical. The organization will be more effective with employees quickly coming up to speed and a new higher will be happier - coming up to speed more expediently. But there's so many different things that a manager and an employee needs to do. There's the hiring rack security badge scheduling training getting an office getting a network ID and email ID benefits enrolment. The list goes on and on. And it's different from organization to organization. An effective self service solution will pull everything required together and help walk the manager and employee through what they need to do. It will also keep them on track and help reinforce the organization s best practices.

Pete:

Marty what types of software do you recommend for these self service applications?

Marty:

Well first this is a great application for portal. The role of a portal when you think about it is to provide a unified and intuitive user experience that intergrades all the systems in content required to support what the users trying to do together. That's exactly what's needed here.

Pete:

Yes and Marty I see these types of portal use interface also being included in the ERP packages.

Marty:

You could use the portal wit the ERP package. But you're only going to be able to support the functions in the ERP package itself. The problem is what do you do when you need to integrate the transactions from your ERP system in to the contacts to something broader? You find that the typical organization needs to expose functions and content from at least a half a dozen back end systems to the users. So what young really need is an open inaugurated platform like web sphere portal to facilitate this.

Pete:

What do you say about the ERP packages that have pre built self service components? Does it make sense to use these within a portal like web sphere portal?

Marty:

Oh, the old portal and portal idea. You can go that way but it's not the best.

Pete:

Ok can you expand on that?

Marty:

Yeah we *inaudible* earlier that easy use is critical. This means that it's important to provide a consistent look and feel and make all of the pieces of the solution work together. With web sphere petal and full *inaudible* integration you can do this. You can have a common looking feel single sign on and even interaction between the parotids. The alternative would be to expose R frames or perhaps eye views into the context of web sphere portal. But these would feel acquired and the user would be limited in some

of the things they were able to do. And perhaps ah it would ah restrict you from meeting your business needs.

Pete:

So if you're recommending building self service portlets and web sphere portal. Isn't this expensive?

Marty:

It doesn't have to be ideally what you want to do is strike a balance between pre built functionality and custom. And the custom functionality should be easy to build. A great example of this is Lotus work force management.

Pete:

Oh Lotus workforce management that's a new one. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Marty:

Absolutely, Lotus work force management is a new self service accelerator for web sphere portal. you can think of it as a set of capabilities hitch snap on to web sphere portal and help accelerate the building and deployment of HR related self service solutions. The initial version of the product is designed to work with SAPHR. It includes many pre built self service portlets, which are pre wired to SAP. The key though is that these portlets are built on a *inaudible* using web sphere portlet factory, which allows for easy and rapid customization. So from some perspectives you can think of them as templates which are designed with customization in mind. This approach can save a tremendous amount of work over having to build customer portlets from scratch and it gives you the flexibility to build your exact requirements.

Pete:

Ah this is interesting. I have clients in many industries and all different sizes that have these requirements today. What is important is that these skills are ness carry to deliver are available globally. To provide continuous 24 hour follow the *inaudible* approaches and flexibility in all cost models.

Marty:

Yeah that's another important area to cover. You can readily find skills for an open platform like web sphere portal. At the leaden portal and based on J2EE resources can be easily found and at a reasonable price. And plus we've reached a level of market maturity an adoption for J2EE which provides customers with many global development

and delivery options. You can contrast this ERP consultant. Who commands a heavy fee and may be difficult to find.

Pete:

Haha but you need more than just J2EE or portable technical skills don't you?

Marty:

Yeah you do. You'll need some knowledge of the back end systems and some knowledge of the functional domain for the self service solution. And this is going to be the case with any option you choose.

Pete:

Ok so if I go with your self service solutions based on web sphere portal. Don't I need to worry about the changes on the back end? For example what happens if my ear piece system changes or gets upgraded? Do I need to redo the entire system?

Marty:

Well you've hit on another important area. The best approach is to have a self service front end which is integrated to your various back ends through service oriented architecture. This is the architecture you get with web sphere portal and lotus work force management. What this means is that all the user presentation and front end logic is abstracted from back end and integrated through web services. So in other words as the back end changes your self service solution will continue to work 0 or very minimal additional effort.

Pete:

Yes services orient architecture. This may play nicely with many organizations presume and *inaudible* growth strategies. As each new company brings more complexity and new back end systems into the mix. And a front end solution based on web sphere portal and Lotus work force management. Can help integrate it all and accelerate the savings the synergies and return on the acquisition investments. Do you agree Marty?

Marty:

Absolutely.

Pete:

And building this solution is just the start. I wouldn't expect users to line up and start using it just because you've deployed a new solution. Ah can you talk about user acceptance Marty?

Marty:

Yes you need to put a plan in place for *inaudible* solution and generator awareness. You should be creative in this area use all resources available to you. Organizational news letters your company internet etc. Give the solution a name, use brand name this will make it easier to promote. Also some training will be required, especially when you're dealing with managers introducing new strategic solutions. You'll want them to avoid rejecting as additional work. You try to add to the overburden schedule. So this means you need to position the solution in a way to help them see the value.

Pete:

Great so let me try to summarize Marty. It sounds like self services continuing to grow and expanding in a new higher value added areas. We also heard some great advice on how to be successful with self service efforts. And it sounds like web sphere portal and Lotus work force management are excellent ways to start. So I'd like to thank you Marty.

Marty:

Thank you Pete.