

# Oracle to Announce 'Project X' Integration Framework

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The new SOA strategy will allow users to pull together functionality from myriad suites without upgrading to Fusion Apps, Oracle says.

Oracle is developing a new service-oriented architecture strategy that could overtake the momentum around its Fusion Applications initiative, according to sources close to the company.

In his keynote address April 16 at the annual Oracle Applications Users Group conference in Las Vegas, Oracle Co-president Charles Phillips is expected to announce a composite application strategy, code-named Project X, that is essentially an application integration framework designed to enable users to pull together the "best of" functionality from Oracle's various application stacks, based on a specific business process, the sources said.

"It's a set of processes that take the best of pieces from - for example - I-flex, Siebel - and - Oracle and deliver that to the customer as a single process," said a source, who requested anonymity. "Behind the scene - the integration framework - grabs different pieces from the Oracle architecture - you have to have a basic underpinning that's going to define a customer across all the suites - then - adds - process orchestration to define the best-of-breed workflows you can do."

While the technical details and scope of processes defined in the integration framework are unclear, the general idea is that Oracle, of Redwood Shores, Calif., will develop its own composite applications as

well as provide users with the services necessary to stitch together their own composites, also based on a process.

One example is the customer on-boarding process for the telecommunications industry, which might pull functionality from Siebel, Oracle E-Business Suite and Net4Call. All users have to have in order to make use of the integration framework, according to sources, is the latest version of Fusion Middleware. More importantly, a migration to Fusion Applications, expected in 2008, will not be necessary to access functionality from the myriad suites Oracle has amassed - a total of 28 since January 2005. So a JD Edwards customer using the integration framework could have access to G-Log's logistics hub or Demantra's demand planning capabilities or Siebel's CRM (customer relationship management) functionality without having to license the suites themselves or wait for Fusion Applications.

However, the development and delivery of Project X raises the question of whether an integration framework negates the need for Fusion Applications.

The integration framework "doesn't take away the need for Oracle to develop Fusion applications, but the likelihood that this overshadows Fusion Applications is pretty high," said Gartner analyst Yvonne Genovese. "What Oracle missed when they first made the announcement of Fusion is that users are very committed to the applications they have acquired and they don't want to take them out. We all know today that Fusion Applications is going to be a new install for JD Edwards users. That would be a major commitment that they are not going to make. So there's a very lucrative install base that Oracle can tap."

Others say Oracle doesn't have to deliver Fusion Applications at all, except at times customers want to replace what they have already from Oracle to implement the latest technology with Fusion applications.

The concept of utilizing SOA to build composite applications is not new. SAP coined the idea - and the xApps phrase - around 2003 when it started delineating its Enterprise Services Architecture strategy and NetWeaver integration platform. SAP, of Waldorff, Germany, has also developed a composite application framework that supports model-driven application composition, an object access layer that decouples repositories of underlying systems from business objects and processes for "snap-on" capabilities, a user interface layer, and a collaboration framework to relate any service or object from NetWeaver to any other business object, according to the company's Web site.

Infor Global Solutions, which has also amassed a huge number of acquisitions to become the third-largest business applications provider behind SAP and Oracle, recently announced an SOA strategy that enables users to build composites based on a process, using a framework developed by the Alpharetta, Ga., company.

Oracle is indeed capitalizing on a concept proven among users as well. In a 2006 research project, AMR Research found that 21 percent of 163 companies already using SOA planned on buying and implementing composite applications to augment the capabilities of an installed application. An additional 27 percent of respondents said they planned to develop a new composite application to extend an installed application.

On its homepage April 12, Oracle previewed Project X, calling it "an important development initiative that has been underway to unify our broad portfolio of applications and help customers close the gap between evolving business needs and IT's ability to execute." Its benefits, according to Oracle, include the ability for users to maximize the value of their IT investments and to leverage a pre-built, open and standards-based architecture.

However, the Project X benefit described by Oracle that will likely hold

sway with the thousands of users the company has acquired is the one that enables customers to "quickly achieve an end-to-end business process with existing assets that survives upgrades."

Gartner's Genovese said Oracle's integration framework is going to be important. "Where users are going to see value is in the composite apps that Oracle builds out of this," she said. "Developer organizations that are readily invested - in IT - will be attracted to the framework."

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