

Weekly Review

Volume 4, Issue 48
October 29, 2008

In this issue:

- **IBM IoD 2008 –
Setting the Information Agenda**
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IBM IoD 2008 – Setting the Information Agenda

By Charles King, Pund-IT, Inc.

At the Information on Demand (IoD) 2008 conference in Las Vegas, IBM launched new software and services designed to help customers put information at the center of their organizations. According to the company, these offerings aim to help customers build an Information Agenda for making smarter business decisions. The new solutions help provide information on demand and address three critical business needs: identifying business opportunities; improving efficiency; and making better use of information for improved decision-making.

The new offerings and services include:

- Cognos-based, industry-specific and financial management solutions in the areas of finance, pharmaceuticals, internal controls, sales and operations planning, municipal scorecarding and business reporting;
- IoD Competency Center Services focused on analytics software to help customers organize internally and execute on their Information Agendas;
- New purchasing options for InfoSphere Foundation Tools and the entire InfoSphere portfolio to support multiple projects and enable the delivery and management of trusted information; and
- InfoSphere Traceability Server, a new item-tracking application that helps businesses manage radio frequency identification (RFID) tags to address issues, such as counterfeiting, diversion of valuable items, making the food supply safer and boosting product availability.

According to IBM, since last month's announcement of new services and solutions designed to help customers develop an Information Agenda, more than 100 customers have actively engaged in Information Agenda workshops and are deploying new software tools, and working with IBM consultants to develop strategies to better use their business information.

The Pitch

IBM's Information Agenda helps organizations gain the full value of business information.

Mission Accomplished?

A cliché long-embraced by the IT industry is that business information carries inherent value. But there is a dangerous thorn on that particular blossom. Information is only as valuable as it is accessible, usable and manageable, so if these factors degrade, then the value of information becomes difficult or impossible to realize.

Recognizing this phenomenon, the goal of IBM's IoD strategy and solutions is to help business customers fully capture the value of their information assets and investments. The company's IoD 2008 conference presented a host of new solutions designed to do just that.

For example, the new Cognos-based, industry-specific and financial management solutions highlight a powerful IBM development model. Since companies across specific industries use many of the same business practices and applications, those comparison points offer a framework for designing and building replicable new solutions. Similarly, IBM's new IoD

Competency Centers leverage the company's long history (and sizable investments) in analytics technologies to help clients gain deep insights into their information assets.

There are some brand new tools in IBM's IoD arsenal. We found particularly notable the InfoSphere Traceability Server, which aims to bring better order (and demonstrable value) to the RFID tags that are commonly used in retail outlets to identify and track goods. According to IBM, the number of RFID tags in circulation is expected to grow to some 30 billion by 2010, suggesting that now is definitely the time to create effective management tools for the little buggers.

While these solutions are impressive, we believe that IBM's broader notion of aiding customers in establishing Information Agendas to be particularly profound. Considering that the sheer volume of information is becoming ever larger and more complex, and that (in the words of one IBM executive) "the world is becoming more instrumented, interconnected and intelligent," setting and pursuing an agenda encompassing an organization's information assets qualifies as an act of self-preservation for most organizations.

That companies run on information is a simple truism, but fully leveraging complex, widely distributed and continually expanding information assets should also result innovative new ways to leverage business data. For example, IBM Research offered Advanced Technology Demos at the conference that highlighted emerging company solutions. One demo showcased a Medical Analytics Platform that uses integrated IBM hardware, software and database tools to create a single, holistic view into a patient's medical condition and treatment regimen. Using the Platform would potentially streamline overall patient care, but it could also be used for practical purposes, such as tracking multiple medications and avoiding negative drug interactions.

At the end of the day, IBM's IoD strategy is not a magical concept or simplistic marketing pitch. By helping organizations to unlock the essential value of their information, the company will also help them achieve consistent, measurable business success. As a result, IBM's Information on Demand 2008 qualifies as a conference of the very best sort; one that provides companies the tools and solutions they require to solve common business problems today and prepares them to face more profound challenges in the future.

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Pund-IT emphasizes understanding technology and product evolution and interpreting the effects these changes will have on business customers and the greater IT marketplace.