



INTEGRATION IS THE KEY TO WIDE-SPREAD SAAS ADOPTION

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Integration is the key to success with today's hybrid IT solutions.

Today questions like "Why do we need a Cloud strategy? And, "Should we consider a SaaS solution?" are no longer being asked. The out of the box functionality that SaaS solutions provide and, and the ease with which they can be configured, modified and upgraded, are all driving factors that are leading business leaders to embrace SaaS business models.

IT organizations have realized that to provide great service to their business clients, they need to adopt a hybrid strategy that combines buy/build and SaaS/On-premise application strategies. The focus now has shifted from "Should we go to the Cloud?" to "How do we make SaaS deployments successful in these hybrid environments?"

This requires both SaaS providers and customers to become true partners to ensure successful SaaS adoption.

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With any system, widespread user adoption is the key to success. Adoption happens when users like the system and want to use it. We tend to think of usability as just the user interface, but to be truly usable the system has to be smart as well as pretty. No one wants to go to several different places to get the data they need or is happy when the data in their application is inaccurate. The better integrated the system is, the more people can find what they want, and the more they will like it and use it. Integration is an essential, though often overlooked, component of usability.

For SaaS applications, there has to be special consideration given to integration. The SaaS architectural model brings a new integration challenge. The concept of integration has not changed, but the focus has moved beyond the enterprise; it's increasingly from the cloud

down to the enterprise, and vice versa, from the enterprise back into the cloud. Data from different systems must be made seamlessly available to the enterprise, no matter where it resides.

A good SaaS integration strategy rests on two key components: a well-considered API solution with the right capabilities from the SaaS provider, and a mature enterprise integration architecture and platform (either on-premise or in the cloud) at the customer site so they can use the vendor's API. These two must go hand in hand for success. Let's see what that looks like.

The API solution from the SaaS vendor should have the following characteristics and capabilities:

- Based on open-standards [REST/SOAP protocol support, XML/JSON data format support etc.]
- Support multiple integration models-- synchronous and asynchronous--to handle different business scenarios.
- Provide flexible error handling approaches that allow end users to handle error conditions manually, and systems to handle them automatically, when they occur.
- Support invocation of the API using industry standard security protocols that encrypt information as the data flows from on-premise systems to the cloud and back.
- Auto-scale to support varying data loads based on business needs, such as higher volumes during a certain hour of the day or day of the week.
- Well-documented and managed, so that the API can be adopted easily and changes managed effectively without impacting end user experience.

The customer IT organization should have these tools and capabilities:

- Integration platform that supports transformation and connectivity to cloud applications.
- Defined cloud integration architecture and patterns catalog, supporting a consistent approach to integrating with SaaS vendors.
- Mature implementation methodology with focus on the overall development lifecycle.

I also strongly recommend that customers and vendors partner to plan for a robust end-to-end integration testing cycle. Testing is just as important as integration architecture and standards in ensuring a successful SaaS deployment. Testing should be planned for well in advance, as part of the project implementation.

These are the pieces you need to implement an integration that ensures that the SaaS application is enriched with the right data, at the right time for the end user. It is a powerful combination of a user-friendly application interface and a system-focused integration strategy, with the SaaS vendor and the customer working in true partnership that makes for an extremely successful SaaS solution.