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EAI Keeps Integration Simple Fiorano Delivers

We tested four enterprise application integration products geared to small and midsize businesses. Find out which offering provided simplicity without sacrificing features.

Jul 8, 2004 | By [Don MacVittie](#)

Enterprise application integration. Its mere mention strikes fear into the hearts of even veteran IT pros, as they recall long nights agonizing over massive, complex systems. Business analysts, too, cringe when they remember promised savings devoured by project-cost overruns.

But EAI is really nothing to be afraid of--that is, if you make it work for you.

EAI can range from complex integration of disparate systems to simple data transfers and updates between two databases. Last year, we reviewed high-end EAI suites (see "[Smooth Integrators](#)."). This time around, we sought EAI products suitable for departments and small and midsize businesses. These we defined as simple, database-driven integration tools that deliver results without weeks of training and months of consulting support. But they couldn't be lightweight: Entries had to offer GUI tools for creating transactions and transformations; support for XML, multiple operating systems and databases; robust management interfaces; and support for multiple sources and/or destinations for updates. We asked for a bus, hub-and-spoke or equivalent architecture, and rated cost at 20 percent of each product's score based on our test scenario.

We not only found products that provide these features, we were also pleasantly

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surprised by the level of ease of use some supplied. If you need straightforward application integration--to connect PeopleSoft or SAP applications, for instance, to other systems, or want to integrate systems running on SQL Server with those on Oracle--these products will fill the bill handily. If your goal is enterprise integration, you may need one of the higher-end systems. But read on, because some of this crop of products could have held their own in that review as well.

We asked Cast Iron Systems, Creative Science, Fiorano Software, Intalio, Iona, KnowNow, Microsoft, Orion, Sonic Software and WDI to send their midtier EAI products to our NWC Inc. business applications lab in Green Bay, Wis. (go to inc.networkcomputing.com for details on that lab and a blog about our testing). We received entries from Cast Iron, Fiorano, Orion and WDI. KnowNow's product didn't meet our requirements because it's more of a transaction aggregator than an EAI tool. Microsoft's BizTalk server, aimed at the high end, does not have a drag-and-drop integration GUI. Creative Science, Intalio, Iona and Sonic Software declined to participate.

After installing the products--Cast Iron Application Router, Fiorano Business Integration Suite, Orion's Rhapsody Integration Engine and WDI's Business Integration Engine (BIE)--in our test bed (see "How We Tested,"), we found them as easy to use as we had hoped, with some notable exceptions. Although our focus was on low-investment projects, some products are viable for a large enterprise.

Complexity Concealed



We use the term integration, whereas some vendors use orchestration and others use routes. They all have the same meaning: the transfer or update of data from a source system to a destination system.

All the products we tested concealed some of EAI's complexity. But there are differences in how each product insulates you from the fray. Fiorano and Cast Iron provide preconfigured "drivers" to connect with many different systems, and both also offer tools to connect with data sources they don't support. Rhapsody requires the creation of an XML file to define JDBC data sources, and BIE provides a browser-based wizard to create connections to JDBC-compliant data sources.

Each product also provides a different amount of management information. And though all let us look at the logs describing each integration production, each vendor defines production differently. For our purposes, we expected the basic unit of work--a single integration--to be viewable.

EAI Pricing

We based our price score on our testing environment, wherein one integration developer and one systems manager have access to a dual-processor EAI server, and Oracle, SQL Server, DB2 and MySQL clients are required. As always, pricing schemes varied: Cast Iron Systems charges a flat fee per application router; Orion will site-license; WDI is

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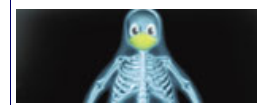
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open-source, and Fiorano is priced using the "what you use" EAI cost model.

Based on our scenario, Fiorano cost \$70,000, Orion's Rhapsody Integration Engine cost \$85,000 (site license), and Cast Iron cost \$75,000. Cast Iron also offers a smaller version, the Application Router 250, for \$15,000. For WDI's open-source BIE, there's no charge for downloading the software. WDI distributes the source code under a GNU General Public License and provides documentation, technical support and professional services on a fee basis. The company also offers exclusive-use commercial licenses.

Having put the systems through their paces, we gave our Editor's Choice award to Fiorano Business Integration Suite. It doesn't work without SQL, but Fiorano has stripped all other programming elements from the average EAI project. Using its drag-and-drop interface, we created, deployed and managed our applications without the coding expertise normally required to get the EAI job done. Add in Fiorano's expandability and support for most major queuing systems and all databases with JDBC-compliant drivers, and it finishes a razor-thin 0.3 points ahead of its nearest competitor, Cast Iron Systems, which we also liked immensely. Shops with more chops than cash will want to check out WDI's open-source offering. And if you're concerned about complying with HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), Orion's Rhapsody might strike the right chord.

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