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Web Services and SOA

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Web services has been bandied about as a solution for many an IT problem, but according to Massimo Pezzini, VP of Gartner Research, there is now one particular issue that the technology seems tailor made to address. Writing in the July 22 issue of VNUNet, Pezzini says that Web services provides a low-cost platform for service oriented architecture (SOA). As a result, it is a driving force that will lead to mainstream adoption of SOA and business process management (BPM).

Because they fit together so well, says Pezzini, many people consider SOA and Web services to be almost the same. While Web services cannot make SOA applications easier to design, it can make SOA implementation easier and its interoperability smoother. Before Web services emerged, only companies with the technical know-how (and the motivation and funding to support it) could take advantage of SOA--and then only for high-profile, strategic initiatives. Even with Web services, SOA is still difficult to implement successfully. But because Web services is easy, inexpensive, and more popular than technologies traditionally used, SOA is becoming much more affordable and accessible for the masses.

Then there is the issue of BPM, which provides graphical modeling tools and scalable run-time platforms. This technology allows developers to create and run more flexible, easier-to-adapt applications and processes. Taken together with Service Oriented Development of Application (SODA) tools, Pezzini writes, BPM and Web services are emerging to facilitate the development of SOA applications. Vendors, for their part, are redefining the architecture of their products according to SOA principles.

But Pezzini points out that Web services and its standards are still evolving, so it won't be the panacea for application interoperability and integration. He says that in complicated scenarios, it must still be applied only in combination with traditional approaches, such as message queuing or transaction processing monitors. It must also be remembered that SOA cannot support all business scenarios.

That's because business processes are both service oriented and event driven. As Pezzini writes, "A process control application or a network management platform are event-driven, not service oriented--they continuously sense 'events' in the systems they monitor, and when certain combinations occur they react, perhaps by notifying alerts to human beings."

Pezzini predicts that Event Driven Architectures (EDA) will follow a path similar to SOA and eventually become a mainstream approach. He points to ubiquitous networking, cheap processing power, integration technology, and application architectures as factors that will combine to make EDA practical for most organizations. In turn, EDA will make application systems more proactive, more adaptable, and eventually more responsive.

The only thing that is missing for EDA to become a mass phenomenon, says Pezzini, is a simple and consistent set of

standards. Even so, Web services is evolving to support EDA constructs. Ideally, an integrated set of standards will emerge that supports both SOA and EDA since the two approaches are complementary. In reality, business process requirements are typically both service oriented and event driven, so users would benefit from a consistent platform that supports both. As Pezzini concludes, "SOA is already big, EDA will be big soon, but the combined SOA+EDA will be even bigger."

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