



Oracle OpenWorld 2005

Oracle OpenWorld was nothing if not spectacular. The logistics involved in processing and managing in the region of 35,000 attendees marks the event as one of the largest of its kind. This year's numbers were swelled by PeopleSoft and JD Edwards customers and partners and it is hard to imagine that Oracle will aim to top this next year should it successfully complete the Siebel acquisition, but the vendor is developing a canny knack for achieving what it sets its mind on. Ian Charlesworth reports on the key themes and developments from Oracle OpenWorld 2005

Summary of the event

Oracle used OpenWorld to make a series of key announcements, reassure its customers and to set out its Fusion vision and architecture. An early headline from the event was the news that Oracle and IBM have reached agreement over plans to certify IBM WebSphere products for running the next generation Oracle Applications. This is an important evolution in the relationship between these two behemoths. It signifies recognition that customers live in a world where vendor heterogeneity is a reality and where those customers require proper collaboration amongst their major vendors and partners - even those with supposed philosophical differences.

Oracle also used OpenWorld as an opportunity to constantly reassure customers new and old. Time after time speakers were heard bolstering customer morale with talk of protecting their investment, extending the value of their investment, and allowing them to evolve their investment. Lifetime application support was announced to cheers and applause, giving customers confidence in the fact that they won't be forced to migrate away from their Retek, PeopleSoft, JD Edwards, or earlier versions of Oracle E-Business Suite. Naturally, Oracle hopes to paint a sufficiently compelling picture with its next generation Oracle Applications that customers will actively volunteer to upgrade. However, credit were it is due, Oracle is doing just about all it can to make all of its customers feel loved - particularly those gained through acquisition. After all, it would be careless to give these customers any inadvertent incentive to make a bid for SAP's door!

Of greatest interest to me by far was the hubbub and focus placed by Oracle on SOA and its Fusion branding and technology. There is no doubt that Oracle is extremely keen and committed to establishing itself as a leader in the market for SOA and business-focused integration software. It's a classic Oracle pincer move; it has gained significant experience in both the technology and business sides of integration through its numerous acquisitions; it now wants to exploit this experience and technology through its middleware platform, in what it expects to soon become a billion dollar independent revenue line.



The three elements of Fusion

Project Fusion

Project Fusion is the overarching vision for Oracle's applications business. The goal of Project Fusion is to facilitate a highly flexible development, delivery, and execution environment for applications, combining functionality from PeopleSoft, Retek, and Oracle, and potentially Siebel applications. Whilst it is obviously a bold vision, I wouldn't go so far as to call it a gamble. The market is moving inexorably towards next generation composite applications – applications that draw capabilities and characteristics from a number of discrete applications. Oracle's take on this via Project Fusion is that it possesses both the source applications and the capability to let customers design and orchestrate composite applications along the lines of business processes. It achieves this flexibility through the use and promotion of a Service Oriented Architecture (SOA).

Oracle Fusion Architecture

The Oracle Fusion Architecture is designed to encapsulate a set of key services required to design, deploy, and manage an organisation's SOA. Oracle refers to it as being a "blueprint for SOA-based enterprise business solutions", incorporating collaboration, analytics and activity monitoring, business process orchestration, enterprise services infrastructure, and information management. This is all built on Oracle Fusion Middleware and Oracle's grid computing capabilities, another important theme of the event. The vendor also went to great lengths to outline just how open and easy its solutions have become, citing extensive support for industry standards and a range of simplified deployment, management, and security capabilities.

Fusion Middleware

Fusion Middleware is the "technology infrastructure for Fusion Architecture". In common parlance this is the meat on the architectural bones. For me, the depth and breadth of Fusion Middleware was the most encouraging aspect of the whole event. Led by the vision and intellect of Thomas Kurian, Oracle has developed an 'integration stack' that combines deep and complex technology with a fresh yet comprehensive approach to marketing. Unlike more established integration vendors, Oracle has not been burdened by legacy technology which is too-complex and often ill-suited to SOA. SOA was an oft-repeated message at OpenWorld, with all executives appearing well-versed in what it means and how it stands to help customers when approached correctly. One criticism is that this evangelism sometimes went too far, with SOA portrayed as being truly revolutionary and a cure-all for integration ills. Whilst SOA is doubtless useful and even exciting, the fact remains that you can still end up in just as big and expensive a mess with SOA as with any other integration paradigm. More focus could therefore have been placed on best practice guidelines and outlining SOA pitfalls to be avoided.



What does it mean for Oracle?

From a pure integration perspective, Oracle must now be taken extremely seriously. The criticism of Fusion Middleware as being great for 'Oracle shops' but otherwise of limited value is dated and frankly incorrect. We therefore expect Oracle to rapidly create market acceptance as being a viable alternative to 'pure' integration software from the likes of IBM, webMethods, Tibco, SAP, and to some extent BEA and Sun.

Its position of prominence in the applications business, particularly if the Siebel acquisition goes through, allied with the vision of Project Fusion, raises potentially exciting opportunities for the creation and delivery of enterprise level composite applications. However, more attention needs to be placed on lifecycle management if these applications are going to be properly controlled and adapted over time.

The roadmap gives customers a clear vision of where Oracle is headed. It has embarked on a journey and is hoping that it is sufficiently appealing that customers decide to join in convoy. For those that don't or can't, lifetime support should be enough to keep them running, although they should not expect anything in terms of product innovation.



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