Getting your head around enterprise applications fabric platforms and why every business needs one

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Thanks to the Internet and 24/7 eCommerce, every business these days is facing stiff competition from competitors located around the world. An above and Beyond brand experience has become the primary competitive weapon. Digital technology has been transformative in unearthing new and better ways to serve customers. Companies that don't harness data and modern innovations like artificial intelligence, blockchain, bots and 3D visualization face extinction.

Enterprise application fabrics are seen as key to implementing digital transformation at scale. As Nick Lawrie, Managing Director of Data Science Consultancy NDMC Ltd explains, "At the last count, the state of innovation in most companies remains at less than 65% of business processes. What I mean by this, is that—were you to run an exercise to map the business processes of an organization—almost without exception, you will find the majority of businesses have less than 65% of their processes automated, with the remaining 35% being driven by a hotchpotch of hard-copy documents, manual data key-fill, or human-in-the-loop solutions, all underpinned by spreadsheets. This wastage in cost, time and convenience is driving demand for hyper-automation and self-service customer experience solutions that remove in-house data entry and off-line processes; extending all the way to on-demand reporting. This is driving demand for next-generation digital ecosystems."

Pressures on businesses to innovate—i.e., to boost customer experience and automate processes to drive down costs—has created 'innovation factories' in most organizations. Outsourcing software development has become too much of a high risk strategy when app development is a constant. And gradually, the trend to buy off-the-shelf SaaS tools for every single department and activity is abating, principally because companies want apps to bring their data together, not separate it out into silos.

But there's a problem: The old ways of building and deploying apps in-house are too slow, and demand too much IT resource once they're deployed. Additionally, no-code tools might be fine when you want to create one app, but even small enterprises these days want to produce tens, if not hundreds, of apps and software robots—so how do you construct an app ecosystem capable of that.

What an application fabric looks like

Unlike their predecessor coded and no-coded tools designed with one-time-only application developments in mind, application fabrics are designed for a future enterprise application vision of hundreds of apps working in consort.

An enterprise application fabric creates a unifying canvas across your enterprise to interplay between internal systems and the bigger digital world. These 'as a service' cloud platforms leverage data from pretty much everywhere and bring together, what used to be, three areas of technology:

1. 1. Technology to **harvest and integrate with data sources**, with added tools to design Master Data repositories.

Technology to **create, iterate and publish apps**, with added tools to plug-in existing data, apps and plug-in best-of-breed features.

1. 3. Technology to manage the **application lifecycle**, with added tools to govern security, operational management, replication, scaling, performance, behaviors—right up to the final retirement of apps.

The age old problem enterprise application fabrics solve

Arguably the MOST game-changing feature of enterprise app fabrics is the ability to drive innovation at scale, and **reduce the IT cost of operation to less than 3% of operating costs**.

Since time and memorial, IT teams have struggled to fund and resource application software updates, platform version control, data security, data integration, and a whole host of application lifecycle issues—such as retiring old apps and creating news ones—hampered by a paucity of tools, technologies, and third party apps.

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For the first time, everything an enterprise needs to design, deploy and run as many apps as it needs, becomes possible from adopting a single, integral, technology layer.

Why is an application fabric different to what's come before?

What makes an application fabric foundational different is its focus on governing many in-house developed apps in a unified way. For digital businesses, this matters, because it has become business-critical to minimize on-going IT costs, keep data safe, and—most importantly—keep up with the pace of app demands from stakeholders, that might want at any point in time to build new apps, make enhancements to existing apps, or use new or existing data sources in new ways.

Examples of application fabrics

Extending virtualization still further, application fabrics are themselves delivered 'as-a-Service.' Using a simple portal interface (available on most major browser platforms), IT architects can fashion, govern and manage the interplay of apps that go to make up their digital ecosystem—servicing all of the stakeholders of the business, be they shareholders, customers, workers, suppliers, channel partners, etc. from one overarching technology ecosystem.

Application fabrics represent the natural progression of enterprise computing, enhancing the traditional cloud computing model—of IaaS, PaaS, and SaaS—to its next iteration. You could call it 'AFPaaS' if you really wanted to, not that anyone not familiar with cloud computing principles will be any clearer for it!

Application fabrics have materialized through the fog of evolution surrounding 'digital transformation,' allowing every customer and worker experience to be personalised. Most have originated from cloud technology companies. Appian began in the area of Business Process Optimization (BPO), Mendix emerged as one of the leading application Platform-as-a-Service vendors, Encanvas and OutSystems began life and enterprise mashup platforms back in the early 2000's, while ServiceNow and Salesforce.com both started their businesses by focusing on a particular application area (customer service in the case of ServiceNow, and Customer Relationship Management, or CRM, in the case of Salesforce.com).

Today, digital leaders are faced with a complex challenge to compare what have become very large and sophisticated technology platforms, with plenty of gears, levers and working parts to come to terms with. Adopting can application fabric for your business isn't a free lunch; the size and complexity of these architectures means that unlike their plug-winnable predecessors, it's probably unrealistic that you're going to download a subscription today and get started tomorrow. That said, compare them against the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Human Resource Management (HRM) platforms that came before them, this next generation of enterprise platform is surprisingly easy to get comfortable with.

Why Encanvas leads the pack in enterprise application fabrics

Encanvas
is the first of the no-code pack to evolve its platform from 'point-specific' app solutions to a true fabric.

AppFabric™
from the team at Encanvas
separates the role of business analysts—who create and publish apps without needing to code—from the IT roles required to operate and govern the enterprise technology stack. This blended approach to enterprise applications lifecycle management (i.e., harnessing no-code/low-code/and rich-code) maximizes the pace of innovation in businesses, while minimising IT operating costs and reducing business-continuity threats. Additionally, a well-thought-through application canvas reduces data security risks by enforcing common operational behaviors and policies across the enterprise.

CTO of Encanvas, Andrew Lawrie explains. "We've taken a step back during the pandemic lock-down to transform Encanvas into the new 4.0 version that takes it from being a versatile no-code applications design and publishing platform, to a true enterprise canvas by beefing up the governance and application life-cycle features. New additions, like the new PassPort™ security and Hyper-Drive™
capabilities provision the services that IT architects and operational teams expect of a modern digital platform."

Another unique from the Encanvas team is the data model design that comes as standard. The platform separates Master Data Records, held in a common-to-all data repository, from application-specific data-sets. This means core data assets, such as places, organisational structures, objectives, process maps, identities, roles, suppliers, customers, policies, risks, RACI models, escalations, etc. are

safeguarded, while any given application can be retired at end of life without impacting on the operation of others.

Perhaps the most significantly differentiating feature of Encanvas AppFabric™ is found in its integration tooling. Subject to your subscription choice, Encanvas AppFabric™ can be supplied with its Hyper-Drive™ module. This is a plug-in enabler that allows business analysts to embed existing code or apps into their designs—things like data sensors, AI, RPA, blockchain, chatbots, 3D, virtual reality, etc. without needed to return to manual coding.

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