

Benefits of Integrated Technology Partnerships

Engaging with customers at a deeper level

CUSTOMER INSIGHTS | CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT | REPORTS

Overview

As Providers head toward greater ICT integration within and between business units - stitching together front office, back office, service delivery centres, static and mobile technology platforms into greater ecosystems - a greater requirement emerges for vendors to work more closely with each other than ever before and on increasingly more complex integrations.

When you look at the possible number of application domains currently being asked to integrate for a Provider's end-to-end solution there's Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Document Management Systems (DMS), Service Delivery applications, Scheduling and Rostering solutions including rates and awards, Budgeting, Billing and Statements, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) integrations including Accounting, Human Resources, Payroll, Budget Alert functions, Facilities Management, Clinical integrations including Medication Management and Residential Care Management. Driving greater understanding of how business units are performing Providers may use insight driven applications and technologies such as Reporting, Artificial Intelligence, Analytics and Customer Insight engines. Third party technologies or communications which may require integration or configuration into the ecosystem may include SMS, Email, Internet of Things device data, Nursecall systems, Building & Fire Management systems, Paging systems, Cloud PBX applications and DECT systems, wearable devices and many other communication devices on an array of different platforms. In addition to integration of these application domains there are often other requirements which, at first brush seem simple but are often quite complex,

such as single button operations for End of Month accounting – a process which involved data calls between Accounting, HR, Payroll and possibly data records such as Scheduling and Rostering logs, rates and awards. The number of devices, systems and platforms comprising a modest end-to-end solution could be multiple and a fully integrated ecosystem both now and especially so looking forward into the future could be over a dozen.

A Coordinated Approach

To coordinate even moderate sized multi-vendor works a prime (leading vendor) is typically required to take the lead and work closely with the Provider's Project Manager/Consultant ensuring that the project's timelines and budgets are met across the group as per the contract of engagement. This is a difficult task especially so for solutions where the vendors have never worked together previously or, products that have never been integrated before. Many issues can and do arise including vendor relationship issues and unforeseen technical hurdles leading to creep in both time and costs. Integrations between Provider preferred products involving two or more vendors without prior history are looked upon as custom installations and therefore the costs associated with integration are typically carried by the Provider, so it is well within the best interests of any Provider to not only choose the right product solutions but also the right vendor mix, including a clear and unquestionable understanding as to who will be coordinating each piece of work and the various responsibilities held within them.

Technology Partnerships

Over the years Technology Partnerships have emerged who have concentrated their efforts on multi-application integrations to provide an end-to-end solution. Usually these partnerships are formed as a sequel to prior integration efforts and further integration development between the member parties have provided them with a strategic advantage over their disassociated product and vendor competitors who, as a necessity, will need to overcome known and unknown hurdles, climbing at times a wall of worry as they progress through multi-application integrations for the first time. Providers can capitalise on these Technology Partnerships and recoup competitive benefits in the form of reduced risk and integration costs to the Provider. In fact, a Technology Partnership between skilled and knowledgeable parties will have addressed many integration hurdles in advance and converted integration/scripting works into configuration options for the client – development of enable/disable functions in user settings rather than programming code or configurations during implementation.

Customer Engagement

One of the most unique Technology Partnerships termed by analytics giant Gartner is the Member Engagement Hub (MEH) - a spin-off from the Customer Engagement Hub (CEH). Both refer to multi-application solutions fully integrated and configurable whereby both were created for maximum engagement of an end customer (ie the Provider's customer) but where they differ is that the CEH is in essence process centric whereas the MEH is people centric. Every process within and between applications of the MEH Technology Partnership, from CRM to ERP, or Service Delivery

to Reporting, is geared toward the Provider's customer. The philosophy behind the MEH is simple; practical, useful and measured customer engagement. It is this focus towards greater customer engagement which is the reason why CEHs originated from manufacturers of offering CRM platforms both historically and current.

At the centre of the MEH is the Customer Engagement Centre (CEC) where customer experiences are shaped and executed according to predefined rules - which rules are applied is determined by customer actions and communications. Customer data which is analysed and deemed to be of strategic value to the relationship between the Customer and the Provider is inserted into an application or solution to create e-workflows, triggers, communications to the customer or the customer's representative at the company.

The CEC is where Customer Insights and actionable data are deployed into the solution so as to deliver the most appropriate customer engagement and experience. Outputs can be proactive or reactive, they can take the form of e-workflows, triggers, staff communications/notifications or customer communications and in the case of multiple integrated applications, the initial data may have originated from one or several of the applications within the overall solution. For this reason, a MEH solution from a Technology Partnership with a portfolio of successful solution deployments should offer a tried and tested solution which can be fine-tuned (configuration options) by Providers on a needs basis. Determining the type and amount of fine-tuning is usually the responsibility of AI, analytics, reporting tools and based upon Provider priorities.

Custom MEH

Providers who are considering investing in the development of their own client-centric MEH solutions should understand that this can come at considerable costs, risk to success and typically entails months – perhaps years – of modifications and de-bugging. The best fit can be found in leveraging existing MEH solutions where others have already gone through the seemingly endless trials and tribulations in bringing to market a fully developed solution with – as stated earlier – configurable users setting options rather than implementation configurations or script development.

Best option for Providers wanting a partial solution or turn-key solution with high Customer Insights is to leverage a high quality and successful MEH with minimal implementations costs and develop-out the CEC to deliver deeper customer insights, greater customer engagement and broader reporting capabilities. This solution then invites additional AI/Analytic developments for the Provider, greatly adding to their business model and most certainly adding to their Intellectual Property. This pathway delivers the most bang for a Provider's buck.

Once a Provider has implemented a MEH solution, developed-out and fine-tuned a CEC engine consisting of analytical reporting, business and customer report generation, datamining and process mining of Provider specific data, they can then determine and leverage actionable data to create triggers or insert data to perform actions within e-Workflows perhaps internal/external communications within and across any of their business units, even out to third party entities via API calls, secure CSV files or emails.

Conclusion

The power and flexibility offered by Integrated Technology Partnerships, especially those which are customer-centric, the MEH solutions, should be explored as a first option, if not for the immediate demand of the Provider then for the expressed purpose of future-proofing their long-term ICT strategy and governance.