NUCLEUS RESEARCH

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RESEARCH NOTE
IBM CAST IRON CLOUD INTEGRATION

THE BOTTOM LINE

When Nucleus examined organizations that used IBM Cast Iron for cloud-related integration projects, analysts found users avoided investments in custom-code development and hardware as a result of the product's cloud-based approach and reusable integration templates. Users were also able to increase returns on their investments in existing applications by creating better integration among on-premise applications, cloud-based applications, private clouds, and public clouds.

Recently acquired by IBM, Cast Iron Systems provides software-as-a-service (SaaS) based technology for integrating on premise and cloud-based applications and data sources. Integration has traditionally been one of the obstacles to broader enterprise adoption of cloud applications. The problem is costs; when IT departments need to make applications play nicely together, they typically rely on costly custom code to develop assets such as APIs and point-to-point connectors. Knowing that these assets are costly to build and maintain, IT departments tend to avoid homegrown integration techniques, especially in the case of cloud-based assets, which are harder to integrate. Unfortunately, this lowers the returns that an organization earns on all of its IT investments. The worse integrated on-premise and cloud-based assets are, the less they can deliver information to users, increase their productivity, or improve their decision making.

IBM Cast Iron provides developers and ISVs with a single product which can be deployed as a physical or virtual appliance, or completely in the multitenant cloud. It is designed to integrate and migrate data among applications and data sources regardless of whether they are located on premise, in a public cloud, or in a private cloud. Components of the platform include:

- A Connector development kit, which enables SaaS vendors to build integration assets that connect public or private clouds.
- A template repository with hundreds of preconfigured integration templates that enable customers to accomplish common integration tasks, such as integrating Salesforce.com with SAP.
- A template exchange where IBM Cast Iron users can access and share preconfigured integration templates.
- A template development kit that enables SaaS vendors to develop their own templates for customers.
- A centralized cloud management console that enables users to monitor multiple integrations across deployments from a single Web-based location.

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TOPICS

Application Development & Integration

Enterprise Applications

Software-as-a-Service

IBM Cast Iron is compatible with all major SaaS applications, including Salesforce.com and NetSuite. IBM Cast Iron also works with on-premise applications such as SAP, Oracle EBS, JD Edwards, and Siebel. Combined, these capabilities enable users, partners, and vendors to create integration among cloud-based applications, on-premise applications, public clouds, and private clouds.

Pricing of IBM Cast Iron is based either on a per-endpoint-per-month or fixed pricing, depending on the purchasing requirements of a given organization.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR CUSTOMERS

It's clear that standardized, tested integration platforms reduce cost, accelerate project timelines, and reduce the care and feeding needed to support less structured integration strategies.

When Nucleus analyzed organizations that used IBM Cast Iron to integrate their cloud-based and on-premise assets, analysts found these companies achieved benefits in two areas. First, users reduced the cost of their integration projects by using the product's cloud-based approach and preconfigured templates to avoid investments in hardware and custom-code development. Second, organizations improved productivity and decision making by using IBM Cast Iron to integrate existing applications with additional data sources. When applications are more broadly integrated, their functionality increases and more benefits are achieved. For example, when sales data from a distribution channel or call center is integrated with Salesforce.com, salespeople cross sell more effectively and make better pricing decisions because they have a broader picture of their customer.

Companies using IBM Cast Iron for integrating on-premise and on-demand applications were able to reduce costs, accelerate project timelines, and improve the functionality and returns on existing applications.

Nucleus found broader availability of cloud-based integration assets and configurable templates accelerated integration projects and reduced the requirements for achieving scalable integration. IBM Cast Iron also reduced ongoing costs by automating tasks such as monitoring, testing, and upgrades.

Customer profile

Alere, formerly Inverness Medical, adopted IBM Cast Iron because its highly aggressive acquisition strategy resulted in the accumulation of 15 business operations and more than 10 separate ERP deployments, all of which were poorly integrated with the company's Salesforce.com deployment. Alere had been relying on a patchwork of integration fixes, including flat-file conversions and custom code, but some data remained unavailable to critical staff, including salespeople and accountants. Alere used IBM Cast Iron to make all of its product and sales-related data uniformly available to people in all of its sales channels, which included direct sales, the Web, and distributors.

Some of the benefits of Alere's IBM Cast Iron deployment included:

- Avoided IT staff. Without IBM Cast Iron, full integration would have required a specialist trained in each of the 10 versions of ERP used by Alere.

- Improved Salesforce.com standardization. After integrating the various ERP deployments with Salesforce.com, Alere was able to standardize many functions within the Salesforce.com platform. With an increased ability to fulfill business requirements in Salesforce.com, deployments of other applications that had been planned and budgeted were cancelled.
- Reduced software costs. When Nucleus analyzed the deployment, Alere was planning to cancel annual license subscription on a number of seats for its ERP system. These seats had been required for accessing and analyzing ERP data, but were no longer required after IBM Cast Iron was used to make this data available through Salesforce.com.

Alere's adoption of IBM Cast Iron was deployed on time and on budget. The project required no consulting or training costs and minimal IT support.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR PARTNERS

Nucleus found independent software vendors and resellers use IBM Cast Iron to both deliver more functionality and reduce the costs of integrating their customers' on-premise and cloud-based assets. SuccessFactors used IBM Cast Iron to reduce the amount of custom code it needs to write for customers to integrate their applications. It found that while it could integrate SAP with SuccessFactors without IBM Cast Iron, in at least one case when the customer upgraded their SAP instance, the custom integration code was no longer functional. It also found that it could dramatically reduce the time needed to integrate new customers by reusing existing preconfigured integration templates. This is in line with other partners and customers who said that the reuse of templates reduced the amount of custom code required to integrate on-premise and cloud-based assets.

Partners using IBM Cast Iron can reduce their custom integration work, accelerate time-to-delivery to customers, and reduce ongoing support costs — and focus on their core competencies: application development and enhancement.

SpringCM, a cloud-based content management vendor, also uses IBM Cast Iron to both reduce its costs and deliver more functionality to its customers. The product is used to automate the integration and migration of data between SpringCM and other data sources such as Salesforce.com, SAP, and SharePoint. SpringCM indicated that by relying on IBM Cast Iron, it was able to avoid developing internal integration expertise, which would have increased its costs.

CONCLUSION

Integration has long been the greatest challenge in the cloud world. IBM Cast Iron's cloud-based product for integration provides the tools companies and ISVs need to successfully integrate public clouds, private clouds, on-premise assets, and cloud-based assets. Functionality is also available to support integration assets after they have been created and must operate continuously despite inconsistent upgrades that can cause compatibility problems. Monitoring tools and common templates reduce the risk of downtime and enable ongoing transparent management of cloud integration traffic. Organizations with one or more cloud integration projects in their pipeline should identify which of their vendors may already be working with IBM Cast Iron and what templates may be available to accelerate their projects and cut their integration costs.