

Agility In the Enterprise

When Jesse Shiah, president and CEO of Ascentn Corp., talks about business process management, two words keep coming up: agility and empowerment. The driving force at the Mountain View, Calif., company is enabling business users to design and deploy business process management (BPM) applications using software tools with which they're already familiar. In doing so, says Shiah, Ascentn's products eliminate chunks of the traditional programming and engineering cycle, saving costs and shortening the time it takes to implement a business integration solution.

Ascentn's AgilePoint BPMS can do this, says Shiah, because it's based on Microsoft's .NET, XML and Web services. "It's the first BPMS able to directly integrate

with Microsoft Visio and other Microsoft tools," he says. "Business users hold a company's real knowledge and know-how, and most business users already know Visio." The result is that the business users who make up the enterprise's front line can not only model business processes but also deploy them. "That's how agility can be achieved," Shiah says.

"Now all the different sides of business management in the enterprise are able to implement processes using reusable and executable functions built by IT. IT can now



play the true enabler role and doesn't have to be involved in every improvement. The whole company becomes like a self-improving ecosystem," he explains. "Agility requires that the company be better integrated from order to cash. It's one end-to-end process. AgilePoint BPMS offers the company a streamlined process and reduced cost of training, change management and ongoing maintenance, because you do not have to support different tools."

With AgilePoint, says Shiah, the company (www.ascentn.com) has a way to implement process-based applications that respond to market changes

at the business level: The business user can not only design a process but also specify executable functions and associate those functions with specific users.

AgilePoint BPMS consists of four parts—AgilePoint Envision, Server, Developer and Enterprise Manager—which can be bought as a package or piecemeal for a progressive BPM implementation and lower costs.

AgilePoint Envision is a Visio-based tool that enables the user to build a graphical representation of the business process that is in fact an XML-based exe-



Jesse Shiah
President and CEO

cutable process model. "Though we put all the BPMS capability into Visio," Shiah says, "the business user doesn't see the difference—it still feels like putting together a Visio drawing." Changes to the model can be made the same way. The user can deploy that new or changed model directly to the AgilePoint Server, which can automate that process model on-the-fly.

If the project includes integration of legacy applications, the AgilePoint Developer production development environment comes into play. AgilePoint Developer is based on Visual Studio .NET with which many programmers already are familiar, says Shiah.

The fourth component, AgilePoint Enterprise Manager, is a Web-based runtime interface for management and collaboration. "Different users playing different roles can log into Enterprise Manager and get a holistic view of all the business process tasks," Shiah says. "You can get a real-time graphical view of where your applications are right now. Project managers can monitor and manage projects—reassign certain tasks, collaborate with team members. Administrators can manage the system activities, the process templates, the versioning and server performance."

AgilePoint BPMS 2.0 adds several major features. One is process simulation, which enables the Envision user to verify the process model's performance metrics and identify potential bottlenecks before deployment. Another is AgilePart, an application for building custom, reusable business processing components. "The next time you need the same thing, you don't have to rewrite the code," says Shiah. "Not only are the components reusable via the Visio interface, but you are able to configure the behavior of that executable part."

Shiah sees Ascentn's focus as "adding a value proposition at a very high level. Business process management is not a slam-dunk. It involves people, processes, culture—it needs to be progressive. You have to understand your operation and put it into a visual process." ♦

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