

WEB SERVICES – HOW TO SPEED UP APPLICATION DELIVERY

This month, Anglia Business Solutions outlines how web services are going to play a far more significant role in modern business management systems in years to come and explains the obvious advantages they offer

BILL GATES memorably once stated that the internet changes everything. By now, virtually everybody is familiar with internet technology. Indeed, many people now use it regularly to purchase goods and services, as well as an invaluable source of information.

However, in the past, few people in the fresh produce industry have used this technology as a means of communicating internally within their business and externally with their trading partners.

This has been gradually changing with the maturing of cost-effective systems designed to pull together various islands of data. Modern business management systems have been incorporating web services technology into their solutions in recent years. The emergence of accepted industry standards has made an enormous contribution in this respect. However, it is only now that the true value of this technology is beginning to deliver real business advantages.

The concept behind web services is to enable ready-made components or applications to be called by another using the internet. This saves having to develop the application within the core system.

While the concept is relatively new, there is general agreement that the principles behind web services will change the face of

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modern software. These loosely coupled applications are already extensively used by companies offering goods for sale over the internet. Many such applications that use an e-commerce delivery mechanism call on web services to facilitate transactions within their business applications.

A good example of this is payment authorisation for goods ordered through the core system. Once the transaction is validated, the back-office system makes a call using web services on the payment authorisation application to clear the payment and collect the cash. This seamless link means



Using maps to work out the most efficient delivery route can help companies plan journeys more effectively, saving valuable time and fuel costs

that the authors of the back-office system do not have to develop and support a unique payment clearance system. They can therefore focus on what they are good at, while still extending the scope of their applications.

Another example of effective use of web services could be to make use of mapping software to plan journeys more effectively. By linking the information in the back-office system to a web services application such as Map Point, it is

possible to visualise where all customer delivery locations are at a glance. From there, it is a simple matter to work out the most efficient delivery route, thus saving valuable time and fuel costs.

Using web services incorporated into a business management application is just another way of securely extending access to vital product and customer information to remote employees, customers and suppliers. More importantly, this can happen in real time rather than having to experience the normal delays inherent in older technologies. In the fast-moving fresh produce industry, where

products can move through the supply chain in a matter of hours, this can provide companies with a vital competitive advantage.

One obvious example is the ability to track and trace product in real time throughout the entire supply chain. The use of web services combined with mobile integrated workflow applications now makes the concept of live inventory a reality.

A further example of web services in action is the use of the internet to track tidal times or storm warnings. A company can make use of its internal intranet to store information that would prove useful to employees. However, keeping the information updated can be facilitated through the use of calls to meteorological information held on another website. This encourages the concept of using an intranet as a single source of information throughout the company. It is this requirement that fuels the current high levels of interest in Microsoft's SharePoint Portal.

The message is that web services are here to stay and will be an important business facilitator in the future information age. Understanding how they can be leveraged is the task now facing IT teams within the fresh produce sector. Bill Gates was right. The internet is already changing everything. ○

TIGHTENING UP AT SAINSBURY'S

SAINSBURY'S IS implementing new software to reduce costs and tighten its control over all aspects of its daily store deliveries.

The Paragon fleet monitoring system is to be used in conjunction with Isotrak's transport management systems to give the retailer real-time information such as driving speeds and vehicle location.

The software will cover the allocation of drivers, trailers and tractors to routes involving operations across the retailer's 19 distribution centres, which service 527 supermarkets and 276 smaller stores.

Darren Jones, head of logistics strategy at Sainsbury's, told *vnunet.com*: "Uncertainties are a fact of life for any transport operation so we build contingencies into our schedules, but they add costs. The more uncertainty that can be eliminated, the greater the control over costs.

"When vehicle turnaround time at stores emerged as a critical factor, for instance, the planned contingency was cut by a consistent 15 per cent by setting store targets," he said. ○

NEW PORTAL FOR ALESCO

GERMAN PACKAGING film manufacturer alesco is launching a new website that brings together documents about its commitment to environmental and climate protection in one place, at www.carbon-neutral-packaging.com

The topics covered by this new portal include environmental protection measures in manufacturing processes and the minimisation of CO₂ emissions throughout the whole company.

Solvent recovery systems, bio-films and green electricity are just three of the many terms that the Langerwehe-based packaging film manufacturer will be providing information about on its new portal.

Managing director Philipp Depiereux said: "We feel that it is important to show what opportunities exist for protecting the environment and preventing climate change, as well as detailing the measures that we have already successfully implemented and those that we plan to realise in the future. And because environmental protection isn't a marketing ploy for us but is an important issue that we are passionate about, we would be very happy to see other companies follow our lead." ○