

Power of Simplicity—PlanetTogether’s Galaxy APS to SAP

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“How difficult is it to integrate your application to SAP?” Even best-of-breed vendors hear this question every time an SAP user considers integrating an APS with his system. In this article, I plan to put our readers’ minds at ease.

About Integration

Of all the issues that I address with executive decision makers, integration is the most overestimated. Any application can be integrated to any other application. After all, as soon as data leaves an application, it loses the meaning that it had within the original application, and is re-interpreted by the receiving application. This process is known as data mapping. In this way, a production order in the sending application is added to the production order table in the receiving application.

How Integration Changes with SAP

I’ve worked in SAP integration off and on since 1998. Since then, it has been surprising how little has changed. SAP is the most difficult application in which to integrate any system because SAP does not allow direct interaction with its SQL tables.

While SAP relies upon a SQL database like other applications, it responds differently by encapsulating its SQL tables. That’s why data must be accessed by either APIs called BAPIs, or by creating custom code in SAP’s programming language, known as ABAP.

To date, I have participated in five such integrations, as either an application engineer or project manager, and I have found that generally the integrations worked quite smoothly. In my observation, however, most companies underemphasize the importance of application functionality in order to gain systems that they think will be easy to integrate. As a result, they end up choosing applications with poor user interfaces in the mistaken belief that they will be easier to integrate. Unfortunately, companies also greatly underestimate the effort required to integrate planning systems and ERP systems, even within SAP or Oracle. *How to avoid this?*

How Integration Between SAP and PlanetTogether Works

PlanetTogether’s Galaxy APS integrates through a dedicated integration database. The data is staged in an intermediate location where it has already been extracted from SAP. The data is then mapped to this staging from PlanetTogether, and then uploaded to SAP. In fact, PlanetTogether has built an extensive library of mappings. When a new instance is created, PlanetTogether can move quickly to integrate to SAP Business One with Production One and SAP Business One with SoftBrand’s Fourth Shift Edition.

It is important to point out, however, that integration to other SAP ERP situations often need to work differently. As an investment, PlanetTogether is building a solution on WinShuttle, an inventive and highly promising integration technology which allows data to be imported to or exported from SAP by accessing its transactions. This solution bypasses SAP's insular and unnecessarily complex data architecture. Candidly, more innovation in data architecture is promoted by SAP than exists in reality. In my opinion, WinShuttle's approach is genuinely innovative. What's more, it offers the ability to reduce integration effort while increasing integration flexibility.

Update Frequency

Another common question asked by APS solution seekers is **"how up-to-date is the schedule?"** You can determine updating during the integration. Simply set a trigger between SAP and PlanetTogether to update data in real-time. Some items may be set to real-time, while others, such as master data, can be set with less frequent updates. These frequencies are an individual choice. Note, the description at this page on the fifth bullet.

<http://www.planettogether.com/faqs/>

In Conclusion

Again, SAP integration difficulty is greatly overestimated. Because of this tendency, prospects should guard against shaping their APS decisions towards a less appropriate planning solution, simply to mitigate against integration effort. Even SAP's own APO to ERP solution (called the CIF) is actually quite unimpressive. I repeatedly work on accounts that still have CIF issues 4 or 5 years after initial go-live. Thus, it is essential that you seek out solid innovation before a half-hearted commitment to the mediocre. As a veteran of multiple SAP to non-SAP integration projects, I always prefer to apply a solution which I have developed over the CIF. Read more extensively here.

<http://www.scmfocus.com/sapprojectmanagement/2011/02/understanding-the-complexities-of-the-standard-sap-erp-to-apo-integration/>

PlanetTogether offers a significant body of reference clients for whom applications were integrated to both SAP and non-SAP systems. You can leverage this experience in ERP integration, and take advantage of PlanetTogether's investment in highly capable added solutions such as WinShuttle. By doing so, companies find new confidence in integration and enjoy greater access to valuable functionality by best of breed applications like PlanetTogether's Galaxy APS. Best of all, you will place intelligent tools in the hands of your production planners.
