

Expert opinion

More agile IS departments through application services

By Nicolas Odet, Hardis Group Executive Vice President

Under pressure from the market, core business managements today will freely opt for external services and applications without necessarily calling on the IS department. And users think that the slightest internal project will last for months. But what if, with application service components, the IS department was able to prove to its internal customers that they are wrong?

IT: support for operational and business aspects

The digitization of companies is making IS departments (even more) sought after on all fronts: marketing, sales, customer relations, manufacturing, logistics, HR, etc. At the same time, they must meet the demands and needs of operational departments in ever shorter deadlines. With tools that allow a multichannel user or client experience: web, mobiles, touch-screen devices, tablets, etc.

But IS departments' budgets and human resources are a long way from experiencing the same growth as the requirements of employees, customers, partners or the market. To respond better and faster to the demands of operational departments, IT departments today have no choice but to streamline and industrialize their processes.

Service components: the link between applications and data

But until now, when an operational requirement was not covered by a "best of breed" solution proposed by a publisher, the most frequently implemented solution was the development of a complete application with its own interfaces and connected to other IS applications.

This approach is now incompatible with the need to design and develop applications quickly. It involves new developments, new connections and new tests for each change or new need, and still more interfaces to be maintained. Not to mention that most of the time, these applications use the same data and/or offer similar features: obtaining customer details, validating a shopping cart, or viewing a history of orders, for example.

What is the solution to streamline development and accelerate the go-to-market of new applications? Develop a repository of "ready to use" application service components that aggregate data from different systems and integrate reusable business rules from one application to another, regardless of the channel (web application, mobile, touch-screen, etc.).

The IS department as a component assembler?

It is possible to dedicate a team to the creation of these new components. But the most effective solution is to create "on the fly": for each new application, identify the services or features that could be reused elsewhere and to design them as such.

This new approach may slightly lengthen the implementation period of the first projects, because you have to take time to identify and design application services that can be reused. But over time, new applications will be faster to develop because they capitalize on an increasingly rich library of objects, business services and graphics.

So will the IS department become a component assembler? Yes and no! Yes, because components do have to be integrated to create new applications. No, because there is nothing "magical" about it: the base is there, for sure, but a minimum of development is still needed, including presentation layers (interfaces) that differ depending on the terminal (PC, mobile, tablet, touch-screen, etc).

In all cases, this strategy pays off in the medium and long term: with more and more services available, the IS department is ready for battle to respond quickly and appropriately to the needs of businesses.

About the author**Nicolas Odet, Hardis Group Executive Vice President**

Nicolas Odet joined Hardis Group in 2000 and successively held the positions of Head of Sales and Marketing in the New Technologies Skills department, Director of the Infrastructure and Facilities Management Department from 2006 to 2008, and Director of Services, Marketing and communication from 2009 to 2012. In particular, he led the transformation of Hardis Group's offering to cloud computing. Executive Vice President of the Hardis Group since early 2013 and a member of the executive committee, he helps to define the group's strategy and manage its operational implementation.

Prior to joining Hardis Group, Nicolas Odet held the position of business engineer at IBM (systems and storage division) and Sagem (network and optical fiber solutions).

Nicolas Odet graduated from Grenoble Ecole de Management in 1998 with a degree in technology management.

About Hardis Group

Hardis Group was created in 1984. It is both a software publisher and an IT consulting and services company. The company offers businesses comprehensive support to carry out their digital transformation, from defining their digital services strategy to their software development and integration with the existing information system.

Its offer is based on four pillars: performance of the supply chain, management and transformation of ISs, digitization of services and optimizing the customer experience. It is based on Hardis Group's historical business: consulting & project owner support; development, third party application maintenance (TPAM), and integration; facilities management and cloud; software publisher and decision-making. It mainly targets the insurance, logistics, transportation, distribution and industry sectors.

For the last 30 years, the company has built its growth on a pragmatic approach and values of proximity and strong commitment to its 2,500 customers and its 630 employees (25% of employees are shareholders). Hardis Group posted turnover figures of €57.2 million in 2013. The Group's headquarters are in Grenoble, with four other agencies in Lyon, Paris, Lille and Nantes.

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