Edit

Enduring the E-spirit

E, while being an extensively used letter in the English dictionary, is also one of the most widely used prefixes in the modern day business parlance. From the early days of civilisation ‘e’ has always been used to describe anything that is positive and progressive. From e-garden to e-commerce, the evolution of e has been anything but exciting. Not long ago the industrial world understood prefix 'e' as empowering, engineering, and enterprising. But today e has assumed a special meaning. It unequivocally means only two things today - electronic (Internet related) and entrepreneurial.

Fortunately, India enjoys a distinct advantage on both these e-fronts. The increase in export revenue over the past few years, emergence of many Indian billionaires and the buoyancy of stock markets all point towards India's increasing e-progress. Being a great leveller, Internet has provided a good chance for India to redeem itself to its past glory. The number of successful entrepreneurs who have emerged recently, the enthusiasm of aspiring youngsters to get into entrepreneurship, the willingness of venture capitalists to fund e-projects with bright e-ideas has given unprecedented boost to many self starting entrepreneurs.

Internet and entrepreneurship may be a great combination in the e-era. But sustaining the e-spirit and enabling its continuous growth is going to be more than a challenge for the government. It is definitely encouraging to see the government realise the importance of information technology in creating the winning advantage for the country. The establishment of Ministry of information technology by merging the erstwhile Department of Electronics is a clear indication of government of India's intentions to prioritise the e-sector. Also, the public acceptance by the first ever minister of information technology Pramod Mahajan that creating wealth is no crime and only IT can create the necessary wealth for the country makes it amply evident that the government realises the importance of IT in the growth of country's economy. MoIT may be a great idea, but one has to realise that the IT industry has grown this far without the patronage of the government and it would continue to do so even in future.

If the formation of the ministry means more regulations and more bureaucratic hassles, as it normally is, then this industry can do without it. The government's role, as in the words of Gururaj Deshpande, should only be that of a referee. It should not get into the business of creating winners and losers. What this means is that MoIT should act more as a facilitator rather than a regulator. This is the model that has made America an IT super power. Certain things like creating a conducive atmosphere for the convergence of technologies and removing exim hurdles could be taken up by the ministry instead of lugging on to trivial things like the imposition of sales tax on software.

IT minister's statement that IT is 'a way of life' for India reflects greater confidence in the virtues of IT in creating a better India. Lot is expected of the budget 2000 in enduring the e-spirit and ushering in an era of e-fulfilment.

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Legacy is not a bad word!

Technologies do not die. The flare to use them does!

Very often, while reading technical documentation or media reports, we come across the word LEGACY applications. Most mention it as a type of application that is downtrodden, useless, discardable and needing immediate resurrection. There is also a misconception that legacy applications only mean older mainframe systems. Both these misconceptions need to be corrected. Legacy applications need not be looked down upon. In fact, legacy applications provide a great degree of challenge and scope of innovation. How? Just read on.

Till recently, legacy applications were considered to be older mainframe or host based systems. However, now the word is used for any older application. Thus even if you have a client-server application in VB4 and some RDBMS, it can now be called 'legacy'. Typical mention of legacy applications was made to differentiate these from the newer type of non-host based applications. However, now that connotation has changed. Any application being described in the context of a newer technology becomes LEGACY.

The purpose of labeling an application as legacy also has a marketing tinge. In order to highlight some new features of a recent tool or technology, you need to compare it with some old monster which does not have these features. What would be better if some in-house application is compared! Thus you take any application which is present in your organization for some time and label it as Legacy. Now, these newer apps or tools try to sound very tolerant and considerate as far as legacy goes. They provide backward compatibility, integration, co-existence and migration capabilities. Ever wondered what is the real picture? The real picture is that having a legacy application is a substantial advantage: provided you use it in the correct manner. Here is how.

Legacy Advantage

Legacy applications are typically older applications. Older is not a negative word. Old application means it has lived successfully for some time. Which also means, it has proven its functionality over a period. Most applications need to go through a troubleshooting or stabilization phase immediately after initial rollout. Older applications will have finished this phase long back and will have delivered results on an ongoing basis.

Legacy applications are supposed to be written in older languages. This is an academic objection. However, when you look at the business functionality these provide, there is nothing old or new. The most important advantage with legacy applications is that these provide tried and tested business logic or processes. The method of implementation may not be perfect. However, everyone has by now built confidence in the final reports and outputs.

Another advantage of legacy applications is that the data structures get matured over a period of time. Therefore, if you want to know a concise view of the data requirements of an application (especially before a redesign exercise), legacy data structures are an excellent starting point.

e-Confusion

With eCom hype all around, all organizations are rushing to have a .dom presence and business benefit. Nothing wrong here. The only problem is that in this eCom revolution, the legacy applications are not being utilized to the extent they should. Most companies think that if you want to bring business to the net,

existing business systems need to be revamped or rewritten. This is WRONG. With little tweaking it is almost always possible to integrate existing systems with Web based systems.

Integrating Old and New

If you do not have the source code
If it is a packaged product or the source code is unusable (poor documentation), you can still use the application in mixed mode. Let the application run as it is. You create external programs by using appropriate data drivers and using a language of your choice to code the desired functionality. This extra code should be used either to expose certain features of this application for external applications like web or to create COM components to perform certain base tasks. Both these approaches require you to understand the data design of the application. This can be done in an easier manner with reverse engineering feature of available case tools.

If you have the source code
The application will be written in some language. There is a very good chance that the newer version of this language now supports COM. The simplest way to integrate older and newer applications is to use COM components. These components can be created simply by extracting the existing code and recompiling it as a COM component using the newer version of the same language. This way, time tested logic is preserved and the code now becomes platform and language independent. Converting to COM components also provides very easy portability to web.

Conclusion

We must understand that if you cut the hype, ecommerce is just any standard line of business application which now has a much longer wire which spans the world. Most eCom initiatives require some integration with line-of-business systems. This integration is generally created from scratch leading to additional cost overruns. Using a sensible combination of code and data lying in the legacy applications, it is possible to reduce the time to market of an ecom application and also to reduce the cost of development.

Never discard any existing application by calling it a legacy application. Try to utilize it in a new light and try to exploit the stability and reliability it has gained over a period of time. Innovative usage of legacy code is the way to cost-effective and effective systems using newer technologies.

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In Box

Digital Age is good in information on HR & IT. It can include readers' views, articles on IT & environment, a column for younger generation, job opportunities, updated hardware/ software pricing and up-to-date information about top ten IT Software companies of the week.
J. John Anand,

Vyapin Software, Chennai.

Digital Age should publish a list of institutions offering quality post-graduates education in computer applications. It will help the students who are now being taken for a ride by bogus operators who charge huge fees for ineffective training.
Karthikeyan C, Cochin

“They Said IT”

“Security is a scare tactic which has been used by large vendors, because they are the ones who are bound to get most shaken up by going to the web.”
Anil Bakht, CMD,
Eastern Software Systems.

"The IT industry in India has made quantum leaps in maturity, to the point that the country's soft-ware engineering capabilities are respected around the world. "
David Parker, Director,
PVCS, Merant, Asia.

People say...

Does IT really create wealth for the Indian economy?

"It surely does. The "trickle down" effect of this wealth on our society, I believe is going to be our concern. We are a developing country and are trying to catch up with developed countries by short-circuiting the classical development model. Of course, one must also realize that there is a paradigm shift in the type of economy- from a bricks and mortar (capital intensive) economy to a double click (knowledge intensive) economy."
Bino George, Principal Consultant,
Baan Info Systems India Ltd.

"With the IT sector booming globally, Indians have made their mark as knowledge workers and it's a matter of time before this wealth gets translated into real income for the Indian economy. Companies like WIPRO, INFOSYS etc. have already caught the fancy of investors in the west and we can contemplate a quantum increase in India."
Chetan Jain, Director-Business Development,
i2iNow.com Pvt. Ltd.

Compiled by Priya Janardan...