



Happy Endings: A Potential Result from Business Process Re- Engineering



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"Many organizations today have un-integrated and brittle legacy data systems. This makes it difficult to adapt them to meet changing business needs. Organizations must analyze and integrate their data before efficiently sharing it across the organization and with external partners." (Aiken)

Despite the precarious nature of implementing massive IT change Frito Lay and RTA, an Australian Insurance company, were able to successfully negotiate the high costs and risks involved with large IT overhauls into successful completion resulting in significant tangible returns on investment. Part of their success was their determination to sensibly leverage components of their existing architecture thus reducing costs of a complete IT overhaul and providing value added services already in demand by their customers.

Frito Lay and RTA both were involved in comprehensive knowledge management infrastructure overhauls which differed in size, scope, and methodology. Frito Lay was confronted with issues pertaining to customer/prospect information available through different disparate systems. Their project consisted in bringing the information together into a new database system accessible through their corporate intranet so as to more effectively manage customer and prospect relationships. RTA needed to render its insurance information database information tag ready via XML so that it could be manipulated at will through a variety of future web applications for internal and external use.

"Data reverse engineering (DRE) is a relatively new formulation of systems reengineering technologies that addresses situations where organizational understanding and/or the physical condition of its data systems has deteriorated or become confused. This has occurred when organizations develop stand alone, or 'stovepiped' systems. Because these systems weren't developed to easily exchange data, they don't." (Aiken)

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Frito Lay’s problem was typical of companies that over the years grew with disparate unconnected information repositories. This is understandable. It is natural for each department to organize information according to their own preferences. As for the case of Frito Lay, the sales team had its own customer database system and the marketing team had its own prospect marketing database. Obviously, by cross-referencing the information in the two databases it would have been possible to more effectively manage customer/prospect communication without overlap between the marketing and sales departments. Additional benefits to the database integration and the new interactivity available through the corporate Intranet allowed geographical and time constraints concerning access to the data to cease being an issue.

Obviously, Frito Lay was successful in implementing their project. They did not attempt to setup a costly web-centric system that gave them more than what they needed with significant developmental time increases. The solutions they brought to their company were one of the many corporate transformations that happened in the late 90s as companies were forced, due to communicational competitive advantages being available, to upgrade their IT infrastructure leveraging the ubiquitous nature of web technology. In my opinion rendering their database information via XML tags for greater freedom for later real-time browser-based-instant-data-manipulation would have been unnecessary. Generally, you need to make sure that your customer and prospect information is managed effectively and do not need to build applications that do anything more than that. Companies like RTA or Experian whose chief service is information management and secure distribution among a network of partners and clients had a different core competency to fulfill. The process Frito Lay engaged can sometimes be referred to as data warehousing and/or customer relationship management system.

RTA, an Australian insurance company, also needed to consolidate information for ready online access. Their project seemed much larger in scope. First of all, RTA like Experian are involved in a completely different type of business whose chief service is information management and secure distribution among a network of partners and clients. RTA must enable online access to detailed customer insurance related information in an online format that would allow it the maximum flexibility in creating new information applications to be used through secure online connections. The best way to do that was to use XML on the legacy source. XML involves putting tags around particular types of fields within information generated from a database so that those tags can then be later referenced in ASP, JSP, and other web application development languages so as to be able to create information applications that query, sort, manipulate, update, add, and/or delete information as required by the business rules of that particular application. This work is mostly done in the back end (legacy, servers, etc.) and through the middle tier (ASP, JSP, HTML, etc.). This project also included an extensive front end design process that included content developers, technical writers, web/graphic designers, as well as information designers. These groups of people heavily interacted with the business managers of RTA to ensure that the initial systems as well as the generations of secure online applications they were creating were on par with expectations. Usability specialists were on hand throughout the development process as well as throughout project completion. It is assumed that usability testing would be maintained throughout the full life cycle of the new system. There were additional features included in the project ranging from self service web publishing capabilities and web statistics.

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"The answer, Marino's group realized, was to build a knowledge management portal on the corporate intranet. A KM portal is a single point of access to multiple sources of information and provides personalized access. Companies are starting to pay attention to portals because they offer an efficient way to capture information, says Carl Frappaolo, executive vice president and cofounder of the Delphi Group, a consultancy in Boston. A KM portal at Frito-Lay would give the sales department a central location for all sales-related customer and corporate information and cut down on the time it took to find and share research. In addition to different types of information about the team's customers-including sales, analysis and the latest news-the portal would contain profiles on who's who in the corporation, making finding an internal expert a snap." (Shein)

I am not sure that there was a clean synchronization between the RTA legacy systems and web server was implemented according to reliable security standards. It seems to me that the overall result was a semi-automated system. I believe that the project should have been successfully completed without too many unnecessary costs while achieving real-time updateability between the legacy systems and the web. It did not seem that the first generation of this project had too many calculators or other interactive content that would have demanded very skillful middle tier-programming. This project could have been of the magnitude of Experian which shares confidential credit information online through a variety of channels and that has developed a suite of online analytical applications for its network. Regardless, unlike prior to project completion the porting of information into the browser based world has made it possible for RTA to develop a variety of customer applications fairly cheaply with low cost of ownership for the foreseeable future.

Despite the precarious nature of implementing massive IT change Frito Lay and RTA, an Australian Insurance company, were able to successfully negotiate the high costs and risks involved with large IT overhauls into successful completion resulting in significant tangible returns on investment. Part of their success was their determination to sensibly leverage components of their existing architecture thus reducing costs of a complete IT overhaul and providing value added services already in demand by their customers.

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