



OVUM OPINION

INTRALINKS MOVES TO BROADEN USE CASES FOR ITS SERVICES

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Impact

IntraLinks, which offers services for the secure exchange of critical information online, is rolling out a strategy to broaden its adoptability, based on application programming interfaces (APIs) to integrate with applications sitting behind corporate firewalls such as enterprise content management (ECM) and customer relationship management (CRM) systems. This promises deeper penetration into customers' infrastructure and broadens the way in which IntraLinks' services can be used. It also keeps the company ahead of potential competitors such as the ECM vendors themselves and providers of collaboration technology. Ovum sees opportunities for enterprise application vendors and consultancy firms to facilitate such integration.

IntraLinks was founded by investment bankers in New York in 1998, its initial raison d'être being to automate the marketing phase of syndicated loans, invitations to participate having hitherto relied on the FAX machine.

It subsequently expanded to automate the contractual phase of the same process and has since added multiple other use cases for its primary service, IntraLinks Exchanges. In April 2009 it launched a second service called IntraLinks Courier, which enables the secure transmission of documents on a one-to-one or one-to-many basis (where IntraLinks Exchange is many-to-many).

Given its founders' background in investment banking and that sector's requirement for secure document exchange, financial services firms clearly represent a major customer segment for the privately held company. That said, other significant verticals for which it caters include pharmaceuticals, where clinical trials information needs to be sent back and forth, and energy, where it addresses the need for collaboration between alliance partners.

IntraLinks made its name providing a secure environment for intercompany data communications for applications such as virtual datarooms for M&A (in the corporate finance world). Having already expanded beyond the financial services industry



to grow its business, the next step is to deepen the applicability of its technology within both existing and new verticals, which is the thinking that underpins its strategy to integrate with enterprise applications like ECM and CRM based on Representational State Transfer-based (RESTful) APIs.

The choice of the REST architectural approach for API development is a logical one for IntraLinks, for the following reasons:

- RESTful applications are designed to maximise the use of pre-existing, well-defined interfaces and built-in capabilities provided by whichever network protocol they are running over, thereby minimising the addition of new application-specific features on top.
- Though developed for the world of HTTP, REST is actually agnostic to the underlying application layer (i.e. layer 7) protocol over which it is running, making it more widely applicable.

Based on a set of APIs it already has and new ones which it is developing, IntraLinks is implementing its strategy with a three-pronged approach.

The first area of activity is in verticals outside its traditional customer base, where it is partnering with sector specialists to gain market penetration. A case in point is the legal sector, where the company announced a partnership in December with Tikit, a UK-based consultancy firm that is developing an API-based connector between IntraLinks Exchanges and iManage WorkSite ECM platform (which was previously the Interwoven product and is now owned by Autonomy since it acquired Interwoven).

The rationale here is clear. Despite having considerable market share in legal, Interwoven was not a major player in any of IntraLink's traditional verticals. As such, while the generic API for integration already exists, the most specific work for Interwoven is yet to be done, and Tikit can both provide that expertise and address the target customer base.

The second aspect of the strategy is a technology called IntraLinks Adapter, whereby the company offers some level of the development work already done for the customer, who only needs to align the XML formats of the enterprise application to which IntraLinks will be integrating so that the process can go ahead.

Finally, there is a technology called IntraLinks Connector, which is a purpose-built connector between IntraLinks' own API and that of the application to which it is connecting, thereby requiring very little work on the part of the customer. The first such connector is for Microsoft SharePoint, which is widely used in most of IntraLinks' major verticals. Others are set to follow: EMC Documentum would seem a logical next step given its market clout, though IBM FileNet and Open Text are also on IntraLinks' radar.

It's still early days for this strategy, but IntraLinks is already talking about a second stage in its API development, going beyond HTML interfaces so as to understand and take advantage of the tagging applied to the content in the original ECM system.

Key Message 1

From a competitive point of view, IntraLinks is already the clear market leader in terms of the independent provision of so-called 'virtual data rooms'. There are other emergent players such as the big ECM vendors which see this as a naturally contiguous area for expansion, a feeling shared by some of the social networking/collaboration vendors. However, these kinds of companies are still some way off and, at least in the latter case, lack the formal processes that the secure interchange of commercially sensitive information requires.



With its API-based initiative, IntraLinks is striving not only to deepen its relationship with existing customers and widen its appeal for new ones, but also to maintain its competitive edge. Indeed, a number of the potential new contenders for the role of independent 'virtual data room' provider are large entities such as IBM, Microsoft and EMC, which could devote significant development and marketing budgets to breaking into this market.

Key Message 2

In as much as IntraLinks is promoting API-based integration with major enterprise applications such as ECM and CRM, Ovum identifies opportunities for the vendors of these platforms—as well as for consultancy firms like Tikit—to take an active part in this integration process and promote it to their customers.

While IntraLinks will itself offer ready-made integration with software packages that are common in its traditional customer base (the first of which is Microsoft SharePoint), there are opportunities for third parties to develop similar capabilities in packages that are more common in other verticals, as Tikit is doing for Autonomy/Interwoven. Other products that would be suitable for such work are IBM FileNet, Open Text and, more specifically in the financial services sector, Hyland Software's OnBase technology.