

Integrating with Success

A Project Summary |

Background

The oil & gas sector has long been at the forefront of driving the effective usage of IT systems in support of the business.

The Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration team within an existing client were similarly engaged, having successfully launched Addept's Connect suite of applications the previous year.

One of their focuses was to build on the success, the perceived simplicity and power of self-service that Connect enables.

The Challenges

Through their adoption and usage of Connect, they had built up an enviable resource that they now needed to ensure was more readily available from within other applications across the business. This was to be realised by offering alternatives to the existing Connect Web Services and web parts.

With Active Directory (AD) as their corporate directory, extending fields to hold additional information was in some cases seen as an obvious target; with Connect providing the user interface.

In addition there was the ever present pressure to improve the quality of data and to further distribute the task of its maintenance. This was further compounded by a drive to prepare for future technologies and to tighten up processes, enabling the extension of the whole self-service approach that is central to both the distribution and successful completion of data maintenance tasks.

In the short term the following priorities were identified.

On the data input side, solutions were needed for the

- Validation of telephony input
- Distribution of Geographic data maintenance

- Automation of approval processes required for key user fields.
- Group synchronisation with Dynamic Email Distribution Lists

and to further open up access,

- Extended integration with AD
- Secure access for corporate search
- Integration with Microsoft Outlook Social Connector and Microsoft Lync™

The Solutions

Addept were able to extend Connect to help address these requirements.

Telephone number input validation was implemented throughout the system, ensuring that correctly formatted international telephone numbers for landline and mobiles alike were input and subsequently exported via synchronisation into AD.

With over 95% of the telephone numbers within the system now in the correct international format, along with a proven method of maintaining them, they are well placed for the future introduction of IP telephony.

The already extensive administrative capability within Connect was further extended by the introduction of the facilities to manage geographic administrators. The premise here was that individuals at a particular location are far better placed to keep abreast of local changes and that it would be most efficient if nominated individuals could be granted rights that would enable them to maintain data local to them. Connect Site Administrators retain administrative permissions overall, but now specific approved individuals can maintain data about their location.

So far this model has been introduced for the independent management of the Geography taxonomy itself (Region, Country, Address, Building, Level etc.) and the parameters associated with Telephony validation (Country Dial Codes, Area Dial Codes etc.).

The new distributed geographic maintenance model resulted in an improvement in the quality of associated data. Changes to national holidays and mobile phone codes were made promptly that may otherwise have been missed.

Certain fields (Manager and Job Role) were identified as requiring a process to be introduced to facilitate the approval of their modification. Building on the existing success of using Connect to facilitate the user changing these fields, the system was enhanced to support working with external Identity Management and HR systems to support change workflows initiated in Connect but managed in the external systems. This powerful combination allows users to have a “one stop shop” for maintaining their data in Connect, while allowing the organisation to control the change processes of key fields in different ways.

The new seamless maintenance of dynamic distribution lists, through the automated synchronisation with dynamic groups formed by users association with the geographic hierarchy within Connect, has removed a perpetual time consuming and costly task.

Further integration provided the ability to push user profile photographs from Connect into Active Directory as resized thumbnails, allowing the photographs to be displayed in applications such as Microsoft Office.

With the wealth of data built up in Connect it was identified as being the first application to be integrated with the corporate Google™ search engine.

Connect now fully integrates with Google's Enterprise Search Appliance. This enables content in Connect to be found by Google™ searches whilst still observing the security constraints of the content itself. In short, individuals performing a search will only locate content that they are permitted to see.

The introduction of the MS Outlook Social Connector API offered Addept the long awaited opportunity to integrate information and activity from social networking tools into the heart of peoples email environment. Deployment of the Connect Social Connector offered users the opportunity to view details of people in email address fields taken directly from Connect along with activity such as forum posts etc.

The Connect Social Connector has integrated the Connect resource into the heart of the email system, where many spend a considerable amount of their day.

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The integration with MS Lync™ enabled Connect (and all other consumers of Connect) to benefit directly from presence monitoring. For example, this made it possible to see which of the people identified in Connect search results were actually online.

Summary

It is the ever closer integration with other systems that improves distribution of value, reinforcing awareness and encouraging users to keep data current.

Connect has become the recognised interface through which people maintain data about themselves. This directly supports the drive to improve data quality, which in turn underpins the solution's growing usage.

For further information

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