

STABLE AGILITY

Delivering online stable agility with
GX WebManager 9



SUMMARY

Companies need 'stable agility' as an integral element of their web strategy. The Internet is a dynamic entity, and the ability to react fast to changes enables companies to respond in an agile manner to the online demands of their customers as well as provide improved information delivery.

On the other hand, stability is required in the underlying web architecture to create a stable and predictable environment, and to manage business applications and systems that are integrated within it.

behavior of their customers. We discuss how to align the web architecture, the existing robust IT systems and architectures as well as the internal business processes in an agile manner.

This paper describes the daily challenges faced by business owners of consumer driven websites and the ways in which they can overcome the hectic and unpredictable

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamically changing world, where the Internet is becoming ever more strategic, the challenges that business owners of consumer driven websites face are increasingly demanding.

Not only do they need to manage and create the websites for their external audiences, then they need to connect to other parts of the internal organization. Additionally they have adapted to the fast and ever changing wishes of their target audiences and the Internet population at large, many of whom are very trend- and fashion conscious and have high expectations of what they can get from the Internet.

At the same time, companies need to stay focused on what is important for the organization: create a stable and predictable

environment, where creating revenue, creating traffic, creating conversions and delivering the best services to the customer have the highest priority. The solution is a solid and thoroughly thought out web content management system and web architecture where stability and agility are combined, where the ability to connect to other systems is easy and straight forward. The pressure is on to deliver value to customers as well as the revenues that come with that investment. GX WebManager is the web content management solution which develops Stable Agility for businesses.

2. CHALLENGES FOR BUSINESS OWNERS OF CONSUMER DRIVEN WEBSITES

Business owners of consumer driven websites, especially large companies with lots of customers and high volume communication and transactions between the organization and the customer, face an increasingly difficult environment to work with. The Internet has now matured to become an integral part of any sales strategy.

Growing demand at board level to increase value and provide strategic advantages with Internet business initiatives

The Internet is no longer an optional element in a business strategy. It has evolved from being a publishing medium to one where people meet, collaborate and do business. New business initiatives are increasingly aimed at involving the Internet in the business plan or even use Internet exclusively. This places additional demands on the business unit responsible for the consumer website, to adapt to changing circumstances as fast as possible without jeopardizing any business processes that are integrated with it.

An increasingly demanding and highly educated Internet population:

The huge adoption rate of broadband not only in the business but also in the domestic sector means access to the Internet has become widespread across Europe and increasingly worldwide. As a result, the Internet population is extremely demanding – they have little or no patience for sites that fail to meet their [high] expectations. The consumer is now in charge, less vendor dependent, and switches from its supplier in just one click of a mouse. As competition moves from bricks to clicks and from a local to a global perspective, consumers are becoming more discerning with the ability to choose the best there is in the marketplace. This means that not only does a website need to use the newest concepts and trends, but also it needs to be accessible, easy to use and with fast response times.

The business is closer to its audience and knows much more about them: Website feedback, statistics and analytics provide businesses with a greater insight into audience behaviors and a better understanding of how their eBusiness initiatives are performing. Through customer experience management, companies can adapt their websites to fit in line with customer expectations and create greater personalized experiences for them.

Ever changing and evolving dynamic on the Internet

The Internet itself is a very fast evolving space, with new ideas, concepts and business models emerging almost hourly. Business owners need to find a way to incorporate such innovations and pick-and-choose those ideas that best fit with the Internet strategy adopted at his or her organisation. The more agile the company, the faster it can adapt.

More pressure to integrate tightly with the corporate IT architecture

Five to ten years ago, the corporate website was mainly just an online version of the corporate brochure. This generated minimal return traffic. Today's websites are much more sophisticated, transactional and personalized as marketing managers have understood the need to move to eCommerce and mass customization. However, as a result of this shift, such websites need to be tightly integrated with internal processes and internal supporting software like ERP systems, CRM, financial and logistical systems etc. Business

owners want a way to integrate these systems in a logical and stable way.

Stability for the internal organization

To provide a certain level of quality, systems and organizations need stability. Stability creates room to give insight into processes and technologies used, and this insight can be used to raise the quality of the service provided by a group of professionals. With the increasing dynamic of the Internet, it is a tough challenge to provide stability and agility at the same time.

Empowering Web visitors

The advent of Web 2.0 has seen increased interactivity between businesses and their customers with richer content. Applications in Web 2.0 should not be solely about consumption of information but about social interaction where people can add value and participate. Businesses that ignore the evolution of Internet applications and technologies do so at their peril. The cultural shift of how the web is used, and businesses' agility to adapt to this change is paramount to their success.

A solution is needed that delivers both the ability to change and provide stability. One that creates a strong architecture, on a stable web platform that, at the same time, creates an infrastructure fostering agility and adaptability, and an easy and standards-based way to integrate with other systems, without vendor lock-in.

3. SOLUTION

Empowering non-technical people

When companies need to evolve their own sites and adapt to changing business models in real time it is essential to empower non-technical people – the usual contributors in creating the website such as Marketers (rather than the IT Department). Making it an intuitive process to add new functionality is just as important to them as creating the website content in the first place. For that to happen, the best solution is one where there is a component-based architecture and infrastructure. Components can be added or deleted easily, without affecting the underlying architecture in just a mouse click. There is no need to restart the system or have hard- or software upgrades, above all there is no technical training required, it is just a matter of selecting what to add, and then adding it. Components can add a lot of interactivity to a website for example: blogs, wikis, online forms or personalization tools; the list is long.

Stable web platform

A components-based system needs a solid underlying architecture providing a stable and mature web content management system, one that performs no matter what, day in, day out. Lots of traffic, lots of changes, a steep increase in numbers of users or lots of complex transactions should not prevent the system from running correctly, fast and most of all reliably.

Prevent vendor lock-in

Such architecture should be based on solid and mature worldwide standards (for example, XML, JSR-170, and OSGi). Using standards means vendors can be switched and there are many more options for a company to choose from. For a strategic architecture, it is a necessity. It is more likely that vendors that exhibit standards leadership will incorporate new standards-based technologies and processes in their products, and use specifications that are most likely to be adopted by the market as a whole.

Easy Enterprise Integration

Enterprise systems are increasingly becoming connected to each other in a Service Oriented Architecture, with the Enterprise Service Bus technology as a primary driver. Websites now commonly integrate with a company's internal processes and internal supporting software, therefore an enterprise grade web architecture needs to be able to connect to all these enterprise systems using de facto standards for integration.

4. BENEFITS

A component-based architecture overcomes any inherent rigidity and provides the technical means to increase agility, and increase the value of the architecture itself.

Leveraging the ecosystem

When a solid, standards-based component architecture is provided in a web content management system, lots of reusable components can be easily added to the system, not only coming from the originating organization, but also from the vendor or other third parties. It is the user community that creates the ecosystem marketplace: the add-ons to the overall architecture can include Wikis and mash up support. This ecosystem of reusable components gives the company deploying the solution many more options to choose from; it also removes or shares risks; it gives more room for experimentation; and it reduces costs.

Updates and upgrades

Organizations want to take advantage of investments made in products, platforms and technologies at other organizations. Upgrades are a cost effective way to profit from such investments. With a components-based architecture, components themselves can be easily updated without resulting in an unstable architecture. Also, the underlying infrastructure which supports these components can be easily updated, while added components keep on working. This type of architecture shifts the focus of upgrades from a global to a local perspective.

Use investments of peers

When organizations, units, partners and other third parties build components on top of the same underlying infrastructure, it becomes easy to reuse that investment at the originating organization, and vice versa. This cost-effective ecosystem of components gives a quick and cheap way to experiment and to be more flexible, by reusing the investments of others.

Market driven approach

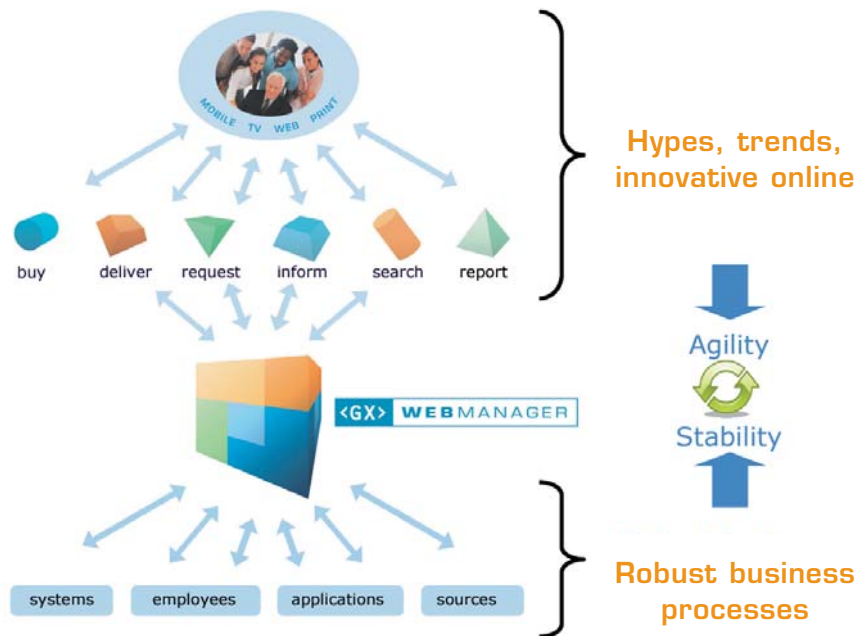
Vendors and service providers are able to provide product solutions specifically tailored for vertical markets. Organizations can create several platforms using the same components, each aimed at specific markets the organization is working for.

Future-proof Website management

With the growing number of technologies in the marketplace it is essential that companies consider only implementing a future-proof platform. A component-based web architecture that is standards-based will protect companies from having to make future investments in new technology that totally replace existing applications and solutions.

5. THE GX SOLUTION: GX WEBMANAGER 9

GX WebManager 9, the next generation Web Content Management System from GX, leverages existing standards and previous investments to provide organizations with a component-based architecture that is both stable and agile.



Component based

GX WebManager uses WebManager Component Bundles (WCBs), based on the dominant Component technology OSGI, for functional components that can be added to the system. WCBs are single files that can be easily exchanged within organizations, or traded in the GX WCB Ecosystem. GX also provides an online marketplace and certification processes to simplify finding, buying, combining or building the right WCBs for the right solution.

Agile

WCBs can be added, removed, or updated with just a simple press of a button. It is as easy as that. No restarting, no hard- or

software upgrades necessary, no technical training required. Dependencies, data conversion and migrations of single WCBs are all supported in the architecture. This architecture delivers extreme agility for the most demanding organizations.

Stable

GX WebManager WCM, first introduced in 1998, is based on a very stable, enterprise grade architecture, using and leveraging proven open- and closed source technologies. GX WebManager is used in hundreds of complex web architectures, running 24/7, including very high-traffic, very high-profile websites such as: KPN.com, Asics.nl, DAG.nl and Planet.nl.

Standards

Based on all the major Web Standards existing today, GX WebManager provides tight, native integration with JSR-170 in the form of Apache Jackrabbit as a native Content Repository, a component-based architecture based on the dominant technology OSGi, framework support using Spring MVC. It can also leverage proven leading edge technologies like Apache Lucene, Apache Tomcat, Apache Maven, MySQL, Oracle and MS SQL server. These standards prevent vendor-lock in, reduce costs and reduce the learning curve for developers and system administrators.

Integration

GX WebManager 9 uses an integrated Enterprise Service Bus (ESB) to provide the organization with either a lightweight or heavyweight Service Oriented Architecture, to integrate with the enterprise easily and yet remain standards compliant. Of course it is also possible to connect to existing ESB systems already in place. The included ESB prevents ad-hoc integration and secures and structures integration with the enterprise.

6. CONCLUSION

Delivering empowerment and interactivity: For demanding organizations that want to operate complex, agile, dynamic and interactive customer-facing websites in order to take full advantage of the potential offered by the web, an architecture that is stable and agile at the same time, while providing a structured integration platform is a necessity. GX WebManager, the next generation, best-of-breed Web Content Management System from GX uses WebManager Component Bundles and Enterprise Server Bus to provide just that: Stable Agility.

7. ABOUT GX

GX is a successful web technology specialist and the largest independent supplier of web content management software in the Netherlands.

GX's perceptive view of the market and clear strategy strongly differentiate the company from its competitors:

Vision – Outside in

The Internet is a mature communications medium that now also offers attractive commercial opportunities. The second Internet revolution, or more accurately evolution, has already started. The behavior and expectations of consumers who currently use the online channel have changed fundamentally.

Moreover, today's possibilities encourage and reward the new consumer's changed behavior and expectations. The generation that will flow onto the labor market in a number of years sees the Internet as a channel without limitations and the difference between the traditional consumer and the online consumer will soon disappear.

Existing software systems that support business processes and handle transactions are based on internal processes. The gap between consumer expectations and existing business software is becoming increasingly larger and will be more and more difficult to bridge in the future. Software suppliers will need to approach business processes from the opposite direction in order to satisfactorily service the new digital consumer, in other words from the outside in.

Mission – Leader in web content management

GX's objective is to support organisations and businesses that focus on the modern digital consumer and improve their competitive position by developing products and solutions that support the business processes involved in an appropriate way. Regardless of what our customer's customer wants to do on-line - buy goods, provide information, lodge a complaint,

play games, access entertainment, submit an enquiry, participate in online activities, etc. GX, as the leading supplier in the Netherlands, aims to provide the best systems and solutions.

Strategy – Stable Agility

GX's strategy is based on the principle of Stable Agility. An increasing share of business processes is initiated from outside the organisation via the on-line channel.

GX WebManager was specially developed to support processes of this nature. A robust and flexible platform that acts as a stable foundation for the many solution frameworks offered by GX and GX's implementation partners for specific market segments or applications. This approach ensures maximum flexibility and effectiveness in adapting to the continuous stream of new developments in this field and making them available to customers. A natural consequence is that the functionality of GX WebManager will infiltrate ever further into the organisation, but always starting from the outside. Outside in.

8. FURTHER READING

GX:

The Power of Components: GX White Paper
GX WebManager 9: GX information sheet
Outside in: GX information sheet

Gartner:

Avoid Building a Home-Grown Web Content
Management System
by Lou Latham, 20 October 2006

New Demands Have Revived Web Content
Management
by Lou Latham, 13 January 2006

Forrester:

Five Pitfalls To Avoid In Web Content
Management Implementations
Overly Complex, IT-Driven Initiatives Can Lead
To Major Headaches
by Stephen Powers, 23 February 2007

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