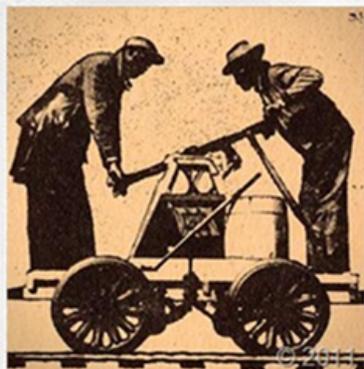


Cloud Extend: Because One Size Does Not Fit All



Lori MacVittie, 2011-20-04

Active Endpoints introduces Cloud Extend for Salesforce.com and reminds us that commoditization most benefits providers, customization most benefits customers.



Operational Process Management
Closer, but no cigar yet.

In the context of [cloud computing](#) we often mention the driving force behind many of its financial benefits is commoditization. Commoditization drives standardization which reduces costs of the product itself as well as the management systems needed to interact with them. Commoditization drives the cost of manufacturing, of creating and/or providing a good or service down **for the provider**. It is usually the case, expected in fact, that those savings are passed on to the consumer in the form of lower prices.

Thus, the commoditization of compute, network storage resources results in a lower cost for cloud computing *providers* and they have, thus far, seen fit to pass that along to would-be customers. The actual product, while perhaps being highly commoditized itself, however, must still be adaptable to fit the customer's often unique use case. For many organizations, for example, business applications are a necessary component to managing business. For others, they encapsulate processes that are considered competitive advantages. Applications, even those commoditized, must be able to support both styles of use while maintaining the low cost realized through commoditization.

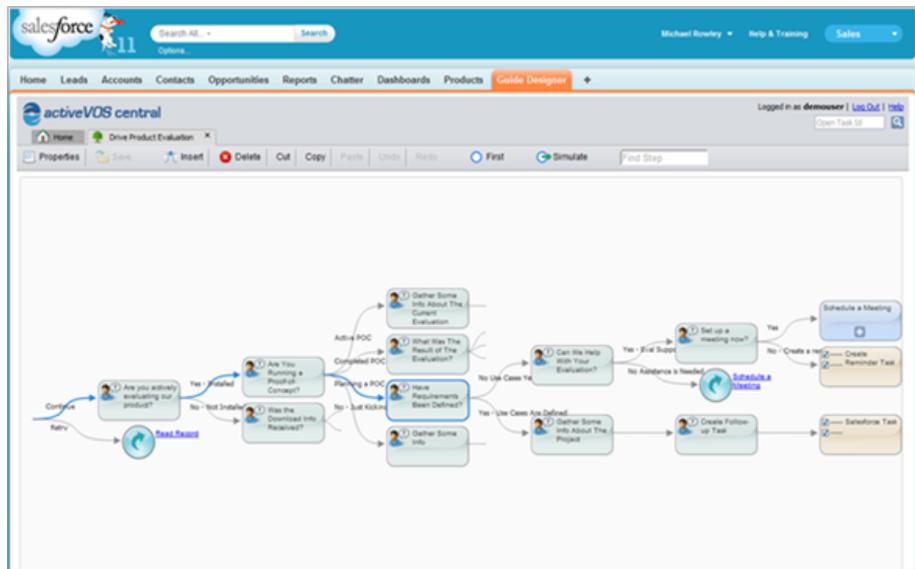
While the core processes many applications encapsulate are the same, there are always tweaks and modifications required that reflect the slight differences in markets, businesses, and even the product being offered. The underlying *processes* are different from organization to organization and that needs to be reflected in the software, somehow. The general use of some software applications has become generalized. It's not commoditized, but it's close. The general process, the data, the purpose of software such as CRM (Customer Relationship Management) and SFA (Sales Force Automation) is generally applicable to all organizations. But the way in which an organization manages customer relationships, sells customers products, and interacts with its customers always comprises some difference that needs to be reflected in the software.

Successful SaaS (Software as a Service) providers like [Salesforce.com](#) knew that from the beginning. Data was customizable, the GUI was even customizable to reflect the differences in terminology across vertical industries and organizations alike. But it also knew that wasn't enough, that organizations would find the restrictions on being forced to adhere to a certain codified process would eventually become an impediment to continued adoption. So it built a platform upon which [an ecosystem of supporting applications and services](#) could be provided that would enhance, modify, and otherwise allow customers to tailor the core application to better suit their needs.

Active Endpoints puts that platform, Force.com, to good use with the introduction of its latest business process management (BPM) offering: Cloud Extend for Salesforce.com.

DROP DEAD SIMPLE

To set expectations, understand that Cloud Extend™ for Salesforce.com (implying there will be other Cloud Extend solutions, which Active Endpoints confirms) is built on the Force.com platform and targeted at Salesforce.com customers.



The reason the overall solution is worth discussing in a broader context is the underlying framework and integration that makes the Salesforce.com solution so elegant can certainly be applied to other software – and potentially infrastructure – solutions.

What Cloud Extend offers is an easy to use, guided method of codifying a process within Salesforce.com that simultaneously allows for integration with the growing set of data integration points within Salesforce.com. For example, say a business or sales leader needs to guide customer service in a specific direction regarding a forthcoming upgrade of its software solution. This sales leader can, with no technical training – seriously – lay out the “script” by which customer service folks can engage customers in a discussion regarding the upgrade and properly collect the appropriate data while simultaneously creating any necessary events or e-mail or what-have-you within the Salesforce.com system.

After having spent many grueling hours with a variety of interfaces designed to provide drag-n-drop creation of processes, Cloud Extend was the first one that actually delivered on its promise of “drop dead simple.”

Now, part of that simplicity is driven by the limitation of what kind of activities can be included in a process and that’s where IT comes in – and the possibilities for other uses in the data center become clear.

IT’S ABOUT the SERVICES

What makes the integration of Cloud Extend with Salesforce.com seamless is under its hood. When users are creating or invoking activities in the business process it’s really executing service-calls to a cloud-hosted business process management solution called Socrates, based on Active Endpoints’ acticeVOS product.

Active Endpoints likes to say you can use Cloud Extend for Salesforce.com to “create guides as easily as creating PowerPoint.” Having used PowerPoint a lot in the past few years I have to say no, no it doesn’t – Cloud Extend was *much* easier than PowerPoint.

Active Endpoints platform is what provides the services and the integration with Salesforce.com necessary to enable a drop-dead simple interface for customers. When a user needs to specify an action, i.e. invoke a service, in the business process it is accomplished by means of a drop down list of available services, retrieved via standard service-oriented methodologies under the covers. In ancient days, business process codification required the administrator to not only know what a WSDL was, but how to find it, retrieve it, and in some cases, pass parameters to it in order to take advantage of services. With Cloud Extend all the minutia that makes such efforts tedious (and requires technical skills) is hidden and presented via a very responsive and intuitive interface. The services and the process automation engine that drives the guidance of users through the process are deployed in Active Endpoints cloud; integrated via a standardized, service-oriented integration model that leverages Salesforce.com APIs to provide the data and object integration necessary to make the experience a seamless one for users.

What this solution offers for Salesforce.com customers is customization of not just the solution, but the business processes required by the organization. Cloud computing is primarily about commoditization and SaaS is no exception. The problem with commoditization of business-related functions is that, well, one size does not actually fit all and every organization will have its own set of quirks and customizations to its sales force automation and customer service processes. Virtually all of the more than 90K Salesforce.com customers customize their offering to some degree. But customizing SaaS, in general, aside from the typical naming of columns in the database and some tweaking of the interface is not a trivial task. What Active Endpoints offers in Cloud Extend is exactly what customers need to be more responsive to changes in the business environment and to enable a more consistent sales force and customer service experience for *its* customers. Scripted, guided processes enable the rapid dissemination of new processes or information that may be required by customers or sales to address new product offerings or other business-related issues.

ONE SIZE DOES not FIT ALL

The concept of commoditization works well in general. Each of the three core cloud computing models – IaaS, PaaS, and SaaS – commoditize different resources as a means to create an inexpensive and highly scalable environment. But they all recognize the need – if even slightly – to customize the environment, the services, the flow, the application delivery chain, the application.

Offering a platform upon which such customizations can be offered, the foundation of an ecosystem, is a requirement but in and of itself the platform does little to enhance the customizability of the resources it supports. For that you need developers and producers of software and services.

This is not a concept that is applicable to only software. Custom ring-tones, themes. Hey, there's an app for that! The ability to customize even the most standardized products like a smartphone assure us that consumers and IT organizations alike not only enjoy but demand the ability to customize, to make their own, every piece of software and hardware that falls under their demesne. You can customize the basic functions, but you also absolutely must provide the means by which the product can be customized to fit the specific needs of the customer. For [Salesforce.com](#) that's [Force.com](#). For [Apple](#) it's an SDK and the [AppStore](#). For others, it's the [inherent programmability of the platform](#), of the ability to extend its functionality and reach into other areas of the data center using [service-enabled SDKs](#), [scripting languages](#), and [toolkits](#).

Where other Business Process Management (BPM) solutions have often failed in the past to achieve the ease of use required to make good on the promise that business stakeholders can automate, codify and ultimately deploy business process solutions, Active Endpoints appears to have succeeded. Infrastructure automation and orchestration vendors should take note of the progress made in providing simple interfaces to solve complex, service-oriented problems like those associated with automation of deployment and provisioning processes, specifically those requiring the collaboration of network and application delivery network infrastructure components. The [service-enablement of components a la infrastructure 2.0 makes them well suited for automation and orchestration](#) via what have traditionally been viewed as software and process automation solutions. There is nothing stopping an organization from taking advantage of a solution like activeVOS and Socrates to create an on-premise solution that leverages the lessons learned from business process automation in a way that positively improves operational process management.

-  [Microsoft / F5 Solutions](#) on DevCentral
-  [F5 Friday: A War of Ecosystems](#)
-  [Aligning IT with the Business by Decreasing Efficiency](#)
-  [Tour of Cloud Extend](#)
-  [An Aristotlean Approach to Devops and Infrastructure Integration](#)
-  [Cloud is the How not the What](#)

-  [Standardizing Cloud APIs is Useless](#)
-  [Standardized Cloud APIs? Yes.](#)
-  [Infrastructure 2.0: Squishy Name for a Squishy Concept](#)
-  [Infrastructure Integration: Metadata versus API](#)
-  [The API Is the New CLI](#)

F5 Networks, Inc. | 401 Elliot Avenue West, Seattle, WA 98119 | 888-882-4447 | f5.com

F5 Networks, Inc.
Corporate Headquarters
info@f5.com

F5 Networks
Asia-Pacific
apacinfo@f5.com

F5 Networks Ltd.
Europe/Middle-East/Africa
emeainfo@f5.com

F5 Networks
Japan K.K.
f5j-info@f5.com