# Marchitecture 101

Don MacVittie, 2012-24-01

There was an interesting discussion on one of the table-top wargame lists I belong to (Two Hour Wargames if you follow the hobby) about the "production value" of a given set of printed products. While it devolved (as web conversations often seem to) to a comparison with Hollywood, the point was valid. The original reviewer that caused the thread to get started was more interested in how pretty the books were than the quality of the contents. I, personally, don't care how ugly or mal-produced a wargames ruleset is if the rules are consistent and provide many hours of enjoyable play. Since most wargames use a lot of charts, I prefer those to be easy to find also, but that's not "quality of paper, binding, pretty pictures…" which is what the topic of the thread was.
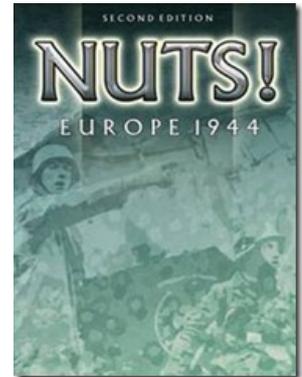
It seems that every field of human endeavor suffers from this malady these days. A toy isn't a toy until it is placed in a shiny box and sold for more than the toy should reasonably command. The same is true of smartphones, a field wherein huge advertising dollars are spent to spur your interest, even though those doing the advertising seem to know that word of (Internet) mouth drives sales as much as anything. In high tech, our shiny boxes and million dollar advertisement equivalent is Marchitecture. In marchitecture, the goal is to show you a solution that you want, whether the solution is implementable by reasonable people or not. And most often, a marchitecture can be implemented by reasonable IT folks, but has nothing special in it. You get everything you need to implement it when you buy the product, but the marchitecture brings the functionality together and puts it in a shiny wrapping.

Full Disclosure: My title is Technical Marketing Manager, though F5 is not the kind of company that forces me into marchitecture discussions unless they're actually something of use - still, felt it worthwhile to mention for those of you who read this on one of its many syndicated locations. In short, I like to put the emphasis on the technical part, but thought you should know the marketing part.

The thing is, when you're talking to your sales rep, you need to cut through the marchitecture discussion to figure out if the solution is real, reasonable, and supported. You will be sold something half-baked in your career, in my experience, most of the time you know it's half-baked when you buy it. Several times I have been in meetings where the response to "function X is weak" is "but everything else is here, and X will get better." And that's okay, as long as you know that X is a problem going into the purchase. It's those times when you're told a product can do something and not given the 5000 line list of caveats that is a problem.

The point of marchitecture, like the point of the shiny packaging for a game like Skylanders is to pique your interest. The company wants to be involved in conversations with you. In a (sometimes misguided) attempt to speak to you on your terms, they offer something to pique your interest. The key is to find out early whether what they're selling has legs. Ask for references, then when they bring them, ask for different references (I can find three people to support anything, but when you ask for a different set, then they have to scurry), dig into the technology, and though our sales staff may dislike my suggestion of lengthening the sales cycle, it is certainly in your best interests to do a trial of any major new product you're considering before you offer up any money. Though if your "trial" must be big because the solution playground is, maybe you should just do testing of the features you need, and make your decisions off of that.

And don't make the mistake of assuming that just because something is dressed up like marchitecture it is not useful. F5's deployment guides (and more recently iApps in the same vein) are an example where we have put the product through its paces, configured it correctly, and tested it thoroughly. They exist to help you get quick use out of the product, and strictly speaking I wouldn't call them marchitecture because they're full of good, tested, configuration information, while marchitecture is usually at the 10,000 foot level. But they do, in a sense, pique your interest. When we have a configuration for VMWare and NetApp to do VMotion outside the metro area, well we certainly didn't configure and test that scenario because we had nothing better to do – our customers and prospects told us they needed it.

Know what you're buying. Know how it helps the project at hand, but also know how it can help you in other projects, now and in the future. Sure, the NUTS! book pictured above is not the best quality book I've ever bought, but the rules are solid and have served me (and many others) for years. The same should be true of your major IT purchases. Why buy something of limited use or tied to a specific project if you have a need across several projects, or could see a benefit to using something for several projects?

Anyway, time to climb off my soapbox. Keep kicking rear and making your company hum along without realizing they'd be lost without you.

And yeah, Skylanders and NUTS! are both a lot of fun to play, when you have the time to invest. The difference in packaging quality doesn't matter much after purchase.