

Apache Synapse Project Shows Impact of Open-Source Approach

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The launch of the Synapse project highlights the growing importance of open-source middleware. But Synapse's success will depend on real-world technology and adoption by enterprises and vendors.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 22 August 2005, the Apache Software Foundation received a proposal from WSO2 for a new project, called Synapse, designed to enable the development of a Web services mediation framework. WSO2 and its partners — including Blue Titan Software, Infravio, Iona Technologies and Sonic Software — plan to develop components for a flexible Web services transformation, management and routing platform providing enterprise service bus (ESB) capabilities.

Analysis

The Synapse project offers further evidence that open-source technology will have a massive impact on application integration. It extends the list of planned open-source ESBs, which now includes Celtix from Iona and ObjectWeb, GlassFish from Sun Microsystems, the Mule ESB project, and an upcoming offering from JBoss. The project's goal is to provide Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) based connectivity, message transformation and routing, and SOAP transport protocol bridging — all features which Gartner considers typical of an ESB. This means it will compete with both commercial ESBs and similar open-source projects.

Most of the Synapse partners will likely integrate its technology into their products and pursue a traditional license-based business model. However, a few will try to develop a service-and-support business similar to that of JBoss. Iona plays a special role among the partners because it has made a big commitment to Celtix, and its major interest in Synapse is ensuring that the two technologies are interoperable.

Gartner does not expect real-world Synapse technology to become available before 1Q06 (0.7 probability). The Synapse product offering will initially be targeted at providing an embeddable ESB core that the partners can extend with proprietary capabilities or integrate into their “closed source” products. The Apache Software Foundation's involvement gives the project credibility, but Synapse will face challenges in getting vendors with different agendas to cooperate on the same platform. The key success factors for Synapse will be its ability to show quality of technical implementation, support from independent software vendors and systems integrators, adoption by open-source distributors, and in real-world production deployments by YE06.

Recommendations

- **Integration vendors:** Expect the Synapse launch to increase the impact of open-source business models on the middleware market. Recognize that a sound open-source program is essential to maintaining credibility about your continuing viability.
- **Enterprises:** Do not be confused by the stream of announcements of open-source ESBs. Monitor Synapse and other open-source ESB projects — and particularly their adoption by independent software vendors and systems integrators — but do not make a commitment until the technology is available and proven in real-world projects. Initially, Synapse's primary impact for customers will be limited to increased interoperability between the products of the vendors involved, and other vendors using its open-source technology as a base for product development.

Analytical Sources: Massimo Pezzini, Paolo Malinverno and Daniel Sholler, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Iona and ObjectWeb Plan Open-Source Enterprise Service Bus" — Iona is contributing its considerable middleware expertise to ObjectWeb's open-source community. **By Massimo Pezzini and Yefim Natis**
- "IONA and ObjectWeb Open the Floodgates of Open-Source Enterprise Service Bus With Celtix" — Iona's new open-source ESB business model will require a vast network of partners to succeed. **By Massimo Pezzini, Yefim Natis and Paolo Malinverno**

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