

Sun and Liferay Plan to Brighten Open-Source Enterprise Portals

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The collaboration between Sun and the smaller, emerging vendor Liferay — both vendors of two overlapping portal packages — combines Sun's execution with Liferay's market traction.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 7 May 2008, Sun and Liferay announced the Sun/Liferay initiative. Described as a "community partnership," the relationship includes collaboration on both technology and business. Under the terms of the partnership:

- Sun will become a "committer-level" contributor on the Liferay open-source portal code base, and join the Liferay Governance Board.
- Liferay will incorporate contributions from Sun into its code base — primarily standards-oriented technologies, such as Java Specification Request (JSR) 286 support.
- Sun will package a subset of Liferay combined with Sun OpenPortal technologies into a Sun-branded release.

Both companies will continue to sell their current portal brands and will support their customers on current system configurations.

Analysis

The Sun/Liferay partnership has several implications:

- It recognizes that Liferay has recently gained traction within the enterprise sector of the market during 2007.
- It indicates that Sun is taking a serious, pragmatic approach to open-source software. Despite having an offering that competes with Liferay, Sun has identified an emerging trend and has acted on its assessment of the company's growth, value to Sun's ecosystem, speed of enhancements and track record.
- It highlights recently introduced differentiators in Liferay Portal v.5, which includes built-in social networking, an interface to Facebook, support for portlets built in Ruby and Python, and support for Google gadgets.
- It recognizes that open-source portals, despite being around for most of this decade, had gained little traction in the enterprise sector until 2007. Now several platforms are achieving momentum, such as Java (Liferay and JBoss), PHP (Drupal, which has been commercialized through the recently funded Acquia) and .NET (DotNetNuke and the recently released Umbraco).

The partnership is not without challenges, some of which could be resolved by an outright acquisition. Currently, there are two products with different code bases and licensing models. These are being merged at the technology level (the JSR 286 portlet container from Sun, for example, and the social networking features from Liferay), but each will, for the moment, maintain its distinct market identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Enterprises using portals on both Java and non-Java platforms:** Take a fresh look at open-source portal offerings on your platform. The open-source approach not only lowers licensing fees and enables easier access to code — it can also provide a

package that is lighter-weight, has a more modern feature set that is faster to implement and, consequently, delivers a more rapid return on investment.

- **Prospective portal customers:** Consider the Sun portal if your organization emphasizes name-brand support. Consider Liferay if there is a priority on social-networking features. Conduct a pilot project and build a deployment road map based on a common Sun/Liferay platform.
- **Liferay and Sun portal customers:** Plan to use the JSR 286 specification, which is close to being finalized, as a default starting point for new portlets.

RECOMMENDED READING

- "Open Source and Portals, 2008" — Though adoption is not yet widespread, Gartner expects enterprise deployment of open-source horizontal-portal alternatives to grow. **By David Gootzit and Ray Valdes**
- "Key Issues for Portals, Content Management and Collaboration Best Practices Projects" — Gartner identifies four Key Issues that project managers and application managers face as they implement their portals, content management and collaboration strategies and deployments in 2008. **By Kenneth Chin, David Gootzit and Jeffrey Mann**

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