

Macmillan shortens integration projects by a factor of six



Business processes that include multiple data formats and platforms can be complex and convoluted. Trying to streamline and automate these processes may require the skills of more than one person, making the project more time consuming and expensive than needed. As each person stays within the boundaries of their expertise and platform, the resulting 'integration solution' is often far from integrated, with numerous temporary files and multiple points of potential failure.

Macmillan Publishers Australia recognized this issue and is now using LANSACOMposer to handle its business process integration projects. By centralizing the transformation and transportation of data and the orchestration of the involved processes, projects can now be realized by a single IT team member. This has shortened the average project by a factor of six and made the delivered solutions simpler with less opportunity for failure.

Semi-automated and Convoluted

Macmillan Publishers Australia is part of the global Macmillan Group, one of the largest international publishing houses in the world, well known for its high quality academic and professional, educational, fiction and non-fiction publications. Macmillan Education, Nature, Palgrave Macmillan, Pan and Picador are powerful brands, established in over 70 countries. In Australia, Macmillan's Macquarie Dictionary brand is of iconic status.

Macmillan Publishers Australia (referred to as Macmillan hereafter) employs 300 staff at its head office and main warehouse in Melbourne and at its sales offices across the region. Macmillan's main focus is to publish local material and to distribute overseas publications to the Australian and New Zealand markets.

Macmillan's core distribution system is a customized version of IBS Bookmaster, an IBM i-based ERP solution for the publishing industry. In addition Macmillan offers a number of services that are Windows-based, such as the individual Web sites for each of its brands/customer groups, through which a growing number of orders arrive.

Book stores use a mixture of EDI, Web, fax, phone and email orders, while sales reps may still collect the occasional paper order, especially when visiting schools.

EDI orders go straight to Macmillan's IBM i, but Web orders are captured on Windows servers. Macmillan faced the same issue as many other companies, which is: How to find efficient, automated, streamlined ways to get data from one source or platform into another?

Before Macmillan implemented LANSACOMposer, the company's Windows programmer would need to develop a program to extract orders in XML format from a specific Web site and store them on an FTP server. Another Windows program would pick up the XML orders and transfer them to a text file format. Then those text files would be copied to the IBM i, where the RPG programmer had to create a program to convert them to an EDI format that Bookmaster can handle.

Angela Scully, Application Software Manager at Macmillan, explains, "It was semi-automated and a quite convoluted multi-step way of transferring data. Also, it was an expensive way, because two resources needed to get involved, collaborate on functional and technical issues and schedule project time next to their daily tasks. This made projects far more time consuming than they should have been."

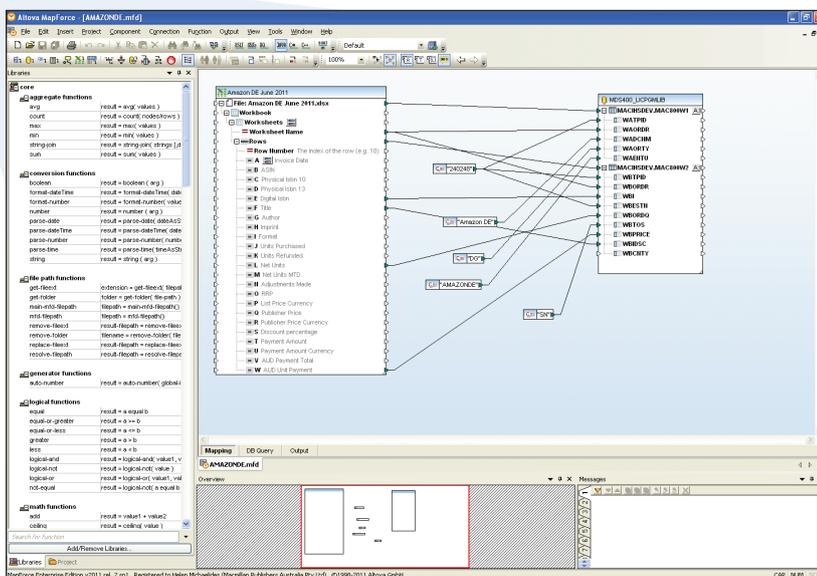
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"Our Windows guy is primarily a Web developer, with little interest in IBM i database systems, so he should not need to get involved all the time. I was looking for a way to up-skill our IBM i developer and provide her with the tools to automate the process of transforming data to and from various Windows servers."

Macmillan briefly explored enterprise service bus (ESB) solutions, but found them too complex and expensive. Around that time, Scully was invited by LANSACOMposer to a Business Process Integration workshop, which she attended. "I was impressed by how many different integration problems, data manipulations and point-to-point file transfers LANSACOMposer could handle. I also liked that you don't need programming skills to use it. The investment was very reasonable and we went ahead with the purchase fairly quickly," Scully said.

Two platforms - One Resource

Macmillan's RPG programmer, who didn't have any experience beyond developing 5250 style applications, was able, after a short training course in LANSACOMposer, to put together a streamlined and automated solution to collect XML orders from the Windows FTP site, map and transform the orders to EDI files, kick off an



Using LANSACOMposer, Macmillan mapped data to existing file formats, so nothing had to be changed in the core Bookmaster system.

RPG program to make some refinements and process the orders into the IBM i ERP system.

"This was her first LANSA Composer project and it took her one month in elapsed time, next to her normal day-to-day tasks," says Scully. "Several similar projects followed and those took only a few days."

A second project was to automate the data entry and processing of the monthly sales reports that Amazon.com and other eBook resellers send. These resellers supply their sales reports in different spreadsheet formats, each of them now having their own automated transformation process. Previously these spreadsheets were manually rekeyed, which took at least two days each month, with often a third day for double checking the results.

"Now it's done in under an hour and well before the financial month cut off. The process is straightforward and the data gets uploaded 100% error free all of the time," says Scully. "This project provided immediate payback."

In both projects, data was mapped to existing file formats. Nothing had to be changed in Bookmaster or at the data source. "We're not re-inventing processes, we're just automating them and making them more efficient," says Scully.

The next project Macmillan is looking at doing is to automate the processing of email orders generated by one of its low volume Web sites. The orders, currently entered manually, are in a prescriptive format, so transformation will be easy. Another candidate is to generate individual orders for combined export orders that are shipped directly from the printer.

In addition to automating inbound data flows, Scully sees opportunities for outbound data automation, such as supplying ONIX data. ONIX is an industry standard for storing and for sharing title information between publishers, distributors and booksellers. It contains bibliographic, pricing and other product information, and needs to be supplied in XML format. Scully plans to create and transmit the XML data directly from the IBM i, even automating the process to pull in some of the required data from a Windows SQL database.

Single Point of Control

"Our RPG developer has always been highly professional and productive, but she just didn't have the tools or skills to work with Windows processes and files," says Scully. "LANSA Composer has harnessed that productivity and has expanded it outside the IBM i. It has empowered her to handle integration projects that include multiple platforms and database formats, on her own."

Scully feels that one of the major productivity gains is due to the fact that LANSA Composer requires business analysis skills, rather than



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developer skills. "That level of expertise really shortens the communication leg and makes it a very productive environment," she says.

"Previously, integration projects used to take two developers several months. Now our RPG developer can produce a working model for a brand new integration project in a matter of days. All you're doing is data mapping, adding some business logic and setting up some process orchestration. Transformations that are similar in nature to a previous project take less than a day."

Macmillan has a very small IT department and wants to keep it that way. "LANSA Composer has enabled us to maximize and extend the capabilities of our small team. It's almost like having an extra resource," Scully says.

It is not just Composer's productivity that Scully values, it is also the quality and simplicity of the integration solutions it has helped to create. "We have essentially eliminated the Windows platform as a sandpit, eliminated the need for Windows-based interim data storage and eliminated multiple points of failure. We have shortened the end-to-end process and made it simpler, with less opportunity for failure."

Scully continues. "From a single point of control we can now monitor the entire process. In the past, it was hard to track down where things had gone wrong. It would require the attention of both our RPG and Windows developer to solve a single process problem."

Raised level of Expectation

"LANSA Composer has been a worthwhile investment. It has given us the ability to create efficiencies in processes that were previously too hard or expensive to streamline," says Scully. "It has been very enabling. I can comfortably say that we had our return on investment well within the first year."

"Projects that used to take six months now only take one month. I can already notice a raised level of expectation with our users," concludes Scully.

"Now I'm looking for more integration opportunities in the business and I can see plenty. Wherever we have manual data entry or other time consuming manual activity, or wherever we have an IBM i related data collection process that runs needlessly on Windows, I see a potential LANSA Composer project." ■

Snapshot

Customer: Macmillan Publishers Australia.
www.macmillan.com.au

Challenge: It always required two developers to streamline business processes that include both the IBM i and Windows platforms.

Solution: Provide the IBM i developer with the tools to automate the process of transforming data to and from various Windows servers.

Key Benefits: Average integration project time reduced by a factor of six.

Product Used: LANSA Composer..