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Outsourcing Without Offshoring Is Aim of 'Software Factory'

ObjectBuilders claims to create custom applications by integrating existing third-party apps

BY P.J. CONNOLLY

The idea of a "software factory" may not be new, but it's getting new attention thanks to the work of ObjectBuilders, a software provider based in suburban Philadelphia. The company in mid-May unveiled a service called The Software Factory, calling it a logical outgrowth of its custom software business.

Third-party applications, such as Business Objects' Crystal Reports, FileNet's Process Designer, and Microsoft's Access and FrontPage, supply the basic functions of a Software Factory application. The secret behind The Software Factory is a pair of ObjectBuilders' own tools, LiveIntegrator and LiveModeler, which output so-called LiveXML documents instead of traditional code.

According to the company, LiveIntegrator can create composite applications from third-party apps, or others developed within the enterprise. LiveModeler abstracts data sources from databases or Web services, permitting developers to combine the sources into a business model and publish them as one

or more LiveXML documents. End users consume those documents using the LiveApp Player rendering engine to access the data sources.

ObjectBuilders' pricing methodology is virtually prix fixe: so much per report, so much per workflow step, and so on; part of the specification for a Software Factory application includes a "bill of materials." The company boasts it can complete most applications in 30 to 60 days; roughly two-thirds of this time is devoted to setting the specifications, and of course, smaller projects can be knocked off in as little as two weeks. All of the assembly work takes place at ObjectBuilders' facility in King of Prussia, Pa., which currently has roughly 100 people dedicated to Software Factory operations.

"Our vision has always been to create a product that allows business users and technical users alike to assemble business applications as easily as you would create a PowerPoint presentation," said Robert Schmitter, president and CEO of ObjectBuilders.

The secret, as he put it, is the ability to "parallel-process" the construction of applications.

Schmitter thinks the time is ripe for assembly-line methods: "It's not just our product alone; there's no one product that's the silver bullet. What's exciting about today's industry is you can combine...products to allow you to truly assemble business applications."

Schmitter is so confident in The Software Factory's appeal that he's giving away an application to anyone who pays for the specification.



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