



Snapshot

February 21, 2007

System i ISVs Demonstrate Business Innovation that Matters: Agilysys, Bally Technologies, InfoGenesis, and Infor Team with IBM

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For as long as there have been applications and platforms there have been independent software vendors (ISVs) and hardware vendors have had ISV programs. The challenge for hardware makers is to get good applications running on their platform and to make ISVs want to recommend that platform for their applications. For ISVs the platform needs to provide a good return on investment. Each additional platform that they support requires commitment of developers and resources as well as time. Traditionally, a platform must provide either a significant installed base opportunity, a superior technology capability, or some total cost-of-ownership benefit that makes the application-plus-platform solution truly palatable to potential users. As customer innovation becomes a more mainstream use for technology, potential buyers are also looking not just for technology innovation, but also for business innovation: new processes, or new ways of doing business, reaching customers, or creating new customers that allow them to expand their businesses and not just to support them.

Solutions Built by Partner Teams

Today's data centers are complex environments in which data is accessed across multiple applications by multiple types of user, so that integration requires a greater degree of ecosystem integration. This not only requires the traditional partnership of hardware vendor with ISV to make sure that applications run well on hardware, but it also implies that ISVs need to learn how to work together with other ISVs to ensure data can be passed or shared between their applications in a useful manner. Ecosystem integration is arguably even more valuable when it is targeted at vertical market applications or in adapting applications for specific industries. While many companies need the same capabilities, how they are deployed and used changes depending on the vertical or industry segment requirements. The ability to adapt applications to specific industries requires specific knowledge. As partners, companies can offer solutions with a greater range of functionality, better adapted to specific environments. Working together can also lead to business innovation as solutions can be adapted to new capabilities.

IBM has been working with its partners to create these types of partnership and has created a program specifically for that purpose, the System i Vertical Industry Program (VIP). In this paper we look at a successful example of this type of partnership. IBM and four ISV partners have developed a fully

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integrated suite of solutions anchored on the System i platform to solve the IT requirements of hotels, resorts, and casinos. They bring together the systems, infrastructure, and applications needed to provide a one-stop solution for the gaming and hospitality industry. Hospitality and gaming businesses traditionally require separate systems to handle property management, gaming, catering, point-of-sale, finances, and human resources, creating a complex IT infrastructure. This suite meets the challenge caused by this inherent complexity, providing customers with a complete, integrated solution. The partners here provide an example of how integration and partnership between multiple companies can provide a valuable vertical industry stack and lead to innovation for customers.

Behind the Scenes

The Program

The VIP program is built off of the PowerNet program that IBM had created, and creates new focus. The goal of the IBM System i VIP is threefold. On one hand it is designed to help companies meet the needs of customers in their region, who frequently want local partners who understand their specific needs. It is also designed to leverage the knowledge of IBM and its partners into more industries than the single-partner model was able to reach. Finally, it helps to create repeatable solutions that can be expanded to a global model, thereby helping partners to expand their reach, their knowledge, and their customer base.

The Players

In the hospitality and gaming industry, IBM worked with four ISV partners. Each of the partners brings different strengths to the market. It is the combination of each partner's capabilities that leads to a solution where 1+1 becomes more than 2.

Agilysys: Agilysys brings several capabilities to the table, including property management, materials management, and electronic document storage, Express Kiosk, and wireless solutions. The Lodging Management System (LMS) is designed to streamline hotel operations and enhance guest service. The Materials Management System (MMS) manages the procurement process via e-commerce from the point of business development to daily operations and integrates with financial and point-of-sale software. The document management solution is an imaging and archiving solution that scans, indexes, and retrieves documents and reports for email, fax, or printing.

Bally Technologies: For this solution, Bally provides the casino management system, slot management systems, and table management systems. The ACSC product line is a suite of products designed to manage casino, slots, and hospitality data. This includes slot monitoring, marketing, casino accounting, and hotel functions. The software interacts with Agilysys' software to provide information on the casino systems, as well as to verify and retrieve information from the casino system.

InfoGenesis: InfoGenesis provides the point-of-sale (POS), cashless payment, dining management, dining reservations, and self-service solutions. In essence, InfoGenesis provides guest experience management applications and services. InfoGenesis has created an interface that allows communication

between the InfoGenesis POS and the Agilysys LMS systems, and between the POS and the Bally Casino Management System.

Infor: Infor provides the financial management, human capital management, customer relationship management (CRM), corporate performance management, and workflow applications. Infor acquired SSA Global, which in turn earlier acquired Infinium. The Infor vendor master is referenced for all purchasing functions in Agilysys' MMS application. Infor's software interacts with MMS for inventory and general ledger activities as well.

The Package

The integrated database in i5/OS, the flagship operating system for IBM System i, allows Agilysys, Bally Technologies, and Infor to source from a single customer profile, optimizing capabilities that these ISVs built from the ground up and integrated with i5/OS. Meanwhile, the InfoGenesis solutions leverage the multi-OS capability of the IBM System i to tap into the enhanced functionality, security, and reliability it offers. The team of companies is also working with industry associations, offering its decades of industry expertise to drive the next generation of development.

Lessons in Partnership

Individually, these companies had been able to provide software to the gaming and hospitality industry to run their businesses. However, as these companies engaged in response to customer behest, they discovered that they could provide a better end-to-end solution working together. The integrated suite offers back office applications that can:

- Manage reservations,
- Purchase goods and services,
- Track players on the gaming floor,
- Provide accurate accounting, and
- Provide human capital management services, including HR, payroll, and employee self-service.

There are also front-office applications that access the Web to facilitate customer and employee usage and reporting. As the same hotel customer checks into a hotel, purchases goods and services, and plays on the gaming floor—sometimes across multiple properties—then it is clear that providing good customer service requires the ability to have an integrated view of the property customer. Any single partner could only provide part of that view. Together they provide a more coherent business view for the property's business managers. With that business view, customers can grow their business more quickly and more efficiently, and can use these capabilities to provide state-of-the-art guest services and relations: real innovation for the hospitality and gaming industry.

The Opportunity

The lesson to be taken from this example is that partnership pays off. A strategy ISVs may want to contemplate for pursuing vertical industry markets in particular is to think about partnering with other ISVs in the same space. These may be companies that a particular ISV encounters frequently that either

does not give direct competition or has minimal functional overlap. These may be companies that have a geographical focus or complementary process focus. At any rate, the way to gain hardware vendor mind share and to put together an optimally appealing position is to target a greater solution. IBM's VIP program has these goals in mind and is working across the globe in multiple industries to help partners create their own ecosystems that provide value to a greater range of customers than they could achieve single-handedly.

These opportunities may start in one market, but they have the potential to take partnerships to global levels. For this example, the opportunity is global, as not only is Las Vegas a large gaming haven, but markets such as Macau and Chile are growing, as well as other locations in Europe and Asia. Each of these ISVs benefits from working with the IBM and the System i platform; however, the potential they have by working as a group of five integrated players is even greater.

A platform like the IBM's System i is designed for integration of multiple applications, business processes, and functions on a single platform. IBM's dedication to the partner program is clear, particularly for the System i as IBM continues to invest in ISVs and partner activities. The success that can be demonstrate with this platform bodes well for future projects in this vein.

Innovation no longer refers only to those projects with new technical capabilities. The trend is for companies to drive business innovation as well as best-in-class technologies together to create new solutions that in turn allow customers to drive innovation in their own companies.