Widgets and Mashup

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3 questions: Widgets and Mashups, snappers-up of unconsidered data and assemblers of data bricks

Which components are used to customize the workstation, and what is their practical utility in the user's day-to-day work?

Eric Samson :

They are elements that are connected to a source in order to locate data relevant to the user's work and bring it to the screen. They are designed to be able to combine different data from different sources and display the product on screen. They are commonly referred to as "widgets" and "mashups". A widget is a visual component connected to a source. An element installed to retrieve information on a public site like Google Maps, for example, or an enterprise source such as a business software suite. It's a dynamic link to heterogeneous resources scattered around or beyond the enterprise. A mashup is an assembly of widgets, or in other words a "composite application" consisting of a set of components each of which is connected to a specific source.

In the same way as with a workflow solution, the mashup controls the interactions between the widgets and triggers a series of actions resulting in the display of a composite data object that can be utilized by the user.

In concrete terms, a mashup might combine the information I have on my customers with data taken, for example, from the Yellow Pages and Google Maps. When I call it up by clicking a screen button, I see the combination of these different pieces of data, without my having had to copy any of the information that I already held, in the phone directory or in Google Maps. The dynamic link established with the component guarantees that the information will be updated automatically from now on.

When data is collected and combined manually, users lose time connecting up to each source, summarizing the data themselves (at the risk of omitting important data) and finally working on data that may be incomplete or even invalid. In a call center for which we are currently working in the United States, each operator has to handle upwards of thirty different applications to get at the information requested. The mashups that we are deploying – currently for 1,400 users and ultimately

for all 14,000 of the center's employees – will enable them to save time. They will then be able to use the time saved to present additional services to customers.

How are these dynamic components created?

Eric Samson :

They are created using two different development environments that don't call for the same level of technical competency. A mashup is a simple assembly of basic components, and can be created by the users themselves, using a specific utility pre-installed on the workstation. Creating a widget, on the other hand, connected to a business application and a database, requires more advanced IT skills.

The development environment that we use for that captures the salient fields from the target database and publishes them in a choice of formats. A button is associated with this action and positioned on the end-user screen. The developer may choose to add access and security rules to the execution of the application.

To what extent do enterprise mashups take account of a company's own data access security rules?

Eric Samson :

The role of a mashup is to take into account data from different sources and, in so doing, to pass through a certain number of security barriers to obtain the desired result. Convertigo's approach involves using two different development environments: one for mashups, one for widgets. The widget generator, for instance, allows the developer to insert the necessary security rules. Then, when the users come to create their mashups on the dedicated generator, they'll be using widgets that are already secure. Other publishers in the sector, such as the US firms JackBe and Kapow, don't make this distinction and so don't allow you to build in the same level of security.