JBoss, Librados Take Open Source to the Integration Market

The JBoss/Librados open-source alliance adds Librados' open-source adapters to JBoss' open-source application servers. This will help reduce the cost of integration, particularly for Java-based, opportunistic IT projects.

Core Topic
Application Integration and Middleware:
Application Integration

Key Issue
Which trends, features, industry standards and packaging strategies will shape the future of integration middleware?

On 23 July 2003, JBoss, a provider of open-source, Java-based application servers, announced a comarketing agreement with Librados, a provider of Java 2 Platform, Enterprise Edition (J2EE)-based application integration software. The partnership will allow Java developers to perform application integration from the JBoss server using Librados' Enterprise Integration Component Server (EICS) and a family of pre-built J2EE Connector Architecture (J2CA) adapters.

JBoss is a J2EE-based, open-source application server. During the past 12 months, JBoss has steadily increased its installed base, which now includes more than 200 enterprises in production use. JBoss has also won some important partnerships; for example, webMethods agreed to bundle and support JBoss as part of its integration platform. However, enterprise acceptance of JBoss has been delayed by several factors, one of which is the lack of advanced enterprise functionality found in high-end commercial application servers.

The JBoss/Librados partnership takes a step toward mitigating this shortcoming. Most modern business applications are composite applications that require access to external information or transaction sources. Such on-request integration is often accomplished through integration adapters. These are typically expensive and often require the additional use of an integration broker, a separate and expensive technology platform. With this announcement, JBoss customers will be able to accomplish some integration for composite applications using their free application server and free Librados adapters. The partnership is likely to make JBoss a more attractive option for a larger number of projects.

Librados is a small startup with a limited suite of about a dozen adapters. Its adapters are primarily for protocols, applications

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and systems with Java-based interfaces, such as Java Database Connectivity, IBM WebSphere MQ via Java Message Service application programming interface, and SAP via its Java Connection Object. Additional adapters are available for "Java-friendly" protocols and data, such as Hypertext Transport Protocol (HTTP) and Extensible Markup Language (XML). Unlike products from vendors such as Attunity or iWay Software, the entire Librados product runs in a J2EE application or Web server environment with no "footprint" in the target application, so Librados does not have a distributed client/server adapter architecture with part of its technology running in native (often non-Java) target application environments such as Customer Information Control System (CICS) or Windows. Until Librados does so, its offering will be limited to the performance and quality-of-service attributes of the Java interfaces available from various application and system vendors. Although they are increasingly available for new applications, Java interfaces are not available for many older versions of applications found in enterprise portfolios.

Open-source solutions for integration middleware, such as Librados, Brunswick's Business Integration Engine and openadaptor.org's openadaptor framework, are just emerging and still unproven, but it is natural for open-source application servers to follow the same evolutionary path as mainstream application servers into application platform suites, which would include introducing integration and portal features. Gartner has been predicting the gradual commoditization of adapters from such vendors as Attunity, Data Junction, Insevo and iWay for use in integration projects. The Librados open-source arrangement, in which the adapters and source code are distributed free to enterprises that otherwise pay for maintenance and support, is further evidence of this trend.

The Librados open-source distribution model is more restricted than most, in which source is typically available for free download by the public. Enterprises get the source code for Librados open-source adapter for free but must pay for maintenance and support; independent software vendors must also pay a one-time fee for the source, but then can redistribute it to their own users royalty-free. Nevertheless, the Librados hybrid licensing scheme should help enterprises reduce the cost of integration, particularly for opportunistic IT projects.

Consider Librados open-source adapters when:

- A limited suite of Java-only adapters satisfies integration project requirements

- Planning opportunistic, less-demanding, low-cost, smaller-scale IT projects with a short time to market

- You can tolerate the risks involved in working with a startup vendor

Consider alternative adapter vendors when:

- You need a full suite of adapters optimized for all operating environments

- Planning systematic, more-demanding, larger-scale infrastructure projects with a long life cycle

- Long-term vendor viability is a high priority

Acronym Key

CICS	Customer Information Control System
EICS	Enterprise Integration Component Server
HTTP	Hypertext Transport Protocol
J2CA	J2EE Connector Architecture
J2EE	Java 2 Platform, Enterprise Edition
XML	Extensible Markup Language

Bottom Line: The alliance between JBoss and Librados should make the JBoss platform attractive to a wider range of enterprises. However, JBoss customers and prospective customers should look for assurances of technical quality of the Librados adapters and understand their limitations compared to higher-priced commercial alternatives. The business risk of dependence on a small technology vendor should be taken into account. With this caveat, Librados adapters should be seen as a welcome extension to the JBoss platform.