

CASE STUDY

Mohawk Fine Papers Transforms its Business by Implementing Liaison's Innovative Cloud Service Brokerage



Mohawk Fine Papers is one of the few companies to put information technology in its proper place – behind the scenes, working almost invisibly to streamline operations and create new opportunities for growth. It's only a bit ironic that the company has accomplished this feat by using two of the most complex, most hyped, and least understood technology developments of the past decade – cloud computing and service-oriented architecture.

The story goes like this. The leading premium paper manufacturer in North America, Mohawk has long relied on the expertise and technology of Liaison Technologies for its business-to-business (B2B) ecommerce infrastructure. In 2010, Mohawk Fine Papers and Liaison began a collaboration to create an entirely new way of using technology to help Mohawk keep its operational costs down and transform itself from a product-focused company into an agile, services-oriented enterprise.

In this case study, we describe how Liaison worked with Mohawk to implement an IT infrastructure based on a service-oriented architecture (SOA) design philosophy and cloud computing delivery model. But as innovative as this technology approach is, the real story – and the real business value – is what this technology has enabled Mohawk to do from a business process and strategy perspective. Mohawk Fine Papers has achieved what few small and medium businesses have been able to accomplish. The company has found a way to make their IT infrastructure take on the characteristics of telecommunications dial tone – always available and easy to use.

Liaison implements a Cloud Services Brokerage

The Liaison platform is a Cloud Services Brokerage (CSB) which uses SOA design principles to overcome the integration challenges inherent in cloud computing adoption. With cloud computing, companies like Mohawk are attempting to perform seamless, on-demand transactions with disparate systems and applications within the enterprise and across their supply chain. For a small and medium enterprise like Mohawk, this potentially could involve managing hundreds of point-to-point interactions with incompatible applications. Liaison introduced service-oriented architecture design into its CSB to break apart individual applications involved into a loose coupling of business processes that are encapsulated in code. By integrating SOA into its cloud infrastructure, the Liaison platform creates an efficient way to eliminate the integration obstacle. In doing so, Liaison's CSB makes the promise of cloud computing's on demand provisioning of new business services a more realistic option for Mohawk and other small and medium sized enterprises.

The Liaison CSB acts as the integration backbone and single point of contact for all IT services within Mohawk and with many hundreds of customers, trading partners, and cloud service providers. It is a configurable, bi-directional single web service that manages all of Mohawk's technical interactions in a way that makes the inherent IT complexity

Mohawk Fine Papers Technology Strategy

Create an IT platform that supports any-to-any communications across the enterprise and trading partner ecosystem. To support the Mohawk Fine Papers goal to enable the seamless integration of on-premises and cloud-based data, services, and business processes, Liaison Technologies has implemented a cloud services integration platform. This platform – the next generation value-added network – facilitates automated processing of transactions and other interactions throughout Mohawk's enterprise and its trading partner ecosystem.

invisible to Mohawk and its business partners. The Liaison CSB manages all external electronic interactions, including electronic data interchange (EDI), managed file transfer, and Web services. Liaison provides Mohawk with project implementation and managed services for on-premises application-to-application (A2A) integration and intermediation with third-parties in its trading partner network.

How Liaison's CSB works

The Liaison CSB is triggered to take action by a request for data or a service transaction from either Mohawk or one of its trading partners. This trigger could be a request for payroll information from one internal Mohawk system to another, an external transaction like a customer requesting information on a shipment or virtually any other data or service request.

The Liaison system translates the data or service request using data maps hosted in its data center. Once the information is translated into a format acceptable to the recipient, it is automatically forwarded and, in turn, triggers an event at the destination application. The interactions can be asynchronous or synchronous. Data transfer between the Liaison platform and Mohawk application travels over a virtual private network connection.

Using the Liaison CSB, Mohawk has transformed the following information technology processes:

- **B2B integration:** The CSB synchronizes data from all trading partners into a canonical that Mohawk can use internally.
- **Master File Transfer-as-a-Service (MFTaaS):** Converts data from one canonical to another
- **Software-as-a-Service (SaaS):** Mohawk is consuming a wide range of core business applications as services, performed in the cloud.
- **Data-as-a-Service (DaaS):** Mohawk is using the Liaison CSB to process data-based transactions like requests for a shipping quotes or credit checks.
- **Application-to-Application (A2A) Integration:** Mohawk is using the Liaison CSB to integrate internal applications. For example, the CSB is integrating Mohawk's enterprise resource planning solution and an enterprise asset management solution.

Cloud Service Brokerage: A Game Changer for Mohawk Fine Papers

Adopting an information technology strategy based on the Liaison Cloud Services Brokerage implementation has given Mohawk Fine Papers a platform to orchestrate business processes across and beyond the enterprise. Using the Liaison CSB, Mohawk has streamlined numerous internal administrative processes, transformed how it interacts with key external stakeholders, implemented new ways to respond faster and more efficiently to business opportunities, and make other operational improvements.

In short, the Liaison CSB has fundamentally transformed how Mohawk manages its business. The list of business transformation made by possible by the Liaison CSB is long and varied. Here is a sampling:

TRANSFORMATION #1: REFOCUS THE ROLE OF THE IT ORGANIZATION

The Liaison CSB has enabled Mohawk Fine Papers to transform the role of its IT organization from hands-on, day-to-day management of technical details to a team focused on creating business value. The Mohawk IT organization is relying on the Liaison CSB for managing security, providing data management governance, and providing visibility into

every aspect of every internal and B2B transaction. This, after all, is part of the promise of SOA and cloud computing; users avoid coping with underlying technical complexities and instead focus on reaching business goals.

By giving the Liaison team responsibility for understanding and resolving complex technical interface requirements with more than 300 customers, 100 suppliers and between internal applications, Mohawk has eliminated virtually all of complex and time-consuming tasks normally performed by an IT department. For example, if Mohawk makes a business decision to establish an e-commerce business relationship with a new trading partner or customer, there might be a 75-page document governing the technical specifications. This is precisely what happened when Mohawk decided to sell its products on amazon.com. With the CSB, the Mohawk IT team no longer has to solve the technical integration between its system and that of the new partner or customer. Instead, Liaison solves all aspects of the integration problem and reports back to Mohawk with the solution. In the case of the Amazon relationship, only a few weeks elapsed between the decision to sell products on Amazon and the first transaction. Turning over complex IT tasks like this to Liaison, has enabled Mohawk to maintain a lean IT organization that consumes far fewer internal resources.

TRANSFORMATION #2: EASE OF ADOPTION OF CLOUD COMPUTING AND CLOUD SERVICES

Mohawk has moved many applications to the Liaison CSB that are complex and time-consuming to manage internally. Third-party applications like customer relationship management solution SugarCRM, human resources (HR) application Kronos, and transportation management system (TMS) MercuryGate are now managed via the Liaison CSB.

To illustrate the benefits, Mohawk's on-premise systems now sync seamlessly with the Kronos hosted software environment via the Liaison platform; this has reduced the operational cost of its HR application by over two-thirds per year. Mohawk has used the Kronos application for shop floor timekeeping, payroll processing and general HR functions for more than 12 years. Although the Kronos functionality was a good fit for Mohawk's requirements, administering the application internally and keeping it current with evolving requirements was onerous.

**TRANSFORMATION #3:
SHED TIME AND COSTS FROM
TRADING PARTNER TRANSACTIONS**

Mohawk's use of MercuryGate for its transportation management system (TMS) illustrates how the Liaison CSB is helping shed time and costs from trading-partner transactions. Mohawk is using MercuryGate in a SaaS arrangement for managing all transportation-related transactions like shipping notices and payments. Liaison provides real-time process and data integration between MercuryGate and Mohawk. Mohawk's ERP system sends real-time shipment information through Liaison to Mercury-Gate in the cloud, and MercuryGate sends invoices back to Mohawk (through Liaison) on a daily basis.

The solution was implemented in less than three months and enables Mohawk to have an unlimited number of users for an affordable annual fixed price. The speed and simplicity of the implementation and the cost-effective access to specialized transportation management functionality has lowered costs and streamlined processes.

**TRANSFORMATION #4:
COST-EFFECTIVELY EXPERIMENT WITH
CREATIVE NEW BUSINESS MODELS**

Perhaps the most beneficial transformation enabled by the Liaison CSB is the ability Mohawk now has for experimenting with new business models. Finding new, profitable business models is an imperative for Mohawk, a manufacturer of paper products in a world that increasingly conducts business transactions electronically. If Mohawk sees a new business opportunity, like offering its products directly to consumers via ecommerce, it can implement the new service quickly using a modest amount of operational expense. Prior to the implementation of the Liaison CSB, the process would have required a capital expense authorization and much more time. With the low cost of entry, Mohawk can try a new service for a short time and then easily cancel it if it doesn't prove to help the business.

In this way, the Liaison CSB has enabled Mohawk to operationalize agility. The CSB gives Mohawk range agility, the ability to respond to an opportunity or a threat with an easy to assemble and dismantle any-to-any integration.

It also gives Mohawk time agility, the ability to respond to new requirements much faster and for less cost. Most importantly, Mohawk's cloud computing environment invites innovation; high availability and quick scaling makes remove traditional barriers to trying new processes. Using the Liaison CSB, Mohawk is transforming its business from a predominantly manufacturing and distribution business model to a more services-oriented model.

Conclusion

Business today is a labyrinth of interconnections. And as technology, the Internet, and global business practices evolve, the numbers and types of these interconnections are sure to increase exponentially. Companies like Mohawk Fine Paper have a compelling business need to embrace these business interconnections to capitalize on the new business efficiencies and opportunities for growth they make possible. But this carries the risk of getting bogged down in the complex technical considerations that are an integral part of these inter-connections.

As a result, Mohawk and companies like it have an equally compelling need to keep the technical specifics of its business interconnections basically out of sight and out of mind so it can focus its time, attention and financial resources on the actual business opportunities they make possible. With this in mind, Mohawk Fine Papers made a strategic choice to turn over management of the technical aspects of its internal and external interconnections to the Liaison CSB and the technical experts who manage it. And in doing so, they have created a new paradigm for how small and medium businesses can make information technology an easy-to-manage, cost-effective enabler of on-demand business services. They have succeeded in making their information technology infrastructure what it should be – lowest-cost, always on, and easy to use.

Atlanta – US HQ

3157 Royal Drive
Building 200, Suite 200
Alpharetta, GA 30022

Tel +1.866.336.7378
+1.770.442.4900
Fax +1.770.642.5050

United Kingdom

+44 (0) 1425 200620

Finland

+358 (0)10 3060 900

The Netherlands

+31 (0) 20 700 9350

Sweden

+46 708102213

© 2013 Liaison Technologies

All rights reserved.

Liaison is a trademark of Liaison Technologies.