

REPORT REPRINT

Liaison touts cloud- and microservices-based 'data platform as a service'

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Enterprises are faced with a disparate number of data sources to integrate, harmonize and then mine for actionable insights. Data sources include monolithic ERP applications being broken apart (and moved to the cloud), social media applications and 'big data' sources. Traditional approaches require data integration, extraction, de-duplication and analysis, which take a long time. Time is a key factor, but a bigger issue is the complexity of managing the data from multiple sources and the resources required.

Liaison Technologies believes legacy integration methods like the enterprise service bus can't keep up. While an integration platform as a service (iPaaS) requires a high degree of expertise at the end user. Instead, Liaison is advocating an approach called data platform as a service (DPaaS), in which the data integration is handled in a cloud-based platform so the user doesn't have to manage it. DPaaS also takes care of different data types – batch, streaming, persistent, log, metadata – and the delivery of those at the application layer via a microservices approach.

THE 451 TAKE

Seeking to propel itself further into the cloud opportunity, Liaison Technologies has tuned its Liaison Alloy integration and data management platform for use as a cloud-based DPaaS offering, delivered via modern microservices architecture. This is not your father's Liaison: The one-time EDI shop is retooling to take advantage of the cloud transformation opportunity and displace incumbents, but it will need to prove that it can address all the most current trends in integration and data management.

TECHNOLOGY

Directionally, Liaison's focus is providing DPaaS, which it positions as freeing up enterprise IT resources to focus on analyzing data, rather than finding it or liberating it. Its Alloy Platform is designed to deliver integration and management, which is hosted and managed from the cloud via its DPaaS approach.

Services delivered on Alloy include B2B integration, application-to-application integration, cloud services integration, hybrid integration, health data management, custom data management, managed file transfer, tokenization and an health-care system network.

Everything is done from the cloud – it uses third party data centers depending on customer requirement and also operates three datacenters in the US and three in Europe. An on-premises agent is used for onboarding data to the cloud or integration between on-premises applications. It provides custom blending of data, harmonization of cloud and traditional applications, tokenizes sensitive data, tracking and profiling, and distributed data integration.

Liaison describes itself as a microservices-based PaaS play. Its IP is in the service delivery of integration and data management and has used a range of home-grown tools (automated mapping and tokenization are examples) and best-of-breed third party technologies (it chose MapR over Cloudera and HortonWorks to build its platform).

BUSINESS MODEL

Liaison Technologies was founded in 2000 originally as an EDI shop to facilitate data exchange for paper manufacturers using centralized, compute and storage resources (outside of any one enterprise firewall) to serve customers. Merck Global Health Innovation Fund and Accenture have made significant investments in Liaison in at least four rounds, though actual amounts have not been disclosed. It claims to be profitable on some \$100m revenue with fewer than 500 employees. It claims 95% of its business is from cloud platform integration and to have 7,000 customers. Its key markets are healthcare, life sciences, retail, manufacturing and financial services. It sells directly in the US and Northern Europe. It has 150 employees in Finland from an acquisition which has become an R&D team. It says it's most often part of deals that are tens of millions of dollars and are specific to the customer problem or use case. Alloy is being used by HCL Technologies and has partnered with CloudBuy. Alloy has also been certified with the federal privacy standard for identifiable health data (HIPAA), the security standard for payment card information (PCI DSS), and the control standard for service organizations (SOC 2).

COMPETITION

Liaison argues that its DPaaS approach provides a full service approach versus traditional enterprise service bus, iPaaS, B2B integration and master data management offerings. These include unified data management and integration platform, tailored offerings and multi-tenancy, automated mapping engine, microservices architecture, API management for data access and federation, and fully managed operations. Its competition is the traditional vendors in this space including Tibco, Informatica, IBM Sterling, Microsoft, Oracle and SAP.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

With its investors and partners, Liaison has built an extensive installed base, mostly on its pre-Alloy offerings. Can re-tooling with the microservices-based Alloy bring it into view as a credible alternative to incumbent offerings?

WEAKNESSES

In addition to its cloud and microservices orientation, Liaison will need to ensure it can address the key trends in data management - stream processing; predictive analytics; self-service data preparation; Hadoop data governance; and the continued blurring of the lines between transactional and analytics databases driven by in-memory processing.

OPPORTUNITIES

Liaison is targeting the 'embrace and replace' opportunity to displace incumbents from accounts where customers want to move to the cloud, use microservices and big data. Its key opportunity is being wrapped into larger deals with systems integrators such as Accenture and HCL.

THREATS

Liaison will need to demonstrate that its new DPaaS approach can offer something more than is already available in the market.