LIAISON TECHNOLOGIES: ACCELERATING INTEGRATION FOR A DATA-CENTRIC WORLD
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By Eileen Singh

Historically, organizations have invested heavily in the purchase and setup of integration software packages, with a significant portion of that investment spent on achieving a basic pre-competitive level of business integration. Liaison Technologies CEO Bob Renner refers to this basic level of connection as integration plumbing, and he believes it’s a perfect candidate for outsourcing. “Businesses shouldn’t spend a minute of their precious IT resources on the integration layer,” asserts Renner. “Connecting to data sources, acquiring data, consuming data, these are all mechanical processes that require very little knowledge of the underlying business.”

This is one of the key premises that Liaison’s cutting-edge cloud integration platform, ALLOY, is built on. ALLOY makes a clear distinction between the areas in which the customer brings the most value to the table, and the areas in which the service provider—in this...
case, Liaison—brings the most value. "Integration has a substantial learning curve—one that needn't be scaled when integration can be outsourced to a competent service provider such as Liaison," says Renner.

Providing integration operations on a turnkey, full-service basis is only half of ALLOY's value proposition. ALLOY also performs fundamental data management work in persisting, storing, securing, and putting the data into usable data models, while simultaneously giving customers broad controlled access to the data through a large number of APIs. "Any of the interesting work that is done with the data—inspection, manipulation, analysis—largely has to be done by the customer, as that is where the expertise needed to innovate within the business lies," says Renner. "ALLOY recognizes this by enabling meaningful data manipulation by the customer—in of self-service capacity."

According to Renner, by combining integration and data management into a unified, data-centric solution, C-level executives can build an environment that allows them to get out in front of one-of-a-kind systems, an environment in which they can quickly and efficiently plug in new applications, blend data, and proactively address security and compliance requirements. This has been a common theme throughout Liaison's 16-year history—finding innovative ways to address even changing integration and data management challenges.

The Shift to Data-Centric Integration

As cloud increases its foothold as the preferred delivery method for technology, the lines of distinction among historically fragmented patterns of integration are blurring. The use of distributed data centers, cloud platforms, and cloud applications have overrun the notion that application integration happens exclusively behind the firewall. "As we begin to see a broader articulation of integration replace and supersede point software solutions, there is tremendous opportunity for the organization to shift from an application-centric—and developer-centric—strategy to a data-centric strategy," says Renner.

Renner asserts that the fragmentation of the integration layer among A2A, B2B, ESB, MFT, and even API management tools has long favored and played into an application-centric—and developer-centric—integration model. Developers acquire specialized knowledge and become invaluable assets; as a result, C-level executives find themselves in a perpetual mode of developer appointment delivering across a wide variety of expertise silos, beholden to the needs of those building the integrations—and the many varied integration tools as well. "Unfortunately, at the end of the day, organizations are left with a very fragmented environment from which deliver data to the business and integrate with ecosystem partners," assesses Renner.

With integration collapsing into a single ubiquitous layer and platforms like ALLOY providing this layer as fully managed services, Renner believes that CIOs will be afforded some breathing room to make the fundamental changes to their organization's integration and data management operations that necessarily put the needs of data—not developers or their toolkits—at first. "In order to shift to a data-centric strategy, the CIO or IT executive in charge must focus IT on driving business innovation, rather than just optimization," emphasizes Renner.

ALLOY: Built for Flexibility

The Liaison ALLOY™ Platform is built upon microservices, an architecture design pattern that breaks complex applications into small, independent, and focused processes. These microservices are loosely coupled into three functional layers that work together to provide varying degrees of solution complexity and mass customization. ALLOY's integration layer is provided as fully managed services and is charged with the transformation and transmission of data across any business process. Its data management layer functions as a data lake, and supports writing, reading, and manipulation of data through APIs. The data visibility layer offers a real-time window into the activities of the other two layers, and integrates seamlessly with leading third party reporting and analytics tools. All platform activities inherit ALLOY's stringent cross-industry security and compliance profile.

"The power of Liaison's platform is that it was built to be use case and industry agnostic," says Renner. "It is being used to solve a wide array of integration and data management problems, including the ones businesses know about today and the ones that have not yet surfaced." One of Renner's favorite examples to illustrate this flexibility is an analytics use case in which Liaison blends clinical data and social media data on behalf of a large pharmaceutical organization so that it can continuously analyze sentiment for its drug portfolio. As a result, the customer is able to identify the regions in which its products resonate well and accordingly target marketing, sales, and development efforts.

Future Ready

Liaison has climbed to new heights with its ability to reinvent, and, at the same time, enhance organizational productivity. It owns a large part of its success to a supportive integration community and board of directors, several of whom are also the largest users of the platform. "Our unique corporate structure is a huge advantage and key differentiator," explains Renner. "We're able to invest in new technology to a degree that most of our competitors can't, and ALLOY is a perfect example of that."

As Renner sees it, legacy firms have stakeholder commitments—embedded software customer bases, private equity interests, or public shareholders—that are at odds with the huge investment in time and money a technology refresh requires. And startups, while more nimble, have a different set of problems: no customers and no experience delivering solutions at scale. "Liaison has figured out a way to provide the best of both worlds," asserts Renner. "Our starting point is not as a software vendor, so we don't have to reinvent our core business to bring our technology platform to market."

Liaison's hybrid culture of innovation and steady state delivery is reflected in the makeup of the team that conceived and, now, oversees ALLOY. Outside, fresh talent was brought in to work alongside seasoned insiders to marry fundamentally new knowledge with deep historic knowledge—an environment Renner thinks is critical to future success. "We've put an inordinate amount of effort into making our vision of ALLOY a reality," says Renner. "Now, in the face of a dynamic market and confusing software vendor messaging, it's time to stay the course, focus on maintaining the innovation that got us here, and show the rest of the world what ALLOY can do."
A sea-change is occurring in the way organizations are harnessing the potential of data and information for the past few decades, as it improves operations and interactions with customers and suppliers. With data flowing into enterprises from disparate sources at varying speeds and times, as the need for real-time business intelligence and the ability to leverage a wider variety of data resources has evolved and grown, so has the path of data integration. Catering to a broad spectrum of organizations—healthcare, retail, energy, banking and finance, data integration providers are driving innovation with their copious solutions. Whether it is designing integration processes for data warehouse loading, converting data between formats, deploying complex application integration scenarios, or integrating applications both on-premises and in the cloud, these solution providers are empowering companies to overcome their challenges, irrespective of their size.

The best practice for enterprise data integration is to use a high-end extract, transform and load (ETL) tool, which provides a single version of ‘truth’ for enterprise data—enhancing real productivity, secure and end-to-end data connectivity, and decision making.

Our selection panel evaluated hundreds of Data Integration solution providers based on their ability to assist CIOs and enterprise holders overcome the challenges in the sector and to help companies choose the perfect Data Integration Solution.

We present to you CIO Review’s 20 Most Promising Data Integration Solution Providers 2016.

**Liaison Technologies**

**Company:** Liaison Technologies

**Description:** From complex integration to data management to the new-age frontiers of big data, Liaison provides customers critical information needed to make better decisions

**Key Person:** Bob Renner

**Website:** liaison.com