WS-I CASE STUDY

FIREMAN'S FUND INSURANCE COMPANY TRANSFORMS ITS BUSINESS WITH INTEROPERABLE WEB SERVICES FROM WEBIFY

WEB SERVICES INTEROPERABILITY ORGANIZATION

WS-I Solves Business Problems

Interoperability among Web services is the key to unlocking their value.

The Web Services Interoperability Organization (WS-I) is an open industry organization chartered to establish Best Practices for Web services interoperability, for selected groups of Web services standards, across platforms, operating systems and programming languages. WS-I comprises a diverse community of Web services leaders from a wide range of companies and standards development organizations (SDOs). WS-I committees and working groups create Profiles and supporting Testing Tools based on Best Practices for selected sets of Web services standards. The Profiles and Testing Tools are available for use by the Web Services community to aid in developing and deploying interoperable Web services.

"Support for the Basic Profile is the baseline for interoperable Web services. Customers should demand that all of their Web services-enabled technology be compliant with the Basic Profile, and that in turn will lay the foundation of Web services to fulfill their promise and provide technology-independent interoperability," says Dan Sholler, vice president and research director at Gartner.

Read below to find out how Fireman's Fund Insurance Company (FFIC) and Webify, Inc. turned to the WS-I Basic Profile to help FFIC gain a competitive advantage.

FFIC Seeks Competitive Advantage

Fireman's Fund Insurance Company (FFIC) is a premier property and casualty insurance company that provides a diverse array of insurance products. An important characteristic of FFIC's business is that its products are sold through a national network of over 3,000 independent insurance agents. And, like most insurance carriers, FFIC has a broad assortment of legacy IT systems, offers a continuously changing array of product offerings and faces continuously changing regulatory requirements.

To better succeed in its competitive marketplace, FFIC was searching for solutions to improve its overall "ease of doing business" with independent insurance agents. It was particularly interested in automating billing and policy support and lowering call-center and other customer service costs. In addition, the winning solution had to offer cost-effective systems integration capabilities and remain flexible and manageable as business needs changed over time.

FFIC determined that an interoperable Web-services-enabled system, to be part of a broad program called the Enterprise Partner Initiative (EPI), was the answer. The system would directly integrate with the agents' Agency Management Systems, would reduce call center volume and would additionally provide valuable dashboard monitoring of agent transactions and business performance.

A critical component of FFIC's challenge was to ensure current and future interoperability of the EPI's Web services in a heterogeneous computing environment. After all, the goal was to ensure easy interaction between FFIC and 3,000 other entities. And, even within FFIC, the diversity of legacy platforms required careful attention to interoperability.

Webify's Web Services Solution

FFIC selected Webify, a WS-I Contributing Member, and its Insurance Collaboration Management Suite (ICM) to implement EPI. ICM consists of insurance industry standards-compliant Web services that automate, manage and optimize an insurance carrier's agency partner networks.

Webify integrated three powerful components for the project: FFIC's legacy assets, including mainframe computers, IMS billing software, SSO user authentication software and Pride agent authorization software; IBM Web services infrastructure components, including WebSphere Application Server, WebSphere Interchange Server, MQ and DB2; and Webify's Service-Oriented Business Applications, Business Services Catalog and PRISM engine.

"FFIC tasked Webify with delivering a 100% interoperable Web services solution, so WS-I Basic Profile compliance was our first requirement," says Akshay Sabhikhi, Director of Products, Webify Solutions. "That's second nature to us, because Webify performs WS-I conformance testing on every Web service we use or provide."

Webify used Mindreef's SOAPscope tool to ensure that every interface was WS-I Basic Profile compliant and used XMLSPY to create WS-I Basic Profile-compliant XML schemas and WSDLs.

WS-I Profiles Lock in the Benefits

FFIC has already had great results with its WS-I-compliant solution. They have seen and anticipate substantial cost savings, both as a result of the reduction of call center volume and through the expected reuse of the IT assets that constitute their legacy systems.

"The key to a successful Web services implementation is WS-I Basic Profile compliant interfaces, and we made that a strict requirement in our vendor selection," said Roger Cottman, Senior Director, FFIC. "By addressing WS-I conformance early, FFIC avoided interoperability problems both at launch and later, when new integration points with our legacy systems are identified."

Note: In August, 2006, Webify was acquired by IBM Corporation. Webify's software is now delivered as part of the IBM WebSphere portfolio.