How MiPaaS Helps Modernize Government

A managed integration platform-as-a-service (MiPaaS) solution alleviates the burdens and challenges of application integration.

Connecting business applications across the enterprise is more important today than ever before. Remote work, digital services, enterprise resource planning, automation, and the advent of artificial intelligence and other data-rich activities — these and other key trends are driving the need to coordinate applications. An integrated network of applications gives business users and decision-makers access to the information and systems they need to perform their jobs. It also allows constituents to move seamlessly through workflows for permit applications and benefit requests, helps HR and finance teams automate and streamline processes, and more.

Many state and local governments have turned toward integration platform-as-a-service (iPaaS) solutions to help with some of the complexity of enterprise application integration. But these solutions can have hidden costs and fail to address a number of management and technology burdens.

A new breed of solution — known as managed integration platform-as-a-service, or MiPaaS — is revolutionizing application integration for state and local agencies as well as commercial entities and other private sector enterprises. Using MiPaaS solutions, organizations can rapidly integrate applications into best-of-breed solutions, alleviate staffing burdens, minimize risks and more easily budget for costs now and in the future.

Too much to do, too little time

Even if they use iPaaS solutions, state and local governments face a number of challenges when integrating business applications:

Staffing and skills shortages. Attracting and retaining qualified IT staff is an ongoing challenge, especially in the public sector. Smaller municipalities may have as few as two or three team members to handle a wide spectrum of IT tasks. In most cases, these workers do not have the time, specialized training or knowledge of disparate integration tools to implement and manage today's increasingly complex integrations.

Time-consuming manual tasks. Manual file integrations consume staff time and potentially introduce errors and security vulnerabilities. In addition, manual integrations require IT teams to put files into shared folders, where they are more vulnerable to breaches and improper handling.

Rapid pace of SaaS upgrade cycles. As organizations increase their reliance on software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions, they increase the risk of improperly configured integrations and security vulnerabilities related to patches and upgrades. Few organizations have the staffing to keep up with today's SaaS upgrade cycles, or to monitor the status of API endpoints and SaaS integration changes over time.

Lengthy implementations. Solution delivery requires analysis of data integration points; solution research and design; development of connectors for integrating various applications and more. As organizations embrace hybrid work models and digital constituent services, the rapid implementation and delivery of critical services becomes more urgent than ever. However, many organizations underestimate the complexity of integration projects and the time it will take to execute them.

Need for ongoing maintenance and monitoring. Once a solution has gone live, the IT team must maintain and monitor it. Many organizations overlook the additional burden this new workload places on existing IT staff. They face the prospect of having to hire additional IT professionals, diverting staff away from more important tasks or deferring critical maintenance and updates.

Unpredictable costs. In-house integrations and traditional iPaaS solutions rarely present a clear view into the additional operational costs associated with them. Such hidden costs can include future upgrades, updates, management and support. In addition, organizations frequently need to invest in specialized tools — for example, to monitor the reliability and security of a finance application, or to integrate flat files with a product that uses an older or non-standards-based file transfer protocol.

MiPaaS as a game changer

To alleviate the burdens and challenges of application integration, forward-looking state and local governments are adopting a MiPaaS approach to manage integrations. MiPaaS is an integration platform that is fully implemented, hosted, maintained and supported by a partner or vendor. It accelerates and simplifies access to mission-critical data, applications, services and workflows by helping organizations more quickly and cost-effectively connect to and

integrate data sets and solutions that are siloed across their enterprise. MiPaaS solutions also strengthen data security by encrypting data both at rest and in transit and by eliminating manual tasks that may introduce vulnerabilities.

MiPaaS vs. iPaaS

It's important to distinguish between MiPaaS and iPaaS. Although iPaaS solutions simplify some integration tasks, they do not address many of the economic, technical and business challenges associated with integration. With iPaaS, an organization's IT team must still perform project discovery; implement, secure and test all connectors; monitor and manage compute capacity and bandwidth loads; and manage updates to various connectors. With an end-to-end MiPaaS solution, the services provider handles all these tasks and more. Enterprise application integration becomes a business conversation with definable, predictable costs rather than a complex, months-long technology initiative that requires software, hardware, training and a significant investment of IT staff's time.

How managed services change the game

Managed services providers typically distinguish themselves by having core expertise and hands-on experience with a wider range of use cases than can be cultivated in-house. They also have deeper, broader investments in technology, toolsets and best practices, and they frequently have pre-defined, proven solution sets for various types of endpoints. In many cases, the MiPaaS staff or automated processes can intercept and handle issues the organization's IT team would otherwise have to address. Such unforeseen issues could include obtaining an approval or manipulating a file to correctly format data in the midst of data migration or integration.

■ MiPaaS solutions deliver the following benefits:

Accelerate time to implementation and reduce integration risks by leveraging pre-defined, customizable business rules as well as dedicated, highly trained experts who already understand data integration processes, pain points and best practices for a variety of scenarios.

Reduce security and reliability risks associated with insufficient staff training, human error during manual data and file interactions, and inconsistent monitoring and maintenance.

Lower staff overhead related to implementation, monitoring and management; free up staff to focus on higher-value tasks.

Automate workflows for traditionally manual, labor-intensive processes such as notifications, approvals and data formatting.

Enable a single source of truth for reporting and decision-making by aggregating data (in near real time) from multiple, heterogenous applications into a single, consolidated data lake.

Promote "right size" investments by allowing organizations to easily create their own best-of-breed solutions instead of procuring enterprise resource planning or other large-scale solutions that exceed their needs.

Make costs more predictable by offering transparent pricing models such as a fixed monthly cost and offloading costs associated with hiring staff to handle less predictable events such as incident management and support.

■ Conclusion

To ensure a successful relationship with a MiPaaS provider, organizations should start by verifying the vendor can provide connectivity into a single source of data for enterprise data collection and analytics; host the MiPaaS platform in a government, private or single-tenant cloud environment and in compliance with government regulations for privacy and security; and guarantee services levels that ensure business continuity during normal operations as well as unexpected events. Organizations should also carefully examine pricing models and agreements to determine exactly what is and isn't covered by the MiPaaS provider.

Working with the right MiPaaS provider helps organizations transform and modernize their services and operations by enabling them to more easily, securely and cost-effectively connect to all the valuable data within their enterprise.

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