

Accenture's View on Open Source Podcast Transcript



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Host

Welcome to the Accenture Systems Integration Consulting podcast series on Accelerating SI. Through a variety of hot topics in systems integration, we will explore how to achieve high performance through reliable, high-quality solutions for accelerated business results.

Today we will hear from Tony Roby, the global lead for Accenture's Open Source capability. Open Source – which generally pertains to software source code that is available to the general public and does not have licensing restrictions that limit use, modification, or redistribution – is rapidly gaining traction in the enterprise world. As companies are continually

looking to do more with less, adopting open source software can deliver real business value— in addition to greater flexibility, lower IT costs and expanded opportunities for innovation.

Tony, thank you for joining us today.

Tony Roby

You're welcome. I'm glad to be here.

Host

I'd like to start off by asking you what value or benefit Open Source can offer enterprises today?

Tony Roby

Open Source represents a significant shift in enterprise IT because it enables companies to obtain robust, reliable and proven alternatives to the commercial middleware that they're using at substantially lower cost. Open Source doesn't have any up-front license fees and it really is paid for using an ongoing subscription model. And those subscription costs, which cover maintenance and training, can be 70-90 percent less than those for typical commercial options.

So for an enterprise, Open Source allows really a lowering of up-front capital investment, it allows you to shift expenses from capital to operational budgets. And it allows enterprises therefore to devote funds to what they know works and discard approaches that don't succeed. So this freedom allows organizations to get much better flexibility.

So certainly in this economy, if you increase the use of open source software, CIOs can reduce the maintenance fees that they are paying on existing software and they can start to shift their environments towards a lower cost Open Source platform and then position themselves to potentially renegotiate their commercial licenses once they come up for renewal. It also allows them to continue to get work done – so projects that may stall because they don't have the right software and they can't afford the right software can really start now with free Open Source without incurring those upfront software costs.

Also, the Open Source community development model really means that the features that are most needed by the community are really the ones that get built and enhanced first. And that happens often more quickly, than would happen in a commercial environment. This is true even for companies that are developing and licensing their software as open source. In fact their revenue, which

is the subscriptions that they get is really based on delivering the value that the clients are looking for.

So as an example, Accenture collaborated with the French Revenue Agency and this was one of the largest commercial implementations of a system based on open source. It was a migration actually from a commercial software platform and the agency needed new applications that would allow taxpayers to securely and easily declare their taxes online. So what they did was build a solution was entirely constructed on open source middleware and operating systems and it went live in 2007. About 7 million users declared their income online and it made a success for the Agency and Accenture. And it's a European reference for tax-declaration applications.

Host

Thank you Tony. What are some of the biggest challenges clients must overcome in the Open Source space?

Tony Roby

While the advantages of Open Source are real, organizations need to ensure that they have some safeguards in place to address three key challenges.

First, open source can be readily downloaded from the internet and because of that and because it evolves very differently to commercial software, it's very easy to get multiple different variants of the same open source software introduced into the enterprise. So that raises integration challenges, support challenges and because you can just download it from the internet, all of this can happen under the radar of IT operations.

Secondly, open source changes very rapidly so the benefit of the community model is that you get the functionality that you need very quickly but that comes at a cost of rapidly changing software. Also, communities provide no guarantees of support.

And then thirdly, the interdependencies between different open source products and all of these are licensed under a whole variety of licensing and can result in both integrations issues and also in conflicts with the software licenses. So really the big challenge around open source for a large enterprise is making sure you can manage it. So, unmanaged open source can create some very real operational challenges in terms of costs and complexity, as well as potentially introducing some legal risks. And Accenture has found that many organizations are not properly addressing these crucial factors things like version control, license management support, and nor are they creating formal programs for managing Open Source in the enterprise. So we believe the biggest challenge for our clients to get the value of open source is to put in place proper governance.

Host

What about the idea that Open Source is free?

Tony Roby

Well, that's a good question. Open source can be downloaded for free, but it's not free of risk, cost or obligation. The costs really revolve around the hardware, the management of the software, many related training that's required to deploy and run the open source software. So it's not free from the total cost of ownership perspective. The companies that use open source really need to understand the obligation imposed by the licenses. So the ability to obtain the software for free is somewhat traded off by the need to comply with the license. Now in some of those licenses, require that you to actually distribute source code. So if you modify the code or if you actually incorporate that code into an overall solution, in certain ways you have to distribute the source code for that solution to an open source community.

This only occurs when you are actually making the software available outside of your enterprise, but it's something that trips people up. Other obligations may require you to clearly state in documentation or in other areas of your software that you're using open source, so attribution is an important obligation. And clearly understanding the obligations imposed by the various licenses, and there's over 20 different licenses that are broadly recognized as open source. And then reconciling those obligations with the scenarios in which you're using the Open Source is really a fundamental requirement for using and benefiting from open source software.

To take full advantage of being able to implement open source comprehensively and successfully, organizations really need to have this governance structure in place so that they can address up front how open source will be integrated within the overall IT strategy and then how different projects use that open source making sure that the licenses and the scenarios under which the open source is being used is really acceptable to the company. So governing the use of the licenses is really the trade off for being able to obtain the free software.

Host

What do you recommend to your clients to help get the most out of Open Source?

Tony Roby

The primary thing I recommend them to do is use it. But first of all, what I'd say within that is take a portfolio view of your applications and infrastructure. Look for those applications that are running on expensive, proprietary infrastructure and middleware and could be migrated to less expensive, yet just as capable, open source alternatives. Look to understand the value of an application and determine whether its commensurate

with the cost of the infrastructure and middleware on which it's running.

There's a lot of opportunity in most organizations to migrate large portions of their applications onto open source. But to do that, once you decide to migrate, or decide to implement new applications on open source you'll need to do that deliberately and to do that, establish integrated open source stacks that support the particular application styles. Those stacks can be assembled, integrated and tested by IT so that you have a fully integrated, reliable top to bottom stack and then they can roll those out in a supportive fashion to your environment. So do this deliberately rather than piece meal, project by project.

And then on top of all of that, make sure you establish Open Source governance to provide the necessary structures, controls and management required to manage the open source in your organization. So that would include the license management the set up of support capabilities and also the ability to interact with the communities that you need.

Also, lastly I wouldn't just focus on custom java applications, which is primarily where open source is played. You should look at the entire open source domain. There's plenty of open source available that's very capable that deals with enterprise service, and Service Oriented Architecture. That deals with server virtualization, enterprise portals, content management, business intelligence and reporting, and the list goes on, so cast the net wide.

Host

Thank you Tony.

Tony Roby

Thank you. It was my pleasure.

Host

With that, I would like to close this podcast and thank you all for listening. To find out more about our Systems Integration Consulting services, please visit www.accenture.com/si.

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