

VAI DELIVERS ONE GUI FOR ALL DEVICES WITH S2K SMART CENTER

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VAI last week unveiled S2K Smart Center, a new HTML5 screen that's designed to be the only interface users need to access all VAI applications. In addition to giving users a single, consistent way to get to their applications, S2K Smart Center also delivers social media capabilities, such as email, chat, and forums, by providing access to IBM's Smart Cloud for Business.

There's been a colossal amount of change to the enterprise IT landscape over the past few years. Not only are business users demanding the capability to access applications from mobile devices, but they're becoming accustomed to communicating via social media constructs. Add in the disruptive nature of the cloud delivery model, and it's no wonder that software vendors haven't gone crazy—or worse, bankrupt—trying to keep up.

VAI is one of the more forward-looking ERP software vendors

in the IBM i community. The Ronkonkoma, New York, company has been ahead of the curve when it comes to delivering mobile interfaces to its business applications. It's also been at the forefront of software as a service (SaaS) and the cloud delivery method.

Now, the company has combined all three elements—mobile, cloud, and social media—with one deliverable: the S2K Smart Center.

S2K Smart Center is the last GUI that VAI customers will ever need. It provides configurable, role-based access to all VAI products. That includes (most of) the core functionality of S2K Enterprise, as well as the add-on products and capabilities that surround the ERP, like S2K Analytics and S2K Force.

The product is written in AJAX and HTML5, and is designed to work the same on every device, no matter which Web browser they use. It's a product of VAI's

responsive design initiative, and is designed to automatically adapt the screen by detecting what device a user is signing in with. That means a user who moves from a 22-inch LCD screen on her desktop won't be disappointed when she signs in from her iPhone and its smallish 4-inch screen.

What's more, S2K Smart Center provides an OEM copy of IBM's Smart Cloud for Business, a cloud-based service that provides users with email, IM, calendaring, scheduling, and online meeting functionality. Smart Cloud for Business is the cloud-based version of IBM Connections, an on-premise application that allows organizations to provide social media capabilities to their employees.

The integration of social media capabilities into the RPG-based ERP suite will pave the way to more advances in the future. "ERP is more than just your basic orders and manufacturing, product



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scheduling and shop floor. It is having the need to be interfaced into social networking or all the other applications that you might have, without having to go through separate entry points," Beasley says.

"We've not only used S2K Smart Center to integrate our analytics and other external components, but it also gives us a platform at the UI and controller levels for future enhancements to come down the road," he adds. "Because this stuff we do never stops."

For ERP companies, developing a

single Web app for all devices is a better approach than the native app approach, says VAI CIO Kevin Beasley. "We see ERPs being deployed on Web apps, while native apps, on smart phones, etc, tend to be for specific functions," he says. "We're not going to sit and code for all the different types of [devices] we need to deploy on," he said, adding that the AJAX approach "was a substantial amount of work."

VAI already had some of these capabilities in its S2K Enterprise Portal, which was also powered by IBM WebSphere Portal. But there are substantial differences

between the two products, not only with the AJAX-based Web interface, but in the role-based configuration, too.

This capability in S2K Smart Center enables a UI screen to automatically change depending on the role of the user. Users will only see the tabs in S2K that they need to do their jobs. "If they're an AP clerk, they're only going to see the tabs that are applicable to them," Beasley said. Users can also make some changes to the final appearance of the screen, based on their own preferences.

