

Webinar Q & A – “Transition to SaaS: The Challenges and Solutions”

Aspire Systems, an Outsourced Product Development firm committed to providing end-to-end product development services to ISVs including SaaS enabling services, recently conducted a webinar on “Transition to SaaS: The Challenges and Solutions”. Eminent speakers – Dani Shomron of Calia Consulting and Janaki Jayachandran, Aspire Systems shared their insights on business and technical consideration in making a SaaS Transition.

Aspire witnessed excellent response for this webinar and received several interesting questions from the participants. Due to time-bound limitation, the speakers could not respond to all the questions. We have drafted answers to all key questions for the benefit of participants as well as for other Software providers.

[Q] Do you recommend an offline system at client end to reduce risk of connectivity issues?

[A] The need for offline capabilities are purely determined by the business needs of the end users. In particular, if the product is close to mission critical or continuous core operations (ex: health care products), then the need availability of the system increases significantly. As part of satisfying the availability parameter; solutions like offline system, local redundant system (a local server which can act in an intranet mode), etc. should to be considered. However, the number of cases for such high-end availability requirements might be less. It is suggested to look at the SLAs as some of them might also lead you to provide this feature. One has to measure the value that it brings to the end user before trying to bring it on top of the priority list.

[Q] How to achieve Federated SSO and how to customize integration requirements?

[A] SSO – Single Sign On – is an authorization concept to provide a common authentication framework across diversified systems within an intranet/organization. Federated SSO takes it to the next level where diversified systems across internet/organizations can use a common mechanism for identity management. To implement Federated SSO, there is a need to have a Federation Server in place. There are several Federation servers available in various technologies. It is necessary to choose the one that fits your product and technology stack.

Integration requirements should be identified and designed in first place in order to customize it. There are lot of integration factors that needs to be considered during the design stage of your product like,

- ✍ In bound or Out bound or both(2 way integration)
- ✍ Real-time(synchronous) integration or offline integration (asynchronous)
- ✍ Volume of data exchange/bandwidth requirements
- ✍ Concurrency support
- ✍ Standard compliances

Once there is a scalable and flexible design that considers all the integration factors then customizing/implementing your specific integration needs become much easier and hassle free.



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[Q] How do you deal with scalability? What sort of redundancy needs to be in place? What performance would users expect?

[A] Performance is current and Scalability is future. The expectations around performance are determined by few factors,

- ✍ Demographics of the user base – primarily age group
- ✍ Type of application – Enterprise (used by organizations), Consumer (used by individuals)
- ✍ Interactivity - graphics oriented, text based, Click through, etc.
- ✍ Usage of system – core activity (used almost continuously all through the day, Ex: trading systems), non-core (used on need basis, Ex: online booking)

The above factors can help you in determining the expectations around performance on your system. For example, the age group of 15-30 typically expects a faster performance, particularly if it's a consumer product.

Performance is much easier to handle compared to Scalability, because you know what is expected. Scalability, from a textbook definition, is about the capability of the system to expand itself for future needs. This leads to few tricky questions,

- ✍ How futuristic you want to be?
- ✍ How much you want to spend today for your future needs?
- ✍ How do you even know about future requirements, and how good can that be guessed?

Looking at the pace of technology changes happening at this moment, it may not be a good idea to plan much for future. Today IaaS plays a key role in this scalability aspect, as it almost takes it out of the equation when it comes to hardware side. Hence, the key is to strike a right balance between time/budget and future expectations

Redundancy is a question of Availability. Redundancy is basically a back-up when something goes wrong. 1) It could be in the form of internet lines, where lines could be obtained from 2 different vendors enabling automatic switch over. 2) It could also be the server setup. Ex: Load balancing, where even if one server goes down the other nodes in the balancer setup will still be able to serve.

One should also remember the cost factor involved in providing such an infrastructure setup and here IaaS becomes attractive because they support most of these requirements.

[Q] How do you feel "Rich Internet Applications" will affect traditional SaaS products that run in a browser?

[A] Rich Internet Applications do not affect SaaS products in anyways. Infact, RIA is a boon for SaaS products as they enrich the application and bring them close to a desktop application. SaaS is a concept that allows the software to be available over internet. However, the technologies than be used to achieve is completely open-ended. Choosing the right technology depends on lot of factors including the type of product, interactivity required with the user, usability, response time, etc.

For example, if the current product is a desktop based and involves high interactivity with the user, then you may want to retain the same usability in your SaaS model, in which case choosing RIA technologies like Flash, MS Silver Light, etc. comes in to picture.



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In general, there is lot of technology improvements that increases the usability and presentation aspects of web applications. Ex: Web 2.0 compliance, AJAX, moo tools, etc. Hence, the technical architect of the product should decide the technologies that will benefit the product as well as the end users.

[Q] We currently license and deliver our software engineering automation meta-tool. We charge based on activity (code analysis, re-engineering, or translation), languages involved, and lines of code processed. We would need excellent security to protect proprietary information needed to use it. What would this look like in the SaaS model?

[A] Let us look at some of the parameters that should be considers in this case for a SaaS model:

Software Distribution - This is one of most challenging part in an on-premise, and will save a lot of time and money in a SaaS model.

Activity based billing – This requires metering the usage of the functionalities. In a SaaS model, this is addressed through a metering module, which continuously keeps track of the usage in a central system. In addition to this, the Billing module can help in generating and tracking the invoices as well.

Protection of proprietary information – Encrypting the libraries and other materials that can potentially expose the IP details is needed. This is much easier to handle in a SaaS model, as the exposure to code and libraries are almost minimum to NIL compared to an on-premise model where the entire setup and code is available.

Processing involved – There are certain activities that require good amount of processing. This is not an issue in an on-premise model, but in a SaaS version this could lead to performance and bandwidth issues. However, there are mechanisms like smart clients to overcome this issue.

Hence, overall this scenario definitely favors SaaS model.

Thanks for all your questions!

[Click here](#) to view the presentation

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