

DATABASE

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APPLICATIONS INSIGHT



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Oracle's "Cold" Fusion?

In 1989, two chemists from the University of Utah announced that they had apparently succeeded in creating a "cold fusion" reaction. The prospect of achieving fusion reactions at room temperature--rather than at solar temperatures--seemed miraculous. But, the initial results could not be reliably confirmed and cold fusion is regarded by many as pseudoscience.

Last year, Oracle made its own, almost equally impressive, Fusion announcement. The acquisitions of JD Edwards, PeopleSoft and Siebel left Oracle with four ERP/CRM frameworks, each with its own extensibility architecture and middleware. Project Fusion is Oracle's master plan to integrate these four offerings into a coherent single offering which would also serve as the foundation for the next generation architecture for Oracle's Application suite.

Oracle has made it clear that this integration would be functional, not technical: while features of PeopleSoft, Siebel and JD Edwards would be incorporated into this next generation, their specific technologies might not. The Fusion initiative is over a year old now,

so we are in a better position to evaluate if this fusion will be a real breakthrough or a "cold fusion" disappointment.

We still don't know how existing functionality will map into new features, but you can be sure that Oracle will do everything in its power to create an application that supports all major workflows and features from the existing applications. To do otherwise would be to invite existing users to migrate to another application. But Project Fusion feels a little "colder," however, on the issue of customizations. Each of the legacy systems allows users to customize the product and each provides a programming/scripting language for that purpose. Migrating these customizations is a key concern.

Many of us suspected that direct migration of legacy customizations into the next generation Fusion framework would not be possible. Maintaining four or five completely independent customization frameworks would entail a huge amount of work and could arguably harm the quality of the Fusion application by increasing complexity.

Oracle has now confirmed that lega-

cy customization frameworks will not carry through into the new Fusion framework. At some point, customers with extensive customizations will need to assess whether new features in the next generation of Oracle EBS render those customizations unnecessary or if they need to re-implement these customizations within the Fusion framework. Oracle concedes that for customers with extensive customizations this may cause "challenges."

It would be a mistake to think that customizations are a challenge only for Oracle's customers: Oracle's biggest risk in the Fusion strategy is that customers will choose to migrate to another framework altogether rather than undergo the effort of migrating to Fusion. You can bet that SAP will be planning a strategy to exploit this possibility. For Oracle, that would be a very cold outcome for Project Fusion.

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