

ZAPTHINK ZAPNOTE™

SNAPXT PIONEERING ENTERPRISE MASHUPS

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Abstract

An important goal of any Service-Oriented Architecture initiative is to enable business users to compose Services into flexible composite applications that can provide ongoing business value in the face of changing requirements. Meeting this need is the emerging concept of the *mashup*, which empowers users to create such composite applications in a dynamic manner by leveraging Web technologies. Most of today's mashups, however, are experimental in nature, and provide little business value.

To bring business value to the nascent mashup market, SnapXT offers users the ability to create enterprise-quality mashups that assemble diverse IT assets and data sources in a flexible, declarative fashion. What makes SnapXT different is its multiple interface metaphors that simplify application creation and empower the users of those applications. As a result, SnapXT is pioneering enterprise mashups through their tool that offers true business value to companies looking to build Service-Oriented Business Applications.

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Mashups and Service-Oriented Business Applications

At the leading edge of both the Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) and collaborative, richly-enabled Web application (Web 2.0) worlds is a new form of application: the *mashup*. According to Wikipedia, a mashup is a Web site or Web application that seamlessly combines content from more than one source into an integrated experience. Many of today's mashups are little more than fun proofs-of-concept, combining consumer applications like Google Maps with various online data sources to display information within a geographical context. In spite of their experimental nature today, however, mashups are a harbinger of a new approach to building applications, giving users the ability for users to create new applications by extending online applications. This change is so profound, in fact, that it represents a new meaning of the word "application" itself.

From the business perspective, mashups represent a new class of user-centric capabilities that enable a broad range of new uses for software beyond the original intent of the software creator, including the collaborative, social capabilities at the core of Web 2.0. In fact, as SOA becomes the established approach to architecture and exposing IT assets in the enterprise, the focus on Services will shift from providers to consumers of Services. After this tipping point, enterprises will care just as much about how they use Services as they do about creating and exposing Services for consumption.

For mashups to become of value to the enterprise, therefore, they must leverage SOA to become Service-Oriented Business Applications, or SOBAs. What makes loosely-coupled, composable Services in SOBAs useful is not simply their machine-processable interfaces, but also interfaces they expose for human consumption. Furthermore, Services must be composable not only in theory, but in practice. Clearly, it doesn't matter how useful a SOBA appears to be if the consumers of that SOBA prevent users from taking advantage of the flexibility that Service-orienting the application promised in the first place. We are now approaching that tipping point as Service consumers with rich interfaces increasingly enable mashups and other collaborative capabilities of software. Enterprises are now realizing that they need good human interfaces as well as system interfaces to make Services both useful and broadly consumable.

SnapXT: A Pioneering Mashup Tool

The creation of mashups is largely of interest only to techies today. While mashup creators don't need the technical chops of, say, a seasoned Java developer, creating mashups is still out of reach of most businesspeople, even reasonably technically savvy ones. As a result, there is an emerging need for a mashup tool that is appropriate for a knowledge worker—a business user with some technical savvy—to use. SnapXT is one of the first tools to enter this market for mashup tools accessible to business analysts and other knowledge workers.

To fill this need, Chicago-based SnapXT's eponymous tool enables users to build a composite view of a heterogeneous mix of data and available Services by essentially snapping together

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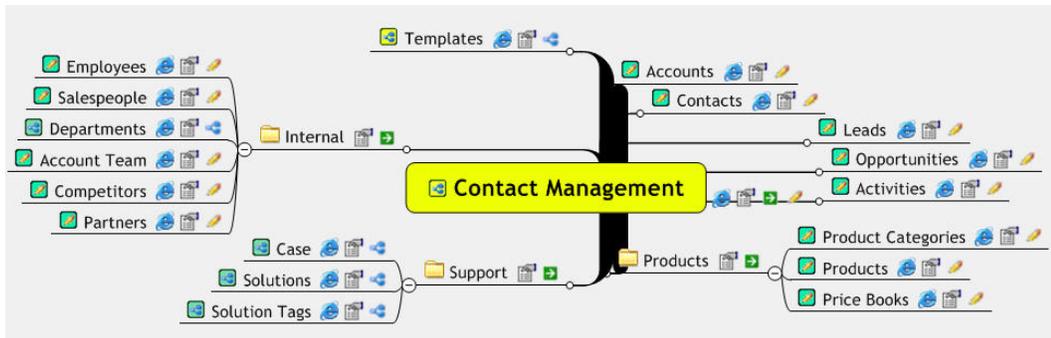
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all of the elements, regardless of what they are or where they come from. Elements can include cells in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, a field in a database record, the output of a Web Service, a discussion forum thread, a Microsoft Word document, a link to a Google map, etc. Elements can also include actions, like sending a notification, doing a calculation, or running a process.

What makes SnapXT stand out from the other entrants into the nascent mashup tools market is the variety of mashup creation visual metaphors that SnapXT provides. In particular, SnapXT enables the creation of mashups through the use of mind mapping technology from MindManager. SnapXT allows users to create mind maps in MindManager that can generate a Web site automatically in SnapXT. SnapXT extends this tool to the server and adds additional server-based capability, including Web deployment, user management, and access to any JDBC-compliant data. The SnapXT mind map interface is shown in Figure I below:

Figure I: SnapXT's Mind Map Interface



Source: SnapXT

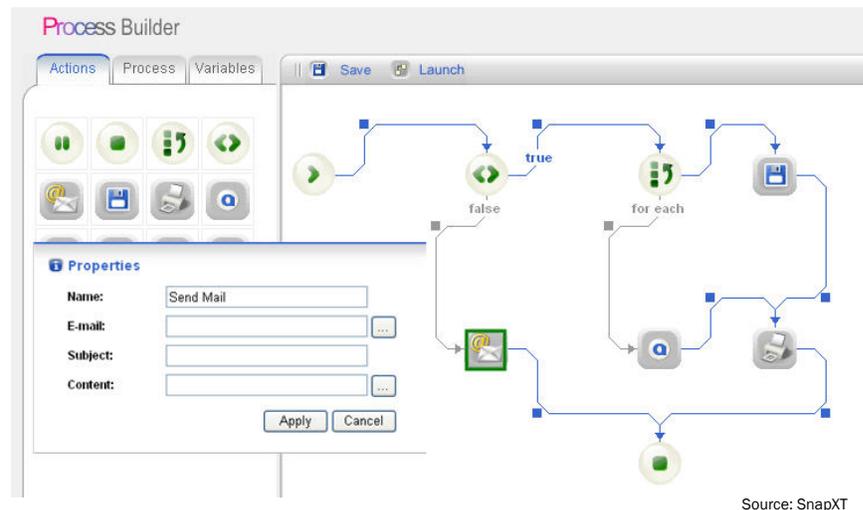
Figure I above illustrates a contact management application that a user has developed by building a mind map that links together the various elements of the composite application. SnapXT then automatically generates a fully functional Web site based upon the information contained in the mind map, as shown in Figure II:

Figure II: Mashup Generated Automatically from Mind Map

Source: SnapXT

The mind map interface, however, is only one of several different mashup creation metaphors that SnapXT provides. SnapXT is a declarative tool, enabling the creation of mashups via the configuration of metadata within the tool. SnapXT also provides a graphical process building tool that gives users a visual representation of a mashup as a process orchestration—an essential capability for any SOBA tool. SnapXT's process orchestration interface is shown in Figure III below:

Figure III: SnapXT's Process Builder Interface



In addition to flexible mashup creation environments that follow different visual metaphors, the user environment also supports multiple metaphors, as well. SnapXT enables users to take data from multiple disparate sources and display them visually, as a calendar, mind map, bar chart, spreadsheet, or Web page, for example. In fact, users of SnapXT mashups can accomplish the following:

- Identify individual elements, including data, information, Web Services, and links that fit together and put them in a form, and then link such forms together.
- Filter, search and sort information. View that information in calendars, charts, and other formats. Send the information via email, print it, or export it.
- Include spreadsheet calculations directly in forms. Embed updatable spreadsheets in mashups.
- Build Web pages with these mashup forms and build entire Web sites by selecting layouts and formats for navigating between pages.
- Build processes by defining actions on elements. Control the sequence of actions with rules. Attach processes to a links on a page or in a form.
- Build community capabilities into mashups by sharing elements, forms, pages and Web sites. Integrate mashups with solutions built by other people. Build and change workgroup and enterprise applications over time.

SnapXT Customer Example

One SnapXT customer in the global market research industry uses the tool to create virtual conference rooms to simulate various forms of collaboration and communication across

several countries. SnapXT's enables the customer to create Web sites that incorporate static content, active pages, forms and interactive spreadsheets. This customer leverages SnapXT's ability to enable non-programmers to build sophisticated Web sites.

In less than one hour, this customer built a working version of a global portal application that provided a form where each record represented the current status of each country. The user saw an aggregate of all countries while each specific country saw only its status. This portal also provided an archive of instruction material, and a form for global communication, where individuals in different countries could post a question and the customer could post the response. This application also enabled individuals to upload pictures. This customer used SnapXT to handle both running processes as well as *ad hoc* issues, including the tracking of proposals, collections, sales leads, and job costs, using online spreadsheets.

The ZapThink Take

The choice of the word "snap" as the core of SnapXT's brand is well-chosen, as this tool enables users to create new applications by simply snapping together diverse elements. Adding to this mashup capability is the fact that SnapXT brings together the roles of application creator and user, as the tool is well within reach of the knowledge worker to use. Further adding to the mashup capabilities of SnapXT is the range of visual metaphors available for both the creators of the mashups as well as the users of those applications.

The mashup tools space is only now beginning to form, because the Services that form the building blocks of mashups that provide true business value are only recently available. SnapXT helps to bridge the gap between today's Services and tomorrow's enterprise mashups by incorporating data and functionality from a wide range of sources, including mind maps and spreadsheets. As a result, SnapXT is ready to provide value to organizations today, either for rapid prototyping, flexible SOBA creation, or for creating dynamic Web sites that leverage diverse data both within and outside the organization.

SnapXT Features

SnapXT

Overview:

SnapXT leverages diverse data sources and Services to provide flexible Service-Oriented Business Applications and enable users to create enterprise-class mashups out of existing IT assets. SnapXT uses multiple interface metaphors for both application creators and users, including mind maps, spreadsheets, and process orchestrations.

Features:

- Accesses a comprehensive set of data sources and Services, including databases, Web Services, Web pages, Web sites, processes, and collaboration environments.
- Integrates with Microsoft Excel spreadsheets on the server.
- Integrates with MindManager mind map tool.
- Fully declarative environment enabling knowledge workers to add additional functionality without additional complexity for the user.

Value Proposition:

- Customers use SnapXT to build quick, lightweight applications that users can easily extend and customize. SnapXT provides all the basic functionality users need to build mashups that provide business value.

Profile: SnapXT

May 2006

Funding:

Privately held

CEO:

Jonathan Sapir

Employees:

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Product:

SnapXT

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- *Service Orientation Market Trends Report (ZTR-WS110)*
- *DataDirect Technologies: Deploying XML Data Services with Stylus Studio ZapNote (ZTZN-1181)*



About ZapThink, LLC

ZapThink is an IT advisory and analysis firm that provides trusted advice and critical insight into the architectural and organizational changes brought about by the movement to XML, Web Services, and Service Orientation. We provide our three target audiences of IT vendors, service providers and end-users a clear roadmap for standards-based, loosely coupled distributed computing – a vision of IT meeting the needs of the agile business.

ZapThink helps its customers in three ways: by helping companies understand IT products and services in the context of Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) and the vision of Service Orientation, by providing guidance into emerging best practices for Web Services and SOA adoption, and by bringing together all our audiences into a network that provides business value and expertise to each member of the network.

ZapThink provides market intelligence to IT vendors and professional services firms that offer XML and Web Services-based products and services in order to help them understand their competitive landscape, plan their product roadmaps, and communicate their value proposition to their customers within the context of Service Orientation.

ZapThink provides guidance and expertise to professional services firms to help them grow and innovate their services as well as promote their capabilities to end-users and vendors looking to grow their businesses.

ZapThink also provides implementation intelligence to IT users who are seeking guidance and clarity into the best practices for planning and implementing SOA, including how to assemble the available products and services into a coherent plan.

ZapThink's senior analysts are widely regarded as the "go to analysts" for XML, Web Services, and SOA by vendors, end-users, and the press. Respected for their candid, insightful opinions, they are in great demand as speakers, and have presented at conferences and industry events around the world. They are among the most quoted industry analysts in the IT industry, and their recent book, *Service Orient or Be Doomed!*, is the leading book on the business concept of Service Orientation.

ZapThink was founded in October 2000 and is headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland. Its customers include Global 1000 firms and government organizations, as well as many emerging businesses. Its analysts have worked at such firms as IDC, marchFIRST, and ChannelWave, and have sat on the working group committees for standards bodies such as RosettaNet, UDDI, and ebXML.

Call, email, or visit the ZapThink Web site to learn more about how ZapThink can help you to better understand how SOA will impact your business or organization.

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