



# True Integration Can Revolutionize Our Industry

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To read today's trade publications, one would think integration is the financial services industry's Holy Grail. It could be the latest M&A activity by a major bank, a trendy new product or, in its most concrete form, the trials of a financial institution attempting to link two disparate systems. Integration – or the lack of it – seems to

touch everything we do.

In its most basic form, though, integration is simply tying together two or more processes. The concept seems to break down as we add more layers of complexity. Change one line of code in an application and you might just have to tweak every piece of software that touches it.

However, there is a perfect storm of technology – service-oriented architecture – that's changing everything in the way of integration. One publication called service-oriented architecture an architectural style whose goal is to achieve a loose coupling of interacting software agents, but the concept operates at simpler levels than that.

You can find service-oriented architecture in many familiar settings, including your living room. Place a DVD into a player hooked to your television and you'll be able to enjoy a movie. The same DVD potentially can be played on your personal computer, in your minivan or on a portable unit. Unlike the object-oriented architecture of many software programs, the DVD does not rely on a system that binds data and processing together. If it did, every DVD would come with its own player.

Many companies, including Fiserv, are using service-oriented architecture to link systems that previously could talk only through custom integration. It's a time- and money-saving process that is making a real difference throughout the business world. For possibly the first time, we now have the ability to add a new, possibly disparate application without taking apart everything that touches it.

That is certainly progress, but we at Fiserv see far greater benefit to service-oriented architecture. This technology quite simply can create real value far beyond the sum of the original parts.

Fiserv is using service-oriented architecture as part of its adopted Fiserv Integration Initiative to integrate nearly every product we own and create seamless links with outside products. We began this initiative with an admittedly self-serving objective – integrating products across our vast store of technology in ways that didn't require customized interfaces. Along the way, though, we're unlocking value that previously didn't exist.

In just one example, we're integrating our banking systems

with those in our health plan management business to offer health savings accounts (HSAs) with a decided difference. Sure, they're wrapped with all the regulatory reporting requirements and the usual payments functionality, but they also offer rich healthcare content – comparative costs for medical care and prescription drugs, calculators to determine proper coverage and much more – so that consumers can make informed choices when purchasing medical care.

In the case of these HSAs, there is inherent functionality in each of the systems – including core banking, electronic funds transfer and health plan management – tapped to provide the final product. However, the sum of this technology is greater than all of the individual parts, creating a product that bank customers can truly appreciate.

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To be more than just a link in a chain, service-oriented architecture should have some definite goals – chief among them creating value such as that achieved by the Fiserv HSA. Beyond that immediate value, service-oriented architecture can help to create a consistent look and feel so that new applications can be added without incurring significant new costs, whether in training or customization. It can finally reduce the entry into systems of redundant information. Maybe more importantly, it can provide an opportunity for banks, or any business, to re-engineer business processes.

Some say service-oriented architecture could be used to provide almost Google-like capabilities to help build a 360-degree profile of a customer. With systems inherently linked, information – both from within your bank and from the outside world – could flow together and allow you to provide outstanding customer service with little more than the touch of a button.

Technology without a purpose is interesting, but ultimately irrelevant. Service-oriented architecture that touches lives at all levels provides easier, more efficient and more cost-effective alternatives for all. That's been the purpose of technology from the start and one Fiserv attempts to further with every innovation it offers clients. ☺