

REPORT REPRINT

Nintex's workflow and content automation platform bolstered by new partnership ecosystems

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At its February 2017 global customer event in New Orleans, Nintex displayed its latest product improvements and extended its reach to a broader range of IT ecosystems. It enhanced partnerships with six industry-leading cloud platform companies – Adobe, Box, DocuSign, Dropbox, Microsoft and Salesforce. Each collaborated with Nintex to connect its offerings to Nintex’s newly minted Workflow Cloud. In January, Nintex announced general availability of the Workflow Cloud, positioning it as a pioneering cloud-based workflow and content automation platform.

THE 451 TAKE

The Nintex Workflow Cloud is the vendor’s new flagship offering. It represents a low-code platform that enables workflow and content automation capabilities. Low-code environments have become popular topics. They are designed to appeal to less-technical ‘citizen developers’ and ‘citizen integrators.’ As the name implies, low-code environments obviate the need for developers to use one or more programming languages to write software. They use visual models, prepackaged templates and graphical design techniques with drag-and-drop tooling to build or integrate software. In essence, they enable software and integrations to be ‘configured’ rather than ‘coded.’ They specialize in process-oriented or content-centric rapid application development and continuous deployment because they include both development and runtime capabilities. We believe low-code environments like that offered by Nintex are likely to become staple technology for applications development. They can even serve as a ‘poor man’s’ DevOps approach for enterprises seeking to accelerate the rate at which they develop and deploy new content-centric business process applications.

CONTEXT

Privately held Nintex is headquartered in Bellevue, Washington. The workflow-automation vendor employs a staff of nearly 400; its product development team is in Bellevue and Melbourne. Other offices are located in Irvine, California, Dubai, London, Tokyo and Malaysia. Nintex says it has more than 7,000 customers globally. Macquarie Capital is an investor, and in March 2013, Updata Partners and TA Associates led a \$135m funding round. Nintex is operating at roughly a \$100m annual revenue run rate; it is now self-financed and reports to be profitable.

STRATEGY AND PRODUCTS

In an earlier report on Nintex, we discussed how it added value to its platform with a new workflow-automation analytics engine called Hawkeye. We also provided a glimpse of the then soon-to-be-released Workflow Cloud offering. Hawkeye is a cloud-based workflow-analytics service that can capture, monitor, measure and assess workflow analytics that provide the means to understand and improve automated workflows and business processes. Workflow Cloud enables Nintex to build automated workflows as a service across IT platforms beyond the Microsoft ecosystems that spawned the vendor’s early growth.

We believe both offerings will attract considerable market interest because they treat workflows and business processes as a portfolio of strategic assets, and manage their development and use accordingly. Moreover, while Hawkeye exposes the typical metrics one would expect of workflow execution and performance measurement, it can also reveal data and insight into the business results of workflow execution by analyzing the content and data executed within workflows.

The Workflow Cloud enables Nintex greater autonomy in new markets. Nintex’s successes heretofore were based on its original Workflow Platform that enabled users to craft workflows within and across Microsoft SharePoint and Office 365 ecosystems. Nintex users, however, also had to be users of SharePoint and Office 365. Vendors dependent upon or catering to a single IT ecosystem in the current cloud era can be at risk. Nintex realized it needed to branch out.

In August 2015, it added content management and automation capabilities by acquiring DrawLoop Technologies. Drawloop excelled in document creation in Salesforce ecosystems. The acquisition gave Nintex at least a one-year time-to-market advantage over building such Salesforce-related technology itself. Together, they would bridge the document-exchange and task-orchestration divide that often prevents effective workflow between these ecosystems. The Nintex Workflow Cloud represents an environment independent from Microsoft that combines the workflow-automation capabilities of the Nintex Workflow Platform and the content-automation capabilities of the Drawloop platform in a cloud-native architecture. Nintex can now be exposed to virtually any IT ecosystem. It declared this at its customer event by announcing enhanced partnerships with Adobe, Box, DocuSign, Dropbox, Microsoft and Salesforce – each of which worked with Nintex to link to the Nintex Workflow Cloud. Now generally available with a more uniform offering, the Workflow Cloud is being positioned as a workflow and content automation platform.

COMPETITION

Traditional rivals to Nintex were typically workflow-automation vendors that catered almost exclusively to Microsoft ecosystems. They include K2, which offers K2 Appit for SharePoint and K2 blackpearl. K2 is gearing up to help it compete with Nintex Hawkeye. It recently integrated with Power BI and other data-visualization providers such as Tableau, and offers process analytics templates for Power BI Desktop. Lexmark's Kofax also enables a range of content management capabilities and offers a business process management (BPM) platform (TotalAgility).

Nintex will find Alfresco to be a more typical rival. Alfresco closed out 2016 with an array of announcements that beefed up its enterprise content management (ECM) and BPM platforms, enhanced its records management security, linked up closer to Salesforce, expanded its deployment options to AWS and created a partnership to extend its content capture capacities. It recently rebranded its Alfresco One ECM and Activiti BPM offerings and launched its new Digital Business Platform. The platform includes Content Services (formerly Alfresco One), Process Services (formerly Activiti) and Governance Services (formerly Records Management) that can be deployed on-premises or as a cloud service.

Another rival is OpenText. In September 2016, it bought Dell EMC's enterprise content business, including the Documentum, InfoArchive and LEAP product families, to accelerate its digital transformation initiatives. OpenText is known for gobbling up software across the enterprise content, analytics, BPM and customer experience markets. This acquisition closely followed OpenText's Release 16 announcement in April 2016. It included OpenText Suite 16 (on-premises) and OpenText Cloud 16, licensed in four technology suites: Content Suite (ECM), Process Suite (BPM), Experience Suite (CEM) and Analytics Suite. Oracle and IBM have content management and BPM capabilities but are less likely to appeal to users that seek a more tightly integrated platform such as that offered by Nintex.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

With its cloud-native Workflow Cloud, Nintex is now free to pursue workflow and content automation within and across virtually any IT ecosystem.

WEAKNESSES

Nintex's content-automation capabilities are not likely to be recognized by larger enterprises as an ECM system. Nevertheless, Nintex is likely to appeal to many line-of-business users.

OPPORTUNITIES

The Nintex Workflow Cloud provides integration and automation capabilities that let users essentially build their own SaaS-based business process applications and run them across a host of new IT ecosystems.

THREATS

We are somewhat puzzled why Microsoft and other IT ecosystem providers are not more aggressive in building out their own automation technology and capabilities. It drives a lot of business and is the reason why Nintex and others like it exist. Should this change, therein lies the threat.