“Defense” Widget Democratizes Data

Applies to:

Business Process Expert and the Defense Industry

Summary

The “defense widget” provides a way for anyone in any organization to track relevant data within an SAP ERP system. In the future, the momentum of this widget will likely gain ground, as organizations find value in tracking various items and information, including parcels and requisitions – without having to make a single phone call.

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The "defense widget" provides a way for anyone in any organization to track relevant data within an SAP ERP system.

Imagine you're an equipment manager with thousands of equipment units that must be tracked and monitored for availability and frequent deployment. Then, imagine keeping track of all that equipment with pencil and paper. That's exactly what drove David Lincourt, Vice President, Field Services SAP Global Defense Industry Business Unit (IBU), to believe there could be a better way to stay on top of mountainous piles of data.

"When I was a maintenance officer in the army in Canada, either peers or my superiors would constantly ask me what was going on with some particular piece of equipment," he says. "I would walk around with a list of all the vehicles with an up-to-date list of information – at least from the time I left my office. So when I saw the widget capabilities, it made me think of that time."

Simply put, the "defense widget" is a downloadable asset that can help monitor the status of equipment from an SAP Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.

Today, with the widget, users can subscribe to the equipment they are interested in checking and monitor the status without having to call anyone or log into another system.

Although it stemmed from the defense industry, its capabilities are not limited to that area. "It can be applied to any organization that has equipment that needs to be tracked and monitored," says Lincourt.

In addition, the widget provides a sort of equalizing force within an enterprise-wide organization. In most companies, information systems are siloed even if they're enterprise-wide systems. Moreover, they are primarily used by management and maintenance specialists.

Also consider that, within the ERP platform, there's an enterprise asset management (EAM) capability, which lets maintenance specialists track equipment and manage the preventive or corrective actions required for its upkeep. EAM offers organizations the capability to manage all maintenance activities and the associated business processes. But even in that scenario, the drivers and owners of that equipment don't have access to the information because they aren't considered "typical" users in the ERP system.

A widget, however, helps to democratize the data so that users — regardless whether they are managing a fleet of vehicles or a production line — get the data they need. The information becomes truly enterprise-wide in the context of their particular interests, roles, and decision-making requirements. "The people using it are decision-makers," explains Lincourt. "I could be a driver, so I may want to monitor the vehicle I'm driving. Or if I'm a pilot, I may want to monitor the status of my airplane."

With the widget, users are empowered with contextually-relevant information, so they can make decisions based on their own particular needs. "The context of my use in the Army was to know that the equipment was fixed and ready to use, but the context for a driver would most likely be whether or not he/she would drive that day. It's all about the context for that person."

Built using the Yahoo! widget engine, it's essentially a dashboard on a screen that offers users a way to reach enterprise systems, Web sites, and enterprise services. It can display the information in a simple, cohesive way. "Because I work in a global organization I have one that keeps track of time zones around the world. You could also have a stock widget to monitor your favorite stock." But the main objective is to provide greater transparency of data and reduce the amount of inquiries to the maintenance organization.

"In an enterprise, you want to maintain access security. However, if I'm a driver, the only pieces of equipment that I'll be allowed to see are the ones I'm *authorized* to see," says Lincourt.

Authentication is done in the middleware layer using the employees' individual security profile. When you provide your user name and password, the system knows what you're allowed to see. It also takes the burden off IT since the user can determine what he/she needs to see based on the context of his/her information needs. "If users have access to information in a simple, digestible and usable way, they'll use it," says Lincourt.

In the future, the momentum of this widget will likely gain ground, according to Lincourt, as organizations find value in tracking various items and information, including parcels and requisitions – without having to make a single phone call.

It's also possible for managers to keep track of employees' qualifications and hire dates, or for a sales person to keep track of sales calls and customers using such a widget, added Lincourt. But he warns against overcomplicating the widget. "It's not a one-size-fits-all solution," Lincourt says. "Simpler is better. If you let people use it in the context of their individual needs, they'll make good use of it."

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