

Critical Mission

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FEATURED ARTICLE

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Silverlight 4 *The Inside Scoop on Business Drivers for Rapid Migration*

The pace of change is relentless. Just a few short years ago Silverlight was seen as an experiment in a next-generation web browser application framework. Microsoft, of course, had a comprehensive, long-term roadmap in mind and a steady stream of new versions made it into a serious, but somewhat isolated, software development tool. With the release of Silverlight 4 and Visual Studio 2010, Microsoft has put it all together to form an amazingly powerful yet productive platform for the next generation in application software. Silverlight integration is available everywhere from SharePoint Online and other cloud services to what would have been traditional desktop applications to smart phones and every client in between.

What's So Special about version 4?

If you haven't been closely following Silverlight's trajectory over the past year you would be excused for thinking that Silverlight was mainly targeted at fancy custom video players and sophisticated animation and visual effects. It is all that, but with each version it has become an increasingly powerful next-generation application development platform. What is so new and special in version 4 that it warrants a newsletter article aimed at business decision makers?

Here are the top five business drivers for rapid migration to Silverlight 4:

- Comprehensive, integrated development tools in Visual Studio 2010 that boost developer productivity and code quality
- Business application features that were lacking in prior versions
- Rich Internet Application (RIA) Services for service-oriented access to real-time, event-based data
- Cloud Services for taking advantage of scalability, high availability and considerable cost savings
- Business Productivity Online Services for rapid provisioning of Exchange and SharePoint as application accelerators

Prior versions of Silverlight made incremental progress on the business application front. Silverlight 4 makes a very significant leap forward and justifies your immediate attention if not investment.

Tool Support

The first thing you will notice is that unlike prior versions, Visual Studio 2010 completely understands how Silverlight 4 and RIA Services work together. Each member of a multidisciplinary team gets the right combination of tools and features to accomplish their tasks efficiently and effectively.

In Silverlight 4 this is particularly obvious when doing data-binding, styling and themes, data services and other common tasks.

Bottom line: better quality solutions, faster.

Business Application Features

The first two releases of Silverlight were heavy on visual presentation at the expense of more mundane

but critical business application development features. This is not to say that modern, attractive, advanced visualization and presentation is not part of a business application, but rather, that these are insufficient for a complete line-of-business solution. As such, early versions of Silverlight could only be an addition to, and not a replacement for, more powerful and complete development platforms.

This all changes with Silverlight 4. A complete list of all the business-oriented features could run several pages, and this topic is covered quite thoroughly online. For the purpose of this newsletter I'll make a bold statement and assure you I can back it up – any business application you have implemented in the past five years can be implanted in Silverlight 4. It is now that complete. Right-click mouse support, printing, read/write access to My Documents and similar folders; all the features that a business developer needs to create a complete solution.

Bottom line: Silverlight 4 is ready for serious business.

RIA Services

If there's one characteristic that defines a line-of-business application it is transactions and data integrity. A business application is only as good as the data that supports it. Prior versions of Silverlight either didn't address transactional data at all, or did so with a motley collection of loosely integrated and immature components.

To an enterprise architect, Silverlight 4 is a joy to behold. Diagram your vision of an ideal design involving an N-tier application, built to last and not bankrupt you on maintenance and enhancements, and you will have illustrated how Silverlight 4 and RIA Services work together.

Bottom line: Silverlight 4 with RIA Services forms the new baseline for well-architected, correctly-factored software systems.

SQL Azure and Other Online Services

Microsoft is making a huge bet on online service. Already available today, in production, we have Windows Azure for service hosting, SQL Azure for relational data, AppFabric for workflow, and many

others. Project "Dallas", Microsoft's massive aggregation of information services datasets, is poised to change the way businesses design information systems.

With the very clear trend of data and services moving into the cloud, where does that leave your application software? Silverlight is delivered via web server and communicates with web protocols, and the same code runs on all current versions of Windows, Mac OS X, Linux and even smart phones. Offline capabilities allow a Silverlight application to function even when not connected to a network, offering a unique value not available to pure web-browser applications.

Bottom line: Silverlight 4 makes it possible to fully embrace the benefits of a move into cloud computing.

Business Productivity Online Suite (BPOS)

Microsoft's BPOS product is a terrific case study for how Silverlight can drive a strategy for rapid migration to online services (aka cloud computing) and a new generation of business applications.

Literally a few clicks of the mouse and you've got an Exchange Server ready to handle 10, 100 or 10,000+ mailboxes for a low monthly fee per user. Same goes for a SharePoint Portal Server instance that can handle one site or 1,000+ for a small department or an entire multi-national, with the same low monthly fee per user and a couple of mouse clicks to get started.

If your needs are not addressed by the fairly generic capabilities of a BPOS deployment, Silverlight is an ideal way to leverage the power of BPOS components and services and implement only the missing features and data integration capability the stand in the way of a complete solution.

Bottom line: Silverlight 4 makes BPOS far more attractive to companies of all sizes.

Summary

Silverlight 4 is ready for business.

If you're curious about Business Productivity Online Suite and want to learn more, Alto offers a training class designed to get you up to speed, fast on the

concepts and address all your questions and concerns.

Contact Alto if you'd like a demonstration of any of the products or techniques discussed in this article. Our next solution briefing is devoted to these concepts.