Refresh™ Software Functional Discussion Document: What’s in it for IT Professionals?

Overview:
Here we will summarize some important points about the pressure IT departments face in today’s economy and the key challenges and opportunities faced specifically in the area of data standardization. We then look at how the Refresh approach provides key accelerators and ways to reduce IT cost and Risk in your projects. For alternative approaches to Refresh including other less-automated approaches to Item Data Standardization please see the Refresh vs. some alternatives chapter. It is assumed here that you already have a good idea of the functionality provided with Refresh. If not, detailed discussions and screenshots looking at the Refresh functionality for Operations, Maintenance, Procurement and other functional areas are all available in the other chapters in this series.

Over the last 15 years IT professionals from Fresh International have been working in Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) projects, specifically focusing on getting the tougher business benefits out of the ERP systems already implemented. Since 2003 we have been addressing these issues through development of our Refresh™ software which is live today in companies using various ERP systems such as SAP, Oracle and others. For the purpose of this discussion we will use SAP as the example where we want to be specific but the reader should keep in mind Refresh today brings the “missing piece of the puzzle” to Non-SAP ERP systems too.

A new focus area – with inherent uncertainty & cost:
IT professionals are used to dealing with uncertainty – they are skilled at weighing up risk and reward and have had lots of practice in managing projects and software vendors. Some of the large ERP providers have a lot on their plates and in general are not able to meet all the key functionality needed by today’s demanding business functional teams. Some areas have not been the main focus of ERP providers and so most companies have a hybrid mix of ERP and point solutions. This is of course also true of Operations and Procurement functional areas.

Refresh™ Software
Fresh International provides a very practical software called Refresh™ for standardizing and enriching the data that you use to describe any line items bought using your ERP systems.

In this chapter we will be looking at challenges and opportunities specifically for IT professionals supporting Supply Management, Procurement, Operations, Finance and Controlling Functional Areas leveraging ERP software. The contents of this chapter have been written by IT experts from various businesses who have been deeply involved in some of the world’s top 10 largest ERP implementations.

Refresh is a very specific software tool which was designed and developed by ERP experts to serve one single purpose – the automatic standardization of item data at lowest total cost of ownership. This has been ensured by designing Refresh in such a way that the customer’s current IT assets are re-used. For example no additional hardware is needed, no custom development is needed and your existing ERP makes calls to Refresh, not the other way around so there are no security concerns. Objects are delivered in a namespace registered with the ERP provider and no user-exits or enhancement spots need to get activated. Of course no modifications to standard ERP programs are required. Since all of these often hidden support costs are minimized by design, cost and risk is much lower than any other approach. It’s overall headcount for a typical Refresh project is only a few days.

Refresh today contains dictionary content amounting to millions of lines, making the Refresh dictionary the largest in the industry. This key content powers your ERP system so that data standardization is automated – quickly building information like short texts, long texts, PO texts and spend classes automatically.

The Refresh Software is currently live at many leading companies and governments globally running SAP, Oracle and other leading ERP systems. Refresh can get you up and running in a matter of days & standardizing your data an order of magnitude faster.

If you think you may be able to use our tools to unlock value from your systems please contact us.

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“SAP is behind some of the competition in data quality, data profiling and associated reporting facilities, which are important in complex product data environments that are heterogeneous in nature. Many customers report having to refer to other tools in this area as part of their implementations. The acquisition of Business Objects enables SAP potentially to leverage some of the data services related to profiling and data quality, but even Business Objects’ experience was generally associated with customer data and not product data”

Gartner, July 2009.

Whenever it is not possible, leading IT departments tend to look for complimentary solutions that provide maximum business functionality coverage at absolute lowest total cost of ownership. This TCO should include license cost, maintenance cost, lifecycle internal IT support costs, additional hardware costs, additional database license costs, software custom development and configuration cost, cost of interface development & maintenance, not to mention risk. If the software being bought has not been specifically designed to minimize these costs by maximizing the re-use of your existing architecture these costs tend to add up very quickly.

For example integration costs and integration risk are today some of the leading drivers in the selection of procurement tools in organizations according to IT research firms:

1. All software has to “fit-in” with what we have today

This is where the IT professional often comes in. Stuck between a rock and a hard place – between the burning business need and the costs of adopting new software. In our experience it is a place where IT can really provide benefits.

IT can really help to minimize total costs
Get involved in a key IT topic

Data standardization of items (materials – stock or non-stock, purchasing line items, invoice line items) holds a fantastic potential for modern organizations. And the potential for benefits increases as the level of standardization increases (of course up until a point). Most organizations today have tried to standardize to some degree either before ERP go-live using ETL (extract, transform, load) tools at data conversion time, or after the fact by scrubbing the data once it is live. It would be an ideal world if the exact level of data standardization was achieved for each data field before go-live. This is of course never the case and in general it is the tougher data standardization jobs with many line items that without a very specific toolset to speed things up, either get watered down or drag the go-live date. A delayed go-live is seldom an option and so data gets loaded as-is. Over time, without a specific tool to help govern the data it also tends to get worse. This is the current status-quo for many organizations and is especially true of many data fields important for Purchasing and Operations businesspeople.

For example, the importance of spend visibility for spend analysis projects has become a burning topic for Purchasing.

A hot business and IT topic these days

If we take the most popular topic above - basic spend analysis is a relatively easy concept. It can be covered using your existing tools as shown in the good example below. However the devil is in the detail and you will need very well codified and standardized materials in order to truly benefit.

Trustworthy Spend Analysis – use your existing ERP

Spend analysis is not a once-off exercise so keeping them in good shape is imperative and not so easy without some sort of automation. This entails keeping existing materials clean and making sure any newly created ones are up to spec.
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What’s in it for IT and Compliance teams?

Get Best Practice Fast
- Rapid Implementation – be running within a week
- Built-in dictionaries leverage man-decades of expertise
- Built-in translations mean a quick roll-out everywhere
- Shared knowledge base from existing customers
- All international standards pre-scored for your industry
- Refresh Desktop install via wizard in minutes
- Refresh Server install in an hour e.g. windows & SAP

About Refresh™:
Fresh International provides a very practical software called Refresh™ for standardizing and enriching the data that you use to describe all of the items that you buy and use.

In this chapter we will be looking at alternatives to Refresh – other less-automated approaches to Item Data Standardization. This is especially informative for IT decision-makers as it has been written by IT counterparts in other organizations who have tried other approaches over the years.

Refresh is a very specific software tool which was designed and built from a blank sheet of paper – it has been developed to serve one single purpose – the automatic standardization of item data at lowest total cost of ownership. When the Refresh product was designed it was made for this specific purpose and no other purpose – it is a key niche product that can be tactically easily used to solve specific data issues.

Fresh International was founded in 2003 with the sole purpose of developing the Refresh practical automatic matching algorithms, the process and design of which are the subject of an important patent. The Refresh Software has been enhanced since, using a unique interaction with key customers including many leading companies and governments globally.

Refresh today contains dictionary content amounting to millions of lines, making the Refresh dictionary the largest in the industry. Out of the box, this content includes all major international codification standards such as UNSPSC, ISO, HS/intrastat etc. in all major languages – even those languages not yet covered by the standards bodies. This key content powers your ERP system so that data standardization is automated – quickly building information like shot texts, long texts, PO texts and spend classes automatically.

Our engineers have plant backgrounds and the Refresh developers have 15 years full-time experience in implementing large ERP in global well known companies. We can get you up and running in a matter of days & standardizing your data an order of magnitude faster.

If you think you may be able to use our tools to unlock value from your systems please contact us.

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