A new research journal involves an element of risk. Will it meet a practical need? Will it play a unique role in an often-crowded area? Has it addressed an audience? And, most importantly, will researchers contribute their work to attract the audience and make it a success?

The journal focuses on enterprise integration strategies that deal with the exchange of messages as the basic component of the solution architecture enabling the integration of people, information, applications and business processes. Portals are central component of this solution.

The fields of web portals and Service Oriented Architecture generally today face two new challenges: First is the impact of the international economic situation on enterprise appetite for new technology investment. This comes alongside a second challenge, a debate on whether SOA will meet its promise or has been oversold by its advocates. Contributions in this and our previous two issues have already begun to address these questions.

In this issue, a Research Essay by Neil Richardson (“Improving our approach to internet and SOA projects”) discusses the evolution of the techniques and practices required to deliver successful Web and SOA projects. He states that “It is clear to me that best practice project management consists of a combination of ‘hard’ PM methods, soft skills (because people, not processes deliver projects) and a ‘project-intelligent (?)-ability’ to recognise the specifics of the situation to provide the correct combination of skills necessary to assure project success and deliver a business objective.

Not-for-profit organisations are significant users of IT services, including Portals. While lacking the resources of the commercial sector, their needs may be similarly complex if they are relying on a portal for service delivery to a vulnerable client sector, or for the protection of medical records. This case study examines the experience of service delivery to two medium-sized not-for-profits in Melbourne, Australia. The case study titled Portal experiences of not-for-profit organisations looks at the challenges of a resource-poor sector and how it meets often sophisticated requirements. The study is based on the experience of industry practitioner Rick Noble, who has worked with not-for-profits in a technology development, support and management capacity for more than 10 years. He is interviewed by Greg Adamson, co-Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Web Portals.

One of the definition of portal states that “A portal is an integrated and personalized Web-based application that provides the end user with a single point of access to a wide variety of aggregated content (data, knowledge, and
services) anytime and from anywhere using any Web-enabled client device” (IJWP, 2(4)). In the previous issue, we have discussed several technical innovations coming from IBM research laboratories. The paper by Andreas Prokoph (IJWP, 2(3)) concentrates on improvement of portal search capabilities and the impact of the URL composition in portals on ability to find requested information. In this issue we provide closer look at portal as “killer application” and the impact of portal announcements on market valuation of the company. The paper by Manish Gupta and Raj Sharman (“Impact of Web Portal Announcements on Market Valuations: An Event Study”) provides empirical evidence for a sample of 25 publicly traded companies in year 2008. The study examines stock data to access investors and shareholders’ reactions to web portal announcements. Interestingly, the results indicate that web portal announcements significantly positively influence investors’ perceptions about the financial worth and future prospects of the company.

In academic world, lecturers publish the teaching material on the university website and as any producer of web-based material they are interested in what the students do with the pages they visit: what do they visit, how long do they spend there, and what do they do while there? The knowledge of a student’s activities can help to build a better educational experience. The intent is to build up a model of the student and to customise the site to achieve better learning experience. The paper by Jan Newmarch (“Using Ajax to Track Student Attention”) provides comprehensive discussion relevant to current available web technologies. This paper has demonstrated a technique based on Ajax for gaining more information about student interaction with courseware. He points out that while the current implementation deals only with documents in HTML, XHTML and XML formats, it should be possible to extend it to deal with non-W3C formats such as Flash and PowerPoint. He also mentions that the extensions dealing with the expected multimedia components of HTML 5 would provide more interesting implementation and the scope for wider industry use. The technique presented was essentially stand-alone but he does not rule out possibility to use this technique within existing Content Management Systems such as Blackboard and Moodle to give them more sophisticated reporting capabilities on user activities.

Jan Newmarch’s paper deals with specific type of tracking web users in academic domain. In this issue, we have also included a brief discussion about web analytics and their importance in portals (J. Polgar: “Use of Web Analytics in Portals”). Web analytics are typically branded as a tool for measuring website traffic. They can be equally well used as a tool for business research, results of advertising campaigns, tracking students’ access patterns to courseware and market research. Web analytics provides data on the number of visitors, page views, measure a visitor’s navigation on a website, etc. This collection of data is typically compared against usage indicators for performance, and used to improve a web site or marketing campaign’s audience response. Tracking portal visits is important in order to obtain better understanding which parts of the portal are delivering value. However, portals have unique attributes and technology for web page composition and refresh which pose specific challenges, and offer new opportunities to gain insights about portal usage and user behavior. Portals are inherently multidimensional in terms of presenting multiple topics on the same page, and effective tool to monitor and analyse portal data usage must be able to support multidimensional analysis.

Until several decades ago an individual or very small group could develop and deploy an operating system, communication software or an entire application. With conception of SOA and increase complexity of software, high levels of integration have changed the processes and roles associated with software development. In particular, over the past few years the philosophy of software architecture has dramatically changed to ensure the overall integrity and critical characteristics of systems and development processes. In the paper by
Amit Goel titled “The Philosophy of Software Architecture” the author explores few fundamental thoughts on software architecture in order to provoke discussion around some basic questions. The author poses several questions such as the meaning and definition of the term ‘Software Architecture’, and why do we need to have Software Architecture. With any technological progress new set of skills is required. The author provides comprehensive discussion regarding the skills and qualities which are required by a software engineer engaged in the practice of software architecture. Many people already questioned the metaphor of software architecture metaphor and how is it similar to or different from art, engineering and science. The author provides interesting comparison of software architecture to other architectural pillars in an art, science or engineering domains. This paper covers few key issues about philosophy of software architecture in breadth. Hence the discussion is brief. However, we point the reader to various references to dive deeper into details of various concepts presented in this paper.

Through the wide range of topics associated with enterprise integration solutions and other innovative approaches and discussions we hope to meet our goal of providing a research journal addressing the interests of both academic researchers and industry practitioners. Are we succeeding? We welcome your feedback.

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