

Supply chain management vendor JDA Software aims to stand out in the cloud

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When Joe King, senior vice president, cloud services, at supply chain management vendor JDA Software, learned that it could take weeks or months to set JDA's prospects up with proofs of concept of its software, he challenged his VP of operations, John Frazier, to find a better way. Luckily, Frazier had an answer to hand. Prior customer implementations had already ended up on Amazon's EC2. JDA implementation teams were conveying that customers wanted rapid deployment, but Frazier knew he also needed to provide business stability.

Company name:

JDA Software Group

Activities:

Supply chain software

Head office:

Scottsdale, Arizona

Number of employees:

NA

LY revenue:

\$671.75M

LY net income:

\$71.02M

Key suppliers:

BMC Software, Dell, IBM, VMware

Early Adopter Snapshot

James D. Armstrong founded JDA Software Services in Calgary, Canada, in 1978. In 1985, when the company was one of the biggest providers of software for IBM's midrange machines, Armstrong sold it and founded US-based JDA Software in Cleveland to take its place. When the new company won a big account with a Phoenix-based car dealership in 1987, all eight employees moved with it to Scottsdale, Arizona. In 1996, JDA Software went public and bought back its Canadian ancestor to serve as its northern distributor. Since 2000, the company has been in M&A mode, picking up Intactix, E3 Corp, Manugistics

and i2 Technologies.

Context

When King and Frazier started to look at their options, JDA Cloud Services had just built out a new infrastructure platform. Its 500 servers – a mix of midrange IBM mainframes and Dell x86 machines – were virtualized, with LPARs on the Big Blue boxes, VMware in the server tier and a little Oracle VM underpinning the Oracle databases. Almost all the company's middleware is WebLogic, and most of its cloud-deployable applications are written in Java, although a few holdovers from the client/server days are written in C and delivered through Citrix XenApp.

Strategic vision and business drivers

This was a sound foundation, but JDA needed to integrate the assets it had acquired with i2, to consolidate six datacenters into one and to be able to spin up expanded services and new prospects much more rapidly than it could with this environment. The moment of truth arrived when Sports Authority, a very large customer, calculated how long it would take to provision and enable JDA. The answer: months. Part of the problem was the legacy software. The company's founder was a mathematician, and his software uses algorithms to analyze supply chains and make decisions on how to change them. Such algorithmically intense applications are notoriously hard to implement and support.

Despite the difficulty, King challenged Frazier to come up with a rapid launch system – something like what vSphere provided at the virtual machine level, but with scope to blueprint and template an entire application environment. Frazier looked at the usual suspects in cloud-enablement, but felt that JDA had some unusual requirements. The company needed to distinguish itself with support for its own complex applications, and with ease of use for its hundreds of customers and millions of users, some of whom are nontechnical. The company also needed a technology partner that could support its entire infrastructure, from the mainframe through distributed systems to Web-based SaaS and the cloud.

Challenges and obstacles

The answer came in the form of BMC Software and its Cloud Lifecycle Management (CLM). BMC shared JDA's mainframe heritage and its conviction that the future was in the cloud. And BMC sees its business as providing the software to manage everything in between. "It's very rare," says

Frazier, "to find a company that truly isn't tied to its own hardware and software."

JDA kicked off deployment of CLM in February 2011, when the software was still in version 1.0. Frazier admits that the software was relatively immature and had significant gaps, especially around JDA's need for sophisticated blueprinting and templating. But, he says, JDA had faith in the fact that the cloud wasn't some passing fancy for BMC.

One requirement that King gave Frazier was at the datacenter layer. The company has one site in the US, a partner in the UK and plans to spin up a facility somewhere in the Asia-Pacific region. Of necessity, it has moved to the point where no JDA employees need to be physically present in its colocation facilities. Frazier's cloud tool had to conform to this requirement.

There were no major difficulties in the rollout, Frazier says. JDA had some EMC storage devices that weren't supported by CLM 1.0 out of the box, but custom integration work addressed that issue. With version 2.0 of CLM, BMC is delivering standard integration for those devices. Frazier says the product's device support is getting increasingly tighter.

Innovation and roadmap

Today, JDA can deliver cloud capacity at the quality its business customers expect, always underpinning JDA's own software. All 500 servers in the infrastructure can be managed and configured as part of this Performance Cloud. There's also an Implementation Lab that's being used to provision new applications for existing customers and to spin up proofs of concept for prospective new customers. Deployment time for a new application has fallen from four to five days to as little as two-and-a-half hours. This capability is emerging as a differentiator, just as King had hoped.

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