

PORTALS THE RED HAT WAY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“What is the best way to build and manage our corporate website?”

For CTOs and other executives responsible for developing website strategies and selecting the right vendors and solutions – this question is becoming increasingly difficult to answer.

Vendor consolidation is shrinking the pool of solution providers and raising questions about focus and commitment. Enterprise portal players are moving downstream while framework and rich interface application (RIA) vendors try to move up, leaving enterprise organizations wondering what level of solution is right for them. And above all, the current economic downturn continues to linger, forcing buyers to do more with less and scrutinize each potential expense.

Portal technology deployment continues to change, further complicating the decision-making process. Customizable, user-friendly portal solutions have evolved in response to products that were once designed to fit large infrastructures with less flexibility. At the same time, the balance of power has shifted to give line-of-business managers more ownership and control over their portal solutions, a change that empowers actual users while reducing the overall strain on development and IT teams.

The purchase decision has even moved. Where buying portal technology was once the sole domain of IT, this choice now involves a cross-functional buying team that can include line-of-business managers, development teams, IT teams, executives, and more.

All of these factors make it difficult for buyers to effectively compare portal solutions. As they struggle to determine which vendor and which solution is really right for their organizations, decision-making teams tend to adopt one of the two most common strategies:

- **The “build-it-yourself” approach** consists of either using homegrown technology, cobbling together disparate products, or “stealing” development time to create and maintain a corporate portal. While this approach may not require a capital expense, it generally doesn’t provide the long-term functionality most organizations require and may wind up costing more to maintain in the long run.
- **The buy-a-full-suite approach** consists of purchasing a full enterprise-level portal suite from one of the larger vendors. While these suites contain the technology and functionality required, many companies find implementation challenging. Portal suites, though convenient, are often less flexible and customizable, and aren’t as easy to use as the vendor says they are. Worse, these solutions are expensive to own and maintain, and often require high-level development to manage or upgrade the portal in the future.

This paper will describe each of these portal strategies in more detail and will further highlight the advantages and challenges that each one presents. It will also introduce the Red Hat portal solution, JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform, and demonstrate how it can deliver a portal solution that is just right for most organizations in terms of product functionality, flexibility, ease of ownership, and total cost of ownership (TCO).

PORTAL MARKET OVERVIEW

Portals have evolved from their initial use as an internal communications tool, and now offer a more powerful customer-support function. Where companies once measured a portal’s success by traditional

IT metrics, including resource cost savings, hardware consolidation, and speed-to-deployment, they are now looking at portals to drive return on investment (ROI), increase revenue, reduce the cost of customer transactions, and decrease the need for customer-support personnel. All of these factors and financial expectations have changed corporate priorities and expectations for what a portal can deliver.

In spite of the fact that the business case for portals has grown in scope, the current web portal market is experiencing a decline. This downturn is due in part to the fact that many of the larger enterprise vendors have bundled their portal solutions with other offerings. This, however, has the downside of creating expensive suites than many organizations can't justify purchasing.

This decline has contributed to many changes in the portal market. As the larger vendors bundle solutions, customers are often put off by the high price, or find they don't need all of that costly functionality. Or they are looking for smaller, more flexible portal technology—especially since a key change in the IT industry has been the shift away from the belief that companies only had to create a single, large portal to meet the needs of all their users.

In addition, the operational requirements for security, reliability, and breadth-of-delivery platforms (including browser, mobile, RIA, etc.) are not universal for all websites. These operational demands are driven by the functional realities of what a portal can do, and what it can support.

Organizations are now developing easy-to-customize portals, aimed at a wide group of employees, customers, partners, and other users. They are moving away from large, monolithic content and portal stacks to deploy flexible, repeatable web-oriented frameworks. This new approach delivers all of the benefits of a full corporate portal, but it also makes it easy for line-of-business managers to use and deploy portal technology. This makes portals more effective for end users while also reducing the amount of development resources required to deploy and maintain them.

TWO COMMON APPROACHES TO BUILDING AND MANAGING WEBSITES AND PORTALS

We've described the two common approaches to building and managing websites and portals—build-it-yourself or purchase it already built. Now let's go into detail about each option.

BUILD-IT-YOURSELF

At first glance, the idea of building web portals internally may seem attractive, especially because it doesn't require capital investment or extensive budget. One of the main ways to justify additional investments in portal technology is to show that certain tasks associated with the portal can be offloaded from IT to a line-of-business resource, such as a webmaster or business analyst.

While it is theoretically possible for an organization to develop its own custom corporate web portal, generally the skill and time required is far beyond what the IT organization can invest. In this case, a portal framework requires a high degree of developmental assistance in order to create page templates, portlets, and underlying content. When organizations attempt to build their own solutions, they often lose control and the solutions become difficult to own and maintain, generating higher expenses and requiring more effort than first anticipated.

Other drawbacks to building custom portals include:

- **Not the right functionality:** Depending on how much time the development team can commit, the organization may not get the technology it hoped for or the functionality that could be available – much more quickly – from elsewhere.
- **Dependence on highly-skilled developers:** Many organizations think that they can push ownership of their portal projects to lower-level developers or line-of-business managers. However, the opposite is true. Developers of a high skill level are needed to design, manage, and maintain these portal projects, limiting the time they can spend on other critical business initiatives.
- **Lack of integration:** Since homegrown applications and third-party solutions are not standards-based, they can't adapt to future changes. As a result, the organization might not be able to scale and may experience difficulty adding required technology or integrating with future infrastructure.
- **Higher cost of ownership:** As a result of all of these factors, this approach may require extensive development work. Ongoing maintenance may take significantly more time and effort than anticipated. All of this contributes to a surprisingly high cost of ownership – in the long run.

BUY-A-FULL-SUITE

At the other extreme, many organizations purchase entire suites of portal technology at once. Though they can often be implemented more quickly than a homegrown solution, it is likely some of the functionality will not be useful to your business. And it is almost certain a technology suite will come at a much higher up-front cost.

As portal technology has grown, some vendors have chosen to offer portal software as part of their middleware suite. Like other software products, these solutions are made available under a traditional software-licensing model, and require an upfront capital expenditure.

Each vendor's product is unique, and in many cases can be complex and inflexible. Buyers should make sure that the portal solutions they select meet the current and future needs of their organizations. In order to retain control of their existing infrastructures, buyers should make sure that the solutions truly fit in their architecture and don't leave them vulnerable to vendor-dictated infrastructure requirements.

Additional drawbacks to buying portal software include:

- **High upfront cost:** With a traditional software business model, there are high upfront fees associated with initial purchase and licensing – not to mention support. Additionally, new versions of proprietary products typically incur a new round of costs, complex upgrades, and related services – all of which can make this approach very expensive. Or worse, unpredictably expensive.
- **Ongoing services commitment:** Purchasing enterprise software often requires ongoing vendor services to customize and maintain the solution, and to upgrade the software when the vendor releases new versions. This adds a layer of complexity and cost that is easy to overlook.
- **Complex products:** While developers will have some learning to do for any portal technology implementation, proprietary products' specialized tools and lack of standardization raise the barriers to learning.

- **Vendor's portlet catalog:** Many vendors claim to offer a full range of solutions via their portlet catalogs, but the truth is that most portlets are either out-of-date, not fully tested, don't work with the current software, or are binary and can't be modified. As a result, the customer has to either build the functionality or engage more services for development.
- **The risk of vendor lock-in:** Similarly, buyers should be cautious about their vendors' future vision and how that vision could potentially impact their solutions. In other words, will vendors remain committed to the purchased technology?

For most organizations, these two approaches don't give customers true control, and don't offer the right balance of product functionality, flexibility, ease-of-use, price, and other important criteria.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: CRITICAL BUYING REQUIREMENTS

As companies evaluate portal vendors and products, they should carefully consider additional buying criteria, including:

- **Time-to-value:** What is the expected time-to-value? Does the vendor have a history of multi-year portal failures compounded by competing technologies?
- **Compatibility:** Will this solution fit easily into existing architecture? Will it work well with the existing infrastructure and other solutions?
- **Future commitment:** Will this new solution contribute to vendor lock-in? What happens if the organization or the vendor chooses to go in another direction? Does the vendor offer us a future-proof solution?
- **Additional functionality:** Do we need best-of-breed, fully-integrated solutions, or is technology that is "good-enough" sufficient? If more is needed, does the vendor provide additional features and functionality via partnerships and third-party integrations?

With all of these factors, decision makers should only consider portal technologies that make it easy to create and deploy high-quality websites and web applications for all users in their organization. Open product development platforms mitigate the business risk associated with vendor lock-in. Finally, as they look for high-value, low-cost alternatives to expensive middleware platforms, buyers should make sure these solutions are delivered with industry-leading support and professional services from certified Java experts.

JBoss ENTERPRISE PORTAL PLATFORM: THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform is a pragmatic alternative to the two current portal options most organizations face. JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform meets the demands of internal and external users who require access to and interaction between back-end applications, SOA services, and Web 2.0 applications. It is based on an open, reliable framework, and can meet the development and operational demands of everything from the smallest tactical mash-up-style applications all the way up to the largest mission-critical websites.



JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform provides companies with everything they need to host and serve a portal website, and integrates seamlessly with other solutions in the JBoss Enterprise portfolio. This includes JBoss.org community projects, JBoss Enterprise Application Server, JBoss Hibernate, and clustering. It also enables organizations to publish and manage website content, deliver personalized user experiences, and support multiple platforms, including Red Hat Enterprise Linux, SUSE, Microsoft Windows, Sun Solaris, and more.

JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform allows organizations to build web applications beyond the portal user interface level. Through a REST-based, reusable framework, customers can minimize the cost and complexity of their web infrastructure by re-using existing assets in high-performance web applications.

JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform Benefits

- **Return on investment (ROI):** Portals are a key driver in reducing the costs associated with highly integrated websites and applications. JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform enables developers to re-use branding and navigation and deploy new composite applications.
- **Reliability and scalability:** JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform is based on the market-leading JBoss Enterprise Application Server, making access to dynamic information simple, while performance and scalability are assured.
- **Tailored personal experience:** JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform enables IT and end users to customize and personalize their website experiences in a secure, well-governed way.
- **Interoperability and open standards:** JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform is based on open standards, and is developed and supported by open source leader Red Hat. It also includes the JBoss Open Choice application platform strategy, and can incorporate components into the portal as standardized and reusable portlets. JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform simply meets the needs of business-to-employee, business-to-customer, and business-to-business portals.

Portals, the Red Hat Way

What may be most attractive about JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform is its ability to solve the challenges of both the build-it-yourself and buy-a-full-suite approaches to portal development, management, and maintenance.

JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform solves the challenges of the build-it-yourself approach by:

- **Empowering line-of-business managers:** With tools and features that include a rich user interface, in-line page editing, pluggable navigation and menus, delegated administration, and website templates, line-of-business managers can contribute more to the deployment and maintenance of their corporate portals.
- **Minimizing developer's involvement:** JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform is completely flexible, enabling organizations to deploy only the functionality they require and offering the industry's smallest footprint. JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform helps personnel build and manage their corporate websites and frees highly-skilled developers to focus on critical business requirements.



- **Delivering the industry's most flexible, open portal solution:** JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform supports portal and Java Enterprise Edition standards, delivering a solution that better fits existing infrastructures and delivers a richer end-user experience.

For those companies tempted to purchase a full suite of licensed software for their portal strategies, JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform helps overcome the challenges of the buy-a-full-suite approach by:

- **Delivering an easy-to-use, easy-to-deploy solution:** JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform gives users the right level of product functionality. With no special tools to learn, a standards-based architecture, and compatibility with rich Internet applications, JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform enables companies to build and deploy the functionality that's right for them.
- **Providing unrestricted licensing:** Because JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform does not restrict its usage, buyers are supported without the typical restrictions set in place by licensing or entitlements. This assurance enables organizations to build exactly what they want, and use the solutions exactly how they need them – without restrictions.
- **Mitigating the risk associated with vendor lock-in:** Because JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform is based on an open source licensing model and is supported by important portal-related standards, buyers can minimize the risk of vendor lock-in. In addition, the Red Hat application platform strategy, JBoss Open Choice, provides a single environment for deploying a variety of programming models with a common platform, making it easier to develop and deploy applications.
- **Delivering business value faster:** In the past, portal technologies were criticized for their inability to deliver business value in a short period of time. JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform offers several ways to enable a faster, more significant return on investment, including accelerated installation and configuration, low hardware footprint, and subscription-based licensing options.

JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform leverages the rapid innovation of JBoss.org community projects, such as GateIn, to provide a platform that is certified and supports a wide range of single sign-on frameworks, databases, JVMs, LDAP servers, and operating systems. As a leading open source middleware provider, Red Hat blends the benefits of a continuous and community-driven development ecosystem with enterprise-class solutions. This allows Red Hat and JBoss to offer customized solutions that are just right for any organization.

HEIDELBERG ENHANCES ONLINE SERVICES WITH JBOSS ENTERPRISE PORTAL PLATFORM

Heidelberger Druckmaschinen AG (Heidelberg), the world's leading solution provider for the print media industry, built an interactive customer portal using JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform. This interactive website enhances customer relationships and provides a unified global brand presence.

Heidelberg's objective was to establish a new customer-specific portal to enhance its customer relationships and provide internal business units with valuable customer insight. Heidelberg built an interactive customer portal using JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform, which helped it:

- Improve its customer web presence with a central portal that increased services and information availability
- Provide a newfound ability to use applications based on open standards in order to interact better with customers, suppliers, and partners



- Reduce overall costs
- Gain excellent support and continuous advancements of its portal software
- Improve compatibility and minimize the risk of vendor lock-in

With the JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform, Heidelberg successfully established a new customer-specific portal that enhanced overall customer relationships and provided internal business units with valuable customer insight.

Where it once seemed like CTOs and other technology executives only had two choices – build or buy – when it came to finding the right portal vendor and product, JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform from Red Hat is a solution that's just right. JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform delivers the right blend of product functionality, ease-of-use, flexibility, and integration capability that today's organizations need to build, manage, and deploy highly-effective corporate portals capable of helping them achieve critical business objectives.

ABOUT JBOSS ENTERPRISE PORTAL PLATFORM

JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform facilitates the delivery of web-based composite applications and high-performance web presences. Through its agile, reusable framework, customers can minimize the cost and complexity of their web infrastructure. Further, its use of open standards mitigates the risk of vendor lock-in, ensuring compatibility.

As an integral component of JBoss Enterprise Middleware, the large and vibrant JBoss.org community fosters the continued innovation and enterprise quality of JBoss Enterprise Portal Platform. And it's deployed on JBoss Enterprise Application Platform – a leading JavaEE-certified application platform that ensures performance, scalability, and a reliable and straightforward path to implementation.

ABOUT RED HAT, INC.

Red Hat, the world's leading open source solutions provider and a component of the S&P 500, is headquartered in Raleigh, NC with over 65 offices spanning the globe. CIOs ranked Red Hat as one of the top vendors delivering value in Enterprise Software for six consecutive years in the CIO Insight Magazine Vendor Value survey. Red Hat provides high-quality, affordable technology with its operating system platform, Red Hat Enterprise Linux, together with virtualization, applications, management and Services Oriented Architecture (SOA) solutions, including Red Hat Enterprise Virtualization and JBoss Enterprise Middleware. Red Hat also offers support, training and consulting services to its customers worldwide. Learn more: <http://www.redhat.com>.

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