

IDIOM

IDIOM and BizTalk Server

Introduction

Business data, processes and rules are fundamentally linked. However, business rules are not effectively managed by traditional information systems. A business that employs business rules management software can expect to gain many benefits. These include the ability to completely delegate ownership of the rules directly to the business unit that governs business decision making, definitive knowledge of all of the business rules that are in effect at any given time, and the ability to rapidly implement policy changes that affect the business rules. IDIOM is a product devoted exclusively to business rules management and can provide these benefits. IDIOM is particularly beneficial for business users, as it provides features such as precise English definitions of the business rules.

The Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) is a system architecture that exposes discrete components of the system through web services. The advantages of the SOA are well documented. In particular, the ability to reuse the business rules system components means that the same business rules can be used by all applications provided by the system. Publicly exposed web services can be used to enable third-party management of business rules; inter-departmental and inter-organisational automated decision making becomes possible. IDIOM generates a runtime implementation of business rules that can be easily exposed to other system components through a web service (see Figure 1).

BizTalk Server is a technology that can be used to implement the Service Oriented Architecture. BizTalk Server allows loose coupling of system components in a way that is independent of any application through the use of adapters.

It also provides message pre-processing and post-processing, data transformation, its own business rules framework, and process orchestration. BizTalk Server can directly consume a web service in a process orchestration by configuring a port to use a web reference that links to the web service.

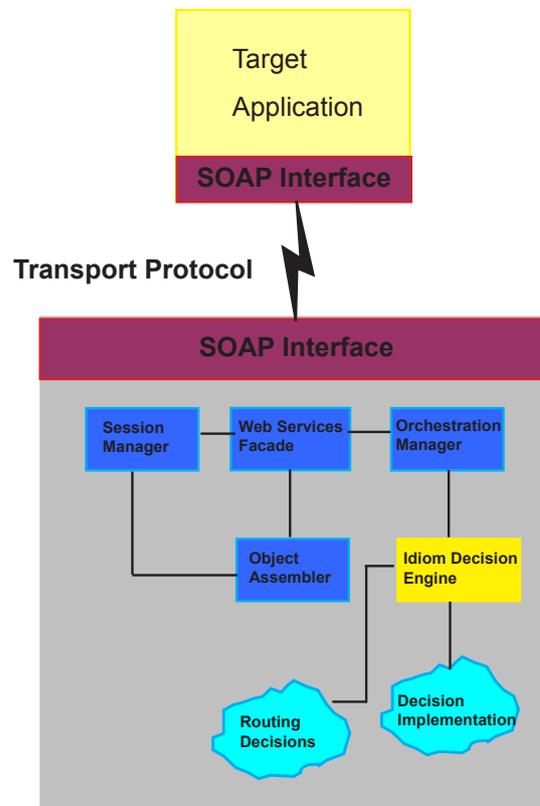


Figure 1 IDIOM in Web Services Facade architecture

Together IDIOM and BizTalk Server can provide a sophisticated modelling environment for the definition of business rules, an implementation of the Service Oriented Architecture that includes a business rules web service, and a streamlined deployment process for the business rules runtime implementation.

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Idiom Ltd recommends that the IDIOM product should be used to extend BizTalk Server's own business rules capabilities when one or more of the following applies:

- ❑ It is preferred that rules are managed and operated by the business unit that owns the rules (rather than the IT department technical specialists).
 - ❑ When rules need to be deployed to multiple platforms, technologies.
 - ❑ When rules defined by one department or organisation are to be implemented by others.
 - ❑ When visibility of the rules to lay readers is important, for reasons of legislative transparency, auditability, or simply for clarity of the implementation of the rules that implement business policy and practice.
 - ❑ When complex rule scenarios need to be defined and managed – for instance, when hundreds of decisions need to be made in support of a single service (example: 'underwrite and price a fleet of commercial vehicles').
 - ❑ When the decision logic is complex and/or the underlying document designs are of commercial scale (tens of layers deep, hundreds of thousands of nodes, even millions in the case of the MDDL) – for instance, when rules apply to multiple documents and/or many levels of repeating nodes using more than one active context (example: 'calculating and apportioning revenue across all patient episodes in a hospital' or, 'validating call schedules for a financial instrument').
- ❑ When business processes use multiple independent sets of rules with discrete departmental or even external owners; rather than a single consolidated rule set.
 - ❑ When various rule changes are made frequently or independently – that is, when the rules need to be implemented without timing constraints imposed by 'whole of system' release processes, or consideration of unrelated deployments.

Idiom Ltd recommends that current or prospective BizTalk Server users should review the above criteria and, where appropriate, extend BizTalk Server with IDIOM's extensive, purpose-built business rules management.

Author: Justin Thomas, Idiom Software Ltd. 2004.