

[Global Services](#) » [Strategy](#) » Detailed Story

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Web Services: When Mavens Meet Connectors

## CASE STUDY

### HELVETIA PATRIA

Switzerland's fifth largest insurers, Helvetia Patria partnered with HP to implement SOA. It achieved a 201% return on investment over a six-year period, 59% reduction in IT costs and a consequent spin off of the IT business unit into its own subsidiary business.

#### Q Helvetia Patria used Web services because...

Helvetia Patria first implemented Web services in 2002 in production, before SOA existed as an industry buzzword. One major principle for the implementation was to re-use as many as possible of the existing business functions (on the legacy system side and from already existing front-end applications).

The implementation of a group-wide SOA was, and still is, a very strategic decision for Helvetia Patria. The company had to centrally integrate different back-end platforms (OS/390, Windows 2003, AS/400, Linux, etc.) and completely different approaches of doing business (from a very structured and process oriented approach to a more ad hoc and pragmatic way) in the subsidiaries.

For example, the sales and distribution channels differ from country to country. Some sell very strongly through their tight agents, others via independent financial advisors and brokers. Further, these subsidiaries are working with different SLA levels and different incident and change-management processes. This heterogeneous landscape and the need to centralize the e-business infrastructure and platform forced Helvetia Patria to choose a very decoupled integration architecture, greatly supported by Web services and SOA.

#### Q SOA at Helvetia Patria today



**Didier Beck**  
Head,  
eBusiness Center

Today, all the services of the e-center (known as ePlatform) itself are exposed as Web services. In the last four years, Helvetia Patria has implemented about 150 services (technical and business oriented) within the e-Platform, plus all the back-end functionalities from different countries (calculation, mutation, printing, information, etc).

#### **Q Difficulties in the implementation**

The implementation of SOA is definitely a journey. You have to build on the front-end side the competencies of developing and integrating Web services; you have to build the technical infrastructure and you have to build up the process and governance parts.

And the most complex part – you have to build or encapsulate the back-end applications so that you can expose the necessary services. This was quite complicated and time-consuming, because these big back-end solutions were developed in a monolithic manner.

On the other hand, you need to reach a kind of “critical mass” to be able to benefit from SOA. By implementing two or three Web services and having just some front-end applications service oriented is definitely not enough to bring your company to a sufficient strategic level of agility.

#### **Q Web services or SOA first?**

The decision to use Web services was “in a way” taken first. The level of flexibility requested to integrate completely different companies with their local infrastructure and applications landscape into one sales-oriented front-end forced the project team to build a very open and modular architecture. All services were integrated into a mode that we called “loosely” coupled integration based on SOAP [Simple Object Access Protocol]. Later on, SOA proved that we had instinctively covered the principles of a modern architecture.