

Collaborative ERP - The Second- Generation of Realistic E-Business

A White Paper by The Lian-James Consultancy

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Executive summary

The second-generation of e-business

While the events of the Internet boom and bust gave e-business a bad name, it is technology that is destined to play a major role in the development of most businesses, whether they be global or in a local marketplace. One of the key technologies that will make e-business possible and practical is Enterprise Resource Processing (ERP), but not as it is known today. What is now required is an environment in which individual divisions in a company, or individual companies themselves can both manage their own activities and collaborate with other divisions or business partners as required. This is what Scala's newly introduced iScala 2.1 provides.

The seamless matrix

iScala 2.1 provides businesses with the seamless and transparent infrastructure they will require if they are to operate in the future world of e-business. It is capable of scaling from a single installation in a single business to multiple locations across a global operation. Each installation has the ability to fully collaborate with all the others, and with other back office business systems such as SAP.

Flexibility is the key

Individual companies work increasingly with business partners, while most global organizations are a mixture of regional or specialist divisions, and/or companies that have been acquired. This reality requires a system capable of great flexibility. This is what iScala 2.1 offers. Businesses can roll out a single application in a single location, test and validate its operation, and then roll it out to all other locations that might require it.

What it consists of

iScala 2.1 consists of two products: iScala Business Server for individual, mid-tier companies, and iScala Enterprise Server, which is geared to the needs of global business subsidiaries and divisions. As it has been designed with multi-site, global operations specifically in mind, it can be directly implemented everywhere on a local basis.

Abstract

This White Paper sets out to consider the development of the second generation of e-business, and in particular the key role of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) in that development process. The phrase 'e-business' has been significantly devalued since the early part of 2001, when many of the 'dotcom' companies that had sprung up with e-business as part of their objectives started to implode. That collection of implosions was largely driven by the fact that the companies were built on a business model that was largely 'vapor'.

This vapor usually revolved around the notion of building brand awareness first, and only following up with products or services once the brand has been established – and the goods or services actually developed. It is a business model that can only succeed while there is a limitless and on-going supply of cash to sustain it until a revenue stream finally appears.

Second-generation e-business realities

The second-generation of e-business is more pragmatically targeted, being focused much more closely to exploiting the capabilities of Internet technology to provide the business processes that companies require.

One of the key business processes is ERP. This is already a major market sector that has reached a level of considerable maturity. But it now offers the potential to grow into the key underpinning, the real infrastructure, for any company now thinking of building an e-business platform for the future.

ERP links together all the core activities of an extended enterprise, including manufacturing, stock control, purchasing etc.

But by its very nature, this can become a system that centralizes the control and management of all such business processes, and this is now very much a double-edged sword for companies. In general terms it has so far only been the largest companies that have been able to exploit the full benefits of ERP systems. They are generally large, expensive systems in their own right, and often require expensive and time-consuming customization in order to make them work effectively. But this approach is now running counter to the trends within a growing number of even the largest businesses, for it is geared towards the needs of a large, centralized, monolithic style of business structure.

Today, a growing number of large businesses treat 'global' as their minimum perspective on their marketplace. In addition, they are increasingly an amalgam of merged and acquired businesses, rather than grown from a single entity with a single management structure or set of business processes. Centralization is nearly always a key goal for such amalgamations and its achievement is often one of the primary criteria in evaluating the return on investment in acquisitions. This is also an area where, historically at least, success has been rarely achieved without more 'pain' than planned. The ability to centralize business activities of increasingly large amalgamated operations, therefore, is now more important than it has ever been.

The second generation of e-business will, in reality, be focused on the practical aspects of linking business partners together more closely and coherently – where 'business partner' can, in fact, mean a department or division of a large, global enterprise just as easily as it means a different company altogether. The business of conducting and managing transactions between such business partners using the Internet is about to start extending well beyond the fundamentals of placing orders and processing invoices. It will involve the partners in deep, intimate interactions between their individual business processes so that, for example, one partner can take an order from a customer safe in the knowledge they can deliver because they have already interacted with another's own systems to check stock levels, check supplier availability records and place orders for components, sub-systems or services.

This is the infrastructure that will be essential if the third generation of e-business, when companies interact directly with end users via the as-yet unrealized potential of mobile phones, personal handsets and the like, is to ever become a workable, profitable reality. Without such infrastructure, any plans companies have for such services will be largely wasted.

ERP is a key component of this infrastructure, but it will need to be a different approach to ERP. This will need to be a far more flexible approach that allows global ERP infrastructures to be constructed from a set of smaller, individual systems, rather than as a single, unyielding entity. This is the objective behind iScala, the new ERP system from Scala Business Solutions. The design objectives underpinning the development of iScala have been to provide global businesses with the components needed to build complex, global business process management infrastructures flexibly, in whatever way suits their business plans and processes best, rather than oblige IT and business managers to bend their business to fit the strictures of a large, rigid IT system.

The Seamless Matrix - Beyond ERP and on to the second-generation of e-business

The Seamless Matrix is Scala's term to describe the infrastructure that businesses of all types and sizes now require. In essence, it means the ability to connect any point within a matrix (the infrastructure) with any other point in a way that is seamless and transparent. In an e-business environment, this is the way that businesses will want and need to operate. Any point at which the 'join' between those points becomes apparent is a point where the management of the infrastructure becomes more significant than the management of the business.

A significant problem faced by many enterprises in establishing an infrastructure, however, is that they set about building it in advance. In practice, no matter how much planning and theorizing goes into this process, the chances of the infrastructure failing to meet the actual, functional needs of the business are high. In practice, infrastructures need to grow organically. This is particularly the case where an enterprise is making the important transition towards becoming an e-business.

What is required, therefore, is a system capable of being installed independently, either as a stand-alone entity in a mid-tier or smaller business, or a local division of a large enterprise. Here it then offers the capability to collaborate and interoperate with other systems – not only other locations running the iScala system, but also other systems from other vendors. This is the goal of genuine collaboration in Scala's new iScala system. The company has a long track record in developing and building ERP applications, primarily targeting mid-tier businesses. It has also been very successful selling to medium-sized local businesses, as well as smaller multinational operations. In addition, the company has already seen its applications used as components of larger, global systems by large multinational businesses, and has consequently set about re-writing the system in order to create the world's first, purpose-built, genuinely collaborative ERP system.

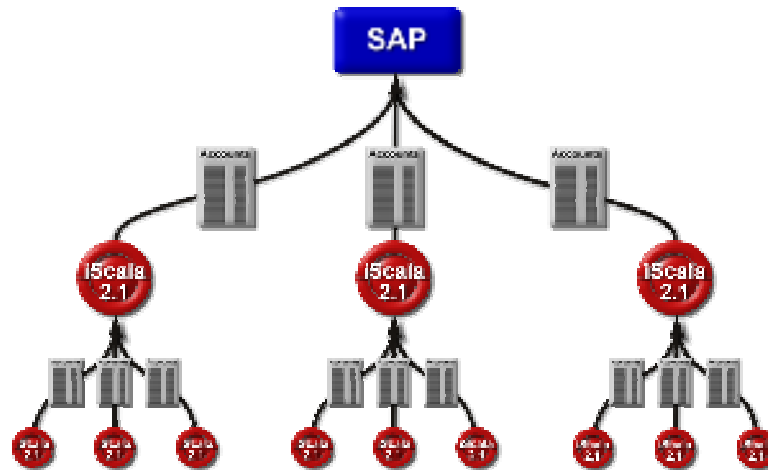
The goal of genuine collaboration is to create an environment where users can develop and run automated business processes that work right across all relevant systems in the business infrastructure – regardless of whether they are inside or outside the company. And it applies whether the business is local to a country or marketplace, or whether it is the headquarters or subsidiary operation of a global player. The availability of genuine collaboration is, therefore, at the very heart of Scala's objective – creating the seamless matrix.

This gives a wide range of businesses a new, flexible tool through which to manage the majority of their business processes in the coming e-business environment. It is a rare company, these days that does not need to collaborate ever more closely with business partners – regardless of size and location a company will face collaborative issues and therefore now require an ERP environment capable of managing such activity, and growing with the business.

Global companies are NOT a single entity

At the other end of the spectrum, global businesses will find that attempts to impose an e-business infrastructure top-down are likely to be doomed to failure. It is very rare these days that a major, global business is a single entity. Most of them will be, in practice, a mixture of regional businesses, divisions and semi-autonomous operations. Each will have its own requirements and business processes, where the imposition of a top-down infrastructure is bound to clash and cause significant management problems. In a global economy, a growing number of those requirements will be concerned with localization issues. For example, compliance to local legal and business requirements is now imperative to global businesses, and will be a hugely complex task to fulfill with a large, traditional ERP system.

How iScala 2.1 fits with existing high-end ERP systems to provide genuine collaboration:



In practice, these divisions and regional businesses need exactly the same tools as a smaller business, coupled to the ability to then have the systems interoperate seamlessly. This is the target for iScala. It is far more sensible for even the largest global enterprise to start any moves towards e-business practices in a phased, controlled manner. It could, for example, pick one division or region as a pilot scheme. Indeed, the cost-effectiveness of iScala means that a single business process could be targeted as a starting point. Once proven and running satisfactorily, others could be added, and then links between them built and proved. Each can also interoperate directly with an existing high-end business system, such as from SAP, which functions as the ultimate back office system for the whole company. For many, there will be an historic requirement to continue with such systems, if only to fulfill the return of existing investments. Others may find that, while SAP systems function well as the ultimate back office system, rolling out specific applications to subsidiaries and regional offices cannot be achieved in a timely fashion. Here, the collaborative capabilities of iScala make it an excellent complement out 'at the coal face', managing the information needs of the ultimate back office system. iScala, however, has the capabilities to manage the largest global business itself, if required.

In essence, therefore, enterprises can buy iScala to automate and manage the business processes of the divisions and departments of a large global enterprise, and get a complete e-business infrastructure as a very useful by-product. It can also be achieved for more cost-effectively than any other approach. With the cost of ownership of iScala running at around one third the costs associated with tier 1 ERP suppliers such as SAP or Oracle – the costs of developing and evaluating business processes in a new e-business environment are much more containable and manageable. It also creates a sensible and manageable environment in which to roll out individual business processes into production as they are ready, and more importantly, when the business is ready to accommodate them. As experience grows, so more functions can be automated and integrated into the production environment.

In this way, enterprises can build much of the core of their e-business infrastructures organically under their full control and in a way that inevitably maps on to their specific business requirements. This is a far safer alternative to what might be termed 'The Armageddon Scenario' of specifying a complete infrastructure and associated systems for installation across the whole business, and which has a definable target 'switch-on' date.

There is no question that e-business is the way to go, but it will be several years before it is no longer

considered as something different or special and becomes an integral component of the whole business infrastructure. But to get to that position will require enterprise managements to take a far more hard-nosed and realistic approach to planning the road map they will need to get there. The one thing they should not do is try to get there in one step. The realistic approach available with iScala is the ability to take small, logical, manageable steps.

The solution for flexible, scalable growth and business development

The key differentiators of iScala are that it is an entirely new, pre-packaged platform, specifically designed to provide genuine collaboration between different operations, be they global enterprise divisions or individual business partners. But while new, it is built on the knowledge gained producing a tried and tested system with an established user base across the world.

Scala has thought what a business will need to get started with genuine collaborative ERP and packaged this together on the new platform. Everything else coming in the future product line can be adopted as required by a business, and the system is already designed to allow for their easy integration, rather than operating as a clumsy add-on to the platform.

Pre-packaged means that Scala has put the core functionality into the system needed for collaborative ERP. What is more, the company has designed the system so that it can readily meet the needs of future trends, technology and developments. It is up to the company buying the software to say what parts they need so they have a solution for their own business processes. This approach contrasts with the often-used term, 'out-of-the-box', as this implies that everything is set-up for a company to behave as Scala defines. This is a common approach found with other ERP systems.

Looking at what other vendors mean by the term collaboration, it can be seen that what they are actually referring to is the provision of a Wide Area Network that gives business partners or divisions the ability to trade on-line. In essence, they are simply using a web browser as the front-end tool for access by multiple users. The term collaboration has been hi-jacked by other vendors and used as a substitute for e-commerce/e-business. Such vendors are capable of building systems that provide a reasonable degree of genuine collaborative commerce, but at what cost can this be achieved, and how long will it take to be implemented?

Scala sees that genuine collaboration has to include a purpose-built platform, and automated business processes, and the ability to allow automated trade between external as well as internal parties. Scala does not aim to make one company work well, but a whole chain of companies work better together.

As a way of establishing the reliability and robustness of iScala, proven through a number of beta testing stages and deployment at early adopter clients around the world, the system has been designated version 2.1. It is also built on a sound heritage of ERP technology development. It performs all the business functions that ERP entails – only with the added benefit of collaboration. Therefore, it still carries out all the accounting processes, manufacturing, project management, etc. that it did before, and even at its launch is available in 24 of the over 30 languages that Scala 5.1 supports. Scala's software is installed and used in over 140 countries in businesses who work with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP), and the company offers the added benefit of a worldwide presence and support capabilities.

The make up of iScala 2.1

iScala 2.1 is a practical approach to collaborative ERP. Rather than bolt on collaborative functionality to an older product, Scala has rebuilt the foundation of the software to give businesses a purpose-built system that will support key business functionality across different systems.

iScala 2.1 is the first globally, commercially available version of Scala's next-generation software - the first part of its complete product range for the future. It carries with it Scala's 20 years of experience in building award-winning standard ERP systems coupled with over two years of delivering pragmatic collaborative solutions. iScala 2.1 sees all of this built and integrated onto a new platform for additional scalability, security, and flexibility to handle future change, whatever it may be.

iScala has been certified as being designed for the Microsoft® Windows XP® operating system and are allowed to carry the 'Designed for Windows XP' logo issued by Microsoft. Together with the increased reliability and performance that standardization on a single, stable desktop brings, Windows XP and iScala 2.1 give global enterprises a powerful tool to increase efficiency and effectiveness, reduce total cost of ownership, and grow their businesses.

iScala 2.1 consists of two products: iScala Business Server, iScala Enterprise Server and the developer tool iScala Developer.

iScala Business Server

This provides many of the core business functions and utilities that companies require. For example, it provides draft customer and customer global ID, which are used to manage information about prospects that can become customers. Global ID is a unique identifier to be assigned to each customer in all of client's enterprises worldwide. In the logistics area, it provides drop shipment, a method of creating purchase orders from sales orders manually or automatically, based on a standard template. Goods can be automatically hard allocated or directly issued to a sales order at stock receipt.

It features a new installer allowing common product installation in both local and remote sites. It also features a common logon mechanism and common administration tools. Security features include the separation of system database and company database, the separation of system administration (administration console) and business applications

It also offers available-to-promise inventory (ATPI), a method to find out how much of a certain product is available on a certain date based on actual stock balance, expected receipts and issues, and the lead-time for the product. ATPI is available on entry of order lines; every new order line is checked to ensure that the ordered quantity is available at the requested delivery date. If the available quantity is less than the ordered one, then a proposal splitting the order line is created based on the stock item ATP and customer ATP set-up.

Automation features in the system include a Windows Deployment Server runtime and administration environment for VBA (Microsoft® Visual Basic® for Applications) projects developed using iScala's VBA Developer. VBA projects can be accessed through the web-based Scala e-repository. A similar approach is used for document deployment. The Document Deployment Server supports the document flow through multiple output channels working simultaneously and schedules it according to automatic document distribution rules.

In the area of service order management functionality, it features multi-currency support, service orders and integration to MPC (Manufacturing Planning Control) work centers and tools, HR machine resources, MS Project, while for Outlook/Mail/Task scheduling, its features include: installment management, export and transport documents, unlimited master/suborder structures, bill-of-material support, extended work-in-progress support, advanced invoicing, goods return and bad handling, texts with Word wrap/pictures/grids, service contract, invoicing prior to period, meter (counter) support, activity, cost, and material specific discounts, cancellation with credit notes, and multi-warranties.

Its integral Data Exchange Server (DES) is an on- and off-line XML-based access server that supports a number of message protocols including Microsoft Message Queue (MSMQ), FTP, and file

transfer via different output channels (E-mail, File, MSMQ, URL). DES can also be connected to networks that use other protocols via a middleware server.

iScala Enterprise Server

This has all the functionality of the iScala Business Server and is additionally geared towards the needs of the subsidiaries and divisions of large multinational organizations, as well as the smaller multinationals that want at least a limited capability of managing an extended enterprise. Obviously all the inter business collaboration works with this as well but it is the product that also will have the intra business collaboration add-ons, such as single site management, master data import and export, customer credit checking etc.

The features of the platform include a range of advanced manageability tools, including remote administration through a single administration console. This can manage all installation properties including system configuration, services, security etc.

It also provides for the separation of SQL databases for companies and the separation of physical locations for companies. It now also uses a common folder structure (standard, custom) for all product components.

In the area of accessibility and user interfacing, it features support for Scala's Windows Deployment Server, Data Exchange Server and future access servers such as the Web Deployment Server and Portal Deployment Server. It also supports IBM MQSeries.

iScala Developer

This incorporates all of the features in the iScala Enterprise Server, and also includes tools and utilities specifically designed to provide rapid and efficient development of specific business applications. The Development Features include a built-in Integrated Development Environment (IDE) for Microsoft Visual Basic for Applications, incorporating a fully open Object Model for VBA developers, a set of UI and application events (available through Automation Manager), a set of printing events (available through Document Deployment Server) enabling document-context-dependent addressing and rooting, uniformed look-and-feel support through ActiveX control, a system services utilization mechanism and a common variables utilization mechanism. VBA-developed projects can then be deployed through the Web-based Scala E-Repository.

Scala supports over 30 languages today, and iScala will fully support a total of 24 different languages when launched to give it global coverage, with other languages added over time. These also include several language sets from countries that are in the new wave of manufacturing sectors that are opening up, such as the Central European countries.

Building blocks for genuine collaboration

iScala 2.1's collaborative abilities come from closely integrating three building blocks for genuine collaboration:

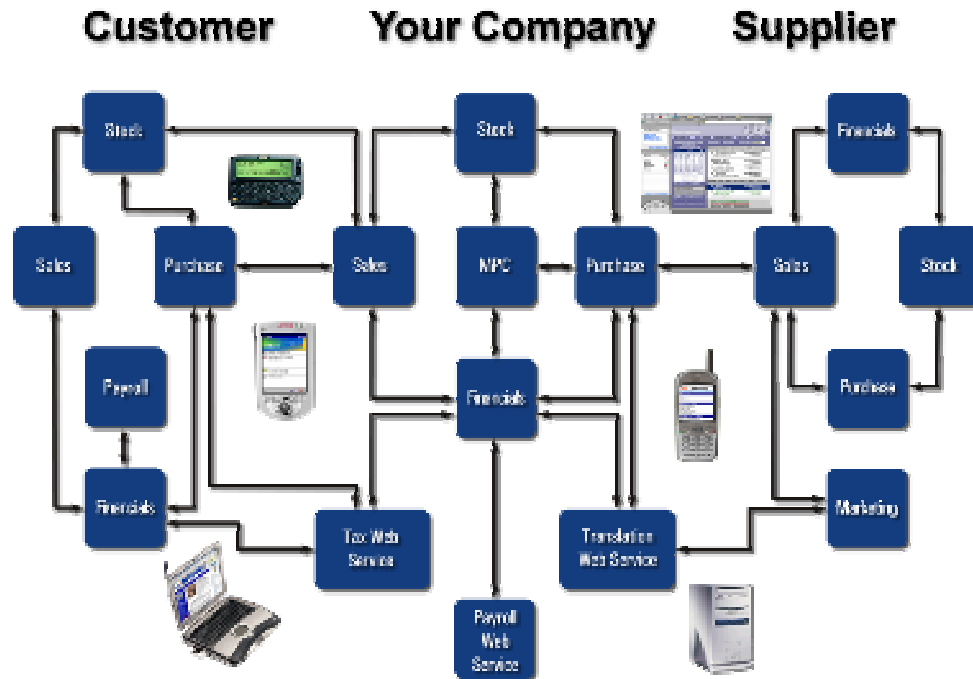
- **Back Office Functionality:** The key business processes that provide the ability to run a business.
- **Connectivity:** The ability to connect to other software in your company and to other companies.
- **User Experience:** The ability to make software work with people, automating tasks and providing an 'experience' of the software through any device they need.



The system comes with a range of pre-built functionality packages (the Scala Connectivity Solutions), each providing a business function that businesses need now. But as well as these pre-built packages, the design of the platform also allows Scala, or third parties, to add in any other functionality a company requests. Scala already operates with a wide range of specialist channel partners around the world, many of whom target specific applications areas, such as the pharmaceuticals business. The development of iScala 2.1 presents an ideal opportunity for third party specialists to create add-on modules providing functionality geared to targeted marketplaces and meet the specific needs of a group of users. This would allow, for example, individual divisions within a global conglomerate business to select or develop functions best suited to their specific requirements and business, while still being able to integrate with ease to an existing global back office system.

Re-architecting the platform has given Scala the ability to use mini-packages of functionality as needed. The packaged collaborative ERP system has the built-in flexibility for internal workflows and external collaboration.

The Scala connectivity solutions



A wide range of functional components have already been developed for iScala, and will be available during the course of 2002. The range is expected to continue to grow, and the company will also be providing a Validation Service for modules produced by third party suppliers, to ensure their full compatibility.

The range of Connectivity Solutions

XML-EDI for Sales

Lets users sell their products electronically.

XML-EDI for Purchase

Allows users to purchase their stock electronically.

XML-EDI Value Pack

Simplifies the connection of two XML-EDI solutions where one is purchasing from the other, and also adds support for automated drop shipment. Each customer site that installs this solution will also need one of the other XML-EDI solutions installed.

Core Data In / Core Data Out

This is for integrating with third party local applications.

Financial Ledger In

This is to receive in financial data from local third party applications.

Barcode

Extends the system to the warehouse for data entry

Multi-language as part of standard product and not as different versions of same product

The product is aimed at multi-site organizations. It is a global product, which means it can be directly implemented everywhere on a local basis, i.e., supporting legislative needs, linguistic requirements, etc. For the global company this brings significant advantages in managing the infrastructure created. iScala is one, single product that is language-independent. This means that other languages can be added, as required, without any modification to the core code. This compares with other approaches, where it is necessary to run different language versions of the same product in different countries. This gives instant advantages in terms of speed of upgrades, consolidation of data, building a foundation for future innovations and improvements, and far easier collaboration across borders.

It also has the ability to work across offices, standardizing business processes, allowing multi-site consolidation. It gives a multi-site company the ability to act as one global company with all subsidiaries using the same reporting tools and business processes, rather than many companies reporting individually to head office.

iScala 2.1's role in developing exchanges

Scala has taken electronic transaction beyond EDI. iScala 2.1 allows the establishment of a small private exchange to develop existing partnerships. Public exchanges are a bridge too far in that they are too expensive, involve unknown suppliers and, in most cases so far, have failed. Private exchanges are what businesses are ready for now. They will eventually allow partners to see their stock position on-line and automate the trading of that stock. The supply chain soaks up human time, but automation of this process through collaborative ERP will save money and resources.

Application areas where iScala 2.1 can have an impact

Web Services

iScala 2.1 is web services ready: the re-written advanced components are able to send and accept XML messages from other web services identified through UDDI (Universal Description, Discovery, and Integration) a form of directory of business services on the web.

E-Commerce Websites

iScala 2.1 connect to e-commerce websites enabling them to gain access to product and customer information in iScala's back office as well as its multi-language and multi-currency capabilities.

Enterprise Portals

iScala 2.1 provides the basis for building truly global enterprise portals. Information such as stock, cash reserves and orders from all subsidiaries around the world, as well as the company headquarters, can be seen in real-time. The same is true for medium size independent companies who want to make company information available to employees through an external portal.

Private Exchanges

iScala 2.1 is the foundation for private exchanges, providing companies with the ability to automate the exchange of purchase orders and invoices, optimizing distribution for their customers, suppliers and across the subsidiaries of an enterprise.

CRM Systems

iScala software allows CRM systems to work in real-time, providing just-in-time or time-sensitive ordering for salespeople. In addition, future releases of the software will include a capability to feed CRM systems with information about customers, their purchasing habits, stock levels, and prices using a convenient synchronization schedule.

Supply Chains

Supply chains don't work unless all the companies involved in the supply chain can be effectively integrated into one specialized supply chain software system. iScala 2.1 provides that integration, making goods visible to the specialized system, without expensive application integration.

ERP Systems

iScala 2.1 links to other ERP systems using industry standard middleware such as Microsoft BizTalk™ Server 2000 through XML - eXtensible Markup Language, an industry-standard method of exchanging information. Global enterprises can cost-effectively connect their central ERP system in the headquarters to each of their subsidiaries, enabling a global view of the business in real-time, and making the most of the investment in top tier ERP systems, but any company can benefit from connecting to their partners ERP systems to automate their everyday business.

The future for Scala 5.1

The arrival of iScala 2.1 does not mean that the well-established Scala 5.1 is set to become obsolete. Many existing users will want to continue running their applications under the system, and Scala will go on supporting them. For some, this will continue to be the most appropriate solution, for example those that have customized Scala 5.1 installations.

But for users looking to move towards an environment where collaboration is an important component in their plans, then they should now consider a move to iScala 2.1. The decision will be based business-related factors only, based on judgments as to when the collaborative features and infrastructure opportunities are needed as a component of the business plan. No technical problems in upgrading are expected, as Scala has already mapped out a standard upgrade path, and a developed a conversion toolkit. Upgrades should, therefore, be a relatively simple task.

About The Lian James Consultancy

The Lian James Consultancy is a long-established technology communications consultancy, using the services of some of the UK's most experienced writers and communicators.

About Scala Business Solutions

Scala Business Solutions creates collaborative ERP software – integrating Internet technology and traditional ERP functionality – to make global business simple. With Scala, global companies can fully integrate all their ERP systems anywhere in the world, whether in a subsidiary, division or headquarters, and extending to their partners and suppliers. Scala's collaborative ERP software makes it possible for global companies to meet the requirements for advanced e-business as well as use a standard ERP product for managing traditional business processes. This enables them to gain measurable benefits from trading electronically, building a private exchange or global portal, or optimizing the supply chain.

From offices in Europe, North America and the Far East, and through its network of partners and dealers, Scala delivers software and services that are available in over 30 languages in more than 140 countries.

Scala is listed on the Euronext Amsterdam Stock Exchange (symbol: SCALA). 2001 revenue was USD 70.6 million.

Visit Scala's website at www.scala.net for press information including press releases, information for investors, and company and product information.

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