Why Choose Centerprise Over SSIS?

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William Zanzinger, Database Administrator
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SQL server integration services (SSIS) is a component of the Microsoft SQL Server database software platform for data integration and workflow applications. It is a popular choice for performing a broad range of data migration tasks and features a data warehousing tool used for data extraction, transformation, and loading (ETL). And it is free! So why choose Astera's Centerprise Data Integrator over SSIS?

Here are ten great reasons...

1. Superior Usability

While consumer products have made major strides in improving product usability, business software products lag behind in that area. Increasingly, companies are realizing that superior product usability results in shorter learning curves, a broader user base, and substantial productivity improvements.

Centerprise is designed from the ground up as a single, unified integration environment with a user-friendly interface and flow. The visual drag-and-drop functionality makes it easy to develop and test integration jobs for business users and developers alike. Features such as single-click data preview, unlimited undo/redo, and cut/copy/paste promote experimentation and enhance testing and debugging.

While SSIS is primarily designed for developers, most Centerprise users are data analysts and business users. Empowering business users to work directly with data management and integration brings enormous benefits to the organization by eliminating the translation layer and leveraging data and business expertise without an intermediary.

2. Native Connectivity

Today's business-to-business (B2B) integration requires working with a plethora of files such as EDI transactions, XML files, and REST or SOAP web services to exchange XML or JSON data. Often integrating these disparate files involves building complex hierarchical structures. Along with its great integration features, Centerprise helps you complete your high-speed, high-performance integration and migration projects more quickly and easily by offering a library of pre-configured Centerprise connector sources and destinations. These connectors have been created specifically to meet your project and business needs and are constantly updated to keep pace with new technologies.

Centerprise includes pre-configured connectors that enable your Centerprise integration engine to communicate quickly and easily with specific enterprise business applications like Salesforce.com, Microsoft Dynamics CRM, QuickBooks, and more, as well as with industry-leading databases, data warehouses, and technologies such as EDI and web services.

3. Extensibility Microsoft.Net APIs

Centerprise is developed from the ground up in Microsoft.Net. Centerprise is designed as an open framework and provides extensibility using the published .NET APIs. Customers can add custom sources, destinations, and functions. Additionally, customers can also use APIs to interact with the server to start, stop, monitor, or schedule jobs.

4. Excellent Support

Astera's support consistently receives excellent marks from customers for its responsiveness and knowledge. All of Astera's support is provided from its offices in the United States. Support feedback is used to continually improve and refine the products.

5. Higher Productivity

While SSIS works from within Microsoft Visual Studio, decidedly a programmer's tool, Centerprise is designed along the line of the Microsoft Office user interface. This familiar user interface promotes rapid learning and adoption by customers. Hundreds of short-cuts, drag-and-drop commands, debugging aids, automation, and thoughtful integration of various modules results in productivity that is several times that of competing products.

It is not uncommon for developers to struggle with the idiosyncrasies of SSIS for hours just to get a semi-complex dataflow to work. With Centerprise's clean-cut interface, well-known ability to deal with poor quality data and one-click preview capability, there are no mysterious errors.

6. Built-In Transformations and Functions

Out of the box, Centerprise delivers an extensive array of transformations that can be used to develop the most complex of data integrations. These transformations include the common ETL fare such as join, merge, normalize, denormalize, lookup, expression, as well as more sophisticated transformations such as tree join, tree node query, slowly changing dimension management, and change data capture patterns. Centerprise also features over 200 built-in functions to enable any type of data processing including string and date manipulation, regular expressions, name and address parsing, data validation, and more.

7. Scheduling, Automation, and Monitoring

Centerprise's integrated scheduler and server manager enable you to build and manage your scheduled jobs with a few clicks. The scheduler provides the ability to schedule jobs multiple times an hour, hourly, daily, weekly, and monthly. Jobs can also be triggered based on specific file drops.

You can use Server Manager to monitor and manage queued, running, or completed jobs.

This approach of enabling creating, scheduling, and managing jobs from a single environment eliminates the need to install, manage, and learn multiple toolsets.

8. Data Quality Features

One of the strongest aspects of Centerprise is its ability to work with data of suspect quality. With Centerprise, you can create data quality rules to validate incoming data and route records with errors to alternate paths. Centerprise provides a 'Data Quality Mode'. This feature enables users to treat data quality errors as data that can be mapped to onward transformations and destinations. Using this feature, you can create custom error logs and data profiles to quantify and fix data quality issues.

Integrated data profiling enables you to build detailed profile of data at any step in a dataflow. The built-in data profile provides a range of statistics about your data, including error count, warning count, min, max, average, standard deviation, variances, distinct and duplicate counts, and much more.

When you work with SSIS, poor quality data often results in mysterious error messages or sudden job termination.

9. Support for Unstructured/Hierarchical Data

Centerprise provides built-in support for unstructured and semi-structured data. This data can be in the form of a text report or a PDF file. Using Centerprise unstructured data features, you can extract data from files that do not fit a fixed or delimited pattern.

When it comes to hierarchical data such as complex XML, COBOL, or custom hierarchical files, most integration tools treat it as an afterthought or cannot deal with it at all. With Centerprise, working with hierarchical data is as easy as working with flat structures. Centerprise provides the ability to parse incoming hierarchical files as well as build hierarchical destination files.

10. Lower Total Cost of Ownership

Even though SSIS is free, Centerprise offers lower total cost of ownership.

In data integration, the up-front cost of software represents a small part of the overall cost. Gartner estimates that for every dollar spent on integration software, companies spend more than five dollars on services. The cost of developing, managing, and maintaining integration projects, therefore, represents the largest component of any integration effort.

Centerprise's unified development environment enables users to achieve a manifold productivity increase in developing, maintaining, and managing integration projects. By enabling data analysts and business users to work directly with the tool, Centerprise reduces the need for expensive development resources on integration projects.

Case Study

Bill Zanzinger , database administrator for Goddard Systems, has this to say about Centerprise versus SSIS.

Centerprise was chosen for our DW project after researching several other tools in the ETL space. It is very flexible and easy to use, and allows for previewing of data within transforms, which is a useful feature. Reconfiguring dataflows and any complex logic contained within them is a snap. I have used SSIS for ETL work in the past and found it to be error-prone and a bit tempermental in its management of metadata, which tends to disappear with the slightest editing or adjustment causing much rework and frustration. Centerprise does not cause or suffer with such headaches. The various components of Centerprise have a clean, crisp interface that makes using them straightforward.

I wrote a lot of SSIS in the past, and I always dreaded it, because SSIS has a habit of simply blowing up in the middle of critical execution phases. Centerprise is a much different experience and makes developing ETL fun. The more I use Centerprise the more impressed I am with it. I have several workflows developed now that incorporate many tasks and dataflows. Everything is working like a well-tuned engine. Thanks to Centerprise, I am now ahead of schedule on the DW project we are developing here. This will bring us much closer to our BI goals much faster. One of the nicest features of Centerprise is to be able to monitor the progress of a workflow (if running it in the Centerprise IDE). This makes it easy to see how things are flowing and where any bottlenecks might be.