

What are some viable alternatives to BizTalk Server? [closed]

Asked 16 years, 3 months ago Modified 8 years, 1 month ago

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45



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In evaluating different systems integration strategies, I've come across some words of encouragement, but also some words of frustration over BizTalk Server.

What are some pros and cons to using BizTalk Server (both from a developer standpoint and a business user), and should companies also consider open source alternatives? What viable alternatives are out there?

EDIT: [Jitterbit](#) seems like an interesting choice. Open Source and seems to be nicely engineered. Anyone on here have any experience working with it?

open-source

biztalk

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edited Sep 14, 2008 at 16:27

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asked Sep 14, 2008 at 16:18



Kilhoffer

32.9k ● 22 ● 99 ● 124

12 Answers

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32



BizTalk Server's key benefit is that it provides a lot of 'plumbing' around deployment, management, performance, and scalability. Through Visual Studio, it also provides a comprehensive framework for developing solutions, often with relatively little code.



The frustration and steep learning curve that others mention often comes from using BizTalk for the wrong purpose and from a misunderstanding about how to work with BizTalk and message-oriented systems in general. The learning curve is not as steep as most people suggest - the essential part of the underlying learning

actually focuses on changing thinking from a procedural approach to a stateless message-based approach.

A drawback people often cite is cost. The sticker price can seem to be quite high; however, this is cheap in comparison to the amount you'd spend on developing and supporting features on your own.

Before you consider alternatives, or even consider BizTalk server, you should consider your organization's approach to integration and its long term goals. BizTalk Server is great in cases where you want to integrate systems using a hub and spoke model where BizTalk orchestrates the activities of many applications.

There are other integration models too - one of the more popular ones is a distributed bus (don't confuse this with the term "Enterprise Service Bus" or ESB). You can also get BizTalk to work as a distributed bus and there are alternative solutions that provide more direct support. One of the alternate solutions is an open source solution called nServiceBus.

When considering whether to use a commercial product like BizTalk, versus something else (open source or developed in house), also consider maintenance and enhancements and the availability of the necessary skill-set in the marketplace.

I wrote some articles that go into more detail about the points I discussed here - here are the links:

- [Why BizTalk?](#)
- [Top 10 BizTalk Mistakes](#)
- [Extensibility Features in BizTalk Server](#)
- [Open Source Integration with nServiceBus](#)

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edited Oct 27, 2016 at 14:42

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Sir Crispalot

4,844 ● 2 ● 41 ● 65

answered Jun 5, 2009 at 16:27



Erik Westermann

967 ● 1 ● 9 ● 10

11 All of your links are dead :(– Fishcake Mar 11, 2013 at 16:25

- 1 The statement *"don't confuse this with the term "Enterprise Service Bus" or ESB"* is not clarifying. BizTalk is the "Enterprise Service Bus", and (I guess) it can be internally arranged as a "hub-and-spoke" or "bus" model. See also the [Enterprise Service Bus](#) entry at Jimbo's Big Bag of Trivia, which helpfully lists a number of existing solutions.
– David Tonhofer Aug 28, 2014 at 13:56 ✎
-

Links are now working via Wayback Machine – Sir Crispalot Oct 27, 2016 at 14:42



My experience with BizTalk was basically a frustrating waste of time.

24



There are so many edge cases and weird little business logic tweaks you have to make when you are doing B2B data integration (which is probably the hardest part of any



enterprise application) that you just need to roll your own solution.



How hard is it to parse data files and convert them to a different format? Not that hard. Unless you're trying to inject a bloated middleware system like Biztalk into the middle of it.

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answered Sep 14, 2008 at 16:40

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[Eric Z Beard](#)

38.4k ● 27 ● 101 ● 147

12 Well. When you have a couple of hundred parties involved, and you need to set up a lot of different format mappings and types of transfer, you really want to use a system like BizTalk. – [Lars Mæhlum](#) Sep 15, 2008 at 8:11

8 Are you basing this on experience? I do integrate with hundreds of parties. The problem Biztalk solves is not the hard part. The hard part is getting the logic right, and scrubbing garbage data that doesn't conform to specs. Biztalk only makes this harder. – [Eric Z Beard](#) Sep 15, 2008 at 12:57

1 The only real benefit of BizTalk, (and I am by no means an evangelist for it.) is the level of standardisation it provides, which makes resourcing and organisation of integration projects a lot simpler. – [ocodo](#) Jan 26, 2011 at 6:23

1 You have no idea what you are talking about. Your own solution of integration, will never come close to BizTalk. – [LastTribunal](#) Aug 18, 2013 at 19:25 ✎

1 @LastTribunal, I have no idea what you are talking about either. Can you please provide some substance to your comparison? – [MEMark](#) Nov 17, 2013 at 22:09 ✎



13



As a BizTalk consultant I have to agree at least partly with Eric Z Beard, there are a lot of edge cases that take up alot of time. But quite a few scenarios are handled extremly smooth as well, so it all depends IMO. But when you (Eric) call BizTalk bloated I have to disagree! We've found that the performance and reliability is excellent, it's flexible and comes with a lot of good adapters out of the box.

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answered Sep 26, 2008 at 11:00

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noocyte

2,522 ● 5 ● 29 ● 44

please mention the address of several good adapters ?

– [saber tabatabaee yazdi](#) Dec 5, 2012 at 10:18

I'm sorry but it's been 3 years since I last did any BizTalk dev, so I'm unable to provide any assistance here. – [noocyte](#) Dec 5, 2012 at 11:07



11



BizTalk needs to be used correctly, I am a BizTalk developer and my experience with BizTalk is quite good. Its reliable, performant, scalable, contains a lot of built in architectural patterns and build in components to make integration easy and fast, you get security, retries, secondary transports, validation, transformation etc... and what ever you dont have build in with BizTalk you can easily customized with .NET code, its basically a hard earned integration system and you get all this in one box.

BUT you need to know how to implement BizTalk correctly, not once I came across solutions that where implemented and often also architected incorrectly.

but the real benefit of BizTalk is that you can implement small solutions and scale up whilst most other integration systems from big vendors will only sell a whole integration pack which can cost much more.

BizTalk is considered the most complicated server from the house of Microsoft.

So any body saying BizTalk is not good dosent know BizTalk period.

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answered Dec 9, 2009 at 23:06

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[dan gershony](#)

119 ● 1 ● 2



We evaluated BizTalk at our company and were really disappointed.

8



We are using IBM WebSphere Transformation Extender (which has lots of (other) problems, too) and the mapping tool of BizTalk is a joke in comparison to WTX.



The graphical tool is not really usable for complex mappings (we have schemas with a few hundred fields in repeating groups) and if you do more than the usual "concat first name and last name to name" mappings, you will be tired of the graphical approach (for example the

arguments of the functoids in the graphical mapper are not labeled and the order in which you connect fields to these arguments is important).

The XSLT-Mapper was usable but not really convincing, and even the microsoft rep told us to use a tool like XMLSpy for XSLT and load the resulting XSL file into BizTalk.

A third approach to mapping is to use C#-Code for the mapping, which was not acceptable for us as a general approach (we don't want to teach everyone C#).

In addition to the mapping tool we did not like the deployment in BizTalk. In order to deploy your process, you need to make lots of settings in different tools and places. We had hoped to find a mechanism like a WAR file for Java Web Applications in BizTalk, so that you can give one archive for your whole process solution to your administrator and he can deploy it.

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answered Oct 9, 2008 at 20:10

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Johannes K. Lehnert

949 ● 1 ● 10 ● 9

-
- 1 I agree, the mapping tool in BizTalk is bordering on laughable, not to mention the poor quality of XSLT generated by it, and yes, deployment is fiddly and no thought to streamlining seems to have been done at all. – [ocodo](#) Jan 26, 2011 at 6:24
-



6



We've been using BizTalk since version 2004, and now have a mix of versions 2006 R2 and 2004 running. I found that the learning curve was quite severe, and development time for solutions is not always quick. Those are definitely shortcomings. Where BizTalk really excels is in its fault tolerance, guaranteed delivery, and performance. You can rest assured that data will not get lost. Retry functionality and fault tolerance robustness is baked in so generally speaking if systems are down BizTalk will handle that and successful delivery will occur once systems come back on line. All these issues such as downtime, etc that are important in an integration scenario are handled by BizTalk.

Further, generally speaking when developing solutions BizTalk abstracts the communication protocols and data formats of the native systems by dealing with everything as xml, so when developing solutions, you typically don't have to write code specific to those systems, you use the BizTalk xml framework.

In the last year, we've implemented a java open source engine called [Mirth](#) for our HL7 routing. I found that for HL7 purposes, the HL7 adaptor for BizTalk is a challenge to work with. Management dictated that we use Mirth for HL7 routing. Where BizTalk falls down in terms of learning curve, Mirth makes up. It is far easier to develop a solution. The problem with mirth is that it doesn't really have any guaranteed delivery. Most of the adaptors (except for hl7) have no retry functionality so if you wanted that you'd have to write your own. Second, Mirth

can lose date if it goes down. I would call it very easy to use (although there is no documentation) but I'd be hard pressed to call it an enterprise solution. I'm going to check out [jitterbit](#) which was mentioned by someone else.

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answered Oct 16, 2008 at 18:38

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Jeremy

46.3k ● 71 ● 211 ● 352

1 I have used mirth too and it is quite good, and I think it is not only limited to hospital environment, it can be used in other places too – [Jaime Hablutzel](#) Jun 7, 2011 at 17:06

I totally agree with you Jamie. I used it in the past and found it easy to use +1 – [Arafat](#) Nov 12, 2014 at 13:30 ✎



We used BizTalk for a couple of years, but gave it up for our own custom framework that allowed more flexibility.

4



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answered Sep 15, 2008 at 20:58

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user9991

576 ● 1 ● 5 ● 11



12 Should elaborate more on where you needed flexibility that BTS did not offer. – [icelava](#) Dec 23, 2008 at 8:15



There is always Sun's (now Oracle) [OpenESB](#) framework. Its generally speaking a smaller, lighter

4 version of Biztalk but with roughly all the same features.



You do get to write more code with it, though.



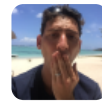
Its Open Source as well.



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answered May 8, 2010 at 15:22

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[Roberto Bonini](#)

7,293 ● 6 ● 41 ● 47

I've not given it a serious glance until now. Thanks for pointing that out. – [Kilhoffer](#) May 11, 2010 at 15:59



2



In the OSS space (though I've never used them as a BizTalk replacement personally - this is anecdotal) you can use one of the Java/J2EE Messaging engines such as [OpenMQ](#) (which is the Sun enterprise one rebadged and without support). If you need Orchestration / Choreography (i.e. SOA/ESB pieces) on top of this, you could look into something like [Apache Mule](#)



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answered Sep 15, 2008 at 8:02

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[Andrew Harmel-Law](#)

7,879 ● 12 ● 45 ● 56

Mirth is a solution for hospital environments based in apache mule – [Jaime Hablutzel](#) Jun 7, 2011 at 17:07



My experience with BizTalk and doing B2B integrations is that most organizations do not truly do schema first

2



design or fully understand xml standards for that matter. Most tend to weave objects and hope they materialize into meaningful schemas. In an enterprise environment, this is backwards.

BizTalk does have a learning curve, but once you get it you are rewarded with durability, performance, true scalability, and extensibility. Like most have said though, it best to make sure it meets your needs and contort your needs to BizTalk.

In the past I have worked with BizTalk 2004 through 2009, and another product called webMethods.

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answered Dec 14, 2009 at 19:55

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jj.

21 ● 1



I have no direct experience with JitterBit, but I have heard very good things from coworkers.

0

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answered Sep 15, 2008 at 8:12

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Lars Mæhlum

6,102 ● 3 ● 29 ● 32



I came across Apatar (unable to post url, but Google finds it) while looking for a solution cheaper than BizTalk. I have yet to try this out.

0



My last company had many problems with BizTalk being too complex and ridged, but I can't help but think this was mainly down to the implementation the consultant did.



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answered May 23, 2009 at 14:04



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Nick Clarke

1,282 ● 1 ● 10 ● 13



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