

A Tale of Long Ago...

15 years ago there was a standard for moving data between E&P systems. It was called “Geoshare” and worked fairly well, most of the time. Of course it wasn’t perfect, the intricacies of real life meant that every transfer had to be tweaked to exactly match the way each oil company used its applications.

At the time there was, however, a problem with Geoshare. It had been launched in the early 1990s in a blaze of publicity. Like many such initiatives the early versions had been somewhat oversold, the evangelists had felt it necessary to claim benefits that the first releases could never quite deliver. These claims had persuaded technologists to test drive the initial versions, which led them to uncover the inevitable early bumps and disconnects, and this in turn caused them to rename the technology “Geo-Scare” and swear to never touch it again. However, by the late 1990s, newer versions of the software, with a better understanding of how it needed to be configured and a set of support tools that allowed that tuning to be done, meant that Geoshare, in the hands of an expert at least, could actually deliver the benefits that the early evangelists had asserted. By then it was too late, of course.



At the time I was delivering integration solutions to oil companies, we learnt pretty quickly that if we exploited Geoshare we had to keep quiet about it, if we let slip that our system was using it some “software expert” within the client company would tell us that “Geoshare doesn’t work” and we would be shown the door. If we just kept quiet we would be told what a fantastic job our system was doing and a sale would follow (sometimes).

My personal view is that Geoshare’s demise was due to the inevitable gap between what had to be promised in order to get oil companies involved and the reality of what could be delivered within the budgets and real E&P data complexities in those same companies. The failure was made almost inevitable by the nature of the relationships between vendors and clients. Numerous attempts at getting “the industry” to cooperate in building a fully capable integration suite has not worked so far. Reviewing the various initiatives provides a litany of oversold solutions, naïve technical choices, political in-fighting, underfunded initiatives and inappropriately competitive behaviour.

We could do with more integration standards. A widely accepted and applicable set of tools would be of immense financial benefit to the oil industry. Unfortunately it is hard to see how we get there from here. Vendors can’t spend what is required, the amount oil companies pay for specialised applications is actually not enough to cover what development costs. That’s why most independent software vendors usually end up being purchased by one of the big service companies. No single Oil Company can be seen to lead such an initiative, they all want to be the second biggest investor. The resulting dynamics make it hard to see how we could get back to having as many working integration tools as we had 15 years ago.