

HOST: Hi, and welcome to the “Did you say Mainframe?” podcast series. This is where we regularly interview IBM technical experts who can help you to understand important IBM mainframe hardware and software issues. I'm your host Nick Garrod.

Today we're going to talk about [how the WebSphere ILOG Business Rule Management System can improve the agility of your applications on System z]

Our guest today is [Dan Donnelly] from [the WebSphere ILOG Synergies Team in Hursley, UK]. it's great to have you here.

SME: Hello, it's nice to be here.

HOST: Before we begin, I'd like to mention to our listeners that there is more information on the WebSphere ILOG Business Rule Management System on the IBM ILOG website. I'll be giving out more information at the end of this podcast.

HOST Q1: [Dan] what are business rules and why would I need them in my enterprise?

SME A1: Well everyone already has business rules spread through their enterprise. For example, businesses use rules to determine whether to accept a loan application, whether a credit card transaction should be flagged as suspicious, or what level of product or discount should be offered to a customer. Those rules are usually locked away inside application code and are only accessible to developers and administrators who have access to that code. This means that every time a business rule needs to be changed a request needs to be raised with the IT department. The IT department has multiple priorities: they may be trying to work through a critical situation, or in the middle of a major migration. They therefore have to prioritise the request from the business against their own list of priorities. A change that is important for those managing a business offering may not be implemented in a timely fashion due to other pressures in the IT department.

HOST Q2: So how does that affect those people managing the business offering?

SME A2: Well those who are managing the business offering need to be able to respond rapidly to changing market conditions. It may be that they need to respond to a competitors offering, or that a given promotion or product is not generating the sales expected and needs to be modified to make it more attractive to customers. A major example of the need to rapidly respond to changing market conditions has been demonstrated by the sub-prime mortgage crisis. Companies needed to rapidly change the sorts of mortgage products they offered (and who they offered them to) in order to radically change their risk profiles. One day a company may have been offering mortgages with a loan-to-value ratio of 100% to people with poor credit scores, the next day even people with good credit scores could be being offered mortgages with loan-to-value ratios of 80% or lower. In this extreme situation, not being able to rapidly change the business rules governing mortgage products could put the whole company at risk. By decoupling business rule changes from IT application changes,

the business side of the organisation can work to a different timescale to IT, bringing adaptability and flexibility to their IT solutions.

**HOST Q3: You've described the advantages this bring to the business side of an organization, does it bring any benefits to the IT side as well?**

SME A3: Yes, the most obvious benefit it brings to the IT organisation is that it frees them from having to code, test and deploy application changes to support frequently changing business requirements. By using a WebSphere ILOG Business Rules Management System (a BRMS) the business side of the organisation is responsible for making the changes that they require. This means that the IT department can focus on performing core application development and system administration. The second advantage of business rules is that it reduces the likelihood of a mismatch between business requirements and what gets implemented in the application. These sorts of mismatches can occur for a number of reasons: the requirements may be poorly defined, poorly communicated to IT, or IT may not interpret the requirement correctly. Because business users are responsible for making the change to the rules, there is no hand-over of requirements to IT. This means the chances of a mismatch between the business expectations and application implementation is greatly reduced.

**HOST Q4: What about change management? If I was a System Administrator I'm not sure I'd be comfortable with people making changes to the applications on my systems without my oversight.**

SME A4: With the WebSphere ILOG BRMS you can control how rules get deployed into your run-time. It is possible to control who can and who cannot deploy rules into a run time. Therefore it's possible for a System Administrator to implement a change management process for business rules: for example, when a business user is finished making the change to a rule it may be that the responsibility for deploying it lies with the IT department. In this scenario we've brought IT back into the business rule management process, but in a very different way. Before, IT would be responsible for interpreting the business requirement, making the change to the application, testing the application change, and deploying the business rules into production. In our updated scenario the business side of the organization interprets the requirement, updates the rules, test the rules, and IT is only responsible for the deployment of the rules into production.

**HOST Q5: OK, so what tools make up the WebSphere ILOG BRMS?**

SME A5: The central part of the BRMS is the Rule Execution Server. The Rule Execution Server runs in a J2EE application server such as WebSphere Application Server. The Rule Execution Server runs the underlying code for your business rules and provides a web interface to allow you to manage and monitor your deployed rules. Your applications can access these rules in a number of ways: they can make normal Java calls to the business rules (assuming you are running in the same application server as the Rule Execution Server), you can make JMS calls to invoke rules, or you can make a Web Service call to the Rule Execution Server to invoke the rules. Along with Rule Execution Server there is Rule Studio. Rule Studio is an

Eclipse based tool for developing rules. A rules developer (who would normally be a member of the IT department) uses Rules Studio to define the business vocabulary of the rules, define the initial set of rules, and deploy them into the Rule Execution Server.

Another tool is Rule Team Server. This is a tool with a web interface that is used by business users to modify the rules to respond to changing business requirements. This tool can also be used to deploy the rule changes into the rule execution server. Rule Team Server can also be used in conjunction with WebSphere ILOG Decision Validation Services to allow users to test and simulate a change to the business rules before they are deployed into the Rule Execution Server.

Finally, there is WebSphere ILOG Rules for COBOL. This tool can be integrated into Rule Studio and Rule Team Server. It takes business rules written in Rule Studio or Rule Team Server and transforms them into a COBOL sub-program. This sub-program can be integrated into your existing COBOL applications.

**HOST Q6: So when would I use a Rule Execution Server and when would I use Rules for COBOL?**

SME A6: Rules for COBOL is a great first step into getting comfortable with rules. It fits into a companies existing IT architecture as it simply generates a COBOL routines. These routines can be invoked from any of the customers existing applications whether they be written in COBOL, PL1, C etc. There is no additional infrastructure to set up and it gives you an idea of how rules can help your applications and systems become more agile.

**HOST Q7: So I can use it to evaluate business rules without major disruption to my current architecture. Are there any other cases where I would want to use it?**

SME A7: Yes, you may also want to use it where you have small rules that are frequently used in your application. In this situation the total cost of communicating with a Rule Execution Server may outweigh the benefits of the flexibility you get in a Rule Execution Server. In this situation the fact that a Rules for COBOL sub-program can be invoked at a reasonably low cost may make Rules for COBOL the right tool to use.

**HOST Q8: I hear there is a Redpaper and SupportPac for Rules for COBOL with CICS could you tell us more about those?**

SME A8: Yes, the Redpaper and SupportPac describe how to modify the rules for COBOL generated code to allow you to invoke it via an EXEC CICS LINK command. You may want to do this when you want to host your COBOL sub-program in a different CICS region to your application. One reason you may want to do this is to allow your requests to your sub-programs to be Workload Balanced using CICSplex SM.

This function is now included in base Rules for COBOL 7.0.2 which has just been released.

For anyone out there on a previous version of Rules for COBOL who would still like to review the Redpaper, the title is “Updating Rules for COBOL Generated Code to Use Channels and Containers”. The title of the SupportPac is, “CA0A: CICS channels and containers support utility for ILOG Rules for COBOL”.

HOST: [Dan], thanks for taking the time to talk to us about the WebSphere ILOG Business Rule Management System.

SME: You’re welcome.

HOST: Well, that wraps up this podcast discussion. To find out more about the WebSphere ILOG Business Rule Management System and its related products, please go to the description for this podcast at:

<http://www.ibm.com/software/os/systemz/podcasts/websphereonz/>

Further information can also be found on the IBM ILOG website at:

<http://www-01.ibm.com/software/websphere/products/business-rule-management/>

Join us next time as we talk about another important mainframe topic. For now, this is Nick Garrod saying “Thanks for listening”.

## Speaker information:

Title: WebSphere ILOG Business Rule Management System

Summary: Hear about the WebSphere ILOG Business Rule Management System can improve the agility for your applications on System z.

Speaker Name: Dan Donnelly

### Speaker Bio:

**Daniel Donnelly** is an Advisory Software Engineer at IBM Hursley in the UK. He has worked for IBM for the past eight years. Dan is currently part of the WebSphere ILOG Synergies Team, with specific responsibility for identifying synergies between WebSphere ILOG products and z/OS. Prior to joining the WebSphere ILOG team, Dan worked for seven years in the CICS Development organization where, for much of his time, he led the development of the CICSplex SM Web User Interface and the CICS Management Client Interface. He is a Chartered Engineer and a Chartered IT Professional.

Headshot from bluepages:

Offer:

ILOG Home page

<http://www-01.ibm.com/software/integration/business-rule-management/jrules-family/>

ILOG SupportPac

<http://www-01.ibm.com/support/docview.wss?rs=1083&uid=swg24024202>

Redpiece relating to CICS and ILOG

<http://www.redbooks.ibm.com/abstracts/redp4589.html?Open>