



From barley to bar: a digital integration journey

Enabling the HEINEKEN EverGreen strategy through a transparent digital integration strategy

by Leah Valentine

5-minute read

In nature, evergreens are highly resilient, adapting to external changes to remain green year after year.

This resilience inspired Dutch brewer HEINEKEN NV, to develop its EverGreen initiative, a set of goals designed to keep the company growing as it adapts and renews itself in response to changes in the beverage industry and the world at large.

The EverGreen initiative calls for increasing customer-centricity, environmental and social responsibility and productivity. One of its goals is to make HEINEKEN the world's "Best Connected Brewer." Guus Groeneweg, Product Owner for Digital Integration at HEINEKEN, explains his approach to this strategy: "What Best Connected Brewer means for me is three things: minimizing the time it takes to deploy



digital integrations across all our applications and devices, providing a high-performing, stable platform for integration and developing reusable digital integration assets."

That's why Groeneweg teamed with [IBM® Consulting](#) to develop a set of integration capabilities that connect HEINEKEN's worldwide network of brewers, customers and business

partners. Together, the teams used a combination of traditional integration platforms, integration platform as a service (iPaas), event and API management solutions—including [IBM API Connect®](#)—to enable all of HEINEKEN's operating companies (OpCos) to communicate efficiently, regardless of whether their data resides in the cloud or on premises.

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Digital Integration, HEINEKEN NV

The digital
integration
platforms
connect

thousands

of business-critical applications

The
platforms
handle

100%

of HEINEKEN's bank payments

HEINEKEN
uses the
platforms to
process
more than

24 million

messages per month across all business functions

Becoming best-connected

In the years since its founding in 1864, HEINEKEN has grown into a worldwide enterprise with dozens of OpCos, many of which were acquisitions that still maintain their original business systems. These varied operating units are dispersed around the globe and continue to manufacture unique local beverage brands—approximately 350 global and local brands in total. HEINEKEN plans to move to a more consistent IT landscape over time, but today it is still quite heterogeneous. This makes the goal of becoming the world's Best Connected Brewer a significant challenge.

Previously, HEINEKEN's applications were connected to each other individually, a setup that was very slow to respond to change and very



challenging to manage and monitor. To meet his team's goals, Groeneweg needed a modern integration architecture that would be flexible, reusable and easier to manage.

HEINEKEN and IBM collaborated to develop this enhanced set of integration capabilities, starting with a few key integrations. Today, HEINEKEN is well on its way to a comprehensive

multicloud integration strategy that connects OpCos and business processes across the globe.

Groeneweg describes the complexity of the solution: “If a bar owner in Mexico sends us a sales order through his or her mobile phone using our B2B portal, it has to be processed in the back end, then the payment needs to be in place. The beer has to be delivered, the picking lists in the brewery have to roll out of the label printer, etc.”

“What my team does is make sure that the whole end-to-end process works right. Integration is the glue for all this—it’s what allows all of the processes and applications in the value chain to communicate,” he says. All these digital integrations are

developed, operated and monitored by the global digital integration team.

The IBM API Connect platform is a key component of the new solution. This self-service API management platform makes developing API-based integrations accessible to everyone inside and outside the organization. Development teams all over the world can use the HEINEKEN APIs, following the Enterprise Data Models. The digital integration team has developed a catalog of more than 3,000 integrations across all platforms.

“When an OpCo comes to me and says, ‘I need the data from the customer interface between application Y and Z,’ I point them to the API Connect self-service portal, explain how to get the key to this API, and they can start using

the integration right away,” says Groeneweg.

The full integration setup is transparent to users all over the globe, which offers Groeneweg an opportunity to show business users what value the integration platforms are enabling. “I wanted to open the black box of integration. It’s super complex and nerdy, but I wanted people to see the value of integration with their own eyes.”

Through custom-developed monitoring software, people can click on their OpCos on a world map to see which interfaces are running for them on which platforms, what the value is that goes over these integrations, how often they are called, if there were any issues in the last 24 hours and, if so, what should be done,” he explains.

A vision for the future

Not only has the new set of integration capabilities helped move HEINEKEN toward its goal of becoming the world's Best Connected Brewer, integration has become a valuable part of the company's EverGreen strategy. "The way integration is now positioned within HEINEKEN has really changed because our customers can look at them. They don't need my intervention to solve issues anymore. That was

completely different two years ago," says Groeneweg.

But that's not all that has changed, notes Groeneweg. "The integration team is coming much closer to the core business processes of HEINEKEN. Already in Mexico, 70,000 bars and restaurants have all of a sudden become my customers. That's been an interesting shift in my customer stakeholder group," he says.

Going forward, Groeneweg hopes to continue building transparency into company processes. "I want to build things out even more. My goal is extreme observability for integration, which would allow us to get end-to-end insights for the sending and receiving systems, as well as the 3,000 integrations we are monitoring. You ain't seen nothing yet," he concludes.

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Guus Groeneweg, Product Owner, Digital Integration, HEINEKEN NV



About HEINEKEN NV

[HEINEKEN](#) (external link) is a Dutch brewing company, founded in 1864 by Gerard Adriaan Heineken in Amsterdam. HEINEKEN currently owns over 165 breweries in more than 70 countries. It produces 300+ international, regional, local and specialty beers and ciders and employs approximately 80,000 people.

Solution components

- IBM API Connect®
- IBM® Consulting

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