Oracle continues to innovate and transform with cloud applications

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Summary

With Oracle's annual OpenWorld event canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the company has been running a series of virtual events for customers focusing on its key strategic propositions. At its recent Oracle Live: Cloud Applications event, led by Steve Miranda, EVP of applications product development, the company showcased the role its solutions are playing in customers' digital transformation, and the continuing rapid pace of innovation that is bringing new functionality to that audience at a regular cadence.

Oracle is supporting changing digital priorities

The coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on customers' digital transformation programs, with several common business scenarios playing out in different ways across industry sectors. These include:

- **Increased momentum for digital business.** Omdia's research has shown that those businesses that were further advanced in their digital initiatives were better placed to meet the challenges of the pandemic, and able to react in a more agile manner to adjust their processes and business models.

- **Digital customer experience.** For many organizations, the pandemic has necessitated a complete pivot to a digital and online customer experience in place of an existing physical or hybrid engagement model.

- **Supply chain resilience.** Supply chains across all sectors have experienced disruption during the pandemic, with a need for greater insight and agility, so that these networks can be reconfigured as necessary to increase resilience.

- **Employee safety and well-being.** The abrupt switch to remote-working models in lockdown has been followed by a more hybrid approach, in which organizations have a greater need to track and ensure employee safety and well-being, and blend office-based working with virtual engagement with those working remotely.

- **Smarter finance.** In such a disrupted and rapidly shifting environment, it has become even more vital to have a real-time view of the organization's finances, in particular to support and guide agile decision making.

As with many technology vendors, Oracle has created several solutions to address specific pain-points created by the pandemic, but more generally, it is the overall flexibility and capability for rapid deployment of cloud applications that has impressed. Some organizations have deployed Oracle solutions in response to specific needs, while others have pressed ahead with large-scale deployments that were already under way before coronavirus hit. Some examples include:

- New York State Department of Health, which deployed Oracle CX Service to handle the large volumes of inquiries from patients and citizens.

- Consumer goods company Unilever, which implemented Oracle Cloud Supply Chain Management to overcome supply chain disruption and meet increased demand for sanitizing and other products used to combat potential infection.

- UK-based retailer Co-op going live with Oracle Learning (part of Oracle Cloud HCM) to better support employees as key workers during the pandemic period.

- Technology vendor Dropbox, which has seen a significant increase in customer trials during the pandemic and uses Oracle Cloud ERP and Oracle Cloud EPM to automate many of its financial processes and provide up-to-date information on profitability.

A regular cadence of innovation

Across its whole applications portfolio, Oracle has established a strong rhythm for delivering new capabilities and innovation. Each quarterly release can typically deliver over 100 new features, which customers can choose to implement at their own pace. Omdia notes that best practice here is for customers to stay abreast of this new functionality, experiment with and test it in a sandbox environment, prior to implementing as required within the live environment. Many customers have established dedicated teams or centers of excellence that are focused on precisely this purpose.

From a platform perspective, Oracle continues to take advantage of its inherent strengths. A large majority of cloud application customers are now running on Oracle's second-generation data centers, providing higher performance, increased security, and greater resilience. The company is also strengthening its investments in emerging technologies including digital assistants, machine learning (ML), artificial intelligence (AI), and Internet of Things (IoT). For AI/ML in particular, Oracle's model is to infuse these capabilities throughout the portfolio, taking advantage of both first- and third-party data to fuel business insights at both a highly strategic level and a more granular operational level.

One notable change that Oracle has made to its internal structure is to bring its support, customer success, and development teams together into a single organization. This builds on Oracle's own ongoing digital transformation and should have the benefit of making it more focused and responsive to customer needs, and able to deliver a more integrated customer experience right through the lifecycle. It is complemented by Oracle's Cloud Customer Connect Community, an online forum that brings together customers, product managers, and partners, and has been an important source of ideas and enhancements for the product team.

Enhancements across the portfolio

Each individual application family also continues to enhance its respective functionality, with some of the recent highlights as follows:

Enterprise Resource Planning and Enterprise Performance Management Cloud

- Increased Efficiency with Touchless Operations: New features and capabilities that help organizations increase efficiency, speed, and accuracy with touchless operations, including Intelligent Process Automation, Intelligent Account Combination Defaulting, and Automated Tagging of Regulatory Reports

- Improved Decision Making with Predictive Planning: Organizations can intelligently plan and rapidly execute with new capabilities including Intelligent Performance Management, Corporate and Project Planning and Budgeting Capabilities, and Business Continuity Management

- Improved User Productivity and Collaboration with Digital Assistants: Simple conversational and contextual user experience features that benefit all users, including Project Time Entry and expanded support for Collaboration Platforms

- Joint Venture Management Capabilities for Utilities and Oil and Gas

- Complex Procurement Capabilities for Asset-Intensive Industries

- Flexible Resource Scheduling for Professional Services

Customer Experience Cloud

- Unified platform across marketing, sales, commerce, and service

- Guided user interface using AI/ML in the new Redwood UI

- Enhanced customer intelligence with Oracle CX Unity

- DX4C, Digital Experience for Communications, a vertical CX solution for the communications and media sector

Supply Chain Cloud

- Oracle Business Network to engage with suppliers

- Project-based supply chain planning

- AI-driven planning advisor

- Service logistics and depot repair functionality

- IoT-enabled logistics

Human Capital Management Cloud

- Opportunity marketplace to allocate resources to temporary assignments

- Improved support for complex business rules and validation logic

- Increased deployment of AI/ML across all modules

- Employee journeys to simplify and enrich common employee experiences

There is increasing evidence from customer use cases that Oracle's Fusion Cloud Applications is being deployed across multiple areas of a business, with initial adoption in an area such as finance, ERP, supply chain, or HCM leading to further expansion. With all the applications built on a common technology platform and based on a common data model, extension into adjacent areas can be done much faster compared to doing an initial implementation from scratch. Omdia's research also shows that despite the overall impact of the pandemic on enterprise budgets, customers are continuing to understand and prioritize the vital role of cloud applications as a platform on which to build their digital business.

Appendix

Further reading

Digital Transformation Evaluation Framework: Oracle Corp. (August 2020)

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