We couldn’t keep doing business that way. So we chased after one technology fad after another: client-server, objects, components, middleware. Each was touted as the solution, and the pros-and-cons seemed reasonable enough, but there was no master plan. On the heels of each failure, our technical people got more and more discouraged. They wanted to get back to small teams of 2 or 3 people hacking away in isolation. But our applications and systems just aren’t that simple any more.

As Grady Booch puts it, “the dog-houses have been built.” Most of today’s mission-critical systems are the equivalent of skyscrapers. They have to be architected.

What is architecture? Formally, architecture is the structure of the system in terms of parts and their interrelationships, and their externally visible properties.

In business terms, architecture is about aligning technology with the business. It is about setting the important pieces in place so that the big goals can be accomplished. It is about making sure the parts work together as a system, so that more can be done by the system than the sum of the parts.

How does architecture set you apart? Where it makes sense, we architect applications as a family. This has significantly increased our reuse and integration across systems. Tradeoffs are visible now, and we can make the call between local business optimization versus overall business effectiveness. Our enterprise-wide technology architecture helps us avoid redundancy while enhancing consistency and integration. All this makes us more agile. It reduces the development and maintenance burden, and we are able to shift on the fly in response to customers.

What about competitors? Our architecture competency is not easy duplicate. We made the investment—not everyone is willing to do that, and most bail part way through. We went through a major shift in the way we do things. We owe as much to our developers and project managers for following as we do to our executives and architects for leading—not everyone has both good leaders and good followers. And Bredemeyer Consulting helped us do this—not everyone gets to work with Bredemeyer Consulting.

The Vision Thing

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP sets ActionCo apart. Two years ago, pressures on business performance were at an all-time high. A short-term view dominated business leadership, as they scrambled to cut costs. In contrast, Robin Bell looked to architecture to create an advantage so compelling it would completely overshadow competitor’s efforts to shave costs.

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