# ISW helps CEMEX integrate Connections with SAP Events

## Result? More Work Gets Done, More Efficiently.

CEMEX, the global building materials giant, has made a significant investment in making IBM Connections available to its employees across the world. Its use of IBM Connections—and more importantly the value it has already gained from Connections—is widely considered to be one of the best success stories with Connections. The capabilities of Connections are fundamental to CEMEX Shift, the firm's intranet (which is powered by IBM WebSphere Portal). However, while Shift provides a way of bringing people together across CEMEX, there is a complementary need for systems to run the transactional side of the house. For CEMEX, like many of its global peers, that answer is SAP.

One of the challenges for any IT system is how to deal with infrequent users. Any time you have a group of people using a system repeatedly, they internalize the capabilities of the system they are working with, and use becomes intuitive. How to use the system recedes from being a front-of-brain activity. However, for infrequent users who interact with a system only every couple of weeks or once a month, usage is much more difficult. They lack the grounding provided by frequent use, and so stumble their way through the system.

*"Since employees use Connections all the time, why not bring SAP to where the employees are?"*

## Integrating SAP Events with IBM Connections

Through its work with ISW Development Pty Ltd (ISW), an IBM Premier Business Partner located in Australia and actively engaged with clients across the world, CEMEX understood the possibility of addressing this problem for infrequent SAP users by integrating SAP into IBM Connections. By leveraging ISW's technical prowess with both SAP and Connections, CEMEX has been able to integrate approval workflows from SAP inside the Connections Activity Stream. The idea is pure genius: since CEMEX employees use Connections all the time, then bring SAP to where employees are working.

While the integration between SAP and IBM Connections would sound complicated if all the correct technical terms were used, in principle the integration is very simple: when an event happens in SAP that requires someone to approve it, a small automated routine runs to ask the correct person via IBM Connections to approve, reject, or otherwise act on the event. When that action is taken inside IBM Connections by the correct person, their chosen action is handed back to SAP and all is well with the world. Travel is approved for a subordinate. The expense claim from a staff member is signed off. A purchase order is pushed back for more information. Since many of the people actually approving SAP events are busy executives and managers on-the-go, they usually don't even have access to SAP for most of the day since they are not at their desks. Now it is easy for them to approve a travel request or a purchase order while in a break during meetings using their mobile devices. Work happens. The business moves forward. The days of waiting for managers to get back to their desks to open SAP, remember how to use it, and then sign-off on something are long gone. Have tablet. Open Connections. Approve item. Done.

## Integrating Business Forms Into an Intranet

There is a second way that ISW assisted CEMEX to integrate IBM Connections with SAP, and that's through the creation of business forms using IBM Forms Experience Builder. Instead of asking business users to log into SAP to create a travel request, an expenses claim, or kick off one of the other processes that SAP authoritatively orchestrates for CEMEX, these forms-based processes are now started in CEMEX Shift, the intranet. Using IBM Forms Experience Builder means nicer forms have been created that can be initiated, filled out, and submitted without the employee even opening SAP.

ISW helped CEMEX with the creation and implementation of these forms and the integration with SAP. Now when a business user submits a form that was designed in IBM Forms Experience Builder and actioned from inside IBM Connections, the form is handed to the application written by ISW. This application—the same one used above for inserting SAP events into the Activity Stream in IBM Connections—hands the underlying details to SAP for actioning. If the form requires an approval step as defined in SAP, then a SAP event is created and passed back into IBM Connections to display as an Activity Stream request for the appropriate authorizing employee. It sounds like magic and looks like it too, but in reality it is just some very smart linkages that have been created between these enterprise-class systems.

## TECH SPEAK

*If you want the more technical version, when an appropriate event happens in SAP, it is handed to the SAP NetWeaver gateway which communicates with an application on the IBM Connections server that an event is waiting. The application, developed by ISW, parses the event from SAP and injects it into the Activity Stream for the correct user. As part of parsing the event, the potential actions from SAP are identified and the appropriate buttons are displayed in the Activity Stream item via an embedded experience. When popping out the information window in the Activity Stream to see the details of the item, these event options are displayed for the user being asked for authorization, along with the fundamental details of the request itself. When approved or rejected, the ISW application captures the response and pushes it back to the SAP NetWeaver Gateway, which hands the answer back into the SAP engine.*

*Finally, ISW created its application in light of the way SAP licenses the NetWeaver Gateway, thereby minimizing ongoing licensing fees due to SAP.*

## Built, Deployed, and Activated Remotely

As a multinational with operations in 50 countries around the world, the virtual team at CEMEX responsible for both SAP and Connections are split across Biel (Switzerland) and Monterrey (Mexico). CEMEX engaged ISW to help with envisioning the integration between SAP and IBM Connections. Following a one-day onsite workshop in Biel in mid-2013, the Connections experts at ISW delivered everything without any travel. Regular video conferences were held. A shared community in IBM SmartCloud Connections was used for passing documentation and deliverables back-and-forth. Online meetings were spun up as required. What it meant at the end of the day though, was an ability for both ISW and CEMEX to leverage collaboration tools to gain tremendous momentum. The team at ISW were able to work on the next part of the integration during their business day, and then pass it across to the teams at CEMEX in Switzerland and Mexico for deployment and testing. Making use of the full 24-hours of the clock gave an agility to the project that may never have been gained if CEMEX had worked with local partners.

*Work happens. The business moves forward. Have tablet? Open Connections. Approve item. Done.*

On reflecting on its work with ISW on the integration between SAP and Connections, Luis Carlos Garza, the CEMEX project leader based in Switzerland, says

*"Working with different timezones it can be a challenge in a virtual team, but it also has its benefits. With the correct coordination mechanisms, and the right attitude to bring the project forward, we can use these differences to our advantage and work around the clock. When a problem appeared, we normally used our project community (where else? in Connections), and enabled the ISW team to progress while we were sleeping. The next day we were able to continue as the feedback already came back, most of the times already solved, finally resulting in great-value deliverables."*

For Adam Brown, the Executive Director at ISW Development, the project with CEMEX was an eye opener as to how easy it is for ISW to engage with multinational companies on such significant enterprise software initiatives, but at the same time a bit like business-as-usual. As an IBM Premier Business Partner, ISW already works with other firms around the world, and its packaged solutions for IBM Connections—including the Kudos Suite—have developed an ingrained ability in ISW's employees to work effectively across time zones, cultures, languages, and geographies.

## For More Information

What ISW helped this client to achieve with integrating SAP, IBM Connections, IBM WebSphere Portal, and IBM Forms Experience Builder, it stands ready to help other multinational companies achieve too. Please get in touch to schedule a discussion to learn more.

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