

TECH CHOICES



February 24, 2006

Appian Delivers Innovative Human-Centric BPMS For Knowledge Processes

Forrester Wave™ Vendor Summary, Q1 2006

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Appian, a pure-play business process management suite (BPMS) vendor founded in 1999 by former MicroStrategy executives, comes from a different background and mindset than other BPMS vendors by targeting knowledge-intensive processes instead of back-office, transactional processes. Appian Enterprise, a J2EE-based product, provides excellent native collaboration, content management and analytics within the context of business processes — delivered through a portal designed for knowledge workers. Appian has carved out unique differentiators in a crowded market, significant market share in the government sector, and envisions a new direction for BPMS that many of its competitors could learn from.

APPIAN IS BEST SUITED FOR CONTENT- AND COLLABORATION-INTENSIVE WORK

Appian was founded in 1999 by a group of employees from MicroStrategy — a business intelligence (BI) company — whose former employer did not agree with their vision of adding process awareness to BI. Appian's analytics-driven vision appears throughout the suite, making it easy for process designers to base decisions within the process on information about the process itself, like average cycle time and individual workers' performance.

Aside from the analytics focus, Appian has some of the strongest user management, content, and collaboration features tested. The suite provides functionality that reaches beyond the boundaries of traditional, structured processes by offering team collaboration features like threaded discussions and document sharing that are monitored throughout the process — supporting what Forrester describes as the “whole process.”¹

Forrester evaluated Appian's current offering and strategy for human-centric BPMS against approximately 215 criteria (see Figure 1). Overall, the product has strong analytics and collaboration features, but lacks robust process modeling and simulation. Because of its knowledge worker focus, the product is not targeted at complex system-to-system integration tasks, or some back-office, transaction-intensive human processes like claims processing or loan approvals — but improved events architecture and Web services support in the most recent version signal a move towards these process types. We found the Appian product is an especially good fit for buyers that:



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- **Need more structure for heavy collaboration and ad hoc workflow activities.** Appian's collaboration and content management features integrate tightly with process work, allowing collaboration to take place in a semi-structured fashion — yet still be audit logged for compliance. Users are more productive because they do not need to leave the Appian portal to accomplish tasks like reviewing a document and contributing to a discussion. Discussion threads can be associated with process models, allowing the creation of thoroughly documented processes that are easy for new users to participate in.
- **Want to build self-optimizing processes.** Incorporating information about the process back into the process logic allows the creation of process models that tune themselves. For example, when a process' average cycle time crosses a defined threshold, the system can begin directing work — with no manager intervention — to more skilled employees to ensure adequate performance. Strong user management features like skills-based routing help Appian make this sort of scenario a reality.

To see how Appian Enterprise 5 stacks up against 11 other competitors, see the Forrester Wave evaluation of the human-centric BPMS market.²

Figure 1 Appian Enterprise 5 Evaluation Overview

CURRENT OFFERING	
Design	Appian provides 100% Web-based modeling tools that are easy to use. The latest modeler is one of only two with support for modeling exceptions and events graphically. It does not support different modeling views, though it does provide formatted documentation through a Microsoft Word template. While most of the product supports multiple browsers, the modeler works only in Internet Explorer and is available only in English. Its simulation features and the information model still need improvement.
Development environment	Appian’s development environment stands out for its ease of use, although the access control and development model are not as robust as some. However, an excellent events framework has been added to the latest version of Appian. The environment is very well integrated overall, and a provided Eclipse plug-in can be used to extend the modeling notation with new, custom “Smart Nodes.”
Automation	Appian needs to improve its overall support for system integration. However, it has strong Web services support – including a UDDI repository – and it provides integration to several third-party rules engines. Its latest version added robust events management and transaction support.
Workflow	Appian features skills-based and ad hoc work routing, making its overall workflow support a strong point. It also has the most easy-to-use and feature-packed workflow portal we tested, and the portal integrates extensively with various desktop work environments. Its native team collaboration features are paralleled only by FileNet. The entire portal is 508 compliant – not surprising considering Appian’s government client list – and it is now internationalized.
Monitoring and management	Appian provides advanced access controls and allows extensive delegated administration. Process instances support in-flight changes, but the changes cannot be selectively applied to other instances. Appian’s BI heritage shows strongly in its monitoring and analysis features; advanced process analytics are available, and this information can be tied back to the process model to drive decisions.
Analysis and optimization	As with monitoring, Appian’s BI heritage shines through in its built-in analytics features. The product has a unique ability to easily tie analytics about the process into the process itself. However, the company has more work to do in giving recommendations about which optimizations to make, proactively detecting workflow bottlenecks, and enabling process changes to be applied more dynamically at runtime.
Product architecture	Appian is a standard J2EE product that runs on multiple operating systems and application servers. It is unique in its support for generic ODBC-compliant databases. The portal is internationalized, and available in English and Spanish, but the modeler is available in English only.

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 1 Appian Enterprise 5 Evaluation Overview (Cont.)

STRATEGY	
Product strategy	Appian has a road map that addresses the company's deficiencies and brings new and innovative features to the BPM space. Its product is uniquely suited to target all three types of human-centric processes. The company's technology partnerships are adequate and do include several rules engines.
Corporate strategy	Appian is a small, private company that has had difficulty breaking out of the government market so far. It is internally funded, and its lack of language support (Spanish only) will limit international growth until more languages can be added.
Product cost	Appian is an economically priced offering, especially considering the amount of additional functionality – in content management, document management, and team collaboration – that is included in the suite. It is also one of the only vendors to offer a hosted solution.
MARKET PRESENCE	
Installed base	Appian's medium-sized client base is focused heavily on government and public-sector agencies.
Revenue	Appian had \$21.6 million in revenue for 2004.
Revenue growth	Total revenue growth was approximately 35% year-over-year from 2004 to 2005, with 171% license revenue growth.
Systems integrators	Four partners have completed three or more deployments in the last 18 months.
Services	Appian has 65 implementation engineers; training is classroom based, on-site, or Web based.
Employees	Appian has 184 employees, of whom 61 are development engineers and 33 are sales.
Technology partners	Appian has no OEM relationships. It does have various technology partnerships.

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.



Go online to download additional in-depth data and scores for this vendor and other vendors included in this Forrester Wave evaluation.



SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Online Resource

The underlying spreadsheet for Figure 1 is available online. The spreadsheet includes more detailed data and scores for this vendor.

This detailed data and scores for this vendor are also available online through an Excel-based vendor comparison tool that provides detailed product evaluations and customizable rankings.

Forrester Wave Methodology

We conduct primary research to develop a list of vendors that meet our criteria to be evaluated in this market. From that initial pool of vendors, we narrow our final list to those presented here. We choose these vendors based on: 1) product fit; 2) customer success; and 3) Forrester client demand. We eliminate vendors that have limited customer references and products that don't fit the scope of our evaluation.

After examining past research, user need assessments, and vendor and expert interviews, we develop the initial evaluation criteria. To evaluate the vendors and their products against our set of criteria, we gather details of product qualifications through a combination of lab evaluations, questionnaires, demos, and/or discussions with client references. We send evaluations to the vendors for their review, and we adjust the evaluations to provide the most accurate view of vendor offerings and strategies.

We set default weightings to reflect our analysis of the needs of large user companies — and/or other scenarios as outlined in this document — and then score the vendors based on a clearly defined scale. These default weightings are intended only as a starting point, and readers are encouraged to adapt the weighting to fit their individual needs through the Excel-based tool. The final scores generate the graphical depiction of the market based on current offering, strategy, and market presence. Forrester intends to update vendor evaluations regularly as product capabilities and vendor strategies evolve.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Most BPMS vendors focus on highly structured processes, with some supporting highly dynamic structured processes and ad hoc processes. But some pioneering BPMS vendors, like Action Technologies, Appian, and FileNet, support both highly collaborative activities and more structured activities within the same BPMS product. As the BPMS vendors focus more on bringing order and structure to highly collaborative activities, organizations will be able to manage the “whole process” that encompasses both a high degree of structure and collaborative, team-based activities. When this occurs, enterprises will be able to automate an entire process through the full spectrum of human work rather than using BPMS for structured activities, collaboration in a separate environment, and integration between the two worlds being done in the user's mind. See the June 1, 2004, Forrester Big Idea “[The Information Workplace Will Redefine The World Of Work — At Last!](#)”

² Many enterprises are now turning to BPMS as a way to realize their strategic focus on business processes. To see how human-centric BPMS vendors stack up, Forrester evaluated 12 vendors across 215 criteria. Lombardi Software, Pegasystems, and Savvion lead with comprehensive suites that foster rapid, iterative process design. Fuego and HandySoft are strong performers with excellent integration — making them great for enterprises that lack EAI or need to span human- and system-intensive processes. TIBCO, another strong performer, is the only vendor we evaluated that’s integrated its human- and integration-centric products, but Metastorm is also on this path. Metastorm and Global 360 are strong performers with Microsoft-based products; but Metastorm relies too much on third-party software and Global 360 needs better analytics. FileNet by far offers the best support for document-centric processes, and both Appian and FileNet excel at combining structured and collaborative work. Ultimus is a contender with a competitive Microsoft-based product, but lacks a full suite. And Fujitsu, another contender, leads in OEM deals and standards but requires coding to build out advanced functionality. See the February 24, 2006 Tech Choices “The Forrester Wave™: Human-Centric Business Process Management Suites, Q1 2006.”