

Sallie Mae: SOA Message Generation

On a previous project we worked with Sallie Mae to build an enterprise ontology for their loan business. After the ontology was complete, they decided to outsource a new line of loans to a third-party SaaS vendor. Shortly after making that decision, they realized that the new system would have completely different screens, and completely different messages and APIs from their existing systems.

Their existing loan servicing systems had, collectively, about 50,000 attributes. The enterprise ontology we had previously designed had 1,500 concepts. They decided to use their ontology as a unifying principle to conform the old and new messages such that their customer-facing systems would not look schizophrenic. They had mature service-oriented architecture but had not done much to unify or rationalize their messages.

We helped them select the DXSI toolkit from Progress Software. We created a set of programs that converted the ontology into a form that DXSI could consume. (There were many issues around translating multiple inheritance to single and converting many fully-expressed notions from the ontology into flatter representations.)

Much of our work for the remainder of this project involved discovering at a very specific level of detail: exactly what each of the fields in each of the new system's messages actually meant. In many cases this required extensions to the original ontology, but for the most part the extensions were consistent with the original design. In the end we extended the enterprise ontology by only about 10%.

The new system was implemented on time with a set of conformed messages that allowed a single presentation to the customer.

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Address: *Semantic Arts, Inc.*
123 N College Avenue Suite 218
Fort Collins, CO 80524

Email: [*info@semanticarts.com*](mailto:info@semanticarts.com)

Phone: *(970) 490-2224*