



Technology and Innovation

Enterprise Platform or Point Solution? Separating the Hype from the Reality

Max Kelleher



Max Kelleher
Chief Operating Officer
Generis

Biography

Max Kelleher is Chief Operating Officer of enterprise information management specialist Generis (<https://www.generiscorp.com/>), whose CARA™ platform is helping to transform business processes in life sciences and other regulated industries.

Established in 1997, Generis began life as a consultancy group. Following the development and release in 2003 of the Company's CARA solution, Generis continued to develop the product and now counts over 500,000 users across industries worldwide, including 8 of the 10 largest Life Science companies.

Generis' mission is to provide industry-defining implementations that are fast and intuitive to bring its customers an enjoyable and efficient experience. Widely regarded by its customers for its responsiveness, it offers unprecedented care and attention to deliver high performing solutions configured to meet their individual and frequently complex requirements.

Keywords Platform, Suite of applications, Enterprise information management, Digital transformation

Paper type Opinion

Abstract

In 2021, the word 'platform' is going to be bandied about more and more often as all kinds of software vendors attempt to reposition their software in order to seem more foundational (and therefore indispensable), comprehensive and cost-efficient. Given the choice of buying a 'tool', a 'solution' or a 'platform', businesses are opting increasingly for a platform, believing that a platform represents something inherently more flexible and all-encompassing. Software providers are responding to this trend by rebranding single-use tools and applications as platforms. In this article, the author separates the hype from the reality, clarifies what companies should be able to expect from a true 'platform' versus a suite of applications, and discusses why this matters.

Introduction

The current trend among software providers seems to involve the repositioning of applications and tools as 'platforms'. This is causing some confusion and potentially creating new risk for customers. It also threatens to devalue genuine software platform – those that companies can use as the basis for building new, connectable applications and features both now and in the future.



Technology and Innovation

Lately, we are seeing everything from simple e-signature tools to project management applications, rendering tools, (for example, Monday.com) to the Microsoft 365 suite being described as 'platforms'. But they are not. If they only do one thing, are a suite of integrated purpose-built apps, or new capabilities cannot be built on top of them, then by the true definition they are not platforms.

Boosting adaptability

The shift in terminology is a puzzling development, but in reality it's software vendors trying to keep pace with the market. Specifically, they are responding to a realization among large enterprises that diverse portfolios of single-purpose applications are an inefficient and restrictive way to deliver business and/or process transformation.

Flexibility, agility and futureproofing is what all businesses are trying to achieve now. The ability to pivot, innovate and scale is critical to remaining competitive in a dynamic market – where customer preferences can change overnight, and disruptors can attack from any angle.

When companies go off in search of a 'platform', then, they are generally looking for something that will boost their adaptability, offer them greater value and competitive protection for the long-term. Something that will provide new scope for creativity in the way they do business or evolve their market proposition.

All of the above pre-supposes that a company can keep reinventing itself, supported by new software capabilities that meet the evolving needs of the business. An e-signature tool, project management solution, or even the wide-ranging applications that make up Microsoft 365, do not provide that.

Providing a core framework

A genuine software platform is something much more foundational. By definition, it plays an underpinning role – providing a core framework ideally to support both specific, defined business processes and adaptable tools that can be used, ad hoc, during daily work.

The right platform should be robust in its ability to manage content and data (the building blocks for just about everything a business does) all in one place. It should enable the company to harness those assets in new ways over time – via new or improved business processes, analytics, or means of content management and creation – supported by a solid yet flexible foundational layer.

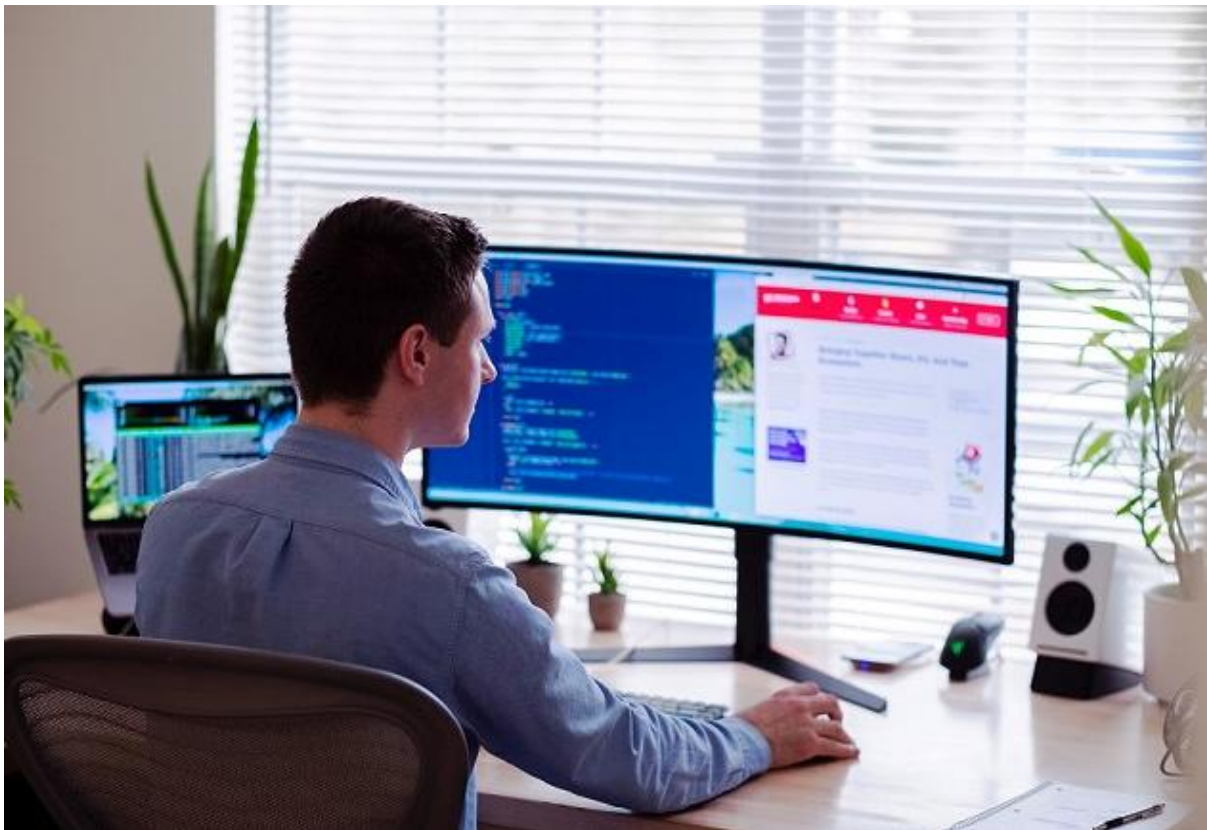
If a software provider is claiming to offer a platform but does not fulfil these expectations, it is making false promises. It is hooking in customers, offering them flexible scope for new features in the future, when all along these are tied to their own development pipeline.

So what does good look like? What most companies really need from a platform is the ability to create a collection of solutions which seamlessly support a business process and any ancillary tasks.



ClickUp is a good example, in the field of project management. Users can create different areas or workspaces and create project-related lists. They can also create workflows and view these in their choice of many different ways, as well as change all the data fields with any form of logic and connect to or create additional functionality. All of this allows companies to flex and support the way people instinctively want to work, whatever it is they are trying to do.

If a new requirement or opportunity emerges tomorrow, the business can create a new workspace to accommodate that. The options are almost unlimited. Any special parameters (for example, to ensure security or information compliance) can be set by IT, but everything else is open for teams themselves to define and modify.



Time to act

There are a number of strong reasons why all of this matters today. First, companies recognize now that tackling digital transformation on a department-by-department basis limits the potential; and that optimal results will come from establishing an enterprise-wide foundation. If each part of a business does its own thing, or sets its own parameters, situations emerge where customer-facing teams can't collaborate with the legal department, for example, because the latter's strong security settings preclude access to their respective systems, hindering collaboration.



Technology and Innovation

Inter-function or inter-company barriers like these have contributed to the soaring use of mainstream online facilities like Box, driven by users' need to collaborate across boundaries when internal restrictions have otherwise prevented this. C-level decision-makers have ended up having to formalize use of these tools simply to take back control of associated information management and safeguarding.



Winning the race

Putting in place a genuinely foundational software platform, for spinning up new business applications and facilities quickly and efficiently, will give companies the ability to transform and keep ahead of rivals.

Choosing the right platform is about selecting the right shoes for the race to market dominance over the next decade. Companies that are looking to move away from a piecemeal approach to digital process, providing diverse capabilities via a single foundational platform, should get themselves in the starting blocks now. This approach is more economical, at a time when budgets are tight; and it enables companies to be more ambitious about the scale and scope of the operational improvements they want to make in future.