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Java And .Net Come Together In Belgium

Mainsoft's suite of .Net-Java software integration tools made it easy for University Hospital of Ghent to implement IBM WebSphere in its .Net environment.

By Thomas Claburn, [InformationWeek](#)

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"When you come to a fork in the road, take it," Yogi Berra famously advised. Thanks to [Mainsoft](#), a maker of interoperability software, that's now as easily done as said, at least when the diverging paths are [.Net](#) and Java.

When Bart Sijnave took over as CIO at Belgium's [University Hospital of Ghent](#) some two years ago, he faced just such a fork in the road: moving in the direction of .Net development or [Java 2 Enterprise Edition](#). With more .Net-oriented developers in his 10-person programming group, he chose .Net.

That meant migrating all applications to a common .Net platform "so that when a developer dies or retires, we could still maintain the applications that they wrote," Sijnave explained. "Before, when a FoxPro programmer or Cobol programmer left the company, you'd have to search the market for a particular expertise that's not very popular anymore."

Last year, Sijnave and his staff made a decision to rebuild the hospital's intranet, much of which had been developed in-house, and implement [portal](#) software that combined Internet, intranet, and [extranet](#) applications.

The most obvious choice, Sijnave said, would have been Microsoft SharePoint, "but as we wanted to be independent in a certain way," he and his team did some research and solicited bids from IT vendors, including IBM. At that point, the end of 2006 and beginning of 2007, IBM WebSphere Portal Version 6.0 became the front-runner because Microsoft SharePoint 2007 hadn't been sufficiently proven in the market, he explained.

"Then we were stuck with our problem of having chosen .Net technology as a common platform," said Sijnave, "and when we confronted IBM with that problem ... they came up with the Mainsoft solution. At that moment, my team and I were very skeptical because we expected mixing [.Net and Java] would be very difficult."

IBM sent over a Mainsoft integrator to ease the fears of Sijnave and his team. Mainsoft makes a suite

of .Net-Java EE software integration tools. After only a few hours, Sijnave recalls emerging from a meeting to find several of the hospital's custom applications ready for demonstration on the new portal. "At that moment, the last hurdle disappeared for choosing IBM," he said.

Using Microsoft Visual Studio 2005, University Hospital of Ghent is integrating its .Net [application framework](#) and 15 .Net applications, over 5 terabytes of data in an [Oracle](#) database, and a [LDAP](#) repository into its new Linux-based WebSphere portal. Instead of having to rewrite .Net code in Java, Mainsoft's software will let the development team compile the programs in Java for use with WebSphere.

"One of the most important things is flexibility," said Sijnave. "We didn't want to tie into one vendor because we have today an electronic health record that has been implemented partly in-house and partly by Siemens."

For Sijnave, Mainsoft's technology enabled his organization to take the .Net fork in the road while still getting to the place his organization wanted to be.



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