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This year we had giant killers, stealth marketers and some who carved a unique niche exploiting, in some cases, Ray Noorda’s notion of “coopetition.” I even heard that term used several times in my interviews with top execs at these companies. That was unique for me. I rarely have heard

that as a uniform marketing strategy. Over the last two years, the strategies have been different. But this year, times, as they say, are tough. And tough times demand tough approaches. Believe me, in the case of these companies, it’s working.

We saw a couple of acquisitions, but they were not common. The

mania of big companies to buy everything in sight and grow by acquisition seems to be on hold as a general approach. There used to be a common practice of acquiring, absorbing the technology, and dumping the rest of the company, including most of the employees. That seems to be abating.

Identity management: Fischer International

We’ve highlighted this fine company before, so I was especially interested in what they were doing that was new and was keeping them in the forefront of innovation in the identity management space. Three years ago, we selected them because of their new approach to identity management, an approach they call federated provisioning. Did it work for them? You bet!

Visionaries at Fischer International told me that they had felt, until recently, ahead of their time. This is a recurring theme for true innovators and it poses its own set of challenges. However, there have been some changes in the marketplace that Fischer anticipated and had the technology ready to address. One of the biggest is security as a service. We used to see this as the province of application service providers (ASPs), but no more. SaaS is going to become a staple architecture and the drivers have changed a lot.

In the old days, the big driver was – as it is now – cost. But countering that driver was secu-

rity. I recall doing a project for an ASP and its biggest concern was keeping clients out of each others’ businesses. That hasn’t changed. What has changed is that back then

companies said, “Well, if they can’t secure it, we won’t do it.” Today it’s, “They had better do it. If they can’t, we’ll go somewhere else.”

The economic drivers are just too strong to allow SaaS to go away. Along comes Fischer International with a big piece of the picture: identity management in an environment that, being SaaS itself, fits right in. However, not only can the company provide a SaaS deployment, for those organizations that want to host their own cloud, an on-premise version is just as easy to deploy.

Early innovations, such as easy self-service, are still with them, although they are much advanced from their predecessors. Their marketing is just as innovative as their technology. For example, a service provider can OEM Fischer products, customize them and drop them into their own services seamlessly. Supporting both service providers and large end-user customers is a tough play, but Fischer International pulls it off without a hitch because the products are designed to support both paradigms.

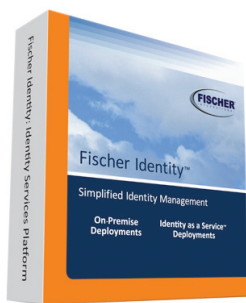
AT A GLANCE

Flagship product:
Fischer Identity

Vendor:
Fischer International
www.fischerinternational.com

Cost: Starts at \$8.20 per user
Innovation: Identity management services

Greatest strength: Vision. This innovator had SaaS pegged three years before it became a buzzword.



Fischer International
3073 Horseshoe Drive South
Naples, FL 34104
T: +1 239-643-1500
F: +1 239-643-3772
information@fischerinternational.com



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