

Reinventing an Industry with the Help of APIs

Postal services around the world are at a turning point. The traditional postal service model of receiving and carrying physical mail has seen a large decline in numbers as people have come to rely more heavily on electronic delivery. In the last seven years, this national postal service has seen more than a 30% drop in letter volume and has reduced mail carriage on the basis of declining demand from six days a week to three. Unfortunately, the struggles of postal services to keep up with the pace of change are global. The U.S. Postal Service has had difficulty in the last several years to generate profits and has struggled to update a model that employs three of the 10 “fastest-shrinking” professions, as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics early this year.

The Challenge

How has this national postal service decided to address the pressing challenge to evolve or become less relevant? With a rich, 170-year history of delivering mail – our messages and data in physical form – they will now deliver messages and data on a much grander scale, aided by the electronic devices that have threatened to make their traditional model obsolete. The state-owned postal service, part of a larger business conglomerate, has embraced innovation in one of today’s most important and dynamic forms: the API. By using APIs, this national postal service can monetize their valuable demographics data through new business services, offering an important growth channel in a rapidly shrinking market.

Aside from the ability to share data with partners, customers and developers, APIs give this government entity the ability to tap into their own developers and the community of 3rd party app developers to enhance customer-facing apps by building on top of them. And with this new postal-service-of-now model. The national postal service can take advantage of a new and seemingly limitless ability to innovate.

The Perils of Design-Later

When the national postal service first realized that APIs could act as the pathway to a much more cutting-edge, relevant and thriving business, they had numerous ideas that they wanted to execute on quickly. They built several APIs themselves, including APIs for parcel tracking, rate discovery, and address finding. These APIs, however, did not include the built-in tracking and management that vendor-provided solutions offered, nor were they designed around an established set of best practices. To ensure scalability of their program and quickly build out their arsenal of APIs, the national postal service turned to API solution vendors.

The solutions they initially employed proved incomplete and as a result, APIs were slow to launch. With one solution, they were struggling to deliver a single API after 6 months; with another, they had little to show after 1 year of development. They determined that in both cases, a lack of design capabilities led to lengthy manual development efforts and produced

Company profile:

- Industry: Postal/Finance
- Employees: 5,000+
- Annual Revenue: \$121 million

Business Requirements

- Rapidly develop great APIs that drive developer engagement
- Centralize management of all APIs in a single solution
- Scale to support rapidly growing number of consumers

Benefits

- APIs delivered in weeks, not months
- Single solution to support the entire API lifecycle
- Solid foundation for strategic API initiative across business lines

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- Online Channels Manager at the national postal service

APIs of varying quality. In addition, because these solutions lacked capabilities for connecting APIs to backend services, it was difficult to advance their APIs beyond production-ready design.

The national postal service knew they needed a solution with rich design tooling that guided them towards best practices every step of the way. They also realized they needed a solution that made it easy to connect APIs with backend services, regardless of the technology on which those services were built. And because of the scale of their program and its large number of stakeholders, the solution had to be easy to learn and produce APIs that were easy for customers to adopt, all while scaling to support an ever-growing number of consumers.

Design-First for Increased Engagement and Adoption

In MuleSoft, this national postal service found the right solution. With the Anypoint platform for APIs, they had all of the capabilities required to achieve their business transformation, in a single, coherent solution.

They gained access to advanced design capabilities in a truly design-first environment that utilized RAML (RESTful API Modeling Language). With concise, expressive and standard-method-based RAML, they could easily design APIs that were easy to understand and use, a key to driving developer adoption. Additionally, the platform could integrate to any backend service so they could quickly move their designed APIs to production.

“With the Anypoint Platform, we can unlock the value of our data through APIs, improve the existing design of our APIs and further build our API strategy,” said the Online Channels Manager at this national postal service.

And more than new and advanced technical capabilities, in MuleSoft, the national postal service, found a trusted partner. MuleSoft’s candid approach to assessing project requirements, alignment of product roadmap with their needs, and depth of local support and services teams were as important as product capability.

A Future Grounded in Possibility

As true innovators adopting and embracing emerging technologies rather than working against them, the national postal service’s future seems as boundless as the future of the APIs upon which their new business model is built.

With a secure and reliable formula in place for delivering APIs that elicit customer engagement, transform data into profit, and forge new partnerships, the national postal service can now develop and leverage APIs in other parts of the business. In a future stage, their banking division will develop APIs to better serve customers on mobile and other digital channels currently under-utilized by their customers. The national postal service also plans to develop internal APIs to enhance operational efficiencies and nurture ongoing innovation within the network of businesses.

“As our customers are increasingly accessing services through digital channels, APIs have become a critical way for us to reach customers and to drive innovation in our business. Our partnership with MuleSoft helps us engage our customers, on the Web and on mobile devices,” said the Online Channels Manager.

By leveraging MuleSoft’s Anypoint Platform for APIs, the national postal service now has the broadest access to the possibility that rests in the open, connected landscape of APIs.

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