

Integrate LS Central to other ERPs with CentralConnect

Webinar Q&A December 10, 2024

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(From both morning and afternoon sessions – there may be some overlap)

Q: Does CentralConnect work similarly in SaaS and on-prem installations (meaning probably Business Central SaaS and Business Central on-prem)?

A: Yes. There's basically no difference. Although you do need access to Azure environment because we're running Azure functions and we're utilizing Azure storage in this as well.

Q: Does the export from 365 Finance and Operations (F&O) use change-tracking, or export only new/modified records or does it export all the data?

A: We use change-tracking, so we will only export records that have been modified on the F&O side.

Q: Do you use OData for integration or only the Data Management framework?

A: We are only using the Data Management framework that F&O provides. If you are not familiar with F&O, then it has a very extensive data management framework that allows you to export and import data, and that's one of the key things that we are using in our integration.

Q: Is CentralConnect ready to be implemented tomorrow?

A: No. We are aiming for go-live of the first release around the end of Q1, 2025. That is roughly three months away.

Q: What if I sell to a customer tomorrow? Is training available already?

A: No. We are still in the development phase. But, as you can see, this is fairly straightforward, if you know how the export of data from your ERP back-end works, and how to work with importing and exporting data, based on Business Central.

Q: Is there a demo environment available?

A: No, you will need to either use the demo environment that Business Central or LS Central provides, as well as whatever demo environment you can get from your ERP.

Q: How will CentralConnect be licensed?

A: Please contact Waddah Laham (waddah@lsretail.com) about this. It's being sorted out, but we expect this to be very fairly priced so you can roll this out to as many customers as possible.

Q: What documentation is available for us to get a better understanding of the product?

A: Documentation is still under construction but as for everything else that we develop at LS Retail, we will provide documentation, probably in the form of online help with some walkthrough of the processes.

Q: Can we handle the JSON format out of the box?

A: The reason we are using XML on the import side is simply that the clients that we've been dealing with are using either SAP S/4HANA or F&O. Both platforms are heavily invested in XML. Technically, nothing is stopping us from using JSON, but it has not been a priority for us to be able to read the JSON format as it is. We have assumed that most of the customers in the first round will be XML-based, so that's what we should focus on. LS Central is, of course, much more focused around JSON. So, it's easier for us to export data from JSON at the moment, but to ingest data on the JSON format you must wait for version 2.

Q: Are any of the update processes between platforms automated?

A: What we were showing you today are the steps that will be automated. So, when Saevar was clicking all these buttons, doing a validation, importing and exporting; that's something we will automate. But we can't really demo an automated process. We must go through the manual steps to highlight the functionality that's available.

Q: Regarding a sales order created in F&O, could it post a sales invoice automatically?

A: Yes. Again, we're just raising everything manually to show you the steps.

Q: What if I select a customer account in the POS and make a POS bill?

A: Saevar touched on this as well. When he made the sale at the POS, the sale goes to the default customer in F&O. But if you sell to a named customer, you need to have that same customer set up on the F&O side as well, so you can post this to account. But we've already thought about that.

Q: Which versions of LS Central does CentralConnect support?

A: We are always aiming for the latest version. This is version 25 now. If you need an older on-prem version, that's just a dialogue we must have with that customer. We might be able to support versions that are still on support. This means three versions back. That's, you know, 23, 24, 25. But we are not going to backport this to Business Central 14 or NAV 2009, if that's the question.

Q: Which versions of SAP HANA are supported?

A: That's a super good question, but neither me nor Saevar know anything about SAP or HANA. Our SAP consultants are unfortunately not on this call. This is something we need to figure out.

Q: Tell us a little more about error handling, please.

A: It may be early days to discuss how we will manage errors. We assume that all errors will be logged so they can be monitored somewhere. We are not aiming for an implementation that has all the manual steps that we showed you today. This should be more or less all automated. And as is the case with automated solutions, you need to have some sort of logging and monitoring so you could report back if something happens.

Q: Are you going to create one sales order for each statement? Then, if yes, what about the transaction register closed on a customer account?

A: We will create one sales order for all cash sales. For every sale that is associated with the customer, we will create a separate order for that. It's basically the same process as we're using in LS Central. All cash or non-customer transactions just go through the general process, but there is a separate process to manage sales that go to a customer account.

Q: Will it be possible to have this connector as out-of-the-box between LS Central and Business Central? Like using LS Central to manage a large number of stores, but the financial management will be in a separate database using Business Central.

A: Yes, you could do it, but you can probably also just use the built-in replication capabilities in LS Central because we are not doing any mappings between different database structures or table structures. So, you could do this, but we can take that discussion offline if needed.

Q: Is this an additional app or is it included in the base application?

A: Yes. This is an additional app and not included in the base application. We are in the process of breaking up the LS Central monolith, so that's something you must be aware of in the future.

Q: How do we ensure an update in F&O has completed update in LS Central before the statement is posted for the item that is changed in F&O?

A: The reason we picked the sales order route through all of this is because it minimizes the replication we must go through, or it minimizes the data we must replicate back and forth. So, what we did when we were returning sales back from LS Central is simply to tweak a bit the payload that's going over to F&O. So, basically, when we are creating the sales order in F&O, we're just assuming that everything is correctly set up in F&O. We're not trying to recreate the sales order configuration and posting on the LS Central side. We're just saying, hey. Here are the items that were sold as a part of this transaction, and please create the sales order based on that. So, this means that all accounting setups, all dimensions, costing and so on are maintained on the F&O side. It doesn't have to be replicated over to LS Central, which saves us a lot of effort and configuration work.

Q: Do we need any extensions from the SAP S/4HANA side?

A: We don't think so. We already have two customers up and running with the previous version of CentralConnect and, as for SAP S/4HANA, I don't think they're using any special extensions - not that we're aware of.

Q: Is there an estimate available on the Azure cost?

A: No. Azure cost is just super-cheap, and you're just talking about dollars a month, based on a discovery we made when we did the web replication from LS Central. So, this is not something that's going to be hundreds of € or something like that pr. month.

Q: You said that the connector works with SAP but is it only for HANA or older versions as well?

A: Neither I nor Saevar are experts in SAP, but we have been working with SAP S/4HANA. So, if there's something similar available for older versions, then yes. We'll just have to take that on a case-by-case basis. But, again, if you're able to deliver documents in XML format, then we shouldn't have any problems.

Q: Does CentralConnect require any customizations on the F&O or SAP side, or does it use standard interfaces available there?

A: I think we can just use the standardized interfaces. There might be different flavors, maybe more relevant to SAP. We are not under the impression that any customizations are required. As we mentioned on the inventory side, if you want to start to play around with where you store the inventory and if you're going to sync the inventory more often than once a day, if you're going to do it outside the statement post window, for example, then you might need some customizations. But, in our experience so far, we've not run into any customizations on the interface side.

Q: How are you closing payment in F&O or other ERPs?

A: Payments are done at the point of sale. So, what we are doing is that we are posting the payments into the Relevance account on the third-party ERP side. But the payment and the validation and management of payments is done on the LS Central side.

Q: When you say Oracle, does it cover NetSuite as well?

A: I know where you're going here, but no, not really because we don't see NetSuite as the multinational, 3rd party head-office application that's basically offering capabilities that Business Central cannot offer. If you're using NetSuite, you should be able to use BC instead. So, the focus will be on the non-NetSuite products from Oracle.

Q: What error trapping and reprocessing is available for message processing, i.e. you change UOM in F&O, but what if it doesn't exist in LS Central?

A: This is something that the validation is supposed to catch. Obviously, when you're doing these mappings, it matters in which order you are synchronizing things. If you were to start by synchronizing the product and find out that all the supporting dimensions for the product do not exist on the BC side then, obviously, you're unable to do anything. You cannot perform a sale on the POS because the POS wouldn't know which units of measure the product is referred to. So, this is what the validation is supposed to make sure doesn't happen when we're sending something over, for example, if you're sending a unit of measure that doesn't exist, then we would block that product from processing, lock it and raise an issue. If you would allow this to flow through, there is no validation, and you just find out when you try to scan the product at the POS with a lot of frustration for the customer. Today, it would throw an error in the staging environment if some of the mandatory elements like unit of measure is missing.

Q: Can you share some further information on what happens if inventory is not managed in LS Central? (Most of the time, it is managed in the head office ERP system.)

A: For us, it's difficult to make assumptions as to how the customer would choose to manage inventory, if they would be doing it in the 3rd party system. In this scenario, for example, we're just assuming that everything is done in BC, and then we can just synchronize everything at the end of the day. However, we have seen cases where customers are doing a part of the processing, maybe in the 3rd party system. This means that you must build a customization on that side as well. Let's say, for example, that you would shift the inventory lookup or inventory availability to SAP. Then you would need to trickle feed the sales transactions through the day into SAP. So, SAP would have a near real-time overview of the inventory in different locations. And you would need to redirect the Web Service call from LS Central for the POS, for example, or the eCommerce that that needs to be redirected into SAP. And we're not going to focus on trying to build something like that out of the box. Still, this is something that can be done as a customer sales customization.

Q: What if we have about 100 stores and we post the statement by shift, so there could be several statements per store. Will it create the sales orders for each store and each shift?

A: Yes. I think this is correct. This is basically the way it works in LS Central. If you create a statement per shift, if you have three shifts per day, then you get 3 statements per store. You could start to do some wrangling and aggregate these statements into one statement on the F&O side. But the default behavior here would be that you would have three end-of-day statements instead of one end-of-day statement. That's the default behavior in LS Central.

Q: How about licensing? Do you need to pay for additional users? What about Azure fees?

A: Neither I nor Saevar know anything about licensing. But we can tell you what we have assumed about this. That, for example, and correct me if I'm wrong, Saevar, in the F&O case we are not using any commerce components. So, if you're worried about having to do license things on both the Dynamics side, or the F&O side and the LS side, then we try to make sure that that should not be the case. Simply license the devices on the other side and you shouldn't have to license anything on the F&O side because we're not making use of any of the commerce capabilities. I have no idea how this works on the other platforms, Oracle or SAP, but this is something that the vendors for these products can easily figure out for you guys.

Q: Is the data validation process that you run prior to importing the data something that can be set up?

A: Yes, it is a basic validation on the data and if some non-mandatory data is needed. But, of course, this can be extended, and partners could extend this validation if they like. There was a lot of discussion whether we should build all of this stuff outside of BC or if we should try to build it as a standalone application in Azure, for example, because there's a lot of building blocks that we could make use of there. But in the end, we saw that most customers will probably have a customization or tool on top of this, and that's really easy to manage in BC. So, we decided to, at least in the first round, try to build as much of these capabilities into BC because it's super easy for the BC partners to extend this. This is built using the extensibility framework so you can add more tables and customize this and that. Time will tell if that was the right decision, but that's at least the approach that we're using for the for the time being.

Q: What about customers who are running on-premises LS Central and have SAP in the cloud?

A: We don't care if you're running LS Central on-prem or in SaaS. The only thing we care about is that the version you are running needs to be within 24 or 25. We're not going to make this available to the older code base, something called BC 14, if you're familiar with that. But if you have, you know, NAV 2009 or something like that, then sorry. You need to upgrade if you're going to take advantage of this. The requirements are that you have access to the Internet, you can write and read files from Azure storage, and then we don't care if this is done on-prem or in the cloud.