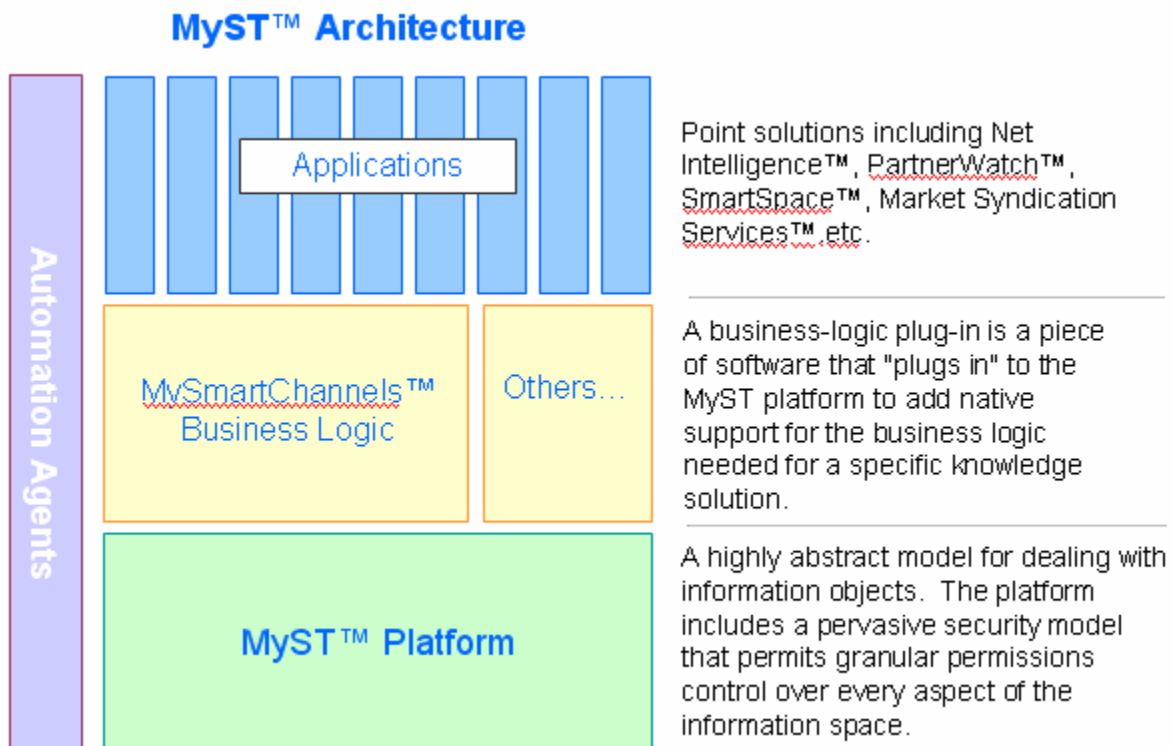




What Is MyST?

MyST has nothing to do with Myst, the game. "MyST" derives from a nickname for "MySmartTags", the name of the first web service solution we built. We liked the term and named our company MyST Technology Partners. We don't actually have a specific product named "MyST". Our knowledge server product is named the *MyST Web Services Platform*, which we frequently refer to simply as "MyST". Since this web services platform is the foundation for all of our products and services, we often use the term "MyST" as an umbrella term that covers all of our technologies and solutions.

In designing MyST, our objective was to create an abstract information space, together with supporting services, designed to help companies solve their own specific "knowledge management" problems. We don't really like the "KM" phrase, but the reality is that information has become a key asset—if not *the* key asset—in most organizationsⁱ. And there is a tremendous need for systems that help workers transform information (raw data) into knowledge (information that increases one's ability to act wisely)ⁱⁱ.



We designed MyST (the web services platform) around two basic concepts: agility and security. The platform defines a relatively simple and highly abstract model for dealing with information objects. This model includes a pervasive security model that permits granular permissions control over every aspect of the platform. It is useful to think of the objects at this level as *elemental* objects from which more specific (i.e., less abstract) knowledge solutions are built. To facilitate the creation of such solutions, the platform supports what we call *business logic plug-ins*.

A business-logic plug-in is a piece of software that "plugs in" to the MyST platform to add native support for the business logic needed for a specific knowledge solution. The platform can simultaneously support any number of plug-ins, giving it a chameleon like quality; the platform can easily look like whatever it needs to look like to most effectively address a specific knowledge solution. Our MySmartChannels *Weblog Application Server* is a concrete example of how a plug-in transforms the MyST platform into something more specific.

MySmartChannels refines MyST's abstract object model into one organized around idea of *channels of information*. Channels are created around specific subject matter areas and contain any number of information items that are about that subject. Channels themselves are organized into higher-level containers known as spaces. To this, MySmartChannels adds the ability to transform (using industry standard XML and XSL technologies) channel content into not only HTML web pages, but virtually any imaginable format including XML, RSS, RDF, Microsoft Office smart tags, OPML,

SharePoint WebParts, topic maps, even formats that have not yet been invented. The MySmartChannels channel metaphor embraces the idea of personal weblog publishing but extends the idea to *weblog applications* that are composed of many channels interacting as an *application* in a secure environment. Thus, MySmartChannels can be seen as both a concrete solution built on MyST and also as a platform for building specific weblog applications.

How does this translate into our ability to deliver solutions for enterprises?

By designing solutions as federations of loosely coupled services built on an abstract underlying platform, we have been able to rapidly offer solutions for a (seemingly) wide variety of business problems, such as: secure enterprise weblogging, partner compliance monitoring, collaborative manuscript review, competitive intelligence monitoring, content management and syndication, secure RSS creation and management, Weblog communities, search engine visibility optimization, project management, distance learning, Office XP smart tag authoring, and others. While these may seem like very different applications, they all share the fundamental qualities of using information to empower users to make decisions more effectively. The MyST platform, extended with business logic plug-ins such as MySmartChannels and others, is an ideal "box of legos" for creating solutions such as these.

i **Agile Content**

Just about every company is really in the information business.

While this idea may run contrary to conventional thinking, it is precisely what forward-thinking organizations believe. In a recent article for [KMWorld](#), we see that Tom Steward, Editor-in-chief of the Harvard Business Review believes fundamentally that "the real value of a business is in what it knows" and that "much of a business' work consists of developing and sharing knowledge." And its not just KM fanatics or academics that feel this way. In [The Lexus and the Olive Tree](#), an Exxon manager explains why Exxon is more in the information business than the oil extraction business; because everyone knows how to extract oil, but Exxon knows how to do it better and faster. It is that information—that corporate knowledge—that makes Exxon valuable.

Guided by [principles of agility](#), we expect system requirements to change in ways we cannot anticipate and we prepare for such change by building solutions that are both simple and flexible. Recognizing that information is a valuable asset--perhaps the most valuable asset--in a business or organization, it is only prudent to represent, persist, and utilize (i.e., "manage") knowledge artifacts with great flexibility. Not doing so may appear, at times, to be the simplest thing to do, but this is usually an illusion.

Incidentally, the idea behind MySmartChannels is to provide a simple, lightweight, yet flexible platform for managing knowledge artifacts, especially tacit knowledge items that are typically unstructured and difficult to capture in conventional information systems. Most of this "business know-how", despite its high value, exists only in people's heads or is hopelessly lost in the tsunami of messages jamming everyone's e-mail folders.

ii **Can A Blog Post Contain Knowledge?**

Sounds like a simple enough question, right? However, a question like this, especially when raised among techies, runs the risk of triggering deep philosophical—I would call them religious—debates. In no time at all, the debate focuses on a fundamental issue: What *is* knowledge?

I figured I could find such a debate-in-progress when I noticed the following comment in [Roland Tanglao's Weblog](#):

*I am not an AI guy, but I think knowledge *can* be contained within a weblog post if the post is [in a] format where the blog system can automatically extract categories/keywords/topics.*

I didn't have far to look. Roland was commenting on dueling posts by [John Robb](#), former Userland CEO and active K-log (Knowledge webLog) champion, and [Vikas Kamat](#), computer scientist. Naturally, John think blogs can contain knowledge; Vikas does not. Roland offers a qualified "yes".

Who's right? Everybody (given each his own definition of knowledge, anyway).

Let me suggest a pragmatic definition of knowledge for those of us who are trying to chip away at real world KM problems (to use the overloaded, seriously baggage laden, "KM" term):

Knowledge is information that improves a person's ability to act wisely.

This is a simple but powerful definition. It defines knowledge *implicitly* in terms of its enabling effect—improved ability to act wisely—rather than any specific attributes. (By the way, the [Turning Test](#) uses a similar technique to define *intelligence*.) Ultimately, it is this enabling effect that we value; that we create software to help achieve; that companies are willing to pay for. Any specific attributes are just "implementation details".

So, can a blog post contain knowledge? If you are talking about information that improves a person's ability to act wisely, then certainly, the answer is yes.