



Mid-market Financial Executives Face Unique Challenges

Mid-market companies are in a tough position. Their business requirements are greater than small business, but their resources are fewer than in the Global 2000. Mid-market companies are vulnerable because they compete against Global 2000 companies that have greater resources as well as against smaller businesses that have greater agility. Because of these challenges, mid-market financial executives are in a unique position. They need to find ways to improve the performance of their company and get away from spending so much time on non-value added activities (such as manually processing transactions) that slow down the ability to distribute critical reports to decision makers. One of the ways they can improve company performance is with business performance management (BPM) solutions. And here's the good news – most mid-market companies already own the building blocks of a powerful BPM solution.

Utilize What You Already Have

Most mid-market companies already own the building blocks needed to have a robust BPM solution. To understand how to better use these building blocks you need to understand what BPM solutions do.

BPM effectively coordinates the connection of financial, accounting and operational data stored in company databases. BPM then places the data into applications that let decision-makers (end users) re-arrange that data into useful information that improves budgeting, forecasting and planning processes. Those databases and analytics components, which re-arrange the data, at most mid-market companies, are Microsoft products – mainly SQL Server, Windows Server and Office.

The latest versions of Microsoft technologies emphasize the same two qualities that anchor the most effective enterprise BPM systems: collaboration and control. The heart of Microsoft's Office 2003 System, note the technical reviewers at PC Magazine, makes data available throughout the workplace in a highly controlled manner thanks to Microsoft's SharePoint Services, which enables employees in different parts of the company to collaborate on the same documents – such as Excel spreadsheets – while tightly managing version control and usage rights.

Understand Mid-market Companies Have Unique BPM Needs

Because of size and budget restraints, Mid-market finance executives need to understand their companies have unique needs when it comes to BPM solutions. These needs can be broken into six considerations which will help mid-market executives avoid costly gaps between what is promised and what is actually delivered.



1. The BPM solution should be easy to implement – systems should be intuitive to use which lowers the amount of time and money needed for training. Familiarity and comfort can play a major role in keeping implementation, training and maintenance costs low.
2. The BPM solution should deliver essential reporting capabilities without excessive complexity – beware of inundating new BPM users with features and benefits they may never have a need to use.
3. The BPM solution should be highly flexible – the software must be able to be enhanced and supplemented as your company’s needs change.
4. The BPM solution should be able to be implemented one solution at a time – sound integration to your existing systems enables your company to add one module at a time, saving money and increasing user adoption, which improves ROI.
5. The BPM solution should show transaction-level detail – digital audit trails are vital to ensure accuracy of data and minimize risk for your company.
6. The BPM solution must leverage existing technology investments – increasing user adoption demands less change take place. Both business users and IT users should be able to utilize what they already know and are comfortable with.

Value Your Greatest Resource - Time

Mid-market companies must recognize their greatest resource is time. Improved company performance comes from saving money and employees spending their time in more productive activities. In order to better leverage your resources you need to automate manually intensive, non-strategic activities. In order to improve decision making you must be able to gather information sooner and distribute to managers to avoid strategic mistakes. By redefining processes and better leveraging technology mid-market companies can improve business performance. The trick is to make sure your new BPM solution takes better advantage of what you already have.



George McMann, a former Big 4 auditor, CPA, and MIS Director, is President and CEO of BizNet Software (<http://www.biznetsoftware.com>), a business performance management firm in Irving, Texas.

Mr. McMann personally designed BizNet Software's core technology, BizNet Insight™, and has over 15 years experience in software development, implementation and consulting. Mr. McMann began his career as a CPA with Ernst & Young and has advised on and managed the implementation of software integration and financial auditing projects with Nortel Networks and Clarus Corporation within the financial, health, insurance and telecommunications sectors.