

A new generation of ERP solutions

Mike Burke, Managing Director of Purpose Software, explores the evolution of business management systems for the channel and explains why software needs to support diversification

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The continued evolution of the delivery of managed services is putting increased pressure on organisations to diversify, so much so that resellers must now decide how much longer they can run their operations on business software that's been designed specifically for the print and copier sector and is unable to support diversification.

Bespoke software designed to handle the specific requirements of print resellers might have been the best choice at the time it was acquired, but changes to technology, operating systems and business processes have necessitated compromises, add-ons or workarounds to maintain business operations.

To achieve the level of functionality required to operate their businesses, resellers have had to integrate platforms with disparate CRM, service management, accounting and business planning software, all of which handle vital business data and have to be separately managed on a day-by-day basis. Such applications are neither integrated nor function in real-time and are almost certainly unable to deliver the real-time big data analytics, business intelligence and other data necessary for a thriving business.

The structure and sources of data across multiple platforms are often seen as the root cause of reduced sales performance, process inefficiency, poor customer management and unpredictable cashflow. Maintaining accurate data across multiple platforms can create a 'cottage industry', the sole purpose of which is to make information available, often through manual process, to enable an organisation to function. This challenge is not market-specific and can be seen in enthusiastic start-ups through to global organisations.

It is often a far easier decision in the short-term to put off change, as this is



commonly perceived to be costly, cause significant disruption to daily operations and distract employees with time-consuming processes, such as planning, data migration, planning and staff training. However, doing nothing is not an option, as failing to replace outdated service management software is likely to have a serious impact on the business as its needs evolve.

What are the options?

Whilst on-premise implementations have been the traditional route taken by MPS and print resellers, moving to the cloud can deliver significant benefits to the channel by delivering greater mobile access through browser-based dashboards, reduced organisational downtime and lower potential infrastructure costs.

However, resellers are already questioning whether moving service management systems to the cloud delivers much more than they already have. Going down this route still doesn't solve problems associated with the integration and ongoing management of disparate systems used to manage different areas of a business.

The cloud is really just a different delivery platform that delivers essentially the same functionality with the same operational limitations as traditional premise-based systems. Not really much of a step forward into the future.

An ERP approach

The alternative to this reliance on multiple applications is to create a 'master data' structure that underpins enterprise-wide business processes, from sales management, order fulfilment and customer service through to accounting and cash collection. It's just not feasible, or even cost-effective, to customise legacy systems to provide the level of integration required to meet this new environment. A new approach is needed.

A core part of this new approach is the consolidation of data sources on a single platform that provides the real-time business intelligence needed for effective management and control. The ability to access a single source of data that supports an organisation's activities in their entirety will help deliver incremental growth, drive operational excellence, retain customers and maximise financial return.

What's needed is a new generation of ERP (enterprise resource planning) solutions like FORZA. Based on SAP Business One, which is used by more than 50,000 organisations worldwide, FORZA encompasses all sales, service and accounting requirements and provides resellers with the first viable alternative to traditional single point software applications.

Adopting this SAP-based approach provides resellers with access to systems

that have grown from development budgets of tens of millions of pounds into the Business One product. This single, integrated solution provides clear visibility and complete control across every aspect of the business, capturing all critical data for immediate access from any location.

It includes:

- **CRM** – sales and opportunity management and after-sales support;
- **Warehouse & Production Management** – manage inventory across multiple locations, track stock and manage production orders based on materials requirements planning;
- **Purchasing** – automate procurement from purchase orders to vendor invoicing;
- **Service Management** – real-time call management and integrated service information;
- **Contract Management** – lease agreements through click, time and seat billing;
- **Mobility** – iOS app for iPhone and iPad to interact with SAP Business One;
- **Financial Management** – automated financial and accounting processes including support for multiple currencies, budgeting and bank reconciliations;
- **Reporting & Business Intelligence** – access to data to create new reports or customise existing ones through integration with Crystal Reports; and
- **Optional Analytics** – powered by SAP HANA to provide instant access to real-time insights for business intelligence.

Single integrated platform

The ability to have, for the first time, a single source of data on a single integrated platform will transform business operations for the managed services and print reseller industry. It provides a clear view of all aspects of the business, from sales and service through to accounting, giving resellers the information they want when they need it most to maximise the customer experience at every touchpoint and maintain a competitive edge.

Designed by the industry, for the industry, ERP solutions such as FORZA allow resellers to effectively track the profit/loss from every machine, contract and customer and generate accurate, real-time management information to enhance visibility across the business.

Centralising and consolidating all

business data using a single integrated platform reduces organisational complexity and makes it easier to increase efficiency and productivity. It also enables a more pro-active approach to running the business by eliminating the need to wait for month end before reports can be generated and analysed, giving insight into business performance over the previous month or quarter.

The ERP approach delivers real-time reporting to see at a glance the performance of different operating divisions. Web-based dashboards, customisable to meet individual functional requirements, provide real-time data and organisational transparency to enable more informed decision-making across the business.

To assist the sales process, this new generation of ERP systems offers fully integrated CRM to provide a 360 degree view of accounts, with instant access to relevant data including contact and service histories, account and order status. Having a real-time awareness of current customer issues in other departments helps to drive sales opportunities, maximise prime selling time and drive incremental growth.

To further enhance the sales process, sophisticated Configure Price Quote (CPQ) capabilities enable salespeople to generate accurate quotations of a consistently high standard, comprising a combination of hardware, software, services and supporting documentation, from any internet-enabled location. It also provides quick and accurate reporting on the status of accounts to enhance sales productivity and forecasting.

Greater flexibility to customise

It is important to note that resellers deploying SAP Business One-based systems such as FORZA no longer have to rely on their chosen software supplier for add-ons that enhance the core functionality or bolt-ons that connect externally and push data to the central platform. With over 3,300 development partners world-wide, resellers have greater flexibility to customise the system with pre-packaged or custom solutions that provide additional business intelligence or process management to meet their specific organisational requirements.

A particular example of this is direct integration with leasing companies for



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credit checks and approvals. This will enable salespeople to create quotes, run credit checks, confirm stock, propose configurations and produce agreements whilst onsite with customers. Removing manual processes in this way streamlines the sales process and presents a more professional image.

No barriers or limitations

When the time comes to make a decision on whether to carry on with the traditional disparate systems that have always been used or to adopt a new approach, it is important to consider where you are planning to take the business. If you are not planning to expand or look for new business opportunities in other areas, such as cloud services, managed services, managed network services, security and more, then it probably makes sense to carry on with the systems you have.

However, for resellers looking to take advantage of these new markets, the question is why would you want a slightly updated version of what you already have, with the same integration, accessibility and support issues, when, for a similar cost, you can implement a powerful ERP platform that eliminates these issues whilst allowing new lines of business to be easily added without barriers or limitations.

In addition, when you add up all the license fees and ongoing support costs required by multiple systems, it is easy to see how using a single integrated ERP solution can deliver a lower cost of ownership and a better ROI. This can be achieved by eliminating the IT and data management issues required when using disparate, broken and archaic systems and freeing up resources to be deployed more productively across the business.

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