

Managing software

How to understand the integration of your office systems

INTERVIEWED BY JAYNE GEST

Even in this recovering economy, businesses are trying to do more with less. While managing existing processes can enable flexibility for the ups and downs of business, incorporating software could alleviate pain points, improve productivity and save money.

“The big question is, ‘How do I improve what I do with my customers, my vendors or my employees?’” says Curtis Verhoff, systems integrations and applications manager at Blue Technologies. “Those are the big three, and every organization is like that — whether it’s somebody who sells widgets, provides professional services or is trying to find donors and support.”

Smart Business spoke with Verhoff about utilizing software to improve a range of business functions.

What are some examples of optimizing your software resources?

These software solutions often deal with enterprise content or customer relationship management, but they also can be transactional, such as helping handle invoices, statements, packing slips or the documents you use daily to communicate with customers. One business recently optimized its existing systems to reduce raw postage costs, saving anywhere from \$4,000 to \$5,000, or 20 percent, each month.

Two other organizations increased productivity by improving payment management. By adding to its software and adjusting existing systems, one company took better advantage of pricing discounts by paying vendors earlier. The other business tweaked the integration of its current system, getting

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its elite group of customers to pay on average five to seven days faster, which improved cash flow.

What can maximizing your software integration mean for your business?

In this economy, it’s critical to look at the level of success you’re having integrating your current software products. All businesses have to work harder to maintain their current customer loyalty, while trying to attract new customers. You must be more productive with the same or fewer employees.

Your competitors are already working to be productive and more customer friendly — you don’t want to be left behind. You need to provide advantages to your customers to separate yourself. Highlighting your software solutions through marketing can give your customers an indication of how it will make doing business with you more pleasant and reliable.

How can you discover if you have problems with existing software?

What complaints do you hear from your current staff about being more productive, servicing customers better or doing day-to-day activities more efficiently? Is each department running at peak efficiency? Where is your business

not functioning at optimal capacity? If you’ve integrated certain solutions, then what’s the ROI and are you happy with that?

If you’re not hearing about problems, check with your managers. Some managers don’t take problems to the top until they reach critical mass.

Once you’ve spotted the pain, what’s next?

First, identify and pull together people to discuss the fine details of the problem. You don’t need to connect all the dots, just get a solid understanding. Develop a game plan that focuses on the most painful areas that, if resolved, can produce the biggest gain.

Many companies put together a laundry list, and then don’t move forward, fearing the cost and scope. However, if you prioritize the most critical items, you might be able to resolve the few problems that are causing most of the pain.

Then, reach out to a provider with the skills and abilities, as well as the offerings, to help you overcome your top challenges. It’s important for all parties to keep the larger list in mind because it could affect the software solution decision. Each resolution is a piece of the puzzle, and you want to avoid having to revisit it later once you’ve moved on. ●