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Hunkering down: three IT strategies that make a real business impact during tough times. This paper is one of a three-part series that highlights the key elements that businesses must have in order to grow and be successful. These elements correspond to three of the biggest challenges facing midsize organizations across Europe: namely data protection, information insight and process flexibility.

In the current economic climate, confronted by the constraints imposed by limited resources, midsize organizations are looking for a partner that can help them address these challenges to make the most of their IT budgets.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To thrive in today's competitive market midsize organizations need to be agile, responding quickly to changing market conditions and exceeding customers' demands. This implies flexibility in their underlying ICT infrastructure and business processes. But in the current economic climate, organizations of all sizes are under pressure to freeze expenditure and wring ever more return from existing assets.

These two conditions need not be mutually exclusive: there are solutions that can release greater value from existing ICT investments while enabling an increase in efficiency across the organization.

This white paper will show that by improving process flexibility and transparency, not only can employees and systems adapt more easily to changing requirements, but existing infrastructure and applications can run more smoothly together for longer, thus raising ROI. It will argue that enhanced visibility via centralized data management makes it easier for problems to be identified and resolved quickly. This helps increase uptime, and reduce maintenance costs.

Reducing the need for remedial maintenance also means skill resources are freed to focus on more strategic tasks, winning and retaining customers and increasing profit on revenue.

# IMPROVING PROCESS FLEXIBILITY:

HOW TO RESPOND QUICKLY TO CHANGING MARKET DEMANDS BY STREAMLINING PROCESSES

## CHALLENGES AND COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS

### KEY BUSINESS DRIVERS FOR PROCESS FLEXIBILITY

- Need for faster reaction to changing market conditions or customer requirements
- Maintaining operational efficiency
- Supporting business continuity
- Enhancing competitive differentiation
- Accelerating time to market
- Improving speed and flexibility of service

With limited resources, midsize organizations can struggle to adapt to changing market conditions, whether these are reduced time to market, increased expected service levels, or price-cutting. But smaller size can be an advantage. By remaining flexible midsize organizations can react faster to changing customer requirements than their larger, less agile competitors. However, in the current climate, midsize organizations also need to achieve that flexibility in an affordable way.

Unlike larger companies, midsize organizations can't lean on globally recognized brands: a lost customer, or a missed opportunity to recruit a new customer, may never be recouped. So they need to find unique ways of differentiating their offerings.

Midsize organizations often depend on quality and speed of service. This requires streamlined flexible processes to adapt and personalize customer interactions, exceeding the expectations of prospective or existing customers. Efficient and flexible processes can enable midsize organizations to offer outstanding responsiveness, both in terms of speed and customers' specific needs.

Once established, flexible processes that operate as part of an open, integrated IT infrastructure, become 'business as usual', ensuring that customers remain happy and loyal into the future.

Another differentiation which can be of advantage to midsize organizations is speed to market. They can't afford to bring products to market late and then slug it out with competitors by spending more on marketing or cutting prices, so being first gives them an edge. But they can't afford to cut corners either, implying a high degree of operational effectiveness.

Streamlined processes that run over an open, integrated infrastructure can accelerate time to market by providing transparency, improving production and avoiding delays due to compatibility issues or communication failures.

Business processes that are not well integrated into a unified IT infrastructure diminish effectiveness right across an organization, losing existing customers, failing to attract prospects and frustrating employees. Midsize organizations with multiple proprietary legacy systems can benefit from the streamlining effect that a centralized, open standards-based approach to data management can provide.

This kind of architecture also makes IT infrastructure more scalable: the company can adapt quickly to growth and change because new systems can be integrated without enormous upheaval.

# IMPROVING PROCESS FLEXIBILITY:

HOW TO RESPOND QUICKLY TO CHANGING MARKET DEMANDS BY STREAMLINING PROCESSES

## KEY IT DRIVERS FOR PROCESS FLEXIBILITY

- Process transparency that ensures traceability of data, transactions and communication trails
- Compliance with data security and retention legislation
- Easily scalable processes with low hardware expenditure and disruption
- Reduce time spent on data process management/maintenance
- Protect investments through compatibility, scalability and easy integration
- Improve data availability and process reliability and long-term resilience

## CORRECT RESPONSES AND BENEFITS

Midsized organizations, then, should look for IT solutions that are flexible, affordable, scalable, open and which help them meet an increasingly stringent governance framework.

Affordability is not just a question of purchase price: TCO calculations should include estimates of the value of increased customer retention, raised productivity and uptime and reduced employee churn, as well as routine maintenance costs, so that purchasing choices are made on a basis of maximizing ROI.

Open and transparent systems can enable midsized organizations to accommodate changes in market conditions or customer requirements quickly by helping ensure compatibility and traceability of information throughout workflows.

By choosing systems which enhance their responsiveness, organizations can fulfil a larger range of requirements more quickly than competitors, thus contributing to greater customer satisfaction, protecting existing revenues and attracting new business.

Midsized organizations should seek out transparent systems which meet compliance requirements for the latest data security, retention and privacy legislation and governance standards. Flexible processes enhance traceability and can help deliver the accountability demanded by regulatory controls. Transparency of information helps ensure compliance obligations are fulfilled, safeguarding the company against official reprimand, enhancing reputation and providing customers with peace of mind.

As speed to market is critical, midsized organizations should look to streamline processes so they can develop products faster, avoiding delays caused by inefficient processes running on incompatible legacy systems.

Efficient, flexible systems also mean employees aren't frustrated by hurdles to their jobs even during times of change. This creates a better working environment that can raise productivity thus reducing employee churn.

Midsized organizations are under pressure to maximize the return on their ICT investments. Flexible processes can extend the life of existing assets, because enhanced process visibility makes it easier to diagnose and solve problems more quickly. Existing systems and applications can thus be run optimally, increasing uptime. Costs can be lowered through faster, less frequent maintenance and longer replacement cycles.

The management, support and maintenance of ICT infrastructure are critical to midsized organizations that don't have a large pool of IT skills. Organizations should look for systems which automate routine processes. Eliminating time-consuming manual administration and support, and reducing the effort required to adapt systems to rapidly changing business requirements, can reduce TCO. It can also allow scarce technical resources to be focused on more creative tasks, such as developing new applications that enhance productivity and exploit new business opportunities that can deliver additional value to the business.

## IMPROVING PROCESS FLEXIBILITY:

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### QUESTIONS TO ASK A PROSPECTIVE SUPPLIER

- Can the vendor provide an open, integrated architecture offering the transparency needed to track data, transactions and communications or full regulatory compliance?
- Can the vendor's solution work on the organization's existing systems or will it require significant hardware and software upgrades?
- Is the vendor's solution scalable? How much disruption will it cause to add more users or new business processes?
- How automated is maintenance and management of the vendor's solution?
- Does the vendor have a network of experts offering local, industry-specific guidance?

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[www.oracle.com/solutions/mid](http://www.oracle.com/solutions/mid)

and further raise the return on IT investment.

Flexible, open systems scale more easily than rigid proprietary ones: new processes can be added with minimal disruption and additional hardware, ensuring service levels for employees, suppliers and customers are upheld even during times of transition. Midsize organizations should use open standards to optimize their processes for better performance from existing multi-vendor infrastructure elements

and applications, and to help ensure they can accommodate peak loads reliably, without additional investment.

Midsize organizations should look to simplify their infrastructure wherever possible. However, even 'out-of-the-box' solutions can demand some fine-tuning. Midsize organizations should therefore choose a vendor that can provide a network of expert partners offering local, industry-specific guidance on providing flexible processes.

## CONCLUSION

Midsize organizations are under increasing pressure from larger competitors and tough economic conditions. Their ability to react to emerging threats and opportunities can only be as effective as their underlying data and processes, but at the same time they have to maximize return on IT investment.

But midsize companies can turn size to their advantage by deploying flexible, open processes which give them the agility to react quickly to market

changes, bring products to market faster than their larger competitors and establish high levels of customer service as business as usual.

The correct choice of affordable systems will also enable midsize organizations comply with data and governance regulations, provide a more satisfying working environment for their employees and extract more value from their existing ICT infrastructure.