

How to Drive Greater Efficiency with Consolidated Software Systems

Over the past decade there has been continued focus on delivering improved and more efficient services through computer software solutions. Systems have evolved from mainframe to client server to web-based delivery, becoming increasingly sophisticated on the back-end while becoming more intuitive for the everyday user on the front end. In today's world of increasing costs and decreasing resources, greater efficiency is a necessity as organizations find ways to meet these continuing demands.

Organizations looking to increase overall efficiency should begin by looking across their organization for areas where software systems can be consolidated. We refer to this as cross-functional optimization. Cross-functional optimization looks to streamline similar business processes from different functional areas into fewer computerized solutions. For example, various departments across the organization may use multiple systems to process work requests. However, since the both the process and the end result are similar, there is an opportunity to consider employing a single software system to handle all requests.

There are many benefits to consolidated systems, including financial savings through economies of scale, reduced IT and network-infrastructure requirements and improved workflow through shared knowledge and training on systems. Instead of focusing on many disparate systems, management can focus their energy on the optimal mix of technology that supports their current business, as well as new business capabilities.

Cross-Functional Optimization

Brings together multiple business areas to:

- Reduce the number of processes needing management
- Decrease the number of computer software solutions to be maintained
- Deliver business capabilities that might not otherwise be possible

This whitepaper will:

- Discuss how consolidation is possible
- Examine the benefits of consolidation
- Explain how cross-functional approaches can open new opportunities for optimization
- Consider how to choose between consolidation and specialized systems

How is Consolidation Possible? Through Cross-Functional Optimization

Due to the way in which most computer software solutions have evolved, they tend to focus on single business areas where they deliver targeted standalone functionality. In many cases these standalone solutions can duplicate similar processes. For example, an organization might have independent solutions to manage their road, utility,

pipeline or fleet assets and each of these solutions most likely includes functionality that supports inspections, work management and preventive maintenance. Provided a solution can manage all of these processes flexibly and can be configured to meet individual business requirements then consolidating becomes an option.

The Benefits of Consolidation

Consolidating systems is a large undertaking, but the benefits often outweigh the efforts required. The largest benefit, and likely most apparent on the bottom-line, is the ability to reduce or reuse the existing IT infrastructure. Most software systems have their own technical database or hardware configurations, as well as unique implementation nuances. When consolidated, a single solution can reduce upfront infrastructure costs, as well as ongoing maintenance and management costs such as training, technical support, upgrades and backups.

Resistance may be met by departments who fear that consolidation will mean compromised data independence or security. However, a well architected

solution can still provide consolidation opportunities while enabling multiple databases and business processes to be configured. This allows separate functional areas to utilize the same software while maintaining their data independently and securely from the other business areas if desired.

Another major benefit of consolidation is greater flexibility for users. Once trained to use the system in one business area, users can quickly adapt to performing similar functions within another business area. Common functions, such as recording work requests can be merged, while more detailed functions such as work allocations can be independent to each business area.

Consolidation Delivers Cost Savings

In addition to the infrastructure and system management savings that can be achieved through consolidation, there are other potential cost benefits that become available such as enhanced work practices and asset management strategies. For example, consolidation provides the opportunity to manage and perform multifunction inspections

against multiple asset categories simultaneously rather than performing independent inspections. Another example is consolidation of work management and fleet/equipment functions. In this case, consolidation enables the work scheduling process to be easily managed based on current vehicle locations and equipment availability.

Choosing Between Consolidation and Specialized Systems

As organizations seek technology solutions to meet their business needs, they must evaluate the options on the market which include both specialized systems (often referred to as “Best of Breed”) or consolidated systems. How should an organization make that choice? There are benefits and costs for both types of options, and organizations should begin by asking several questions:

- What systems are already in place?
- How much will it cost to replacing existing solutions, including the costs of retraining and data migration
- Can a general solution replace the specialist functionality?
- How much is the data shared across the organization for actionable items, reporting and analysis?
- What levels of IT resources are required to manage each of the current systems?
- What hardware and infrastructure is necessary to maintain the system and what will future requirements be?
- Are there integration and security factors for systems that talk to each other rather than all data being managed in a single database?

Best of Breed – A Definition

The best product of its type. Organizations often purchase software from different vendors in order to obtain the best-of-breed for each application area.

Although these considerations
can help organizations start
to narrow down the decision
factors, the most important
question may be the simplest:
What do we need to accomplish
with our software system?

AssetWorks Brings Best of Breed and Consolidation Together

With AssetWorks, you don't have to choose. Our Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) solution combines the specialized functionality of a best-of-breed solution with the flexibility and effectiveness of consolidated systems. With nearly 30 years of experience managing fleet, equipment, rail and linear assets we are already recognized for delivering best of breed solutions and are uniquely positioned to understand the challenges that come from managing a broad scope of complex assets.

The AssetWorks EAM solution now offers the opportunity for organizations to take a consolidated approach for all operational asset management business needs. Utilizing the same underlying technologies and the option to implement shared databases, our users can now optimize their IT infrastructure, training, operational and support costs without having to sacrifice the quality of service that they deliver.

For more information on how AssetWorks EAM can help manage complex assets and infrastructure, please visit www.assetworks.com/products/eam

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