

A horizon-to-horizon view of the enterprise

Helping clients with a deeper understanding of their own business is key to success, according to TRC Solutions



Gavin Peacock, group chief executive, TRC Solutions

Few software vendors are as well known as SAP. What may be less well known is that SAP's ERP solutions aren't all aimed at massive enterprises. SAP Business One is one such example.

"Business One is suitable for all sectors, bar heavy manufacturing. It's particularly suitable for light manufacturing," said Gavin Peacock, group chief executive of TRC Solutions.

"The sweet spots for us are financial services companies, retail, and so on – anybody who is looking to put e-commerce into their business."

Peacock said that the past year has seen spending returning to the economy and businesses willing to invest. Chastened by the recession, however, TRC Solutions' customers have particular requirements from their ERP system.

"A true ERP system should be a single-source database, and include CRM, with a true 360-degree view of the business," he said.

"E-commerce, mobile and connectivity are the driving factors. Nobody is coming to you looking for a more detailed chart of events – that was five years ago. What they're saying now is: 'This problem is slowing down our business'."

The importance of retail is well understood but, according to Peacock, business-to-business ventures also need to open up to customers, and are doing so by mobilising new, up-to-date ERP solutions.

A move toward electronic invoicing and self-service has sped-up business processes and allows customers and suppliers to enjoy smoother transactions.

"There's an expectation now: 'Why are you still sending me paper-based statements?' Companies are getting much more aware of their costs."

"Even though we're coming out of the recession, people are now more aware of the cost of doing business with companies," he said.

In line with this, SAP Business One allows users to create remote self-service facilities for billing, invoices and statements.

"When you have a self-serve portal, you don't have to ring Janet in accounts in order to find out what you've ordered or what you owe, you go on to the web portal and do it yourself."

Peacock said that, along with a general return of confidence, the development of new ERP systems means businesses have a better view of the value of their work.

"If you were, say, a print and packaging firm and you have five jobs going for AIB, someone would want to know what the overall value of the contracts are."

"With Business One you can set any invoice, any customer or department within a customer, as a subproject and link it back into the company overall, so you can see different profit margins on different

jobs. Then you can go back in and make actionable decisions based on the information," he said.

TRC Solutions knows business inside and out. SAP's huge install base – an estimated 76 per cent of financial transactions are touched, at some point, by SAP – means a massive base of distilled business process knowledge can be put into a pre-configured product.

It's not just SAP, however. TRC Solutions has been in business for 25 years and now has over 1,000 clients, and a London branch office following the Dublin headquarters.

This experience has taught TRC Solutions that working with clients to understand the drivers for change is essential.

"An ERP system build is very much akin to building a house: it's somewhat tailored. So, before we install, we need a set of plans. We use something called 'design thinking', getting together all of the stakeholders in the

company and seek to understand where the real business benefits and problems are. We then move to project scope and blueprint production, execution and build, and then the review and the go-live," he said.

ERP is known for cost overrun – something that Peacock said can be avoided by choosing the right software and designing the system correctly.

"We pride ourselves that 95 of our SAP installations go in on time and on-budget," he said.

"SAP has so much configurability that you don't have to get into huge customised screens and tens of man-days to deploy something."

Business One also affords mobility, which is about more than just sales: it gives users the same power as if they are sitting at a desk in the office. Overspend can be noted automatically and decisions to approve or reject made on the hoof.

It also integrates unexpected and up-to-the-minute business functions, such as the Internet of Things and even social media.

"Retailers have tended to be more aware of social media than business-to-business operations, but now business-to-business is becoming aware of the massive power, both positive and negative, of social media and they understand the need to integrate it into ERP."

"We can listen to Twitter hashtags, for instance, and put them into a ticketing system. Because of the acceleration in apps and overall digital processing tools, it's vital that the organisation finds a way of bringing them into the mundane world of invoicing," he said.

COMMERCIAL PROFILE: Microsoft Dynamics

Planning for enterprise success

Microsoft Dynamics is among the most flexible and trusted enterprise resource planning systems deployed by Irish businesses, writes Jason Walsh. But what makes it such a success?



All businesses recognise the importance of data in managing customer relationships and business processes. On top of typical customer relationship management (CRM) suites, full-scaled enterprise resource planning (ERP) allows for a 360-degree view of the business.



Charlie Donnelly, managing director of Sysco

The idea is to collate all business information – not just customer CRM data – and use it to plan all business operations, from planning through to delivery as well as sales and marketing.

"In addition to that mobility, you've got multiple transactions going on. You have sales people getting sales and inputting them straight in, van drivers doing proof-of-delivery and so on. That takes out the error that can arise in paper-driven systems and reduces the manual intervention in the business process," he said.

Although this has simple cost-cutting benefits, Donnelly stresses that the real importance is in efficiency and knowledge.

"Once the ERP and CRM are integrated totally, as they are with Dynamics CRM and ERP, it allows the information to pass through seamlessly and you get a total view of the customer," said Charlie Donnelly, managing director of Sysco.

"Through the recession, companies reduced their head count considerably. Now, having more efficient business processes through connectivity and mobility, means that the job can be done. You don't have to come back into the office to hand in pieces of paper and record things," he said.

"Microsoft Power BI sits on top of ERP and delivers business intelligence across multiple platforms. You have real-time data based on what's going on in your business. It's also multifaceted and you can have it in a BI format on any device with the information that is relevant to each manager."

Sysco is the largest Microsoft ERP partner in Ireland, with 18 years' experience of implementing ERP systems, and now has a staff of more than 70 supporting various installations across more than 300 sites, some of which have more than 100 users themselves.

"You need an ERP system that can deliver on those three pillars of mobility, connectivity and business intelligence."

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"There are multiple areas: demand planning from sales, but also MRP in manufacturing – materials requirement planning – and one [more] key area of late is cash flow, so you can now project what cash will be needed based on payroll, creditors, debtors and so on. It's a cash flow guide, and from that point of view, it's very useful for managers," he said.

"The food industry is one of the big targets for us. With the size of the industry and where it's going with traceability, it can really benefit from the agile way Microsoft Dynamics ERP can work. The meat industry has different requirements from dairy, and each one has to be treated as an individual business," he said.

"Not that you would want to lie on the beach and work, but you can lie on the beach and approve purchases," said Donnelly.

Manufacturing is a particularly interesting example of ERP use, as manufacturing businesses have complex supply chains and product production processes – and, in many cases, thinner margins than many retail businesses – making control of finances essential to profitability.

Sysco now has more than 180 sites using Microsoft Dynamics ERP, and also works on manufacturing, general distribution and service management.

"The mobility aspect of Dynamics ERP also means that business information is collected and shared live, in real time, rather than being batch processed."

Food and pharmaceuticals are among Ireland's larger manufacturing industries.

"This (service management) is becoming a rising industry as bigger operations outsource more and more of their business: cleaning, canteen, security and so forth," he said.

"Connectivity is a large driver: you have web ordering seamlessly connected to your ERP, whether that's business-to-business or business-to-consumer, and sent straight to delivery without manual intervention. Following on from that, you've got EDI: Electronic Document Interchange."

"There's a lot going on in

"The ERP there is in managing the contracts and billing for these high-volume, low-value services, so it has to be automated."

"The final leg of connectivity is self-service. You can allow people through their web connection to get copies of invoices or add their own documents, reducing the need for phone call intervention," he said.

Making the connections in business

Donnelly identified three areas where ERP comes to the fore: mobility, connectivity and business intelligence.

One area that is unique to Microsoft Dynamics ERP is the deep integration with Office 365, CRM Online, SharePoint, Power BI.

"The one major requirement we are working on at the moment, and one area companies are talking about, is mobility; they want to be able to access the system anywhere, anytime. It's speeding up the business process, approving pro-

cesses, being in touch with the system, and being able to make decisions," he said.

All of this data is no good, however, if it just sits on a server taking up space. Sysco delivers business intelligence systems that make the infor-

ation immediately useable in the business.

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