

FINANCIAL SOFTWARE

KEEP IT TOGETHER

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ently would be prohibitive," said Browne.

"In cases like that you gain the comprehensiveness you want by integrating the specialist application with the main business management platform. It is quite common, theoretically not ideal but in fact usually works very well. We have a client in the Netherlands that rents construction barges – how's that for a micro vertical? In such cases you either integrate the existing third party solution or custom develop. The former is usually a lot more practical."

Another Irish partner for SAP Business One echoed the view of progressive SMEs looking to invest in smarter and more comprehensive systems today. "Businesses today are far more strategic in their IT investments. The on-premise vs cloud debate comes right at the beginning of the conversation, for example," said Gavin Peacock, chief executive of TRC Solutions. Founded in 1991, TRC has been working



Gavin Peacock,
chief executive,
TRC Solutions

with Business One solutions across a wide range of industries and has a long track record in retail and distribution.

"We have a lot of experience in multi-branch enterprises, which has proven valuable in our Business One solutions.

Today our clients range from about say 15 staff and €2 to €3 million turnover to several hundred users and maybe €0.25 billion sales. What we are seeing is that they are looking both for the obvious smart efficiencies, like best possible

mobile working, and for that strategic path to their future expansion."

In this context Business One has some unique advantages, said Peacock. "It is the same software solution whether used on-premise, from a data

centre, or on cloud of some type. The enterprise can move seamlessly between them all when it needs to. That enables us to do what we call Design Thinking workshops with our clients, even the smallest, so that we can work out

together what is possible for them and the strategic path to follow. Lots of whiteboard activity and post-it notes and chat and even fun, but when we then move on to the specifics of the solution everyone has a deeper understanding of the needs and priorities."

An interesting comment by Peacock was that his company frequently encounters deeply embedded specialist systems in potential clients, still working satisfactorily. "But there are pressures from the market, from their customers and partners, especially in regard to working in the mobile space, that make operating in silos like that more and more difficult.

"This usually become apparent in the workshops, when we focus on the business rather than the solutions, that there are costs involved in siloed data. Even when a standalone specialist application is working okay, it poses an additional business risk – two databases, two suppliers, two roadmaps and so on."

WHY JOINED-UP SYSTEMS ARE BEST

Business systems today aim to be comprehensive across all functions

One of the perennial mantras in the marketing of business software, especially financial systems and ERP, has been 'joined up,' that old primary

school handwriting phrase. It was and is also used in attempting to differentiate enterprise systems from mere business applications. It is certainly essential today that

all systems in any organisation can at least talk to each other and exchange data. For obvious reasons, that would apply especially to financial and related applications.

The general move towards ERP solutions some years ago was a response to the increasing understanding by busi-

nesses of all sizes that joined-up or integrated solutions offered both more efficiency and more powerful software. It was also in emulation of the giant corporate systems from Oracle, SAP, JD Edwards and some others which has always been about total management across the enterprise. So for a



One obvious choice factor is cost. By and large the smarter, more comprehensive systems are more expensive

which makes some high end systems a practicable choice for many smaller enterprises.

But the comparative cost factor is still there. On the other hand, most SME directors would acknowledge that the costs or investment associated with the best software solutions you can rise to are still modest compared to the cost of a warm body on the payroll. Or, at least, they would if they ever thought about it in those terms.

It is not normally an either/or decision. But certainly when considering investment in financial and enterprise management solutions it is worth bearing in mind that every week or day or hour of employee time saved is a significant and ongoing economy.

The key to that efficiency is usually behind the scenes rather than simple speed or ease of use in performing tasks. Automation of business processes is frequently cited and that can begin with the simple retrieval of a customer name and address from a single master database, for every item from an invoice to a label. More sophisticated automated workflows can, for example, take an order entry from a sales rep in the field by smartphone and never require another human input or decision.

Complete automated fulfilment is in daily use by at least dozens of Irish SMEs, including in some cases warehouse order picking and packing and logistics, all the way through proof of delivery and invoicing.

Today, there is a wide range of choices for any business and any organisation from a barely plural two employee SME up to the giant multinationals. That points up one obvious choice factor – cost. By and large the smarter, more comprehensive systems are more expensive. There is very often an alternative to capital investment such as Software-as-a-Service or a subscription cost per user,

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