

# Newsflash

FROM LINDA SWERLING

**March 5, 2002** - Spring is here and a stronger economy might also be making an arrival. For those of you thinking about making changes in your business, following is a case study that will help you put together a plan that will have management nodding in agreement.

## MANAGEMENT'S POINT OF VIEW: DEVELOPING A WINNING PLAN

### PROBLEM:

The head of IT for a \$27 million manufacturer faced two important, interrelated problems: an outdated operating platform and under-performing proprietary and custom software.

The operating platform had several drawbacks:

- ◆ The manufacturer had neglected for too long to keep the operating system up-to-date so that the developer no longer formally supported this older version.
- ◆ New applications that might be good for the company were not compatible with the current system.
- ◆ Communications, particular e-mail, worked sporadically, often requiring employees to ask for faxed information - from both customers and vendors.

The company was also using two proprietary software products that tracked two different divisions:

- ◆ Interfaces to the general ledger did not work, causing the divisions to operate like self-contained entities.
- ◆ Management could not analyze or present a consolidated view or analyze the divisions as profit centers.

### SOLUTION:

The IT manager knew that in order to get management approval for any changes, she needed to put together a convincing plan that included more than just the IT department's point of view.

In planning for the assessment, the team also considered the company's:

- ◆ Business strategy and objectives
- ◆ Need for specific ROI
- ◆ Commitment to its employees

Another smart tactic the team used was to include key management executives during the process - both informally with short face-to-face or e-mail updates and formally at appropriate planning meetings. This insured that the final proposal and implementation plan addressed issues that management felt were important.

The needs assessment looked at both the network and the proprietary software to determine priorities, alternative ways to accomplish the objectives, possible economies, e.g., licensing options, and financing plans.

The final proposal and implementation plan included an executive summary, detailed plans, spreadsheets with ROI, employee time and training needs, key milestones, and a Gantt chart. Proposed time to complete the project was one year.

### RESULTS:

The team had built a case that included concrete examples of how the new system met management's objectives by providing reliable communication for employees, customers, and vendors; better customer service; allowing real-time information and real-time access; and improving ordering information to increase discounts from vendors.

Management agreed to the plan in concept but extended the timing. The first year would be focused on changing the operating platform and connectivity. Once that was complete, the team could work on the software.

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