



On the Same Page

ERP solutions companies venture into the CRM zone

In an effort to offer companies the best way to get the most for their money, some ERP vendors are beginning to combine CRM into their offerings, solving front- and back-office issues with one solution. The result is often an inexpensive way to get a wholly integrated system in which both CRM and ERP applications are sharing identical data. Recently, Baan Co., J.D. Edwards & Co., and Open Solutions Inc. have all released CRM solutions that integrate with their ERP solutions.

Aberdeen Group Inc., in a January 2002 profile of Open Solutions, said, "While organizations have invested in an array of technologies - for example, in CRM and ERP - such systems are often constrained by incomplete information that reflects only a portion of the value chain. As a result, critical business decisions are often based on incomplete views of the customer, and pertinent demand and supply requirements. Today, organizations desire more packaged CRM/ERP solutions that help to resolve this 'information disconnect.'"

Although the company started selling CRM software in 1997, Baan didn't really take a stance in the market until recently with its new solution - iBaan for CRM. Baan believes that the iBaan for CRM Suite can be a single solution in integrating the front and back office. By using the data collected through the CRM application and combining that with the ERP data, Baan believes companies will have better knowledge of what customers want and need.

According to Leonard Chermack, president of Baan's CRM business unit, "With superior analytics and increased integration of front-end service applications with back-end corporate data, CRM's aim has changed from efficient customer support and service to providing solutions that can help current and prospective customers improve their profitability."

J.D. Edwards is trying to accomplish a similar goal with the latest release of its CRM product. CRM 1.1 integrates with J.D. Edwards' ERP applications so that they share identical data, and, according to a company press release, sharing the same data repository "significantly reduces error rates, lowers ownership costs, and results in shortened time-to-value."

"In this challenging economic environment, companies need to leverage their current ERP solution vendors for CRM solutions specific to their business needs. With this CRM solution, J.D. Edwards is making its customers' decisions much easier to make," said Sharon Ward, vice president, CRM and enterprise applications group, Hurwitz Group.

According to the Aberdeen report, small- to medium-sized enterprises may have the most to gain from these integrated CRM and ERP solutions, as they offer "low up-front investment costs and limited front- and back-office integration requirements, but [are] scalable to meet planned and future growth." One company the report singles out is Open Solutions and its ResQ Enterprise solution. ResQ Enterprise helps companies with sales force automation, service and support, accounting, asset management, and warehousing and inventory. But one of the main things Aberdeen likes about the solution is that it's affordable.

As the troubled economy continues to make companies pinch pennies, combined CRM and ERP solutions may help streamline data and cut costs. Aberdeen states, "Companies that can offer integrated CRM/ERP solutions that support rapidly evolving business requirements will be positioned for success in the coming years." — Jeanette Perez