

THERE'S A LITTLE THREE-LETTER ACRONYM that's become quite the craze among IT circles. It's being touted as the "must have" technology. And new software vendors continue to enter the market, staking their claim on the term. This term, of course, is Business Process Management (BPM). Business Process Management has many lengthy definitions. To put it simply, BPM is the disciplined methodology used to manage process improvement. It includes the use of metrics, key performance indicators, collaboration, and change management. Business processes span organizations and involve both people and systems.

By these definitions alone, BPM may not appear to be such a revolutionary advancement. However, before BPM, most technology vendors approached processes

with one-dimensional solutions. For example, workflow solutions map out individual tasks, but fail to acknowledge system and integration requirements. And while Legacy Enterprise Application Integration (EAI) technology executes system-to-system activities, it ignores the human dimension.

Ultimately, these predecessors don't recognize the magnitude of end-to-end processes. They fail to address that every process has exceptions and every process changes. And these aren't just minor flaws, as a break down in process can cost organizations big bucks.

*It is in identifying and correcting these flaws that BPM software delivers its value.*

A BPM system is the software infrastructure that coordinates the flow of tasks, access to resources, and the exchange of information between employees, customers, partners, and suppliers. By addressing end-to-end processes, BPM cuts across departments, applications, and users. BPM not only promises to improve the processes of today, but because of its adaptable and flexible technology, it ensures that organizations are ready for the inevitable changes of tomorrow.

The remainder of this article will explain why this technology demands your attention now, as opposed to later. You will also learn what to look for when you're ready to implement a BPM solution.

# Capturing the potential of Business Process Management

*By Mike Sander*

## BPM: Not Just an IT Issue

BPM is not just an IT discussion. After all, BPM systems give business executives control over the way work gets done. This level of control can result in countless benefits including lower operational costs, lower IT costs, improved customer satisfaction, and increased revenue. Indeed, business executives who are first to recognize BPM's capabilities will teach some harsh lessons to their competitors.

## World-Class Organizations Optimize End-to-End Processes

Process management has become increasingly complex in today's global market. Outsourcing, e-commerce, and government regulations are



modern realities that often dictate how organizations execute their end-to-end processes. Moreover, common processes such as invoicing, order fulfillment, and customer support are just a few that cross multiple departments, suppliers, customers, and regulatory agencies. Ultimately, these processes span not just organizations and people, but also all the supporting IT systems and applications.

Organizations that embrace today's virtual business models recognize these factors. In other words, they identify their core processes as well as all the people and systems involved. When such an evaluation is done, many businesses discover exactly where their inefficiencies lie. For example, they may find that a certain activity or sub-process is perfect, but that a core process is far from it. They realize they can't gain much value with their perfect order management application when their distribution systems consistently ship products to the wrong customer.

While the situation described above is just an example, world-class organizations are indeed utilizing BPM to detect and correct these very types of inefficiencies. They are leveraging BPM to optimize change and they are creating a competitive advantage by doing so.

According to a survey conducted by the BPM Institute, the following strategies are common to enterprises currently achieving the greatest return from their BPM initiatives:

- Identify high-value business processes in areas such as compliance and risk management, customer service, and supply chain operations.
- Develop metrics for achieving measurable, quantifiable results through improvements in operational efficiency, process visibility and control, and business agility.
- Establish long-term goals to evolve from process improvement to process excellence.

### Finding the Solution You Need

While they may look and sound the same, all BPM software solutions are not created equal. Each solution is optimized for a specific set of processes, as well as integration, exception-handling, and performance management requirements. Each also makes specific assumptions about the roles and required skills of process designers.

For a BPM novice, such details can be confusing as well as overwhelming. That's why during your selection process it will be helpful to keep this simple standard in mind; a complete BPM solution is designed to address the entire process lifecycle, including both people and technology.

Based on this principle, Insession Technologies—a global software provider who has been in the business for over a decade—presents the top 10 standards to evaluate when looking at BPM solutions.

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### 1. Scalable/Fault Tolerant Architecture

Many BPM solutions have evolved from document management solutions, so only a very few are designed with enterprise scalability in mind. Whether you want your BPM solution to solve a specific need in one department, or would like it implemented as an enterprise standard, you should always take scalability into account. The best solutions will not only scale across multiple nodes, but also survive the failure of nodes when deployed in a cluster.

### 2. Rules Engine

A rules engine automates routine and repetitive decision processing. A BPM solution should enable invocation of the rules engine from conditional process transitions and also from within process activities. A fully integrated graphical business rules engine (BRE) empowers business users to create and maintain the business rules that govern a process. Look for a solution with a "loosely coupled" BRE, as it gives you much more flexibility in choosing if and when to invoke the rules engine.

### 3. Graphical Tools

Graphical tools are designed to analyze, model, and define processes. Such development tools (which can include a screen designer and a business rules editor) deliver executable processes that are linked to business

rules. These tools also provide an intuitive interface for business and IT users to create processes and monitor the state of active process instances.

#### 4. Facilitation of Human and Automated Activities

A BPM product selection team should carefully consider a solution's ability to perform fully automated activities. A comprehensive solution should have the ability to execute asynchronous and synchronous automated activities. The best solutions will empower invocation of virtually any existing system or database in the enterprise. The system should also enable both "push and pull" capabilities for interacting with other enterprise systems. Furthermore, a comprehensive BPM solution should be able to assign activities to your organization's various human resources.

#### 5. Dynamic Gateway

True enterprise-class BPM solutions provide a dynamic front-end gateway. This feature not only provides a simple way to deploy a user-facing application, but it

front-end applications. In these instances, the BPM system should facilitate invocation of the runtime engine via programmatic API calls and/or Web services calls. The best solutions will expose their entire API set, including everything from process creation to all business functions and monitoring capabilities.

#### 9. Flexible Platform Support

In today's IT environment, many companies maintain a mix of computing platforms and databases. That's why a truly cost-effective BPM system will utilize an organization's existing IT infrastructure. Additionally, companies universally report that when a BPM system is acquired for just one department, the company quickly grasps the value provided by the system, and other departments move to utilize the system as well. So, even if you're looking at a single department procurement, you should consider whether the solution could be utilized effectively by other departments or at an enterprise level.

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also empowers dynamic integration with business applications for live content and context information. A gateway also provides insulation from future changes to back-end systems, as it can be pointed to new applications at any time without affecting the user interface.

#### 6. Knowledge Base

A knowledge base holds the history and definitions of all processes. The knowledge base should be deployed in a relational database, and an organization should be able to run custom queries against the database tables in real time. Ultimately, the knowledge base provides an audit trail of historical information and is invaluable to users in ongoing process improvement.

#### 7. Real-time Activity Monitoring

A comprehensive BPM solution should have the ability to continually monitor process activity in real-time. Such capabilities allow for users to instantaneously make changes. Furthermore, the solution should have a visual display so that users can easily see the status of a process at any time. Users can then drill down into the historical information provided in the knowledge base to see who did what, when, and how long it took.

#### 8. Integration with Existing/Custom Front-End Applications

Many departments or enterprises already have existing

#### 10. Ease of Use and Broad Technical Support

Many technology solutions are geared toward IT developers and the IT group. In addition, development, deployment, and management of sophisticated technology often requires extensive training, consulting, and/or IT expertise. If a BPM vendor doesn't have the proper support team in place, you may be left in the dark when it comes to implementation. While a good BPM solution should be easy to use and allow anyone (even those with very limited IT experience) to use the product, you should be able to call your vendor's support team any day, at anytime.

Remember, there are major differences in BPM solutions. Getting a good fit means doing your homework. As you move forward with your initiative, it's important to apply your unique circumstances, and determine what BPM features are critical to your company.

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