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Dec. 01, 2008

From the Sept. 2006 Issue

Working in the mid-market continues to evolve. To best serve your clients who work in this space, consider your current strategies and what you recommend for clients. It's hard to believe that we're over halfway through the first decade of the 21st century, and for many of my friends and colleagues this has meant retirement! For those of us still active and leading market changes, we need to think about how our strategies are going to make a difference in this decade and beyond.

As I follow technology and try to report, inform and strategize with you, it is clear that the next five years will lead to some radically different strategies, particularly in the small to mid-markets. Competitors are becoming more sophisticated, information is being used for a competitive edge, remote and ongoing access to data and customer information is becoming cheaper and more common, applications are becoming more web-enabled, more innovation is being applied to web-enabled applications (particularly through the use of AJAX and mash-ups), business analytics are becoming more meaningful and easier to use, and infrastructure is changing to include virtualization.

Accounting Software. I consider accounting software the key foundation and building block for business information. As covered in other articles in this issue, accounting software continues to become more sophisticated and easier to use. Additionally, the accounting software vendors are improving web integration and accessibility from remote locations as well as on handhelds. Most of the publishers who have been around since the 1990's and before are really

investing in their products today in order to move them to the next generation.

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Focusing on the Client. The client businesses that are doing the best in the mid-market always focus on their clients. They are truly discovering where they can add value as well as how to increase client satisfaction. Technical tools like CRM, web self-service, Voice over IP (VoIP), and Computer Telephony Integration are leading to better capability to serve the client. Surprisingly, a relatively small percentage of mid-market companies have leveraged their resources by using these tools, so the opportunity is large when client-facing technologies are implemented.

Remote Access. One change that is occurring in the infrastructure is to give more and better remote access in a secure fashion. This may be through an infrastructure tool like Microsoft Terminal Server, Citrix Presentation Server or VMWare workstation virtualization. SSL VPN, high-speed cellular data access, and WiFi hot spots are all contributing to a more ubiquitous connection. Consider how to make your team members and your clients able to work securely from more places. This is not about getting more out of people. It is more about improving the quality of life by bringing flexibility to people's work.

Web 2.0. The way next-generation applications are being created involves more server-to-server and server-to-intelligent workstation communication. The interactivity of new applications will lead to solutions that just weren't possible in the past. We will come to expect high-speed applications via web browsers with rich and previously impossible content. Good examples of this approach include the following sites or applications: www.lazlosystems.com, www.chicagocrime.com,

Writely or Google Earth. As common applications like e-mail, calendars, word

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multiple images of machines running simultaneously on a single machine.

As Microsoft servers have proliferated and as vendors have demanded a dedicated server for their application only, we have added one server after another. We have done this for Exchange, firm applications from CCH or Creative Solutions, CRM, Citrix and so on. It is possible today to have multiple server applications running on the same physical hardware, reducing the number of servers required to get the job done and more fully utilizing server power. The economics are clear on this today for larger businesses, but for smaller businesses the technology is not particularly affordable. Virtualization clearly shows promise from both a convenience and maintenance perspective, not to mention reliability, upgradeability and business continuity.

If you have become comfortable with your current technology approaches, you can probably enjoy them for a few more years. However, I'm fairly sure that all of the above technologies will be deployed and used by businesses of all sizes as our technology continues to evolve. You may get by for a little while using older strategies, but you will see these technologies enter your business one by one over time. I'll forecast that all of these technologies will see widespread use this decade. Do you want to be on the leading edge of these technologies or would you prefer to be a market follower? □

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