

GETTING UP OUT OF THE WEEDS



Douglas Archibald, VP Client Services for Ungerboeck Systems International, explains the virtues of implementing a seamlessly integrated support system and designing effective surrounding operational procedures, which are ideally positioned to create executive reporting systems.

While Executive Information Systems in various forms have been tossed around since the invention of computers, today's Venue Managers are starting to demand more executive level information from their operating system support infrastructures. Executive Dashboards are becoming more common in order to provide real-time, key performance indicators, which measure performance on time periods from daily to year-over-year comparisons.

Today's Venue Managers who are trying to push the performance envelope in their locales are muscling up their systems to provide them with executive level information on everything from fairly common sales performance numbers to more sophisticated analyses of venue utilization, and then ultimately the actual overall yield management of their venues.

Similarly from a qualitative perspective, Venue Managers want their finger on the pulse of everything, from visitor satisfaction and customer loyalty to maintenance activities and 'going green' initiatives. Getting access to detailed data is generally accomplishable by many entities. However, it is turning all of that detail into "actionable and reliable executive level information" that remains a significant challenge for many Venue Managers.

Carefully thought out metrics, tied to causal operational and manageable activities, are making their way through the industry. The affordability of software and hardware today is making the end goal of better informed managers a daily reality. Firms offering expertise in developing Balanced Scorecards for organizations are on the rise. Leading managers are first defining what they want to measure and then



Event Management Maturity Continuum



Above: Event Management Maturity Model Levels.

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The extent to which operational processes are well defined, best practices are deployed and overall discipline is applied consistently and effectively throughout the organization, can be measured against a continuum which we will refer to as the 'Event Management Maturity Model'.

There are three primary levels associated with organizational maturity for maintaining information systems. These being:

LEVEL 1 — DEPLOYED

In Level 1 installations, the system is primarily being used for basic functions. Users know how to enter information in order to create basic reporting based on counts and a low level of analysis. Information is often delivered in a 'push' method and is delivered to all audiences in the same format. There is little to no use of web-enabled functionality, which allows the sharing of data and information with vendors, suppliers, customers or other third parties. The organization may not view the software as being 'mission critical' and therefore migrations to new versions may lag by one to three years from their release dates. Level 1 organizations also tend to have significant reliance on disparate systems, including the use of manual processes or spreadsheet and word processing documents, which are created outside of the supporting systems.

LEVEL 2 — INSTITUTIONALIZED

In Level 2 installations, the system is more widely used throughout the organization for sales and operations processes. Users understand how their use of the system impacts other business areas. Suppliers and other partner organizations are invited

to use the application in order to capitalize on integration. Use of the system is more proactive in Sales and Marketing, and allows for slightly more advanced reporting. Overall use of the system is still primarily focused on reporting past results. The software is viewed across the enterprise as more 'mission critical' and therefore there is a greater focus on consistency of processes and migrations to new releases, which would usually be undertaken within 12-18 months of software releases. Level 2 organizations would likely have moderate use of web-enablement in order to leverage the resources and information available from customers, suppliers, vendors and other related third party organizations.

LEVEL 3 — OPTIMIZED

In Level 3 installations, the system is a core tool in implementing the organization's overall strategy and is used (either in day-to-day operations or by utilizing the data from the system) at all levels of the organization. Analysis is forward thinking and allows for planning of future actions, rather than solely for retrospective analyses. Resources are most effectively utilized and costs are reduced by sharing lower value administrative data entry activities with outside partners, such as the meeting planners, the exhibitors, or other third parties who have firsthand knowledge of the information needed by the system. Level 3 organizations have a keen awareness and dedication to the value proposition of operating from a fully integrated system that operates from primarily a single data source. Executives in Level 3 organizations recognize the system as 'mission critical' and rely on the system for critical management reports to oversee sales, operations and managerial planning activities.

calling on their information systems support teams, and their technology partners, to create dashboards and executive level reports that meet their managerial needs.

Unfortunately, just deciding on a balanced scorecard and the appropriate executive level metrics is only possible in those venues where there is a significant level of consistency and discipline over the means by which the data is captured, labelled, classified and maintained. The reality is that the age old problem of 'garbage in, garbage out' is still a challenge for lesser organized and disciplined organizations. The lack of best practices and discipline still leads to inaccurate and unreliable reporting, including variances in data sources, which promote multiple versions of the truth in organizations that have to rely on multiple data sources from disparate systems.

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Leveraging the Value of Optimized Systems

Organizations that are functioning in the upper range of Level 2 or in Level 3 have a significant opportunity to implement executive level reporting. These organizations have achieved the ability to create executive reporting systems that produce actionable information, based on data that is consistent, complete, and accurate over a significant number of reporting periods.

Those organizations that have succeeded in creating and implementing mature business processes, and have implemented integrated support systems, are best positioned to produce executive level reporting, particularly if their financial systems are fully integrated with their sales and operations support systems. Some examples of Key Performance Measures that are readily available in organizations using fully integrated applications include for example:

- ◆ Meeting Space cost per occupied sqm/ft day
- ◆ Revenue per sqm/ft
- ◆ Economic impact by event type
- ◆ Percentage of sales by department
- ◆ Yield per sqm/ft
- ◆ Cancelled business/lost business by reason

Many of these reports require information from marketing and sales activities, along with related financial data. In many organizations, creating these reports would require manual compilation, since the supporting information systems are not integrated. In fact, in many cases, the manual effort to produce such information is simply too time consuming and the resulting reports are deemed too unreliable and inconsistent to be used to support executive level decision making.

On the other hand, those organizations that have succeeded in implementing seamlessly integrated support systems and have designed effective surrounding operational procedures are ideally positioned to

create executive reporting systems. Executives in these venues have the ability to be 'hands on' in managing their venues but have the added benefit of reporting dashboards, which allow them to "get up out of the weeds" and look at their operations in a more strategic and comprehensive manner. ✪

