



## Staying Competitive for Small and Medium Sized Businesses:

### Realistic Solutions for Today's Business Environment

Business leaders everywhere know that today's marketplace is in a constant state of change. Case in point: Customer choice continues to multiply exponentially as the speed of new technology adoption escalates. It took the Internet just seven years after its introduction in 1994 to reach 30 percent of American households, while it took television 18 years to achieve the same penetration. In today's interconnected economy, customers can purchase, communicate and connect at any time of day or night.

As a result, businesses are facing competition like never before. The same technological advances that propelled globalization have enabled most large organizations to more efficiently operate and effectively communicate with customers. To date, however, many small and mid-sized businesses have struggled to achieve levels of efficiency and effectiveness that are required to thrive in today's increasingly competitive marketplace.

To remain profitable businesses that can make an impact, these smaller companies now have the opportunity – and the mandate – to operate more resourcefully. From internal processes to customer communication, companies need ways to manage these processes better and faster, without sacrificing effectiveness. According to The Rules of Business, a recently published book by the editors and writers of *Fast Company* magazine, "In today's economy, it's the fast companies that trounce the slow. Competition these days can come from anywhere – from down the street, from across the ocean, or through the

Web. If you have any hope of staying in business, you need to stay ahead of them. And that, as the best leaders know, requires speed, moving quickly to do the right thing. Among other things, that means reducing your cycle time... In other words, streamlining the organization should be your first objective.”<sup>i</sup>

However, the answer is not technology alone. Organizations must partner with expert solution providers that understand the different needs of a small to medium sized business and how technology can impact business outcomes. Only when these two critical components are threaded – technology and expert partnership – can small and medium sized businesses rise above the competition and make their mark.

eIS Business Solutions focuses on weaving these threads together. As a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner serving the New York Metropolitan Area and Southern California, eIS Business Solutions is poised to lead a new wave of technology impact by working with owners, executives and employees of companies to implement realistic business solutions. From the very beginning, we have based our working relationship on teamwork, focusing specifically on the needs of the small to medium sized businesses.

A significant portion of our client base has actually worked with other providers before partnering with the eIS team. In fact, we often find clients coming to us unhappy with past providers, often frustrated by the bureaucracy and lack of expertise of other vendors. That’s why so many of our clients tell us “We wish we found you first.”

## Finding Realistic Solutions: Step One

With increasing competition, the natural evolution of technology, and the resulting downward trend in its pricing, smaller companies not only can but MUST now take advantage of sophisticated technologies once only available to larger organizations. A recent article in *Insights*, Microsoft’s newsletter for midsize U.S. businesses, reports, “Midsize companies face tough choices when it comes to technology purchases. But products traditionally more suited to big enterprise budgets are being scaled to more affordable levels to meet the storage, security and other needs of smaller businesses.” Now, there are affordable technology options – truly “realistic” solutions – for businesses of all sizes.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Financial Management and Supply Chain Management solutions are three such examples. On the simplest level, CRM provides organizations with the information and processes necessary to find new customers, market and service their existing customers, understand their needs, and effectively build relationships between the company, its customer base, and distribution partners. Financial Management and Supply Chain Management solutions, when integrated together effectively, can help

companies manage the important parts of its business, including product planning, parts purchasing, maintaining inventories, interacting with suppliers, and accounting. These applications also include modules for the finance, payroll and human resources aspects of a business.

While these technologies are solutions in their own right – implementation statistics – they cannot operate successfully without a context of changing business processes and models. CRM, Financial Management and Supply Chain Management are much more than installing software – they are business philosophies and change management initiatives that do not end once the software is installed. This is an important takeaway that makes an incredible difference in the implementation of any technology initiative. For small and mid size businesses, creating holistic business solutions – the right combination of technology, people and processes – requires a careful balance of the right expertise and focus.

## Finding Realistic Solutions: Step Two

Therefore, to achieve the maximum implementation benefits of these technologies, the next step in the process of finding realistic solutions is to team with experienced technology professionals who understand your business' needs. Thomas C. Leppert, chairman and CEO at Turner Corp. is quoted as saying, "A successful team boils down to two things: mutual respect among team members and a common vision about where the team is going."<sup>ii</sup>

To this end, realistic solutions are collaborative, time-effective, cost-effective and manageable. In particular, they respect the time and budgets that face the small and medium-sized business. While many employees of medium-sized and large businesses have distinctive roles within a company, employees of a small business staff usually are pulled in many directions. In a small business, it is not uncommon to see an accounts payable employee also answering phones or pulling inventory. Realistic solutions take these differences into account and make sure that they are factored into the complete solution.

Therefore, a solution that requires significant overhead or more time in terms of data entry may put a strain on the staff. Without an expert implementation partner guiding the way, the perceived gains may not outweigh the additional burden it places on the company. On the other hand, there might be a solution that consists of a simple change in process and with the use of technology will provide much bigger efficiencies and maximize returns. This is where the realistic solutions partnership comes in – to maximize return within the context of mutually understood business drivers.

## Case Example: Joan Rivers Worldwide

New York-based Joan Rivers Worldwide is a distributor of skin care products and jewelry. Bill Anderson, senior accountant at the company recalls what drove the company to revamp their technology environment. He says, "The way business is today, and before we integrated technology solutions into our systems, we felt like we were behind our competitors." The company's back office operations and database systems did not provide accurate information or an efficient means of managing business tasks. Jim Halliday, CFO at Joan Rivers Worldwide says, "These issues were causing a delay in receiving payment from our customers. It was also causing problems in our relationship with our vendors."

Joan Rivers Worldwide worked with eIS Business Solutions to deploy a business management solution based on Microsoft technology. After automating and streamlining the company's back office systems with technology solutions, Joan Rivers Worldwide (and the company's vendors and customers) are pleased with the results. According to Halliday, the company "resolved inefficiencies and gained such incredible results from our technology investment right away." Halliday adds, "We're working smarter – not harder. We're getting the same amount and more work done in fewer hours. We've reduced overhead costs and realized a return on our investment almost immediately."

Halliday also notes, "We're only human and we make mistakes. Fixing errors before was always time-consuming. But, what took us hours to correct before now takes us minutes – with the help of realistic technology solutions. Now, quick timing and fast turnaround are the norm and I believe we're ahead of the game."

## eIS Business Solutions: Leading the Way Forward

Robert Smith, founder and president of eIS Business Solutions, says, "We focus on our clients' desired results. We don't just sell software applications. We become a part of each client's team. Our team is committed to our own ongoing education and to becoming a trusted advisor for each client we serve."

Client testimonials speak for themselves. Nicholas Kouyialis, controller and director of finance for Visiting Nurse Association of Central Jersey, says, "The eIS team has a high degree of competence and proficiency and has shown extreme efficiency and care in providing services to our organization... their customer service is practical and user-friendly, which makes the installation and implementation process accurate, timely and pain-free."

Cathy Barilla, controller for Associated Radiologists in Green Brook, New Jersey, describes her company's business' situation prior to working with eIS. "At our physicians' practice, we have many departments and profit centers for which I need to run reports. Obtaining the information and compiling it into a

format that management could use was time-consuming and consisted of consolidating information from many different spreadsheets.

Since automating the company's financials, Barilla is able to get more accurate information in minutes, rather than hours, creating reports in the fraction of the time it took before. She mentions, "The eIS team is always friendly and available when we need them. They have taken the time to understand our business and understand what is key to the success of our business... I have worked with other technology vendors in the past who have tried to sell me things I didn't need or that were not right for the company. We are in the health care industry. Our doctors don't make recommendations without first diagnosing a problem. eIS has the same philosophy, and I appreciate that."

Smith adds, "Customer loyalty is extremely high because our team members have a deep understanding of each of our clients' business issues and goals. We take the time to understand client needs so that we can recommend, implement and support business software solutions that really work to produce results. Our clients know that when they partner with us they can focus on what they do best – growing their businesses – while we focus on what we do best. They tap into our extensive experience and backgrounds in finance, supply chain management, accounting, business operations and technology."

To survive – indeed, to *thrive* – the successful small and medium sized companies of the future will be those who today capitalize on smart technology and implementation to construct the foundation of a sustainable competitive advantage. A transformational change to "business as usual" is required. The process of finding realistic solutions for today's business environment involves taking the time to find a technology partner who takes the time to understand your business' needs. Those firms that choose to do this automatically make stronger customer relationships the basis of their companies' competitive differentiation. As a result, they will become members of an expanding group of insightful organizations that already understand and act upon the promise, the possibilities, and the power that arise from creating a more efficient, effective and powerful organization.

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<sup>i</sup> The Rules of Business, by *Fast Company's* Editors & Writers. New York: 2005, p. 184.

<sup>ii</sup> The Rules of Business, by *Fast Company's* Editors & Writers. New York: 2005, p. 186.

Based on our experience, here are some key tips for businesses looking to deliver a bottom-line impact through improved processes and effective technology solutions:

#### DOCUMENT YOUR PROCESSES.

Make sure you have your processes documented. Make it easy for new hires and existing team members to apply processes consistently. Consistency builds trust with customers and among employees.

#### ALLOW FLEXIBILITY IN YOUR PROCESSES.

Change happens. Companies change, businesses change. Be consistent but don't become so attached to one way of doing things that you can't adapt to new ways of business. You should review your processes regularly to be sure they are meeting your needs. Provide a feedback mechanism and encourage team members to speak up if they feel that a process is not serving the needs of your customers or is inefficient.

Also, take a good look before you automate. An experienced technology advisor will build time into review processes before automating them. They will look for and identify inefficiencies in current procedures and suggest changes that can make a big impact on your business and provide a quick ROI.

#### INVEST IN THE APPROPRIATE SOLUTION FOR YOUR BUSINESS.

When looking to automate a function, do it realistically and make sure that you weigh the risks associated with being on the "bleeding edge" of technology (downtime, time needed to devote to working the kinks out of a new solution) with the benefits the newest technology will bring you. Being a "fast follower" protects your company from the consequences of relying on unproven technology, but it can limit your ability to compete. Consider taking more IT risks for the sake of competitive advantage, although companies in conservative industries such as health care and manufacturing need to be more cautious as do the smaller business.



#### About eis Business Solutions, Inc.

Since 1991, the team of eis Business Solutions has been identifying, implementing and improving business processes through technology with our clients. Over 120 companies in industries including wholesale/distribution, manufacturing, health care, staffing, professional services and government have placed their trust and continue to place their trust in our company. Our people are CPAs, business professionals, and industry certified technicians who are interested in and focused on the success of your business, our employees and our partnerships. Our clients will attest to that. We have built our business and our reputation on it. Through our strong partnerships with industry leading vendors such as Microsoft, Open Systems, Citrix and Dell, we can offer you exceptional services with full confidence that we will exceed our promises to you. Please visit our site at [www.eisBusinessSolutions.com](http://www.eisBusinessSolutions.com).