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WHY OPTIMIZING THE USER EXPERIENCE IS KEY TO ROI

One of the biggest issues companies have had over the years with enterprise application software is maximizing its use. Much functionality in these expensive programs is either underutilized or not used at all, leading to sub-par performance, lower return on investment and, perhaps most unfortunately, questions about the value of the technology itself.

While a number of factors influence the usage equation, one that has been getting more attention of late is how effectively the end user interacts with the application, what some have called the user experience. Software providers have been hard at work trying to improve such things as the software interface itself as well as streamlining the process by which a program executes.

As engineers will always say, however, you

can't manage something you can't measure.

Improving the user experience requires being able to monitor, measure, and analyze that experience. And that's the focus of a relatively new category of software called end-user experience management.

One of the champions of this new category is a New York City-based company called Knoa Software. Founded in 2003, privately held Knoa has been helping companies deliver what it calls an "acceptable user experience" as well as helping to ensure that business processes enabled by an application are executing effectively.

Knoa's software product, called Experience and Performance Manager (EPM), collects a series of metrics in two dimensions. One is in the experience received by an end user, including such metrics as response times and application errors,



Lori Wizdo

and the other is in performance achieved, which tracks, among other things, end-user errors. EPM also captures information about workflow. This month, Knoa will bring out version 5.5 of EPM, which will include a series of role-based dashboards and reports.

EPM currently works with SAP and Oracle applications as well as Microsoft's CRM product.

Knoa claims that EPM can substantially cut support costs. "The time spent in end-user support calls can be cut by 50%," said Lori Wizdo, Knoa vice president of marketing, in a recent briefing.

The past year has been one of momentum for Knoa, which now has about 75 customers, including Kimberly-Clark, Johnson & Johnson, Medtronic, Pfizer, and BASF. In March 2008, Knoa announced that SAP would resell EPM and in May the company won a software innovation award from the Computing Technology Industry Association. In addition, Gartner Group dubbed Knoa a "cool vendor" and Forrester Research called the company a leader in "passive agent end-user experience monitoring."

"We are targeting a problem that few technology providers have attempted to solve," Wizdo said. "We recognize that complex business systems only deliver results when people, process, and the technology work together." Amen.

— David R. Brousell