Choosing the "Right" Technology

Technology is evolving at an incredible pace. The rapidity of change challenges any business trying to employ the most appropriate technology for their business model and environment. The following processes and criteria have proven helpful to us in considering our technology decisions.

Treat Technology as a contracted business input

Technology is employed to create, facilitate or improve business services and efficiencies. Technology therefore has to integrate to a business environment and not the opposite. Business service efficiencies, process continuity and quality, neutral or positive end user impact and return on investment must be key criteria in the selection, implementation and operation of any technology. Business process owners must create, monitor and insist on Service Level Agreements (Contracts of operation and maintenance between the business and technical functions) in relation to any technologies being implemented. Without this they cannot establish and offer with confidence services to their users.

Recommendation

All technologies proposed for implementation must provide neutral or positive impact to the end users and business process owners. Service level agreements should be created and enforced to ensure business services are maintained in terms of operation and quality.

Have a Technology Blue Print

One of the most Important criteria in choosing a new technology is how it will integrate to existing applications and processes. In order to be able to quantify and measure this it is necessary to have a detailed understanding of the potentially impacted applications and environment. Ideally any business should have a full blueprint of their existing and aspired to technical environment. This should be used as the strategic baseline against which technologies are purchased.

A suggested starting point for any business, which does not yet have such a blue print, is to examine and codify (document in a standard fashion) the Y2K systems, applications and process analysis that guided your Y2K campaign. This will allow you to benefit from this costly work and form a clear baseline against which to plan change and impact analysis.

Recommendation

Create a baseline blueprint of the technical and process environment that you wish to achieve. Use existing Y2K documents and knowledge as a key input to this process.

Compatibility is critical

Any technology will have to operate within an existing environment. When choosing a technology a key consideration has to be the ability of that technology to fit into existing processes and technical environment in a cost-effective manner. Compatible technologies are those that can be integrated to a business technical environment with minimal process disruption and with reasonable cost. Disruptive technologies are those that impose radical or unpredicted change to associated applications or processes in order for them to operate correctly.

Recommendation

Analyze the integration issues related to any technology. The business process and service impact on the end user has to be a key criterion in relation to an adoption decision. Low process impact or high positive service impact projects are generally considered the most likely to succeed.
Reuse as a criterion

Most organizations have an established environment that offers services and processes to users across many channels. New channel technologies should be strongly judged on their ability to reuse the business processes, business rules and data that support other channels. This ensures a similar and equivalent baseline service across all channels of service for users. It also means that past investments are leveraged by each successive technology implementation. A good example of this is the WAP technology. Companies with Web infrastructure and services are capable of repositioning those services to be presented by WAP devices. This decreases time to market for WAP and increases the return on original investment in the web infrastructure and processes.

Recommendation
Establish a highly weighted criterion in relation to reuse of existing environment resources (business and technical) when choosing a new technology for service provision or visibility.

Plan for backward Service compatibility

Any new technology will bring with it a new set of business and service opportunities. These opportunities need to be leveraged in order to generate the returns from the investment. Opportunities to upgrade existing channels and processes needs to be a criterion used in the decision process. If this is not the case then a business will end up in one of two positions. The first will be variations of service across its channels or second it will have to align all channels to the lowest common service level as defined by the least capable of the channel technologies.

Recommendation
Choose technologies that are compatible with your existing environment and that allow existing channels to provide upgraded service levels that are of equivalent content or value to the end user. Factor in the upgrade costs of existing channels to the costs of the new technology project. Business benefit analysis should be calculated across the entire affected channel suite.

Avoid the first generation of a technology

Any new technology will require time to mature, have inadequate cost effective skills to implement and support it and will change rapidly. Adopting the first wave of a technology will increase the costs of implementation because you pay a premium for the skills, the product itself and the support costs for integrating immature products to your environment. Any technology must be able to prove to be equivalent or better in financial returns to the business but most importantly have a service improvement that generates Returns that compensate for costs associated with its implementation.

Recommendation
Buy proven products for which non-premium skills are available in the market to implement and support it. Focus on time to operability and return as key decision factors in the purchasing decision.