



viewpoint

Three crucial steps to help you get savvy with SaaS

Critical themes highlighted by Forrester Research in their recent report have a strong resonance with our own experience of 'Software as a Service' implementation... so how can you make sure you 'get it right'? Read on!*

The promise of SaaS ('Software as a Service') is clear. Rapid deployment of functionally rich, flexible applications; the ability to scale up or down based on business need whilst only paying for what you consume; and the overall cost savings, particularly in the early years of deployment. Sounds compelling, and it is, but getting deployment right is not as straightforward as some would have you believe.

Which is why, in this Viewpoint, we're sharing three key steps for exploiting SaaS capability at the enterprise level – where SaaS applications are supporting the very lifeblood of your business in terms of sales, fulfilment or service assurance - combining some 'old school' lessons of the past with new, more dynamic approaches to ensure your SaaS programme delivers the transformational change it is capable of.

The first step is to ask "why am I doing this?"

Whilst this may seem rather trivial, the answer will help you to identify the right deployment strategy for you. If you're looking to set up new capability in an immature environment, you could choose to deploy quickly and iterate the solution as opportunities emerge (the "land and expand" approach); in this instance, you may take just a few weeks to be in and live.

However, if you need to integrate the solution with existing systems and re-engineer established business processes, then a more considered approach will almost certainly yield a better outcome. In which case you're likely to need a few months rather than a few weeks to execute a well thought through plan.

Which leads us to the second question: "Where should I focus?"

Despite the rapid deployments which can be achieved with SaaS, it's important not to measure success simply by how quickly you can 'go live'. The real business value SaaS brings is in the flexibility and speed of change which can be achieved after deployment.

Take, for example, a product catalogue made up of individual components, with various options and additional services which can be added at the point when a sale is made. The way this catalogue is structured will almost certainly drive pricing, inventory, provisioning and billing activities across the enterprise, through both workflow and downstream data-flows. So get this catalogue structure right and you'll potentially eliminate much manual re-keying, opportunities for error and many sources of customer dissatisfaction. Get it wrong and you've created a headache which will haunt you each time you need to make a change or introduce a new product.

About Quortex www.quortex.com

Quortex are business change experts who bring a refreshingly different approach to the more traditional management and IT consultancy space. Quortex is a privately owned and completely vendor independent professional services firm. It helps companies face the constant challenge to deliver improved and sustainable business performance, where success depends on clarity of vision, astute planning and superb execution. Quortex provides expertise to drive business change ranging from small scale business process enhancements to setting up global transformation programmes. Its pragmatic approach and active transfer of knowledge to client teams is what sets it apart from the crowd. Quortex' difference is best summed up by one of their clients: "The difference with you guys is that you really care about what you do."

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This is not a question of application configuration; it's a question of business solution design – of defining in detail how the systems need to operate. And it is an element of critical design work which needs to be informed not only by what your systems can support, but by an understanding of the drivers of efficiency and flexibility across the whole of your business. If you're deploying a heavily integrated solution, you're likely to have a number of such areas where the implications of getting the business solution design wrong will be significant.

This process of 'design', therefore, needs to be a distinct step in your SaaS deployment lifecycle. In key areas, it will be the quality of the design output which will make the real difference...

Some will argue it's not necessary to take this step – just let the developers 'get on with it' – and in some circumstances, this may be valid. But most developers are not Business Analysts or Technical Analysts; designs they create in isolation to other important inputs are unlikely to be optimised to exploit the opportunity. Furthermore, with more complex deployments, it simply cannot be possible for individual developers to account for the knock-on implications of all the design decisions they might be taking.

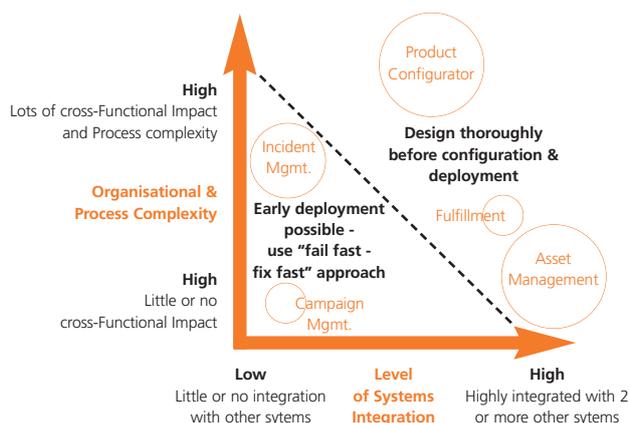
This brings us to our third and final step: deciding how to approach the design.

And this is where tensions can emerge between the 'old' world of waterfall development approaches ("define everything before you do anything") and the 'new' world of Agile ("build as you go"). So, I have to make a choice between the two – right? Wrong! In our experience, both dogmas can carry inherent risks and hidden costs if one is used to the exclusion of the other.

In practice, up front scoping and High Level Design will be needed to define boundaries and interfaces. And 'Out of the Box' capabilities need to be factored into any Requirements Analysis so as not to waste time reinventing the wheel. Once this is completed though, Agile development cycles will bring focus to the development effort.

But in areas which are complex and where the implications of having to make changes post 'go-live' are significant, then more detailed analysis and business solution design will both save cost in the overall deployment, as well as deliver greater business benefit once live.

The following simple framework may help make more sense of this:



By mapping the various areas of capability in terms of their technical and organisational complexity, you will start to create a picture of where your real challenges are likely to be. Combining this with the relative importance of each area to the success of the programme and the impact / disruption of having to make change post 'go-live' (represented by the size of the bubbles), will reveal the areas which require the most focus for getting the design right up front, so you can then start to build your plans accordingly.

Since the real benefits SaaS systems offer are the flexibility and ease of change which can be achieved once your platform is live and running, it's worth taking the time to make sure these advantages are not compromised in the initial rush to deploy. Following our simple 'three steps' and identifying critical areas of design to get right from the outset, will help ensure you reap the rich rewards that SaaS has to offer your business long into the future.