Manufacturers move to the cloud

Manufacturers have one thing in common - they need to make themselves hassle free from a supply chain, distribution and services point of view. Many manufacturers are looking to cloud computing to improve their process, supply chain management, R&D as well as front and back office functions.

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The pressure on manufacturers to improve accuracy and process speed is relentless, says Richard Vester, director of EOH Cloud Solutions. "Fast-paced product lifecycles and short time-to-market schedules are no longer the exception these days, they are the rule. In a competitive market place, being the first to deliver is the difference between thriving and closing doors."

He says a manufacturing strategy built around the cloud allows manufacturers to add business intelligence (BI) and knowledge management all along the supply chain, right up to sales. "On premise systems have this ability to a certain extent as well, but cloud is infinitely faster and more customisable. Although manufacturers are not known for investing in the most advanced technologies, cloud computing is ideal for manufacturers, particularly for lowering capital expenditure, and reducing human resources and labour costs."

He cites one reason as being that the responsibility for running on-premise solutions, hardware and software now lies with the cloud provider, and all associated hassles, which would usually fall on the shoulders of the manufacturer, are then removed. "This includes maintenance, upgrades and so on."

Over and above the lowered hassles and expenses, he says manufacturers who adopt cloud can look forward to faster deployment, improved ease of use and flexibility. "Cloud solutions allow IT practitioners to free up and allocate computing power to those areas that need it the most."

In addition, through cloud, these entities can use analytics and BI to capture intelligence across the manufacturing chain, and use this information to enhance planning and decision making. "This also assists with quickening the introduction and

development of new products. Cloud can be extremely helpful, particularly in high tech manufacturing environments, as time-to-market pressures require more and more collaboration, earlier and earlier in the process and design cycle."

In terms of the sales and marketing process, Vester says indirect and direct channel sales can be managed from one cloud platform that tracks sales against quotas and targets, from the individual sales person, to a group, to a division. "The status of each sale, as well as the profitability of each deal can be tracked."

For marketing, cloud-based marketing tools can plan, carry out and track the results of each and every marketing campaign. "With marketing budgets getting smaller and smaller in tough times, any spend of this nature is under tremendous scrutiny. Marketing automation delivers results, and can gauge the success or failure of a campaign, as well as whether the marketing spend is resulting in a return or not."

Boosting customer service is another benefit seen by manufacturers who adopt cloud. "Once customer service and support is automated, it is far easier to track the status of orders online. In addition, these systems can be integrated with distribution, pricing, content management and similar platforms," Vester explains.

Cloud-based systems are being used by all types of manufacturers to streamline key areas of their business, to free up time and resources to invest in the future. "Cloud computing can offer the latest technologies, with top functionality and flexibility at far lower capital and operating costs than on-premise solutions. It allows for collaboration among mobile and remote workers, vendors, suppliers and other stakeholders in the supply chain, and offers quick, secure and easy access to information as and when needed to boost operations and make data-driven decisions," he concludes.

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