

Bi-Monthly
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Support
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Customer Service is non-existent for many vendors

So few organizations understand the cost of poor customer service that the industry is at risk

Customers will buy products when the products are what they need and the vendors they deal with provide them with good



service. The decision to purchase a product comes into the equation when the customer has to go through their own justification process. If product improvement is not all that great and past experience with a vendor is not good, the customer is strongly motivated not to buy the new product.

As people look at what it takes to drive the economy, many conclude that sales of products - - not just service is what needs to be improved. The difficulty is that quality of service drives all follow-on sales. That is the case with Boeing 747 and software developed by American companies. This is where industry leadership should be focused, not on how to get an extra nickel out of a dollar.

In the course of normal everyday operations, we all read of new software and upgrades to packages that we use every day. Many of the new versions sound like they will answer all

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Report design and presentation of data is not all art

Tools make it easier to be creative and be a winner

Until recently, it was very difficult to present data in other than tabular form without a great deal of expense. The advent of PC-based graphics and laser printers have minimized that. Now artistic capabilities are available to everyone. The only limitation is one's imagination and artistic taste. Tastes and style now are issues that creators of graphic reports must deal with.

Another problem that we now have is that graphics do not convey the ideas the data represents. As a guideline, definitions have been developed for producing good versus poor graphic presentations.

Data Presentation Rules

Many reporting systems have been developed in concert with traditional accounting data analysis and presentation. This has led to a certain amount of excess measurement of minute details that do not matter. As reports are produced out of computer systems, totals are traditionally printed on the last page.

List summary totals on the first page of a report not on the last

The best data is normally so buried that action that could be taken is taken too late or is not taken at all. It may seem obvious but this one action will improve the value of any reporting system where it is implemented.

Added to the accounting thrust of massive amounts of detailed information, is the desire by many on the technical side of the Information Systems business to be accepted by management. This causes too much irrelevant data to be captured and reported. We can all

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100% Recycled paper

Report design and presentation of data is not all art

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remember the reports that were produced by well intentioned individuals that provided no value except to the pulp mills that produced the paper. Why do all reports have to be detail reports?

Produce summary reports as the primary source of information

Most executives and managers do not have enough time to get their day-to-day functions completed in a cost effective manner. In addition, so much data crosses each individuals desk that summary data is the most beneficial. We have found the most powerful presentations of data are those that are the simplest and most easily comprehended. Once an idea crosses into multiple pages, many factors begin to take hold.

Produce One Page Reports

In the case of senior executives, we have found there are many who do not want to know the details of an issue. Rather they want to know what they need to know. It is more important to communicate back to them with the facts on the status of solutions and trends. They do not want to be the ones who find problems by reviewing data. That is the job of the individuals who are producing the reports.

One CEO told me that he spent his entire career hiring people better than him. He did not want to do their jobs for them. Rather he wanted them to do their jobs and give him the tools necessary to measure their performance.

Most reporting systems in place are like the engineer who is measuring the size of the hole in the side of the ship as it is sinking. It would have been much better if time had been spent on a good radar system to show what was about to happen before it did.

Design metrics that show trends not reports that show history

In the course of a day or a week, so much information crosses the desks of decision makers that much of it gets lost. The only time that some of this critical information can be seen is when it is recast in a period reporting process. The key is to have a period reporting process that is responsive enough to allow for an enterprise to alter course.

Graphic Report Guidelines	
Good	Poor
Words spelled out	Abbreviations
Legends and words on a single line	No legends and / or words that run over a single line
Discussion area for brief explanation	Graphic that has no legend / discussion or a cryptic one
Shading or types of lines that are well defined and contrasting	Unclear coding with minor differences requiring repeated references to the legend
Graphic that is pleasant and attracts the reader	Graphic that is "ugly" or in bad taste and / or too cluttered
If color is used, it is soft (i.e. blue)	Multiple colors not taking into account "good taste", color implications (red for profit), and color sensitivity (color blindness of audience)
Type is clear and does not overpower the graphic	Type is "loud" and overbearing
Upper and lower case type (Times Roman / Helvetica proportional fonts)	Type is upper case and all bold (Courier fix spaced fonts)

Have a formal reporting process that will drive decisions to be made before the report is produced. In this way you will get much more value out of the process. If you just produce the report and shuffle the paper, why do it?

Data that is presented crisply and cleanly is much more valuable than a statistical table. USA Today showed the publishing industry the power of graphics. While that has been going on, the move away from computer screens that can just show characters and numbers to screens with objects, sound, and motion has accelerated.

Use graphical presentations of data — the graphic should do the analysis

Analysis of data with graphic reports can simplify the communication process. If the data is presented as just a trend of a single item it is in a vacuum. Things to be considered are:

- Plan versus actual - if the numbers are what was budgeted and nothing favorable or adverse is occurring, then no time will be wasted on unneeded analysis.
- Current year versus last year for the same period-report on 13 periods for a monthly metric. 

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of our problems. With the movement of the corporate world to Windows this is happening with an ever increasing frequency.

As these announcements are made, we are all motivated to get and use new and enhanced offerings as quickly as possible. What we have learned is that because of the lack of customer service by vendors, this is not a good idea at all.

Many new or enhanced products have given vendors a chance to exceed our worst fears

Vendors continue to operate in the mode that this is a mass market that you can afford to write off a percentage of your customers and not worry about the ramifications. Some great examples of firms that have done that and have lost the leadership position that they once had include Lotus (123 - leader to fighting for existence), and Ashton-Tate (dBase leader to one of the biggest losers of market share and volume in an expanding market). Other firms continue to try and reach that standard. Listed are a number of examples of types of problems that we have seen with various vendors. This is not an all inclusive list but it does include a number of industry leaders.

- ☒ After being converted to windows, DOS applications that had worked wonderfully are almost impossible to use -- Xtree, Fastback and Foxpro.
- ☒ Applications are enhanced beyond the point of working including elimination of features that were used every-day -- Delrina wins this hands down.
- ☒ Vendors assume their software works, therefore, they do not have enough telephone support. Either the line is always busy or you only get music on hold on a non 800 number for hours on end -- Delrina (WinFax Pro) and Campbell Services (On-Time) are among the industry leaders in this.

- ☒ Vendor provides a conference on a public bulletin board and three weeks after the employee who is the SYSOP resigns, the company assigns someone to review the messages on the bulletin board -- Microsoft.

Many new or enhanced products have given vendors a chance to exceed our worst fears

- ☒ Vendor has products with bad drivers in shrink wrapped packages and continues to ship it without even having a corrected driver on a public bulletin board -- The IBM Multimedia Card for Micro channel is the best example of this.

Revenue maximization is the driver of new product enhancements

There is nothing wrong with firms trying to maximize their revenue. The difficulty is when we see companies try to figure a way to get a few more dollars without adding value. I do not want to harp on DEC or Computer Associates but they are both prime examples of firms that are trying to maximize revenue without trying to add value to their customers.

Why should a customer pay more because the vendor has poor distribution practices or because the customer is running purchased software on another computer or on a bigger box if there is no difference in the code that is running? 

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Forecast Of The West Coast MIS Job Market

**Business activity is picking up - -
Will the improvement last more than
one quarter?**

by M. Victor Janulaitis

As the world economy turns towards improvement, the diversity of the West Coast is starting to show through. With the rest of the country continuing to improve some, many organizations are again starting to turn their heads west. The super bowl and end of the drought have both helped. The regulations firms face here may be tough but the cost of operations have continued to fall. The surplus of office space and the movement towards fixing the workers' compensation laws are starting to have an impact.

Most of the new business activity has been in areas that you would least expect it. They include the San Fernando Valley, San Diego and the Portland/Seattle metro areas. Another area of growth is in the Palmdale/Lancaster area. It seems that housing costs are lower there and there is a well educated labor force that is willing to work for reasonable wages. There continues to be a move out of the Los Angeles city to other areas in the metro area. Los Angeles still troubles many because of the uncertainty of the government with



Published by:

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over 20 candidates for the mayor's position, the slow and massive effort required to rebuild LA and seeming lack of a program to get "law and order" back into south central LA.

Several large enterprises have started to do some new work. This includes a few foreign owned distribution companies that are starting to position themselves for the recovery. However, one of these firms is poised for a major lay-off due to poor sales. The health care and insurance industry is moving ahead with the new administration in Washington giving them encouragement. HMO's and firms providing health care to the aging "baby boomers" is were there is a lot of action.

One of the sleepers may be the defense industry. With the cutbacks and high use of military parts and equipment, there will be a need to replace a lot of those one time use items. I have yet to see any military establishment replace a large portion of their armaments with last year's model. Add this to the fact that the new administration is probably looking at how to make Keynesian

economics work. They will need to spend a lot of money to see that the economy is sufficiently turned around to give them four more years. Clinton is no dummy and he knows that Bush lost the election because of pocketbook voters. Defense could be a bright spot on two fronts. First,

**...first period that we
heard of more Chief
Information Officer
positions being filled
than...fired !!!**

because the defense firms may have cut back more than they had to. In order to maintain the support for spending they will need to add staff. Second, because they are the only firms that have the engineers and experience necessary to help rebuild the infrastructure of the country.

On the staffing side, this is one of the first periods that we heard of more Chief Information Officer (CIO) positions being filled than CIOs being fired. Don't rest easy, there still is a move afoot to get rid of overhead positions. The watch word is to be value added.

Vic

Industry	Prospects Short Term	Prospects Long Term
Aerospace	Poor	Poor
Distribution	Poor / Fair	Fair
Entertainment	Good	Good
Financial Services	Fair	Good
Health Care	Good	Excellent
Insurance	Fair	Good
Manufacturing	Fair	Fair / Good
National Consulting	Good	Good
Service	Fair	Fair / Good