



October 2008 Week 4

## Proof of concept

Regardless of how good business intelligence (BI), information management (IM) or management information systems (MIS) tools look on paper, businesses would only see the benefits or disadvantages of a system once the system has been installed.

Unlike other products, business can't send software back to the supplier should they be dissatisfied. Because most businesses don't test the viability of software before purchasing it, they end up paying for a system that adds little value to their business.

These tools are necessary but expensive assets to your business. Having time to consider whether software will add value to the day-to-day challenges of a call- or contact centre is a necessary step in the decision-making process. When looking to purchase software, always ask the supplier to provide a proof of concept.

A proof of concept is a trial period of the software you intend to purchase, installed at your business with your existing programs. Employees get the chance to test the software in the working environment, in real working conditions.

A proof of concept allows your business to experience first-hand the advantages or disadvantages of the software. Any software supplier worth their salt will be happy to provide a proof of concept (PoC).

A PoC is beneficial to your business for the following reasons:

### Firsthand experience

A proof of concept will allow you to assess the value of the new software on your business. The proof of concept will also help the supplier identify any incompatibilities the software might have with your business.

Should you decide to purchase the system, a good supplier should ensure that the system is adapted to cause as little disruption as possible during the installation process. A proof of concept would enable the installers to identify the hurdles on a small scale and prepare ways to bypass it should you decide to install the software.

### Convenience

It is much easier to understand a system once you work on it. Suppliers can demonstrate the advantages of their software many times. However, it is only once a BI system is installed that the full potential of the system is realised.

The trial period gives you the opportunity to weigh the output of the system against the promises made by the sales people.

## Responsible decision-making

Oftentimes, the decision makers in a business don't use the systems they purchase. They have to rely on the word of sales people, who tend to provide one-sided information. In many cases important business decisions are based on misinformation.

When testing a PoC a power user, in other words a user that would use the system every day, is appointed to use the system instead of the centre's existing system. This user's report will make a valuable contribution to the decision making process.

Identifying what is not feasible will also assist call- and contact centres in identifying elements in a BI tool that would be advantageous to the call- or contact centre.

### It's free

Getting the opportunity to test software is free in most cases. Should you decide not to purchase the system, the software will expire and you can move on to the next supplier until you find a system that is perfect for your business.

However, should the software you are testing prove to be beneficial to your call- or contact centre, the supplier is already aware of how the system should be installed across the entire enterprise to disrupt your business as little as possible.

### Training

Seeing how your power users adapt to the new system should give managers a fair idea of the amount of training that would be required before the system is completely integrated. This allows decision makers to find a system that would disrupt business as little as possible.

Time spent on training is usually time not spent doing business. Keeping training for basic systems down to a minimum would be a contributing factor when deciding if the system on offer is the right tool for your business.

Choosing the right software for your business is no doubt a challenge, but proof of concept will allow you to make responsible business decisions. Read our next article to find out how to make the best of your proof of concept.

For an EasyAsk proof of concept, phone Chris de Jager on (012) 643 4400

