



Snapshot

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IBM iSeries Takes on SME Customer Challenges

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Small and medium enterprise (SME) customers face a different set of challenges than their colleagues in enterprise IT departments. Their requirements span the traditional needs of availability, reliability, and scalability, but they need partners who can help them optimize the results possible with their usually smaller resource pools. The IBM iSeries server has several characteristics that address these needs squarely.

SME Customer Pain

The pace and degree of change within IT has left many managers with no margin for misjudgments or flawed decisions. At the same time the variety and combination of applications and the lack of clear standards for many newer technologies render decision-making increasingly difficult. For SMEs, this process is coupled with an inherent limitation: lack of necessary resources. SME IT managers must cope with:

- The transformation of business processes to ebusiness;
- The growing complexity and interaction of business and computing needs;
- The need for executives to focus on run-the-business decisions and not IT project planning and management expertise; and
- The need to deliver more business value while continuing to reduce IT costs.

SME IT managers require products and solutions that are technically capable of meeting their needs, flexible enough to adjust to changing business requirements, yet easy enough to deploy and manage with minimal IT care and feeding. These needs are driving vendors such as IBM to develop products and programs that enable SME users to deploy and maintain computing services that mask or simplify computing complexity. The IBM eServer iSeries family is positioned at the core of their SME offering and provides a solution that addresses many of these customer needs today.

The iSeries Approach

The iSeries family is intended to provide a platform that combines flexibility and manageability designed to deliver the lowest total cost of ownership. Systems are fast to deploy and easy to use. Manageability features provide easy-to-use interfaces to simplify administration. High availability features are provided throughout the family so customers can scale system capabilities as their businesses and applications grow. IBM also provides workload management tools so flexibility is not sacrificed. High availability features combined with flexible management drive down the overall costs of administration and management that haunt complex applications. The server features are designed to mask or minimize complexity so that SME customers can run enterprise business applications without a full-scale enterprise IT department and take on board new technologies when they're ready to.

SME Applications Focus

One of the ongoing concerns customers have for operating systems is application availability. IBM is aware of this concern and has invested serious resources in order to woo many ISVs (independent software vendors) to the iSeries platform. The iSeries Business Partner community is a strategic focus for the company, and the results demonstrate this commitment. Software vendors have discovered that their applications run effectively on the iSeries and have ported many popular applications to the platform. IBM works with these companies

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and offers them access to its testing labs and development expertise. Once product is running satisfactorily, IBM also commits people and resources to joint marketing and sales programs with ISVs, making sure that customers, sales people, and resellers have the latest information on which applications and solutions are available for the platform.

IBM has recently welcomed companies such as Navision, the Sage Group, and Hansa Business Solutions to their partner solution roster. All three of these ISVs have products targeted to the needs of SMEs who want to take advantage of the latest technology to run their business.

- Navision is a provider of integrated business solutions for SMEs. Navision's Attain product will run on the iSeries. Navision Attain has functionality to support integrated solutions for various business functions, including financial management, supply chain collaboration, customer relationship management (CRM), and e-commerce. (www.navision.com)
- Sage Group provides business management software to SMEs. Sage's Line 500 application will be offered as an integrated solution for the iSeries running on Linux. Line 500 allows users a single view of financials, distribution, manufacturing, and service operations. (www.sage.com)
- Hansa Business Solutions is a provider of financial solutions software for SMEs. The entire Hansa product portfolio runs on the iSeries, providing solutions for CRM and ERP, as well as ebusiness. (www.hansaworld.com)

These European companies' products are targeted specifically toward SMEs. They take advantage of new technologies such as Linux, and in conjunction with the iSeries hardware can provide customers with effective solutions. IBM continues to look for ISVs such as these to add to the burgeoning portfolio of iSeries-ready applications.

Industry leading systems companies continue to focus development on platforms that provide reliable, secure, and robust computing. These companies are also striving to create solutions that are easily managed and that reduce complexity without sacrificing flexibility. IBM has committed to making the iSeries a forerunner in this market. Due to its heritage of providing easy-to-use, richly featured, end-to-end solutions, the iSeries will continue to be a serious option for SMEs. IT managers who face the challenges of complex computing should investigate the iSeries as an integrated solution that keeps costs manageable as well as allowing them access to the latest and greatest technology.