



summit

# IT management integration drives mid-market business value

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*System and software downtime frequently mean lost revenues, lowered employee productivity and reduced customer satisfaction. Yet, many mid-sized businesses must depend on just a few IT staffers to keep these critical applications up and running. Many IT groups serving mid-sized businesses are struggling to satisfy critical business needs because the cost and complexity of sophisticated IT management tools has forced them to turn to fragmented point solutions and inefficient manual processes.*

*An emerging class of unified IT management tools, geared to the needs of mid-sized businesses, is poised to change this situation dramatically. Early users of Microsoft's System Center Essentials 2007 unified management tool say they are improving business performance and end-user productivity by implementing a single tool that unifies service-level monitoring, problem detection & troubleshooting, security patching, software distribution automation, and asset tracking & reporting.*

## Key messages

### **IT is a critical enabler of mid-sized business success**

Servers, desktops, laptops and software support virtually every critical business process from email and office productivity applications to customer relationship management, logistics, inventory and finance. Failure of any hardware component or software application can impact revenues, reduce employee productivity and sour customer relationships.

### **IT staff serving mid-sized businesses lack adequate management tools**

Most mid-sized businesses rely on a very small staff of IT generalists to keep their IT resources up and running. However, these staff frequently report that neither their management tools nor their work processes are up to the task. They frequently rely on point solution tools that do not share information or enable automation, forcing them to manage on a reactive rather than proactive basis.

### **Unified IT management solutions are poised to improve business and IT productivity**

Until recently, most IT management tools that could effectively integrate activities such as discovery, root cause analysis, automated software distribution, performance reporting and asset tracking required expensive, customized

implementations and dedicated IT staff to use the tools on a day-to-day basis. For mid-sized businesses, the potential business value that might be realized from this level of integration could not justify the cost and complexity of the solution.

### **Microsoft's System Center Essentials 2007 customers experience benefits of unified management**

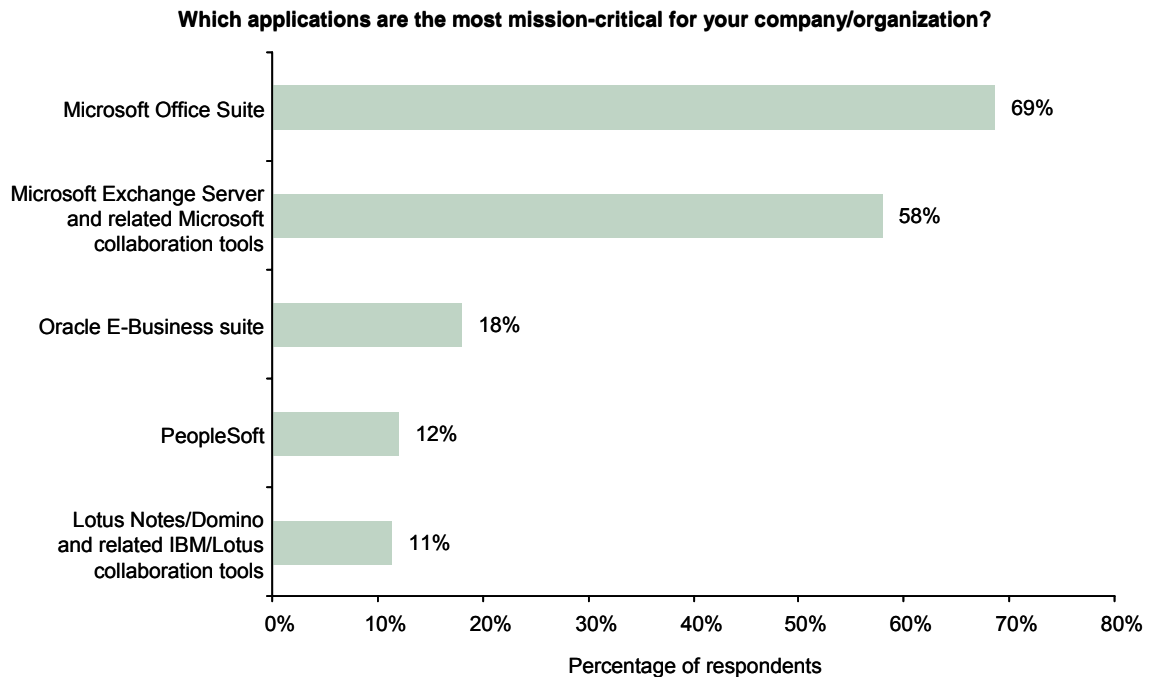
Microsoft has recently released System Center Essentials 2007, a unified IT management tool scaled to the needs of mid-sized businesses and their IT staff. By integrating and simplifying a number of key management activities, and making them accessible via a single console and operator interface, Microsoft offers mid-sized customers an opportunity to unify IT management activities and tools. Early adopter customers report they are significantly improving IT staff productivity while increasing business process availability and employee performance.

## **Business success depends on stable and efficient IT management**

Business success is most frequently measured by a mix of external metrics such as revenues, profitability and customer satisfaction, and internal measurements such as employee productivity and satisfaction. Large or small, each business identifies its own measures of success, then organizes and invests in a way optimized to meet those targets.

Information technology (IT) is a critical enabler of most of these mission-critical business activities. Sales teams need constant access to customer information and sales and order status. Administrative employees rely on accurate and timely financial data provided by general ledger and other accounting and inventory applications. Customers depend on websites for order entry and customer service. Compliance mandates demand sophisticated monitoring and archiving. And, of course, virtually all employees, including remote or mobile workers, depend on electronic mail and core productivity applications (particularly Microsoft Office, as shown in *Figure 1*) for vital internal and external communications and work support.

Figure 1 **Top five mission-critical applications in mid-sized businesses**

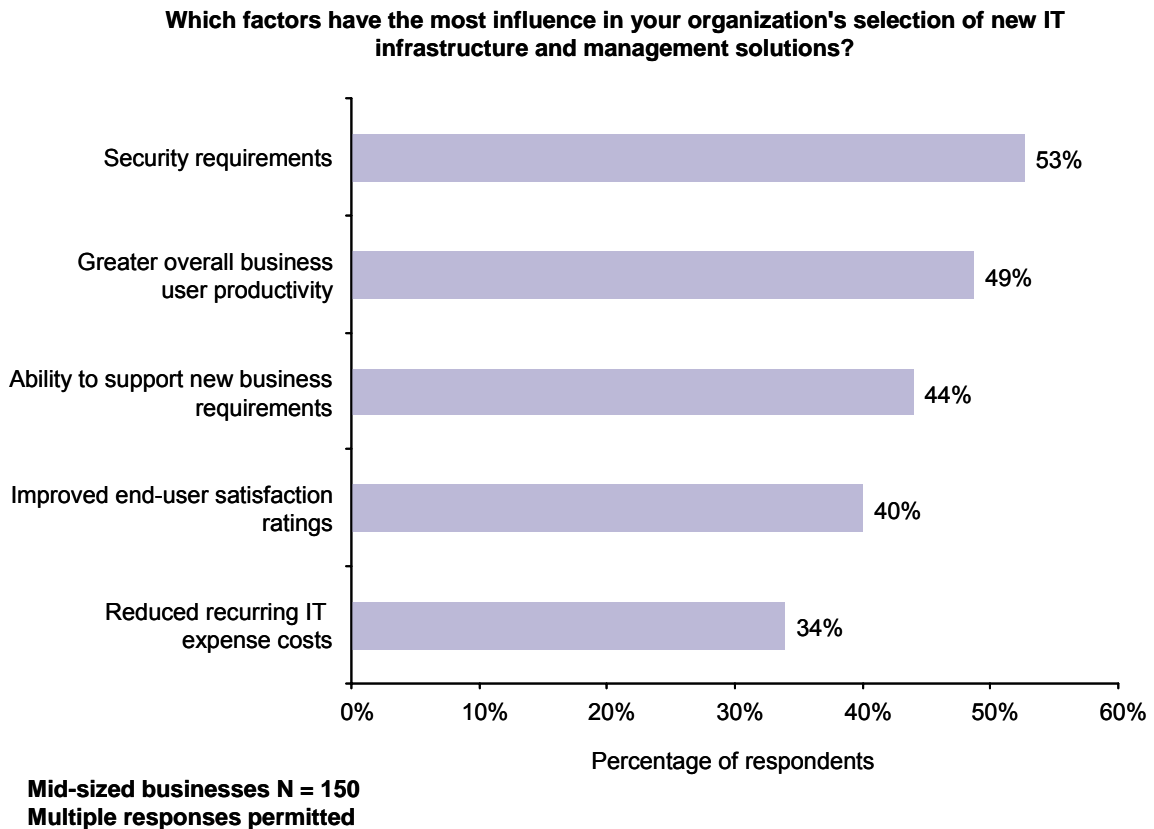


**Mid-sized businesses N = 150**  
**Multiple responses permitted**

Source: Ovum Summit

These critical business applications rely on a myriad of database and workflow tools, as well as the server, storage, desktop, laptop and mobile computing devices that support them. As shown in *Figure 2*, IT and business decision-makers prioritize IT investments that promote security, business process performance and end-user productivity. It is clear that a business's success and value is directly linked to the reliability and security of its operational IT environment. However, ensuring the consistent delivery of required IT service levels is very challenging for many mid-sized businesses.

Figure 2 **Top five factors influencing mid-sized business selection of IT infrastructure and management solutions**



Source: Ovum Summit

## IT struggles to keep up with business priorities

In most mid-sized businesses, the IT staff tasked with keeping the company's vital business applications and computing resources up and running is frequently limited to just three or four very busy IT generalists. Unlike larger IT shops that can assign specialized roles to different staff members, IT experts working inside mid-sized businesses are likely to be responsible for all aspects of IT support, operations, maintenance, trouble-shooting and end-user support. Money for management tools and IT staff training is often much lower on the priority list than money for new laptops or software licenses.

As a result, the majority of IT management tasks in these organizations are often implemented manually or using point products for specific tasks, such as security

software patching or device-specific monitoring tools. A typical mid-sized IT group supporting 250 users and 15–25 servers is likely to spend at least 8–12 hours a week monitoring and trouble shooting servers using these types of rudimentary tools and manual processes. Keeping desktops compliant with security patches and software updates can take another two to four hours a week. User support consumes the vast majority of IT staff time, often as much as two full-time staffers.

Clearly, these 'lean and mean' IT staff need to be as productive as possible just to keep up with day-to-day business requirements. Yet, by their very nature, point tools are not designed to help IT organizations efficiently correlate data, identify root cause or cross-system dependencies. Nor do they help automate a wide range of tasks or support policy and compliance monitoring. This fragmented, task-specific management environment drives mid-sized business IT staff towards highly manual methods for data correlation and troubleshooting day-to-day problems.

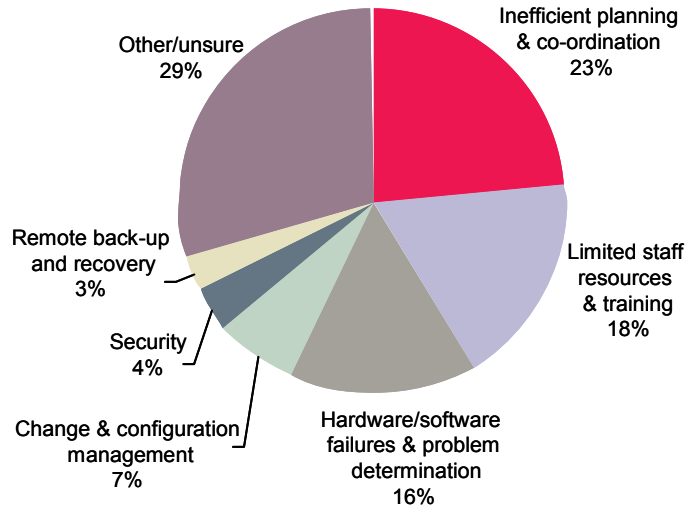
Likewise, time-intensive manual procedures are frequently used to simply gather the inventory and configuration information needed to support compliance reports or planning for new application implementations. The result is an inefficient, reactive management environment that actually reduces business value by extending unplanned downtime, slowing system and application upgrades, and diverting IT staff attention from planning and innovation (see *Figure 3*).

A key reason that processes such as planning, problem determination, configuration and change management are often inefficient is that they require IT staff to access, correlate and interpret information from multiple systems. However, until recently, only complex enterprise-class tools were capable of discovering configurations, correlating data, identifying root cause, automating security and software updates, and providing integrated, best practice wizards and recommendations for repair and remediation. These enterprise-class tools generally required implementation and integration of multiple modules, as well as availability of sufficient, dedicated IT staff to take advanced training and specialize in getting day-to-day value out of the tools.

Mid-sized organizations typically have neither the budgets, time nor staff resources for these types of complex solutions and opt to continue to struggle with ad hoc processes and point product tools instead. The result: unplanned downtime, lost revenues, reduced employee productivity, and lowered customer and partner satisfaction.

Figure 3 Sources of IT inefficiency and downtime in mid-sized businesses

Which IT work process is the most inefficient and/or creates the most unplanned downtime?



Mid-sized businesses N = 150  
Open-ended responses

Source: Ovum Summit

## Unified management tools help IT create more business value

The good news for IT groups serving mid-sized businesses is that unified management tools are beginning to become available at price points affordable to mid-market IT. These tools offer simplified, integrated monitoring, analysis, automation and best practices – functions that can be accessed via a single, shared console and user interface.

For mid-market IT organizations that have not recently reviewed their management environment, 2007 is a good year to reconsider the status quo and evaluate whether a new generation of unified tools might be able to help their IT staff create more business value while improving employee and IT staff productivity.

IT groups evaluating tools for mid-sized businesses should look for the following capabilities.

- Unified user interface, allowing an IT generalist to access a variety of activities, ranging from performance monitoring to asset inventory using a consistent set of reports and graphics and a single, customizable reporting application and console.
- Automatic asset and configuration discovery and data collection to assure that all IT staff have access to accurate and timely information, whether they are planning a major upgrade, validating a system patch installation or monitoring server disk space utilization.
- Integrated, automated performance monitoring, problem detection and root cause analysis that can proactively spot service-affecting conditions before they impact end users, and quickly identify the problem sources to reduce and streamline remediation efforts. Out-of-the-box reporting and analytic templates should be available to help IT staff become productive immediately.
- Automated software distribution capabilities to help ensure that desktops and servers stay up to date and in compliance with security patches and approved software image guidelines.
- Embedded expert knowledge bases and best practice recommendations that provide actionable advice specific to the businesses' existing server and desktop environments in order to expedite remediation and improve IT's ability to keep the business up and running.
- Easy to install and manage, including availability of installation wizards, system generated health checks and automatic update services for the management tools themselves.

IT organizations evaluating these emerging, integrated toolkits may need to make trade-off decisions between best-in-class point products and 'good enough' capabilities found in more unified offerings. Each organization needs to evaluate its operational requirements in a way that balances the cost and efficiency of point products versus unified products. For many organizations, unified products may be missing a few in-depth features, but the ease of installation and use, and the resulting improvements in business performance and IT staff productivity may be worth the trade-off.

## Microsoft System Center Essentials 2007 early adopters report significant benefits

One of the unified management tools getting solid ratings from early customers is the Microsoft System Center Essentials 2007 (Essentials 2007) product, which has been evaluated by over 20,000 customers during the first several months of 2007.

Essentials 2007 is an integrated, unified management product designed to address the needs of mid-sized companies, which Microsoft defines as those organizations with between 50 and 500 end-user PCs. It is designed to tightly integrate with the

Windows-based desktops used by many mid-market customers, providing in-depth analytics and problem-remediation best practices for many widely used Microsoft products, including Office, Exchange Server, SQL Server, SharePoint Server, Internet Information Server (IIS) and Active Directory, as well as Intel-based servers.

Early users we interviewed noted that the monitoring report templates and automated software distribution capabilities available out of the box have been of particular value. The Essentials Update feature allows for the import of third party update catalogs as well as updates provided by the online Windows Server Update Services. Early adopters report that they needed just an hour or two to get the system up and running using the wizards and standard reporting tools.

Typically, prior to implementing Essentials 2007, these customers relied on reactive point products, such as Desktop Authority for hardware and software asset tracking or Centennial for tracking disk utilization. When problems are reported by end users, many of these organizations rely on a manual review of system logs or email event histories to isolate the source of a problem.

Although these organizations frequently realized they would be more productive if they could do a better job collecting and correlating configuration and performance information, they also consistently reported they had been unable to find an affordable tool scaled to their needs. Using a before/after comparison of time spent on several routine operation tasks, a sampling of several Essentials 2007 early adopter customers identified significant reductions in the time needed to identify the root cause of a server performance problem.

More importantly, these users noticed a marked change in the way that they worked. Essentials 2007 implements an ongoing realtime performance reporting capability, using standardized reporting templates to graphically display server health and the status of key metrics such as disk utilization. Rather than needing to dedicate time specifically to opening administration windows into individual servers to assess how well they are performing, IT staff can now keep a constant realtime watch on server performance. This capability alone allows these organizations to reduce the time associated with performance monitoring by as much as 50%.

Software distribution, patching, server & client hardware and software inventory tracking are other areas where Essentials 2007 users report fundamental changes in the way they work. By being able to more consistently deploy patches and monitor desktop images, many organizations report noticeable improvements in the stability of their desktop and laptop computers. For organizations with mobile users and remote branch offices, Essentials 2007 has significantly improved their ability to monitor the health and performance of remote systems and to ensure that those systems also stay up to date.

These capabilities provide the dual benefits of reducing end-user requests for support and of making diagnosis of client device problems more efficient since version levels and configurations are more consistent. Given that many IT groups

serving mid-sized businesses estimate that end-user support consumes between one-half and two-thirds of available staff time, any reduction in end-user support requirements immediately frees up significant IT resources while improving end-user productivity.

As is shown in *Figure 4*, a typical mid-sized IT group of three or four people supporting 15–25 servers and 150–250 end users can realize as much as a 35% overall productivity improvement in IT staff activity by using Essentials 2007, mostly due to reductions in time needed for end-user support and performance monitoring.

**Figure 4 Representative IT productivity improvements reported by selected Microsoft System Center Essentials 2007 RTP users**

Task	Weekly IT staff time using reactive point tools	Weekly IT staff time using unified, proactive tools	Percentage IT staff productivity improvement
Server OS and application monitoring and troubleshooting	12 hours	4 hours	66%
Desktop security patching	2 hours	1 hour	50%
Keep hardware/software inventory up to date	2 hours	1 hour	50%
End-user support	70 hours	50 hours	29%
Total weekly	86 hours	56 hours	35%
			Weekly hours freed for business value creation
			30

*Source: Ovum Summit, with information provided by Microsoft and System Center Essentials RDP customers*

Interviewed customers noted that Essentials 2007's embedded knowledge bases provided them with extensive expert advice and automated repair wizards for Microsoft products such as Office, Exchange Server, SQL Server and Active Directory as well as Intel-based servers. They noted these resources have been very helpful in reducing the time needed to identify and implement the appropriate fix, once the source of a problem is identified. They also appreciated the ability to access all reports and functions from a single console and user interface, a capability that allowed them to get the job done without having to log into multiple machines and deal with multiple, disconnected tools simultaneously.

For IT organizations serving mid-sized businesses, there will never be enough hours in a day to get all the work done. It is therefore critical that these organizations seriously consider taking advantage of emerging unified, automated

management tools to help make them more efficient and productive while simultaneously improving business performance and employee productivity. By improving mission-critical business application availability, maintaining up-to-date desktop security and software patches, and detecting and re-mediating problems before they impact end users, IT can clearly deliver significant value to the business.

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