



Empowering Business Users and Improving Customer Centricity:

An Analysis of StreamServe Persuasion

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Executive Summary

The ability of businesses to achieve greater levels of customer-centricity and customer service depends more and more on the empowerment of the entire business towards this goal. That increased level of empowerment has translated into an equally increased need for technology to serve not just the back-office, IT-centric needs of the business, but also those needs of a new class of business users. These business users—with job titles as disparate as business analyst, marketer, customer service representative, and graphic designer, among many others—are now on the front lines of this new customer-centricity.

Many of the applications currently in use by business users require the IT department to be a functionality gatekeeper to these tools, thus setting up a fundamental disconnect between IT department priorities and business users' timetables. This disconnect is particularly evident when it comes to improving customer service through the development of customer-centric messaging and services—including invoices, marketing literature, and call center services—that are more personalized and therefore more relevant to the customer relationship and overall business success.

Fortunately, new software tools are emerging that are designed to produce results that are seen across the entire enterprise, and out into the customer and partner base as well. The best of these tools are designed to work in lock-step with existing enterprise software and business processes, bringing an immediate, measurable return on investment to the line of business, while lowering IT costs as well. This in turn helps drive significant improvements in levels of customer satisfaction and customer-centricity.

Among the new business user tools that highlight these capabilities is Persuasion, a business user communications product from StreamServe, Inc., a global provider of business communications software. Enterprise Applications Consulting's review of this new offering, and its interviews with StreamServe customers, show a well-designed product set that serves as an example of how technology can empower business users, and deliver significant results these business users, and to IT departments, and, most importantly, to customers as well.

Interviews with customers in disparate industries such as telecommunications, public utilities, and testing services have shown that Persuasion can yield benefits across a range of factors, including:

- Faster turnaround for key business processes.
- Significantly increased efficiency and throughput.
- Support for new business opportunities.
- Lower hardware and software costs.
- More direct empowerment of business users and less demand for scarce IT resources.
- Better leverage of existing IT/ERP resources.
- Improved ROI across the enterprise.

EAC's research has shown that Persuasion provides precisely the right mix of business user functionality and technological savoir-faire to empower these users with the tools needed to improve the customer-centricity of the enterprise.

Introduction: Business Users and the New Customer-Centricity

The growing requirement for businesses to become more aligned with their customers is a worldwide phenomenon that has had a broad impact on how technology can serve business needs. Most significantly, the ability of a business to achieve a greater level of customer-centricity and customer service depends more and more on the empowerment of the entire business towards this goal. That increased level of empowerment has translated into an equally increased need for technology to serve not just the back-office, IT-centric needs of the business, but also those needs of a new class of business users whose jobs put them on the front lines of this new customer-centricity.

These new business users—with job titles as disparate as business analyst, marketer, customer service representative, and graphic designer, among many others—have come of age in an Internet era that has focused on user empowerment as one of its central themes. This focus has made their tolerance for poorly designed, kludgy software extremely low. This is in sharp contrast to even the recent past, when these users were disconnected from their companies' ERP strategies, and the tools available to them were typically hard to use. At the same time, these users were dependent on IT departments to deliver and manage the technology necessary for their day-to-day work.

Indeed, many of the applications currently in use by business users were primarily designed with the needs of IT as their primary purpose, and serving the direct needs of the business user was an incidental benefit. This has meant that business user tools often require the IT department to be a gatekeeper to the functionality in these tools, thus setting up a fundamental disconnect between IT department priorities and business users' timetables. This disconnect too often results in the inability of business users to act in ways that meet the new customer-centric requirements in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Business Communications, Business Users, and Customer-Centricity

The disconnect between business users and IT is particularly evident when it comes to empowering a business to effectively communicate with its customers and other stakeholders—a key requirement for customer-centricity. Indeed, today's best practices in communications require business users to have exceptional access to customer information and efficient tools for using that information. This increased usability allows business users to improve customer service through the development of customer-centric messaging and services—including invoices, marketing literature, and call center services—that are more personalized and therefore more relevant to the customer relationship and overall business success.

The value of this customer-centric approach can be significant. Research by the Aberdeen Group shows that “best in class” email marketing—emails that are personalized to the interests and needs of the recipient—can yield significant improvements in the rate in which an email is opened and read by the recipient, as well as the click-through rate of the email. (See box, below)

Personalized email yields a 51% annual improvement in open/read rates, and a 45% annual improvement in click-through rates.

Source: Aberdeen Group

The importance of these kinds of customer-centric processes in the competitive success of the company means that the disconnect between business users and technology is no longer acceptable. Business users need to move quickly and effectively to address the customer-centric processes in their companies, or lose their competitive edge, and this means they need tools for improving customer-centricity that fit business user—and not just IT—requirements.

Fortunately, new software tools are emerging that are designed specifically for this task. These new tools produce results that are seen across the entire enterprise—and out into the customer and partner base as well. The fact that the best of these tools are designed to work in lock-step with existing enterprise software and business processes helps bring an immediate, measurable return on investment to the line of business, while lowering IT costs as well. In addition, by empowering users on the front-lines of customer interaction and customer success, these tools help drive significant improvements in levels of customer satisfaction and customer-centricity.

Among the new business user tools that highlight these capabilities is Persuasion, a business user communications product from StreamServe, Inc., a global provider of business communications software. Enterprise Applications Consulting's review of this new offering, and its interviews with StreamServe customers, show a well-designed product set that serves as an example of how technology can empower business users, and deliver significant results to business users, IT departments, and, most importantly, to customers as well.

This report describes how StreamServe Persuasion achieves these goals, and how StreamServe's customers are able to derive a significant return on investment while building stronger, more customer-centric companies. This report is organized into four sections. The first is a discussion of the value of empowering business users and how that impacts customer-centricity with respect to business communications. The second section describes how StreamServe Persuasion bridges the requirements for empowering business users and enabling customer-centricity. The third section describes the results of Enterprise Applications Consulting's interviews with StreamServe customers. The Conclusion highlights the overall value that customer-centric tools like Persuasion can bring to a company.

Business Users and Customer-Centricity: Opportunities and the IT Barrier

The simultaneous growth in consumer and business usage of the Internet is emblematic of the challenges and opportunities represented by the empowerment of business users toward the goal of customer-centricity. A look at the basic numbers of Internet users in the business world and consumer worlds can be had by examining the number of business email accounts. According to data from the Radicati Group, the Computer Industry Almanac, and others, the current number of business email accounts is over 600 million today, and is likely to reach almost 1 billion by 2014. Consumer email accounts today exceed 2 billion, and are likely to reach 3 billion in the same period.

Reaching the growing consumer base by leveraging the growing business user base is becoming job number one for an increasing number of companies across the globe. Nowhere is this requirement felt more strongly than in industries that count their consumer customers in the hundreds of thousands or millions of users. Financial services, telecommunications, insurance, and utilities companies are among the companies that meet this requirement.

The main financial driver for empowering the business user to better serve the consumer comes from the need to better leverage existing customer relationships in order to improve bottom and top line performance. This requirement can be seen in a recent survey, conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit and PricewaterhouseCoopers. This survey focused on the growing requirement for greater customer-centricity in the financial services industry.

According to the survey, customer-centricity has become a main strategic driver for organic growth, greatly exceeding mergers and acquisitions, and joint ventures. That promise of organic growth, in turn, derives from a number of factors that effectively combine cross-selling and up-selling existing and new products to existing and new customers—the commercial imperative of the customer-centric business. (See Figure 1, below.)

Figure 1: Top drivers of customer-centric organic growth

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit, PwC

Existing Customer penetration (cross-/upselling) with new products/services	57%
New customer acquisition with existing products/services	52%
Existing customer penetration (cross-/upselling) with existing products/services	50%
New customer acquisition with new products/services	35%
Geographic expansion into new markets	33%
Changes in channel and distribution strategy	25%
New customer acquisition with price/margin change on existing products/services	17%
Existing customer penetration with price/margin change on existing products/services	10%
Improved performance by intermediaries	9%
Encouraging exit of unprofitable customers	5%
Other, please specify	0%

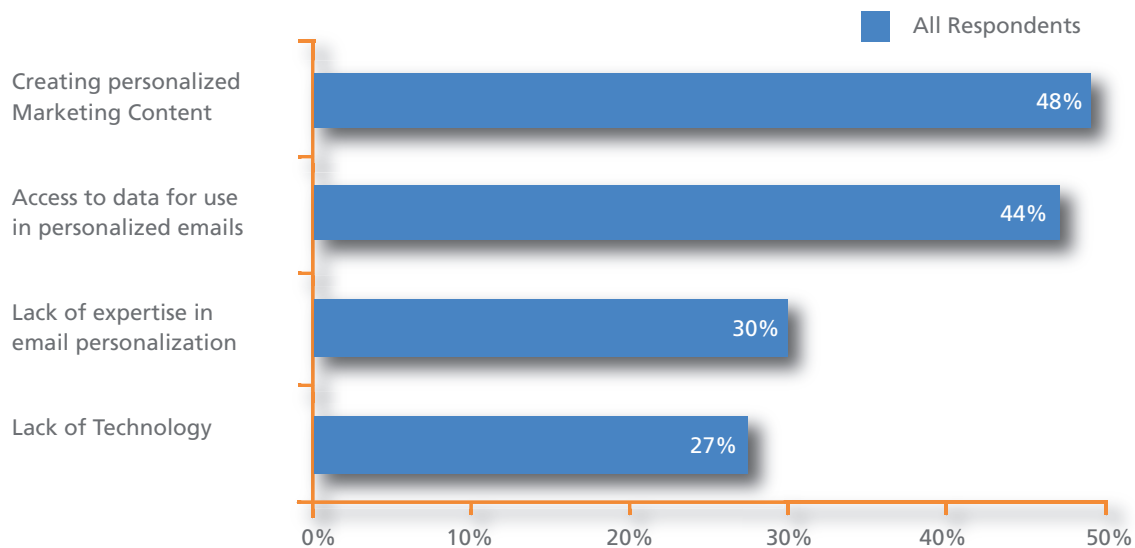
This customer-centric growth strategy doesn't just happen. A company's ability to offer more products to more customers hinges on its ability to connect more of its internal resource—people and processes—to more of its external customers and prospects. And while the growth of Internet access—along with other technologies, such as mobile devices—makes this connection seem almost inevitable, the fact remains that there are significant barriers to empowering business users to better leverage customer interaction.

The Software Barrier

The Aberdeen study cited above yields interesting data on the barriers for effective interactions between businesses and their customers, with email marketing serving as an example of the problem that extends well beyond email into other channels as well.

According to the study, content creation and access to customer data for personalization are two of the major barriers when it comes to the kind of personalized email message that recipients are most likely to open. Limits to user expertise and access to technology were also cited in the study. (See Figure 2, below.)

Figure 2: Top Challenges to Email Personalization



Source: Aberdeen Group June 2008

Those barriers can be boiled down to an important single factor: business software, particularly that which empowers individual business users, has lagged significantly behind the potential opportunity represented by increasing customer-centricity. While businesses recognize this opportunity—as the EIU/PwC survey shows—their business software systems are often woefully inadequate for this new reality.

The same EIU/PwC survey singled out the software side of this problem in several ways. When asked to identify the barriers to effecting a more customer-centric company, 48% of respondents stated that their IT infrastructure was the largest single barrier to customer-centricity, and a full 67% said that improving their IT systems is their number one priority as they move in the next 12 months toward becoming more customer-centric. Clearly, for many companies, significant changes in technology are needed to better serve the customer.

Meeting Business User Requirements: The Marketing Department's Plight

While the EIU/PwC survey identified IT as the locus of the effort for greater customer-centricity, Enterprise Applications Consulting's research shows that companies need to disengage IT from the customer-centricity effort as much as they need IT to be part of the solution.

The reason for this can be seen in the fact that the simultaneous growth in individual business and consumer Internet access has typically not been matched by a similar growth in business tools that help connect this growing number of business users with their consumer counterparts. This can perhaps best be seen in terms of the relationship between the marketing department's requirements for customer-centricity and IT's role in delivering that functionality.

The velocity and complexity of the marketing mission in many companies has accelerated significantly in recent years: the growing "consumerization" of many old-style industries like utilities and financial services has meant that the cycles of new product and service introductions have become shorter, while the need for customer responsiveness has become greater. Similarly, many companies that relied on older, monopolistic business models now find themselves competing in a free market against long-standing players, such as the US-based utility company that is now selling appliances in competition with WalMart (and using StreamServe's tools to do so).

This business change—along with the need to leverage the cross-sell and up-sell opportunities noted above—has not been met by an adequate change in the software tools available to marketing users. Despite the mantra of "customer-centricity" and the velocity of change, the software tools available to the marketing department are often based on an old model that gives IT the central role in delivering functionality to the marketing department.

This has meant that marketing's need for broader and more timely access to customers has been stymied by the requirement that innovative marketing programs first run the classic IT gauntlet. A new project or program must first take its place on IT's change order queue; then be translated from business requirements to IT capabilities; and finally, some time in the indeterminate future, actually iterate through several development and testing cycles before the final product is produced by IT to meet the marketing department's requirements.

One of the StreamServe customers interviewed by EAC, a U.S.-based public utility, gave a typical recounting of this problem. "We used to have to have a committee meeting over six months to change the bill," the utility's IT manager told EAC. "How can you run a marketing group with that kind of turnaround?"

This utility, like many StreamServe customers, realized that it had to build out its marketing and customer outreach plan by giving better tools to its "power users" so that they could act rapidly and develop new programs and customer initiatives.

This example highlights how the opportunity for direct empowerment of business users—in marketing, sales, customer service, finance, supply chain management, and many other domains—becomes an imperative. As long as business requirements have to move according to IT timetables, opportunity will be lost. While IT has

and will always have a strong role in business enablement, there is a growing set of requirements that can be undertaken by business users with little or no direct involvement from IT.

This change is rooted in both the improvements in the customer experience that are showing up on the desktops of the business user, as well as the growing technical sophistication of these users. The result is a new paradigm for business success: by empowering more business users to use the tools they need to reach more customers, the growing opportunity for customer-centricity can be realized more effectively and rapidly, with less cost and direct burden on already over-taxed IT resources. The next section discusses an example of how this opportunity can be realized through the use of the business user tool StreamServe Persuasion.

StreamServe Persuasion: Anatomy of a Business User Tool

StreamServe's Persuasion is a collection of tools and capabilities that are intended to enable a broad range of business users—designers, marketers, sales people and others—to create, change, and deliver highly personalized documents in support of customer-centricity and customer service. Enterprise Applications Consulting's review of the product set and its user experiences shows that StreamServe Persuasion lives up to expectations.

The focus of Persuasion on the business user is specifically intended to empower these users to take direct control over processes that were either left up to the IT department to manage, or were largely missing in the software portfolio available to the business.

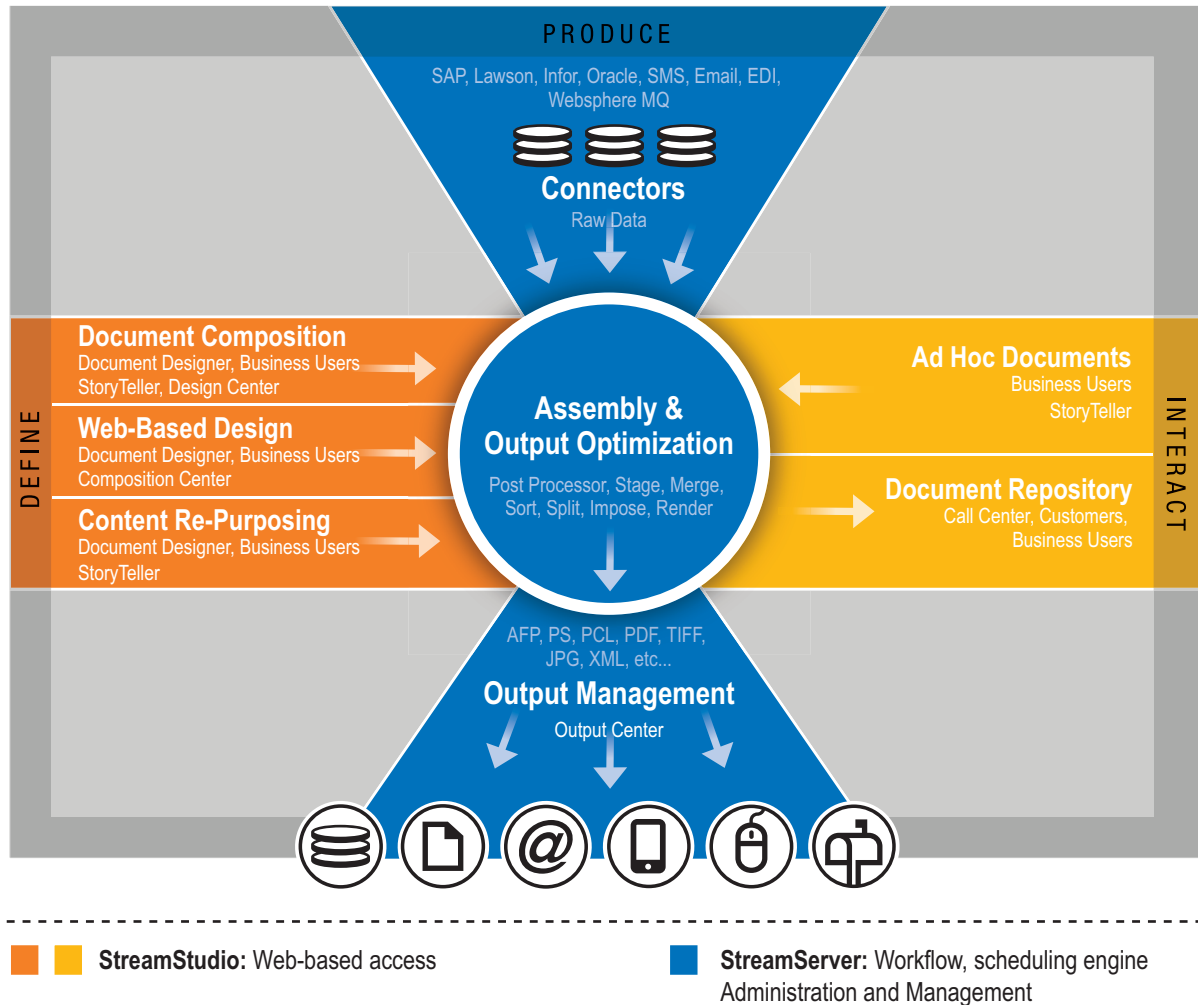
The list of processes that Persuasion supports include bills, invoices, brochures, POs, service requests, and other documents that are used for communication between a business and its customers as well as and prospective customers. These documents and the communication functions they support—marketing, sales, billing, call center interaction—have historically been part of the backoffice enterprise software portfolio managed by the IT department. In most cases, however, enterprise software has provided only rudimentary support for advanced document creation and processing, and thus the reliance on existing backoffice systems not only short-changed the business user, but the entire business, and its customers as well.

Missing from many of these tools was the ability to not only design complex, individualized documents on the fly, but to make use of a rules-based engine to manage the production and delivery of the documents as well. Simple functions like tailoring a marketing message to a specific customer by analyzing utility usage data were either unavailable or too complex to be used as extensively as possible. Similarly, being able to direct printing and fulfillment services to the most cost-effective provider, based on a customer's geographic location or individual preferences, was also too complex, or simply not possible.

Persuasion is StreamServe's latest product set that seeks to both shift the management and control of these document-centric processes from IT to the business user while expanding on the limited capabilities that were part of the original enterprise software portfolio. In doing so Persuasion removes many of the barriers that IT-centric technology had placed in the path of companies' customer-centric strategies.

Persuasion consists of three main tools: Composition Center, StoryTeller, and Design Center. A fourth tool, Ad Hoc, provides document-editing capabilities as an add-on to an existing browser-based tool. The use cases for the different StreamServe tools hinge on the role and function of the business user in the design, processing, and output management of the document. StoryTeller is intended to be used by designers for the creation of document design templates that can be manipulated by business users in order to meet the specific requirements of a promotional campaign, or other communications activity. Design Center provides a more comprehensive processing and output management environment for data and output management, while Composition Manager is used by business users in marketing, legal, billing, and other departments to create and manage the content in the documents and other communications. (See Figure 3 below.)

Figure
Source: StreamServe



In addition to its broad usefulness to a variety of different business users, a key component of Persuasion’s value is the ability to direct the messaging content and design to fit the output channel, regardless of whether it is a traditional paper bill, an e-invoice, or a notification sent to a mobile device, among others. This multi-channel capability is delivered as a capability to be managed by the business user, and not, as was in the past, by IT. Persuasion also supports the input of customer data from a variety of sources, including SAP’s Business Suite, and a long list of third party billing and customer management systems. The SAP connection is particularly robust: StreamServe is an endorsed business solution partner as well as a NetWeaver certified partner, and works closely with SAP in key industries, including utilities.

Another key feature of Persuasion is that the documents it helps create can be delivered in an on-demand fashion, further reducing the customer’s burden on their IT department. This feature was an important part of the business case for StreamServe at PI Company, a psychometric testing company based in the Netherlands. PI Company’s customers—companies and agencies that administer psychometric tests—are able to send an email with a URL that allows the test-taker to access the test from anywhere in the world. This ability to deliver tests on-demand using Persuasion means that PI Company’s customers are not tied to taking tests at specified locations where a test administration and management system has been installed. “Our customers only need a web browser,” said Willem Valk, the chief operating officer of PI Company. This on-demand capability has also allowed PI Company to hire only one new IT employee to manage the environment, despite an order of magnitude increase in test volume.

Persuasion at Work: Serving the Business User, Reaping the Benefits of Customer-Centricity

The intersection of business user productivity and customer-centricity provided by Persuasion was evident across all the interviews EAC conducted with StreamServe customers. In every case, the ability to empower business users to improve the customer experience also resulted in both significant savings, as well as new business opportunities.

PI Company's example was representative of how StreamServe's customers are using Persuasion to support a rapidly growing global business. PI Company's main business, providing testing content and services to companies and agencies for employee screening, needed a significant productivity boost in order to meet an enormous business opportunity in China. "Instead of producing 250,000 tests per year, we needed to produce 12 million," said Willem Valk, PI Company's COO.

PI Company's problem was that the production of test content and the delivery of test results were dependent on a set of Microsoft-based tools that made it hard to rapidly develop the content, and even harder to produce the final test reports for employers and agencies. Prior to using Persuasion, tests were laboriously built using Microsoft tools, with considerable IT support, and then even more laboriously changed or customized to meet different client requirements. And once an individual finished one of the on-line tests, the system would take ten minutes or more to compile and produce the results.

The slowness of the content development process and the length of time the system took to produce a test report threatened PI Company's ability to make good on their new business opportunity. "We estimated we were going to lose 20 percent of the customer base," said Valk. "That was unacceptable. Customers were complaining about the 10 minute wait." That lag in report production was impacting PI Company's existing customers as well: "We have customers who run job portals," Valk added. "They don't want their customers to have to wait 10 minutes."

The possible volume of the new Chinese market opportunity had PI Company scrambling in other ways. Valk estimated that the company would have to buy 30 new servers to support the increased volume, at a capital cost of 600,000 euros. Maintenance and support would have added additional costs. "We could not have run this new volume without a massive pile of new hardware," Valk said.

PI Company chose Persuasion as the tool to help it meet this new opportunity. The company's test designers—not the IT department—use StoryTeller to create the tests, based on a set of standard templates. The test components are broken down into their basic building blocks, made up of graphics and text. Designers can reuse these elements as they customize tests for different customers. "This makes the report generation process lean and mean," said Valk.

The result is that test result production went from an average of ten minutes per test to less than one minute, an enormous savings in production time and cost, that was even more important for customer satisfaction. "The moment they click on the mouse, the report pops up on the screen," said Valk. "This helps us to be one of the top providers in this market."

For PI Company, Persuasion's ability to significantly improve the efficiency of its document design and production requirements was an important factor in switching to this new system. Persuasion lets PI Company's business users design tests that are highly personalized for their customers—in this case, the company or agency administering the tests. "No one knows better what he wants than the client himself,"

PI Company's Persuasion Advantage:

- Test development and production in the hands of business users, not IT
- Time to produce a test result: from 10 minutes to less than 1 minute
- Hardware cost savings: \$600,000
- Total increase in test output supported: from 250,000 to 12 million per year

Valk said.

The bottom line is that Persuasion has allowed PI Company to improve its customer-centricity by improving both the personalization of its tests, as well as the time it takes for test results to be delivered to the customer. Meanwhile, the company has been able to not only scale up to a significantly higher volume of business by empowering its business users, but it has also been able to prepare itself for even more new customers and business opportunities. Test delivery on mobile devices like the iPhone—one of the many platforms supported by Persuasion—will be an important feature for growing PI Company’s presence in the expanding Chinese market. “With the Chinese market, 12 million is only a starting point,” said Valk.

Moving Utilities into the 21st Century: The Public Utility

Meeting new business opportunities was also essential for the public utility mentioned earlier in this report. Like many utility companies in the U.S. and worldwide, this provider is facing a changing utility market that requires it to be much more proactive in conservation and resource management than ever before. This requirement—mandated in part by government regulations and in part by the realities of the current economy—has meant that this utility provider has had to begin communicating and interacting with its customers in ways that most utilities have never considered.

As a utility in a deregulated market, the provider also had to begin behaving more like a business than a protected monopoly, according to the IT architect. “We found ourselves competing for customers and competing for their conservation results,” the IT architect told EAC. “We needed to have a multi-channel approach.”

This IT architect looked at the personalization of marketing available in the commercial world, and decided that this was what his utility needed. “When I call up my local pizza guy, he sees my caller ID and asks if I want my usual,” the IT architect recounted. “If my local pizza guy can market to me like that, why can’t a utility?”

Public Utility Persuasion Advantage:

- Marketing department can customize messaging without IT
- Shortened new message development process from months to days
- Improved multi-channel marketing efforts
- Leverages customer and usage data in SAP environment for marketing

This utility provider’s dependence on the SAP Business Suite made the selection of StreamServe, an SAP business solution and NetWeaver partner, an “obvious choice,” the IT architect said. While SAP has some functionality in the domain of document management, it lacks a set of tools and capabilities for business users that would allow the utility to expand its customer communications activities using its marketing team instead of relying on IT.

By deploying Persuasion on top of the SAP suite, the utility’s business users have pre-built templates and business rules—developed by the utility’s systems integrator partner—as the starting point for their customization process. “Once it is set up you just have to tweak it,” the IT manager explains. “Part of the deal is that you don’t have to deal with [complex configurations] on a daily basis.”

The first use of Persuasion is for bill creation and customer correspondence, but the system will soon be put to use supporting customized marketing messages: “We will be able to do dynamic marketing based on customer information in the SAP system,” the IT manager said. To do this next level of communications, the utility will use Persuasion’s rule engine to set up a dynamic billing system that will support the utility’s 30-plus different marketing programs, depending on the customers’ SAP-based user and usage profiles.

As with PI Company, the use of Persuasion has allowed the utility to significantly improve the pace and scope of its marketing efforts, and, importantly, this expansion will be handled inside the marketing department, empowering employees whose jobs are most directly connected to the utility's customer base. "This is something that the business users will be doing, not IT," the IT manager added.

3 Scandinavia: Maintaining Brand Consistency

The theme of expanding customer interactions based on business user empowerment with minimal IT dependency is echoed at telecommunications service provider 3 Scandinavia, a wholly-owned operating company of Hutchison Whampoa. 3 Scandinavia is a company specializing in selling mobile phone services in the highly competitive Scandinavian market. This competitive market required the company to maximize every opportunity to communicate with its customers, and at the same time lower its service costs to compete in a market with considerable pressure on margins.

Optimizing the messaging and content of the 600,000 invoices it sends out each month to serve this dual customer-centric/cost-conscious purpose was an important driver behind its choice of StreamServe Persuasion, according to David Johansson, invoice product manager at 3 Scandinavia. "We saw a business opportunity to up-sell and cross-sell on the invoices," Johansson said. Improving the content and messaging on the invoice was also seen as a way to reduce customer service costs and improve customer satisfaction. "Fifty percent of our costs in customer service are about the invoices," said Johansson. "The invoice is a very powerful channel to communicate through every month."

The company has recently used Persuasion to add color to its invoices, something that helps them maintain the consistency of its brand in customer communications. "We as a company have always used a lot of color in our logo and websites and packaging," said Johansson. "The customers really like it. We know that it's working well."

A key element to this strategy was to find tools to deliver the new functionality that could be used by the company's relatively small marketing workforce, without requiring significant amounts of input from the IT department. StreamServe's Persuasion has been able to fit this requirement: "It's pretty easy for a business-oriented person to use," said Johansson. One of Johansson's colleagues in the marketing department is in charge of creating all the content and the layout for the invoices. "She's using Composer to do this, and she is really not from a technical background," Johansson added.

Conclusion: The Right Tools for the Job

The problem of empowering business users will only grow as the need to unleash the full complement of business resources in support of customer-centricity continues to drive business growth. Putting more tools into the hands of business users whose jobs are central to the customer experience is both the most efficient and the most effective way for a company to increase its communications with customers, prospects, and any other relevant participants in a company's product and service ecosystem.

These business user tools, however, have been scarce in the traditional enterprise software market. The traditional role of ERP and enterprise software has not focused on the degree of end user productivity needed by the new customer-centric paradigm. On the contrary, ERP software, with its focus on closing the company books and managing the flow of goods and services in the enterprise—along with its close ties to the productivity needs of the IT department—has not been able to keep pace with the needs of business users whose jobs are radically different from the order entry clerks and financial managers who made up the bulk of the ERP user class only a few years ago.

StreamServe's historical focus on business communications has led it to a deeper understanding of the needs of business users than many of the enterprise software vendors who service this market. EAC's research has shown that Persuasion provides precisely the right mix of business user functionality and technological savoir-faire to empower these users with the tools needed to improve the customer-centricity of the enterprise.

As companies evolve their business strategies in support of customer-centricity, they will need more tools like Persuasion. The promise of the customer-centric enterprise can only be realized if the full potential of a company's people and processes are expressed in the software tools they use in their day-to-day jobs. Persuasion is one of those tools that get this job done.