

The Information Technology Management Planning Tool

Small- and medium-sized enterprises looking for help with their information technology investments can turn to a new Commerce Department-produced CD-ROM for assistance.



A new CD-ROM-based planning tool is helping small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) around the world assess and plan their IT investments. Created to help stimulate demand overseas for U.S.-made IT products and services, the planning tool is also a welcome aid to any SME that needs to better understand how information technologies can improve the organization's operations. With the tool-assisted analysis, the Department of Commerce hopes SMEs, some of the more traditionally challenged IT users, will find their way over a few key hurdles and accelerate their uptake of IT.

The Information Technology Management Planning Tool, or IT Tool for short, is the brainchild of the Office of Information Technologies Industries (ITI) in the U.S. Department of Commerce. The IT Tool provides an interactive database for SME managers to examine their IT usage and plan for additional IT investment. In the short time since it was developed, the IT Tool has sparked considerable interest among organizations around the world that work with SMEs to improve their competitiveness.

Drawn From Y2K Tool

The concept of the IT Tool derives from an experience in 1999 with a similar CD-ROM-based tool dealing with the Year 2000 computer problem. Created to help raise awareness about the Y2K problem and motivate smaller companies worldwide to address the issue, the tool relied on a logical structure to help SMEs address the Y2K problem in their organizations. It also was popular; more than 300,000 copies of the so-called Y2K Tool were eventually distributed in English and 10 other languages.

For those at the Department of Commerce working on the issue, the Y2K project highlighted the importance of IT investment to the successful operations of governments and businesses. The ITI staff concluded that a useful successor to the Y2K Tool would be a product to help SME management review current IT investment and plan for additional

investment. The staff designed the tool to encompass a wide variety of IT investment situations, from stand-alone PCs to e-business and e-commerce applications. The IT Tool is directed toward senior management, and it ties IT investment into an organization's mission, goals and core functions.

Additional explanatory materials are on the CD-ROM, including a video on the benefits of IT, a voice-over guide to each element of the tool, a user's manual, a video and presentation on critical infrastructure protection and Internet links to appropriate informational sites. The CD-ROM loads automatically on a PC when it is inserted in a drive and presents a menu of options.

The tool itself has four phases. Phase one links an organization's mission, goals and core functions in a priority ranking.

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Phase two creates an inventory of existing IT systems and links them to the organization's core functions. Phase three assesses an organization's readiness for use of the Internet and electronic commerce applications and provides e-business and e-commerce options. Phase four offers a cost/benefit analysis framework for managers to estimate the resources required to implement new IT projects.

The CD's content, and the IT Tool in particular, does not replace the need for users to contact IT consultants and suppliers. In fact, several phases of the tool, such as selection of an IT project and a cost/benefit analysis,

would be most effective if users survey suppliers on the latest technologies to implement a given IT project and compare pricing of those technologies.

Positive Feedback Received

More than 5,000 evaluation copies of the CD have been distributed in English throughout the world, and reaction from the recipients has been favorable. A Spanish version of the CD has been completed and Simplified and Traditional Mandarin Chinese versions are nearing completion.

Because of the uniqueness and complexity of the IT Tool, ITI staff are planning seminars for prospective users around the world on the content and use of the Tool. Two such seminars were held recently in Lagos, Nigeria, and Beijing, China, the latter during an SIIA-led trade mission to the region. Subsequent events will follow in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Dublin, Ireland; Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Johannesburg, South Africa. The seminars cover trends in the use of IT and e-commerce applications and a detailed explanation of the workings of the IT Tool. Attendees receive a free copy of the CD at the end of the event.

U.S. IT suppliers can participate in these seminars as presenters and/or have links to their company Web sites added to the CD and distributed to the seminar participants for a modest participation fee. The Office of Information Technologies is also seeking U.S. IT suppliers as partners to support, for example, the translation of the CD into a local language, such as Vietnamese, and developing a Web-based version of the IT Tool.

U.S. IT suppliers interested in receiving evaluation copies of the IT Tool should contact the Office of Information Technologies, +1 (202) 482-0572. Suppliers wishing to obtain additional details on upcoming seminars or discuss partnership possibilities should contact Raymond Cho, +1 (202) 482-0396, raymond_cho@ita.doc.gov.

