

EIS Conference Report

The Cooperative Newsletter on
Executive Information Systems and Top Management Computing

Vol. 5, No. 3

March 1992

Alternative EIS Action Plan

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As the December 1991 issue of the EIS Conference Report pointed out, there are a number of forces influencing the future direction of EIS. Open systems, networks, downsizing, and end user application development are four that were correctly sighted as impacting the direction of EIS.

Unfortunately, the Action Plan for EIS staff members that was outlined to deal with these forces seems to have been targeted to the under-achievers of corporate America. The December article implied that by following the five step Plan one could "not just survive the changes but [could]...use them to your advantage."

Outlined below is an Action Plan that's designed for those who are looking to do more than survive. It is targeted to those individuals and organizations looking to develop enterprise-wide EISs that can fundamentally improve the way they manage their business. It is designed for those who have studied what some companies have done with EIS and believe that now, more than ever, is the time to use this technology to empower today's managers and executives.

1. Create an EIS Director position within the organization and find the best candidate possible to fill it.

This person must be a leader who understands the importance and relevance of EIS as a means of providing up-to-the-minute information to a company's decision makers. He must believe in the ability of information to provide competitive advantage and must act as a liaison between the end user community (executives and managers) and the IS community. This person must have the ability to sell EIS throughout the organization. He must be both technical and business-wise. He should report to the CIO or top IS vice president. To settle for someone with a staff mentality for this position dooms any EIS to failure.

2. Interview target EIS audience to pinpoint appropriate applications.

Different people will have different ideas of what is important. The objective of the EIS Director is to build a consensus of what needs to be done in what order. Moreover, he must resell these prioritized applications to the user community. When the work actually does start, there will be absolutely no doubt as to the importance of the applications. The users will have already decided that question. This is user ownership at its extreme. And that's what's needed to succeed.

3. Select an EIS product that works with a DSS product.

It seems that every database vendor on the market now claims to have an EIS product. It also seems that many people think that low priced Windows packages can provide the same functionality as DSS/EIS packages like Express/EIS. The fact is they can't. If you're looking to develop an enterprise-wide EIS that contains primarily sales, marketing, or financial data you should realize that SQL-based databases by themselves aren't suitable to support the type of queries necessary to satisfy most decision makers. What's typically needed is a DSS product that supports multi-dimensional modeling. The EIS product that's selected should support access to this DSS product.

4. Realize that EIS expenditures aren't discretionary.

If you're firmly committed to altering the content and method of delivering information to key decision makers in your organization, you shouldn't view expenditures for EISs as discretionary. Rather, you should view them as a necessary investment in the infrastructure of your organization. You should attempt to convince others (especially executives) that the benefits associated with the EIS far outweigh its costs. To do this, don't get trapped into defining costs in purely monetary terms; think in economic terms. What are the missed revenue opportunities (the cost) if the EIS isn't appropriately staffed and

funded? What are the costs associated with a misinformed decision? To sum up: push to get the funding that's appropriate to design the best system possible. Don't settle for less.

5. Build alliances.

EIS projects tend to involve individuals from different parts of an organization. Some will undoubtedly attempt to thwart efforts to systemize data. Political intrigue can become quite high. The EIS Director needs to be not just an effective manager, but a leader. He needs to have the intangible qualities necessary to overcome the pettiness and turf wars that occasionally enter into the development of high visibility systems.

Building alliances between involved parties is a necessary step in implementing a successful EIS. Only then will the system be sufficiently institutionalized to ensure its continued enhancement and evolution.

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The **EIS Conference Report** is a cooperative newsletter published monthly by and for the people who implement and use Executive Information Systems. It is the method by which EIS users and implementors share the news they have learned and the techniques they have perfected. It is designed to operate like a conference. A chairman oversees each of the topic areas in top-management computing. The chairman is responsible for collecting, sifting, and editing the problems and solutions provided by other participants. The editor of the EIS Conference Report is Alan Paller, president of AUI Data Graphics, a Division of Computer Associates, Int'l. 12120 Sunset Hills Rd., Reston, VA 22090, 703-709-8131

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