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Overall, I am cautiously optimistic that as 2009 progresses, things will continue to improve. This recession is far from over, but I don't see it affecting IT quite like the 2001 recession did. Back then, IT was hit with excess capacity from Y2K as well as the dot-com bust in addition to the downturn. Today's CIOs and IT directors have done a better job of aligning IT goals with business goals, making IT a stronger contributor to improving the business's bottom line. IT can bring the analytical skills and technology expertise needed to help the business transform into a leaner enterprise—through product innovation, automation, customer service, going green, or any other business initiative.

Everyone's budgets are being scrutinized more closely and many projects are requiring more approvals. I advise clients to review their application portfolios and projects in light of staff and budget reductions. They need to prioritize what adds value to the business now and align projects with goals that increase revenue, reduce costs, or improve customer service.

Some of the best solutions incorporate business process improvements and quality assurance. For instance, companies are finding they can solve many of their business challenges—like streamlining their call center performance or reducing the time to close their financials—with process improvements rather than expensive new technology. IT-department business analysts can help

teams benchmark current processes, analyze potential improvements, recommend the best course of action, and then take measurements to quantify improvements.

Similarly, implementing quality assurance programs across the organization can save a great deal of time and money as downstream errors and re-work are minimized. Even if organizations have to go outside for the expertise to do these things, they will realize substantial savings.

Going green is another great way to improve the bottom line—with the added benefit of improving the environment. A dollar saved on recycling, waste reduction, or energy conservation is a dollar that goes directly to the company's bottom line. IT can do everything that other departments do to go green, but we

also have the tools to analyze data for tracking a company's carbon footprint.

In the end, don't skip on your biggest asset—talent. These are the people who know the business and can help transform its processes and systems to become a leaner organization. The downturn is a great time to reinforce skills needed to connect with the business, e.g. business analysis, facilitation, and project management. Look for inexpensive ways to unleash creativity, such as doing brown bag lunches to cross-train staff or generate ideas. Engaging your staff in solutions to make your company more effective is a great way to build morale. **TechNo**

