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## SAP works with EU, others on value of e-government

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John Blau, *IDG News Service, Düsseldorf Bureau*

Numerous public-sector organizations are interested in using IT to improve operational efficiency and customer service but struggle to define and measure the economic, social and political returns of government-funded technology programs, according to SAP AG executives.

The German company, which sees significant opportunities for deploying its business software in the public sector, is participating in separate e-government assessment programs in the U.S. and Europe and will address the various challenges at "The Impact of eGovernment in Europe" conference next month in Helsinki, said Ian Swann, vice president of SAP's public sector unit.

Last year, SAP joined a program headed by the Center for Technology in Government at Albany State University in New York to help address the challenge of calculating return on investment (ROI) for public sector IT initiatives. The center has conducted five case studies of organizations that have sought to assess the impact of the IT investments and has drafted a document offering a methodology for measuring ROI. Swann will present the findings of the five case studies and the ROI white paper.

SAP is also participating in the European Union's eGovernment Action Plan, aimed at helping Europe's sprawling public sector improve the efficiency of its internal operations and external services to citizens. The company is a contributor to the E.U.-funded Picture Project, a Web-based system that lets government officials measure the impact of information and communication technologies on organizational processes, enabling informed choices for long-term technology investments.

"This isn't just about investing in IT but about investing in transforming the way governments deliver service," Swann said. "We're trying to show

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them ways to justify their investments in what's being achieved."

Transparency is a prime concern of many public sector organizations, according to a survey SAP recently conducted. IT can help meet this requirement, Swann said.

While pointing to SAP's software expertise in areas such as accounting, human resources and logistics, Swann acknowledged an eagerness on the part of many governments, such as Germany and France, to create applications on "open architectures."

Public-sector organizations will use "open source where it is appropriate and where it works," Swann said.

But Swann was quick to use the word "open" in the context of SAP's new service-oriented architecture platform. The platform, he said, "opens up the delivery of services" and opportunities to work with independent software vendors. "All of this is about building more agile applications and creating more value out of existing investments," he said.

Currently, sales to the public sector account for roughly 10 percent of SAP's total revenue and are growing, according to Swann.

But selling to governments, which "are and will remain under severe financial constraints," will continue to be a challenge, he said: "That's why we have to deliver value to what they're doing."

John Blau is Dusseldorf correspondent for the IDG News Service.

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