COST/BENEFIT CASE FOR IBM INFORMIX: COMPARED TO MICROSOFT SQL SERVER FOR MIDSIZE ORGANIZATIONS

Why Informix?

Informix is one of the world's most widely used relational databases. With over 200,000 customers, it has developed a strong following among users that range from the world's largest corporations to startups and small businesses. Its growth has outpaced the relational database market as a whole. It enjoys exceptional levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

One might reasonably ask why. Part of the answer is that, from its inception in the early 1980s to the latest version 11.5, Informix has incorporated design concepts that are significantly different from other relational platforms. These translate into extremely low administrative overhead, extremely high levels of performance and availability, and distinctive capabilities in data replication, scalability and other areas.

Another part of the answer is that, since IBM acquired Informix in 2001, the company has continued to invest in this platform. A steady stream of enhancements have maintained technological currency, provided a wide range of new features and functions, implemented the latest industry standards and made Informix an industry leader in embeddability; i.e., the ability to integrate with and optimize for third-party solutions.

In addition, Informix has developed a very large "ecosystem." There are at least 4,500 businesses worldwide that resell, support and/or offer tools and solutions for Informix environments. There is also an active peer community – the International Informix Users Group (IIUG), for example, has more than 25,000 members – that provides extensive sources of information, advice and assistance.

The final part of the answer is that Informix costs of ownership are lower – by wide margins – than those of competitive platforms. These cost advantages are the focus of this report.
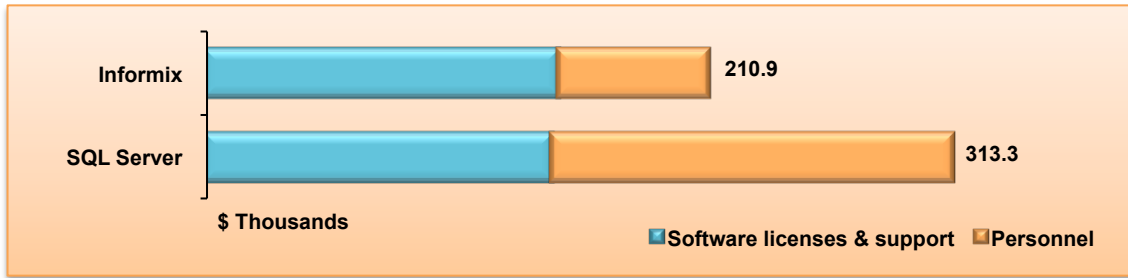
Cost Picture

The report is built around two sets of research data. First, results from a survey of 62 midsize organizations employing Informix in North America and Europe deal with DBA staffing levels, and confirm that these are significantly lower than those for competitive equivalents. Other advantages of Informix use are also documented.

Second, comparisons of configurations, software and DBA staffing among these organizations, and among equivalent Microsoft SQL Server users, provide important insights. Three-year costs of ownership for use of Informix are significantly lower than for SQL Server. In nine representative installations with between 8 and 1,000 users, three-year Informix costs average 33 percent less than those for SQL Server.

Figure 1 summarizes these results.

Although software license and support costs are similar for both platforms, Informix personnel costs average 63 percent less than those for use of SQL Server.

Figure 1
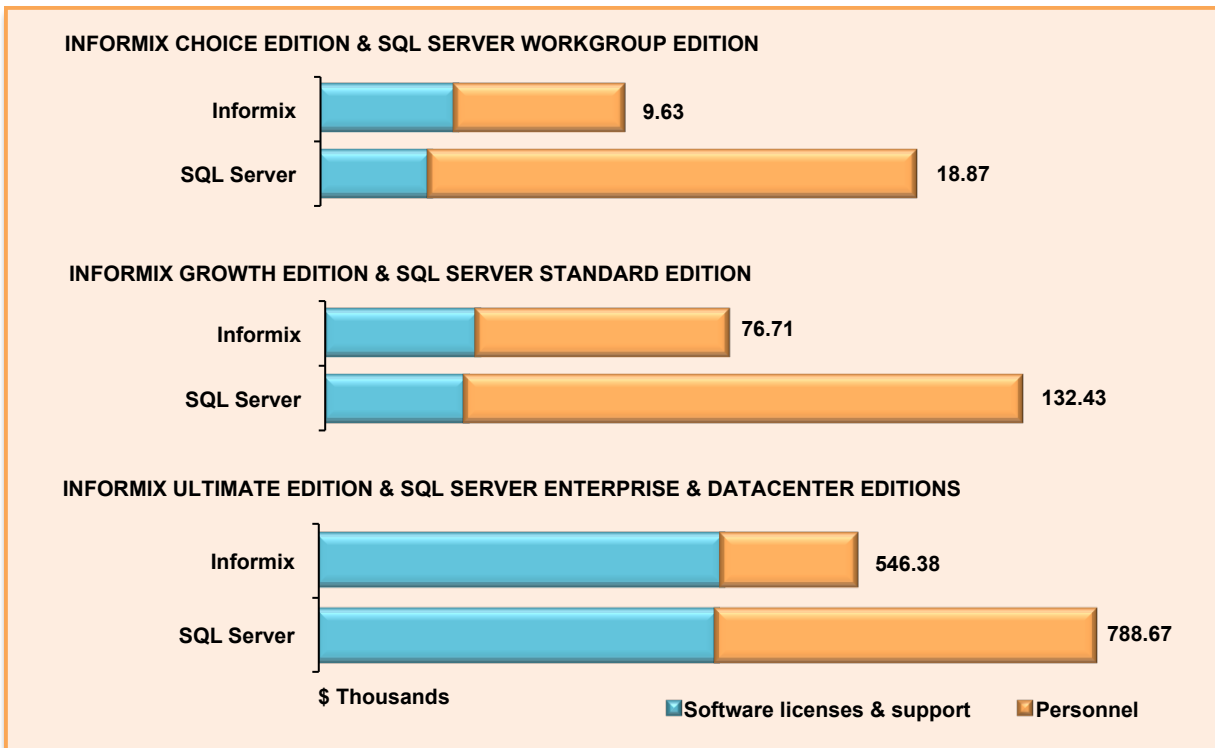**Three-year Costs for Use of Informix and SQL Server: Averages for All Installations**

Comparisons are for use of Informix 11.5 Choice, Growth and Ultimate Editions and SQL Server 2008 R2 equivalents – Workgroup, Standard, and Enterprise and Datacenter Editions.

For purposes of comparison, Informix as well as SQL Server databases are deployed on Windows Server 2008 R2 on standard Intel-based servers. Costs of server hardware, systems software and system administration are not included. These would be generally similar for both platforms.

Although the general picture was consistent, there were variations in costs between different database versions, which are summarized in figure 2, and individual installations, which are documented in the Detailed Data section.

Figure 2
Three-year Costs for Use of Informix and SQL Server: Averages by Brand

Comparing the entry-level versions of each platform, costs for use of Informix Choice Edition average approximately half of those for SQL Server Workgroup Edition. Comparing Informix Growth Edition and SQL Server Standard Edition for installations with between 65 and 200 users, costs for the Informix solution average 42 percent less.

For larger installations employing Informix Ultimate Edition, costs average 31 percent less than SQL Server Enterprise Edition or Datacenter Edition.

The basis of these calculations, including descriptions of installations and methodology, is outlined in the Detailed Data section. Cost breakdowns for all installations and database versions may also be found in this section.

Challenges and Solutions

The challenges that midsize businesses face today are considerable. It may be vital to contain costs. But businesses must also use information technology to realize more proactive goals – gaining competitive advantage, increasing organizational efficiency and responsiveness, building new relationships with customers, and realizing other bottom-line benefits that vary between industries and geographies.

The core appeal of Informix is that it enables organizations to achieve such goals while maintaining an essentially simple IT environment.

Informix architecture is designed for high levels of availability and incremental scalability. It incorporates unique, integrated virtualization features and performs well handling transactional as well as business intelligence (BI) workloads. It offers failover clustering and replication as effective as, if not more effective than higher-priced competitive platforms.

Informix runs not only on Windows servers, but also on Linux, MacOS and the industry's principal UNIX operating systems. Organizations thus have a variety of platform options. For more demanding applications and workloads, use of IBM's Power servers and the AIX operating system may deliver significantly higher levels of performance and availability than may be realized with x86 servers.

The impact of Informix database extension technology has also been significant. Support for image, video and multimedia content, as well as spatial, geodetic, time series and other advanced data types have made Informix a competitor in a wide range of emerging markets. New application opportunities have become available to users in established Informix verticals.

IBM has also focused, to a greater extent than any competitive vendor, on embeddability as a central parameter of Informix system design and product strategy. Close integration between applications and databases further reduces costs and improves quality of service.

A further issue should be raised. Midsize businesses have increasingly deployed advanced tools and technologies that were once the prerogative of Fortune 500 companies. This trend will clearly accelerate.

Technological sophistication, however, can all too easily translate into excessive complexity. New integration challenges may be posed. Management overhead may escalate. Maintenance of performance, availability and security can be become increasingly problematic.

The effects of complexity have undermined the IT strategies of many large organizations. In midsize businesses, with fewer staff, funds and technical skills, the effects may be a great deal more serious.

It is better, by far, to control this process at an early stage. Informix offers the opportunity to do so.

Additional Information

This ITG Executive Summary is based upon results and methodology contained in a Management Brief released by the International Technology Group. For copies of this Management Brief, please email requests to info-itg@pacbell.net.

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