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Chapter VII

Business Software Specifications for Consumers: Toward a Standard Format

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Abstract

Commercialized business application software packages have been widely used to implement business information systems. In order to determine whether a software package meets the system needs, consumers must check the software specifications against the target system requirements. Since the commercial software industry does not have standard format of software specifications for consumers, free-formatted descriptions of application software and ad hoc demos are commonly used in marketing software products, but are often too ambiguous for consumers to uncover the implemented capacity. This chapter proposes a model of commercialized business software specifications for consumers. It suggests that software packages need to provide specifications for consumers in four aspects:

business operations, user-computer interfaces, user-perceived inputs and outputs, and business rules. Using an example, the chapter demonstrates the implementation of the model.

Introduction

Information systems analysis and design lies in the core of the information systems discipline. The techniques and approaches of information systems analysis and design are continually renovated. About 15 years ago, systems analysis and design projects were more likely to place the focal point on the use of databases and fourth generation languages to implement real business information systems. Gradually, systems users and consultants found that commercialized business application software packages were readily available in the software market. According to the author's observations over the past decade in supervising 428 real-world MIS (Management Information Systems) systems analysis and design projects, the percentage of business applications that can be implemented by using commercialized software packages has dramatically increased since 1994 (see Figure 1). Clearly, the phenomenon and the trend observed are based solely on the author's personal experience, and the

Figure 1. Increasing commercialized business software