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Fighting slump: A CIO's game of golf

By [Vivian Yeo](#), ZDNet Asia

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SINGAPORE--Managing corporate IT in the current economic environment requires one to think a tactical game of golf or squash, according to an IT head based in the country.

IT heads need an effective blend of short serves and long shots, or short-term and long-term strategies, [Nariman Karimi](#), senior vice president and CIO of DHL Express Asia-Pacific, said Thursday. He was speaking at a panel discussion organized by the Singapore Management University (SMU) as part of the [Apex Global Case Challenge 2009](#).

In an environment of cost containment and margin protection, Karimi said about 80 percent of his current focus is on more short-term [scrutiny of contracts and suppliers](#).

"It's about what kind of organization should I have, right now--not in two or three years' time--so that I can contribute to the margin of our corporate business package," he noted.

Because of the emphasis on some areas, others have to be held back, said Karimi. "The temptation is so great to get into business process engineering, but this is not the [right] time."

However, Karimi pointed out that there was also a [need to "maintain my long game"](#). DHL, he said, believes that small and midsize businesses (SMB) will increasingly drive business opportunities, and hence are planning how they can gear their IT systems toward this market segment.

To help DHL be agile enough to meet SMB needs, the company is reviewing its e-commerce capabilities and how it can better present its products to customers, he said. It is also exploring the potential for partnerships with Internet companies.

Ng Kuo Pin, executive partner for communications, media and high-tech at Accenture, added that the bad times present an opportunity not only for businesses to ["get back to basics"](#) by evaluating their strategies and processes but also take proactive steps to generate market demand.

"During these uncertain times...companies can choose to either contain costs or generate demand to create new streams of revenue, or maybe a mix of both," he explained.

Adding that he has observed clients within the region taking steps to create new opportunities, Ng noted: "The only thing that holds back their action is they [don't know when](#) this uncertain times will be over, so there's a bit of hesitation in what to do, when to do things."

"If you look at Asia, in Singapore, there are companies that can afford to do that," he pointed out. "We are somewhat conservative--we're actually a bit careful about what we get into. If we start to see signs of [a market] recovery you will see that things will start to pick up tremendously."