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## An ISV's Guide to Achieving Business Advantage through Faster Application Problem Resolution

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## Executive Summary

There's no debate that software errors, or "bugs," are costly; we've all seen reports about how much money is lost each hour that a critical banking or retail application goes offline. And, when software is your business, the impact of application problems can be devastating — one seemingly small issue can have a ripple effect:

- > Lost license revenues because of late product releases
- > Delayed revenues from customers waiting for new features or releases before buying or upgrading
- > Declining maintenance renewal rates from existing customers
- > Loss of competitive advantage due to slipped features or release dates
- > Skyrocketing costs for resolving complex customer support issues
- > Damaged company reputation as word of the problem spreads

The characteristics that make today's software development and deployment methodologies, such as SOA and Web Services, so powerful and productive when all goes well, make problems extremely difficult to diagnose when things go wrong.

Complex issues involving a number of component vendors and no obvious root cause can lead to unproductive finger-pointing — while customers wait impatiently for a resolution. Research has found that these difficult multivendor issues typically take four times longer to resolve.<sup>1</sup>

Hundreds of top independent software vendors (ISVs) are successfully addressing these issues and achieving business advantage by optimizing their application development processes using application problem resolution technology. The technology has been proven to accelerate problem resolution times by up to 70 percent in both the development/quality assurance (QA) and the support phases of the product lifecycle, which helps software vendors:

- > Accelerate the launch of new releases
- > Improve product quality
- > Reduce support costs
- > Improve customer satisfaction ratings and meet service level agreements (SLAs)

This paper examines the problem resolution challenges ISVs face throughout the product lifecycle, and presents three case studies that demonstrate how leading ISVs in healthcare, retail, and content management are optimizing application development processes with application problem resolution technology from BMC Software for a competitive advantage.

## Is Your Development Team Working on Development?

According to industry research, on average, application developers spend 39 percent of their time finding and solving application problems on applications that are already live.<sup>2</sup> Any executive in charge of application development should be concerned by that figure. And every executive in a software business should be alarmed. It means that nearly 40 percent of the time, your engineering team is not working on the next release, module, or product that will keep your maintenance revenues flowing, drive new sales, and maintain your competitive lead.

In its 2006 Benchmark Study, the Service and Support Professionals Association (SSPA) reported that the percent of support cases closed at first contact continues to decline, while the length of time a case is open continues to increase (see Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> This, too, is an alarming finding. Escalation to a broader resolution team leads to skyrocketing personnel costs and takes engineers away from their primary development tasks. Longer problem resolution times also cause customer satisfaction issues and possibly delayed or lost revenues.

Service Levels Decline

| Metric                                                                          | 2003 | 2006 | Net Change % |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|--------------|
| Resolved on first interaction — Phone                                           | 54%  | 46%  | -15%         |
| Resolved on first interaction — Email and Web self-service                      | 52%  | 40%  | -23%         |
| Average percent of issues resolved within 24 hours — Phone                      | 63%  | 58%  | -8%          |
| Average percent of issues resolved within 24 hours — Email and Web self-service | 59%  | 50%  | -15%         |
| Successful visits to self-service site                                          | 48%  | 44%  | -8%          |

Source: 2006 SSPA Benchmark Survey Data

Figure 1. The percent of support cases closed at first contact is declining, while the length of time a case is open is increasing.

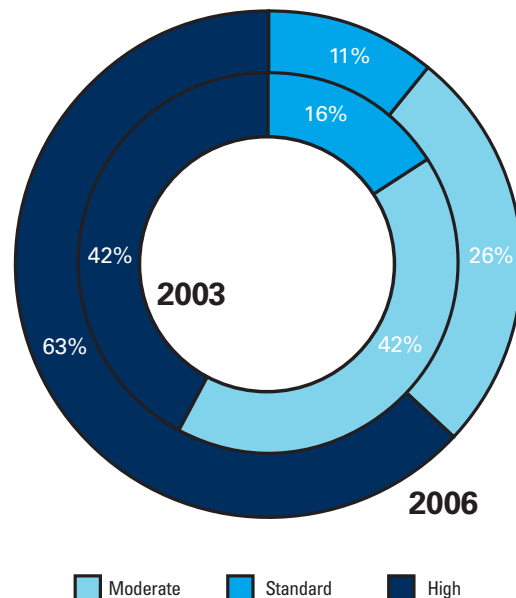
## Increased Complexity Means Increased Time to Resolution

The characteristics that make software development and deployment methodologies, such as SOA and Web Services, so powerful and productive when all goes well, make problems extremely difficult to diagnose when things go wrong. Complex issues involving a number of component vendors and no obvious root cause can lead to unproductive finger-pointing — while customers wait impatiently for resolution.

SSPA benchmarking research has found that these difficult multivendor issues typically take four times longer to resolve,<sup>4</sup> which only multiplies the potential negative impact on your business.

A few years ago, the answer to longer support cycles and higher costs was a move to Web self-service, offshoring, and better knowledge bases for service desk staff. However, as Figure 2 shows, these quick fixes have not been able to keep up with the rate of technology change and the increasing complexity of the software environment.

Complexity of Products Supported  
2003 vs. 2006



Source: 2006 SSPA Benchmark Survey Data

Figure 2. Software environments continue to grow increasingly complex.

While the software development process has undergone multiple paradigm shifts in the past few decades, the problem resolution process continues to rely on basically the same manual, labor-intensive, iterative approach which contributes to those major productivity losses mentioned above.

Clearly, a change in the application problem resolution paradigm is long overdue.

## Application Problem Resolution Technology

A growing number of innovative software vendors are leveraging low-impact application recording technologies as a mechanism to capture the information needed for problem resolution — both during the testing process and for remote customer support. These software technologies look inside a running application to collect the technical information needed by engineers and support staff to determine the

root cause of a problem. The more sophisticated technologies can capture not only the user's actions preceding a failure, but also the system configuration, events, application performance parameters, and even the related code execution flow. They can also synchronize this information on a single timeline for further analysis. The most advanced systems provide users with powerful automated analysis capabilities to dramatically accelerate root-cause determination and problem resolution.

As any software veteran knows, the challenge is that the symptoms of a software problem rarely reflect the root cause. Finding the source of the error is not an easy task when you don't know where to start looking. A single business transaction may kick off a sequence of complex processes, each of which may involve events that happen on up to a dozen potential servers. The root cause of the problem could be a software issue, a hardware fault, a configuration issue, or even an end-user's mistake.

A recent survey, conducted by Dynamic Markets Ltd., found that 75 percent of the application problem resolution cycle time is attributed to determining the root cause of the problem.<sup>5</sup>

The BMC® AppSight™ Application Problem Resolution System (BMC AppSight) automates the entire application problem resolution process and eliminates the need to replicate the problem to pinpoint the root cause. BMC AppSight leverages patented Black Box software technology to monitor application execution and capture a synchronized, real-time log of user actions, system events, performance metrics, configuration data, and code execution flow — much like the “black box” flight recorder on an aircraft captures a real-time record of a flight. By capturing actual problem history in a centralized repository, BMC AppSight provides the basis for team collaboration and communication. By allowing each member of the team to quickly analyze problem information using role-based views, rather than recreating the problem, BMC AppSight eliminates up to 70 percent of the cycle time traditionally consumed by root-cause analysis.

BMC AppSight can be used in preproduction to dramatically improve the development and testing cycle, as well as at the customer site, where the BMC AppSight Black Box software can easily be shipped with your product or deployed on an as-needed basis through a Web portal. Using BMC AppSight does *not* require any changes to your source code, executables, or the system.

## Accelerating the delivery of higher quality applications

BMC AppSight complements your current testing tools and processes, allowing you to run more tests in less time. Because it eliminates the need to document the sequence of events leading up to the error in a failed functional test, it can save up to 30 percent of a test engineer's time. BMC AppSight also enables deeper root-cause analysis during performance testing by tracking transactions across complex distributed architectures and multiple systems automatically. With BMC AppSight, engineering gets a clear view of the problem as found by QA, and can proceed directly to root-cause analysis — without trying to reproduce the problem or go into the testing environment. This significantly accelerates the problem resolution process, eliminates irreproducible problems, and minimizes finger-pointing with component vendors.

A key supplier of manufacturing and distribution solutions used BMC AppSight to accelerate the delivery of its .NET version by almost a year by accelerating problem resolution during the QA phase. In addition, a leading supplier of healthcare management solutions has found that using BMC AppSight helps them keep their developers focused on development.

### From the Field

“Before BMC AppSight, tough customer problems pulled our developers away from their new product work for intolerably long stretches. Now that BMC AppSight reveals the root causes, they can be instant heroes and get right back on task.”

*Owen Straub  
Vice President of Engineering  
Cerner Corp.*

## Reducing support cycles and costs

Pinpointing the root cause of application problems can be especially difficult when they occur at remote customer sites. Support team members typically go through a lengthy and costly process that includes endless conference calls, iterative attempts to gather information, costly trips to the customer site, and multiple attempts to recreate the customer's environment and the problem scenario. And in many cases, it turns out that the root cause was actually related to another vendor's product.

BMC AppSight simply revolutionizes the process and eliminates time-wasting fingerpointing among vendors.

### From the Field

"BMC AppSight helped us narrow the problem down to one component, and then one class in the component. We did it all without travel costs, without taking our people away from the development work that moves us forward, and without the on-site disruption that can make us look bad with our customers and reduce their confidence."

*Tom Messina  
Senior Architect  
Fujitsu*

## What can BMC AppSight mean for your business?

BMC AppSight has been proven to:

- > Improve time-to-market for new releases and upgrades
- > Reduce testing cycles and improve application quality
- > Significantly reduce the number and duration of onsite "SWAT team" visits
- > Facilitate rapid time-to-resolution for support issues, leading to reduced costs and improved customer satisfaction

The benefit that most customers realize is a 70 percent reduction in the overall problem-resolution cycle. This allows the engineering team to spend more time developing new code and less time fixing bugs from the QA and support organizations. This translates to shorter release cycles and an overall time-to-market benefit.

### The proof

What follows are three case studies that demonstrate how leading ISVs in the healthcare, retail, and content management industries are using BMC AppSight, along with best practices, to meet their product release schedules (with higher quality products) and reduce their service and support costs significantly – all with a rapid ROI.

## Case Study – Healthcare: Cerner Corp.

As a world leader in healthcare software solutions, Cerner is replacing paper charts with intelligent, interactive electronic forms designed to improve patient care and business management by eliminating error, variance, waste, delay, and friction. Because the lifeblood of modern medicine is information, and healthcare institutions increasingly depend on software solutions to manage and deliver it, downtime and application problems can bring patient care to a costly and hazardous halt.

### From the Field

"We found that employing BMC AppSight in production virtually eliminates the need to recreate problems in the lab, saving us significant time and costs."

*Owen Straub  
Vice President of Engineering  
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Minimizing downtime requires rigorous quality assurance — and it's typically a manual, laborious, and costly process. "Given the labor it takes to assure the software quality demanded in healthcare — where lives are literally at stake — we were immediately intrigued by BMC AppSight Black Box technology," recalls Owen Straub, Cerner's vice president of Engineering.

Cerner first used BMC AppSight to accelerate its QA process, and found that the more than 40 engineers in its QA group gained two hours per person, per day. Because Cerner's QA engineers also provide level-three customer support, they soon saw the difference between solving problems in the lab with BMC AppSight and the challenge of troubleshooting problems in the field without it.

### Zooming in on root causes

Cerner now embeds BMC AppSight Black Box technology in its Cerner Millennium™ healthcare solutions platform. The BMC AppSight Black Box is transparent to users and has no effect on system performance. However, its effect on customer support is dramatic. Either running proactively and feeding log data into cyclical, FIFO buffers, or running on-demand when problems emerge, the BMC AppSight Black Box captures field problems when, where, and how they happen. This enables Cerner's engineers to analyze customer BMC AppSight Black Box logs, swiftly pinpoint the root cause of a problem, and proceed directly to a solution — saving the hours, days, or even weeks involved with problem replication. "We found that employing BMC AppSight in production virtually eliminates the need to recreate problems in the lab, saving us significant time and costs," says Straub.

### Diagnosing unexplained application behavior

For example, a Cerner client in radiology reported a baffling problem: a transcriptionist found that random paragraphs kept mysteriously disappearing from her transcriptions. The problem escalated to the point where the client needed it fixed immediately, since avoidably incomplete information in healthcare records poses great potential danger.

## Cerner

### Transaction Solutions:

Healthcare

### Customer:

Cerner is a leading healthcare information technology provider with 7,300 employees and 1,500 clients worldwide, including major healthcare conglomerates operating scores of hospitals.

### Challenge:

Cerner wanted to maximize the trustworthiness and availability of its healthcare information solutions, while also reducing development and support costs.

### Solution:

The company is using BMC AppSight Black Box software throughout the application lifecycle to produce more robust applications with lower QA costs, and remotely resolve field problems more quickly, thus reducing costly client site visits.

### Results:

- > Saved Cerner's 40 QA team engineers over two hours per person, per day
- > Cut root-cause analysis time by about 80 percent and significantly reduced the need for client site visits
- > Transformed resolution time of an elusive problem from days or weeks of trial-and-error to complete resolution in the span of a coffee break

Cerner sent its level-three SWAT team onsite, as stipulated in the client's service agreement. When the transcriptionist stepped out for a moment, the problem happened again, so the Cerner engineer activated the BMC AppSight Black Box. Then, when the problem quickly recurred, the engineer was able to study the log and discover that the transcriptionist, in cleaning up raw transcription files, kept hitting a combination of keys that the relevant program interpreted as "delete paragraph."

With the root cause revealed, the fix was simple, and nearly instantaneous. Had BMC AppSight Black Box technology not been used to trap this problem "in the wild," Straub estimates that replicating such an unforeseen and idiosyncratic problem "could have taken weeks." Along with reducing the duration of client site visits and dramatically shortening downtimes, BMC AppSight has reduced the number of site visits needed because Cerner engineers can now solve more problems remotely.

"Before BMC AppSight," says Straub, "tough customer problems pulled our developers away from new product work for intolerably long stretches. Now that BMC AppSight reveals the root causes, they can be instant heroes and get right back on task."

## Everybody wins

BMC AppSight creates a win/win situation: Cerner delivers superior product performance and better, timelier customer support, while spending less money to do so. Cerner clients deliver superior patient care and gain business efficiencies, while enjoying increased confidence in their information solutions and the company standing behind them.

## Case Study – Retail: Fujitsu Transaction Solutions

They say no good deed goes unpunished. This seemed to hold true for Fujitsu Transaction Solutions Inc. — until the company discovered BMC AppSight.

Fujitsu's good deed was making its GlobalSTORE® POS solution for retailers outstandingly easy for its users to customize. By empowering retailers to take control of their own IT systems, Fujitsu helps them lower the cost of operation, realize greater added value, and support and extend the relationship style that makes each retailer distinct in the eyes of its customers.

The punishment? A potential nightmare in product support. When GlobalSTORE customers call Fujitsu to resolve problems with a system in use for some time, Fujitsu doesn't find the system it installed, but a latter-day variant that may be in different, and not fully-documented, states of evolution across a multistore chain.

### Recording reality

"We start with a very strong and reliable platform," says Tom Messina, senior architect at Fujitsu, "and we have a reliable process for tracking service packs and versions and so on. But with a system so complex and flexible, at some point down the road, neither our engineers nor our customers will know every detail and implication. This imperfect knowledge can make facing problems rather dark and discouraging."

For this reason, when Fujitsu learned of BMC AppSight, the company was immediately interested. The BMC AppSight Black Box logs provide invaluable diagnostic information when problems arise with an enterprise application and the system on which it runs.

### Eliminating trials — and errors

The BMC AppSight Black Box logs replace the time-honored, time-consuming approach to application problem-solving: speculating on the unknown cause and then attempting to replicate the problem behavior through trial and error. Eliminate this resource-consuming sinkhole, and the gains can be huge.

## Fujitsu

### Industry/Market:

Retail point of sale (POS) solutions

### Customer:

Fujitsu Transaction Solutions Inc. (Frisco, TX) is a lifecycle solutions provider of hardware, software, and services for consumer transaction environments in North America. Customers include Canadian Tire, Kroger, Loblaws, Nordstrom, Payless ShoeSource, Regal Cinema, Staples, Stop & Shop, and The TJX Companies.

### Challenge:

Fujitsu wanted to lower support costs and improve the reliability of GlobalSTORE, its Windows-based retail application. In particular, the company was looking to minimize the difficulties of supporting myriad, site-by-site customized variants.

### Solution:

Fujitsu is using BMC AppSight Black Box technology to efficiently capture a complete, diagnostic picture of problems in real time — plus the detailed system context in which they occur — in order to pinpoint and solve problems more quickly.

### Results:

- > Realized ROI within the first year
- > Enabled remote solution of an intermittent problem which would have been “impossible” to solve otherwise, even onsite
- > Reduces need for customer site visits, lowering support costs significantly, accelerating development projects, and enhancing customer confidence
- > Provides objective diplomatic verification when GlobalSTORE is not the source of customer problems

Fujitsu is a case in point. Before adopting BMC AppSight for its GlobalSTORE support, the company did a careful, detailed ROI projection and concluded that the solution would pay for itself within the first year.

Reality has proven better yet. “One of our customers was experiencing a very intermittent problem causing POS terminals to crash,” says Messina. “Before BMC AppSight, a problem like this would have required us to send people out to the field for several weeks, at a loaded cost of, say, \$150 per person, per hour. But by using BMC AppSight, we were able to deploy the BMC AppSight Black Box in the live store environment, running it remotely from our Wake Forest, N.C., location.”

“Even with the BMC AppSight Black Box, it took us several weeks to solve the problem because it was so intermittent. But without BMC AppSight Black Box, it might have been simply impossible. BMC AppSight helped us narrow the

problem down to one component, and then one class in the component. We did it all without travel costs, without taking our people away from the development work that moves us forward, and without the onsite disruption that can make us look bad with our customers and reduce their confidence,” Messina continued. “We realized around 75 percent of our ROI on BMC AppSight just in solving this one problem alone.”

## Finding causes instead of pointing fingers

BMC AppSight’s benefits for Fujitsu include quickly capturing system configuration information — minimizing the downside of extensive user customization — and providing objective evidence in instances where Fujitsu’s own offerings are not the source of an apparent GlobalSTORE problem.

“It’s great for everyone involved when you can eliminate finger-pointing and focus on resolving the problem, whatever its source happens to be,” says Messina. At present, Fujitsu pushes the BMC AppSight Black Box modules out to a customer implementation on an as-needed basis, but they plan to integrate BMC AppSight into their next release of the GlobalSTORE platform.

“Our mantra is to relentlessly drive costs out of customer IT operations,” says Messina. “We see BMC AppSight as a key enabler for doing just that.”

## From the Field

“Before BMC AppSight, a problem like this would have required us to send people out to the field for several weeks. But by using BMC AppSight, we were able to deploy the Black Box in the live store environment, running it remotely from our Wake Forest, N.C., location.”

*Tom Messina  
Senior Architect  
Fujitsu*

## Case Study – Content Management: FileNet Corp.

FileNet Corporation helps organizations make better decisions by managing the content and processes that drive their businesses. FileNet’s Enterprise Content Management (ECM) solutions allow customers to build and sustain competitive advantage by managing content throughout their organizations, automating and streamlining their business processes, and simplifying their critical and everyday decision-making.

Assisting FileNet’s worldwide customer base of over 4,000 installed systems are the 120 Global Call Center personnel who support more than 80 products and field approximately 9,000 customer calls a month. Robert Roach, vice president

of Customer Support Services (CSS) at FileNet, found that, historically, it took his team 15 times more effort to *find* a system-level problem than to *fix* it.

“Our customers are large financial organizations that have 24-by-7 mission-critical production needs. Any downtime results in loss of business totaling millions of dollars a day,” says Roach. “Faster resolution of critical issues eases the impact on the customer and builds their confidence in our products and services, leading to a higher level of customer satisfaction.”

### Cutting problem resolution time by 50 percent

In order to improve customer service and satisfaction, CSS would need to improve overall efficiency in its fault isolation process. Using BMC AppSight Black Box software, Roach hoped to reduce fault isolation time by 25 percent and reduce average time-to-resolution by 50 percent or more.

#### FileNet

##### Industry/Market:

Content management software

##### Challenge:

FileNet, the leader in enterprise content management solutions, wanted to reduce the cost of supporting complex, business-critical applications at remote user sites.

##### Solution:

Using BMC AppSight Black Box software, FileNet, can automatically receive critical support data from customer sites and pinpoint configuration and performance problems.

##### Results:

- > Reduced fault isolation time by more than 25 percent in a three-month period
- > Reduced average time-to-resolution by 50 percent
- > Reduced labor hours and costs: fewer and shorter onsite visits for deployments — and in some complex cases, reduced support costs by a factor of ten
- > Increased customer satisfaction and loyalty due to improved ability to forecast time-to-resolution

The benefits went far beyond these goals. Typical system-level problems, such as erroneous configuration and component integration failures, were discovered in less time and without deploying support personnel to the field. In addition, the call center was able to concentrate more time on solving problems rather than finding them. Roach comments, “We solve more problems more quickly without increasing our staff when we use BMC AppSight, and this directly affects customer satisfaction and impacts favorably on the cost.”

### Pinpointing configuration problems

The CSS organization receives and triages calls as they come in. “80 percent of the time, the problem is a configuration issue within the customer’s environment and is handled immediately by the call center with the help of BMC AppSight,” says Roach. Out of six typical escalations, CSS saved 1,040 hours of labor using the BMC AppSight Black Box. “With BMC AppSight, we experience excellent results in reducing our labor hours associated with fault isolation,” says Roach. For example, the BMC AppSight Black Box isolated a complex customer production error in five hours — when previously it would have taken the team hundreds of hours. “We encounter these types of escalations on average six to ten times a year,” says Roach.

### Eliminating costly SWAT Team field deployments

If a problem requires escalation, Roach sends his “SWAT Team” — a special group of senior support engineers on a four-hour standby — into the field at no additional cost to the customer. In the field, the SWAT Team found that 30 percent of the problems were due to network issues where a quick fix could have been done had the customer relayed accurate information. Other times, after hours of tracing, the SWAT Team would find that customer changes to the system had caused the problem.

Using BMC AppSight, Roach’s team was able to catch the network and system issues without deploying the SWAT Team, saving his organization time and money. With the BMC AppSight Black Box’s ability to capture problems at remote sites, the call center and SWAT Team were able to solve system-level problems without escalating them through the CSS organization. “By using BMC AppSight, we dramatically reduce the fault isolation time, which then reduces the overall time to resolution,” says Roach.

### Bringing value to customers

Since FileNet deployed BMC AppSight in its CSS organization, feedback from customers has been very positive. In fact, several FileNet customers have noticed that their system-level problems have been isolated more quickly, thus saving them time and money. Feedback from CIO-level customers has also been positive, as they are happy to see FileNet using innovative tools. “Overall, we reduced fault isolation in Customer Support Services by more than 25 percent in a three-month period, and overall average time-to-resolution by 50 percent or more,” says Roach.

## Conclusion

No company faces a greater business risk from software problems than an independent software vendor. To mitigate that risk and achieve business advantage, ISVs should consider using application problem resolution technology during the testing and support phases of the application lifecycle to accelerate problem resolution cycles and optimize the use of engineering resources.

To learn more about the BMC AppSight Application Problem Resolution System, please visit [www.appsite.com](http://www.appsite.com).

## Endnotes

- 1 The Service and Support Professionals Assoc. (SSPA) 2006 Benchmark report, as mentioned in Aug. 24, 2006 webinar.
- 2 "How Visible are IT Problems, Really?" Dynamic Markets Ltd., Sept. 2004, p. 5.
- 3 The Service and Support Professionals Assoc. (SSPA) 2006 Benchmark report, as mentioned in Aug. 24, 2006 webinar.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 "How Visible are IT Problems, Really?" Dynamic Markets Ltd., Sept. 2004, p. 6.



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## About BMC Software

BMC Software delivers the solutions IT needs to increase business value through better management of technology and IT processes. Our industry-leading Business Service Management solutions help you reduce cost, lower risk of business disruption, and benefit from an IT infrastructure built to support business growth and flexibility. Only BMC provides best practice IT processes, automated technology management, and award-winning BMC® Atrium™ technologies that offer a shared view into how IT services support business priorities. Known for enterprise solutions that span mainframe, distributed systems, and end-user devices, BMC also delivers solutions that address the unique challenges of the mid-sized business. Founded in 1980, BMC has offices worldwide and fiscal 2006 revenues of more than \$1.49 billion. Activate your business with the power of IT. For more information, visit [www.bmc.com](http://www.bmc.com).

In May 2006, BMC acquired Identify Software, creators of the AppSight™ Application Problem Resolution System. For more information about BMC AppSight, visit [www.appSight.com](http://www.appSight.com) or call 1 (800) 364-5467 or +1 (919) 388-3333.

