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oration Suite] will work out much better for organisations and reduce ongoing costs," says Abouseif.

However, Oracle is unlikely to have it all its own way. As Haider Salloum, server marketing manager, Microsoft Gulf, points out, the vendor is totally unproven in the messaging and collaboration space. "Oracle is not a player in this market yet. There are no customers or success stories so far," says Salloum.

"It's a new business and they will claim that the can do better, but it hasn't been proven. [Oracle] will leverage some customers with large

database investment and they will throw it in at a very cheap price," he predicts.

However, if Oracle is to make headway against either Microsoft or IBM/Lotus, the vendor should focus on delivering the smart enterprise suite (SES) potential of its Collaboration Suite. According to Gartner Group, the SES market will hit US\$1.5 billion by 2005. The analyst house describes SES as combining content management, knowledge management and collaboration within and between enterprise organisations. It also says that such solutions blur the line between the tra-

ditional office suite and core ERP-type business apps.

"If Oracle presents it [Collaboration Suite] merely as an alternative to Exchange or Domino e-mail and calendaring, the Collaboration Suite faces an uphill battle to win market share in the well-entrenched Microsoft and IBM/Lotus customer base," states the Gartner Group research note.

"Collaboration Suite has greater potential as an SES, but Oracle must understand the requirements for this type of offering and then must devote sufficient resources to develop the market," Gartner adds.

Al-Rabie deploys IFS to handle future growth

Al-Rabie Saudi Foods Company is replacing its proprietary enterprise resource planning (ERP) application with a solution from Industrial & Financial Systems (IFS). Scheduled to go live in January, the company will deploy approximately 20 IFS modules as it looks to build a software stack capable of handling its future growth.

"Saudi Arabia's commercial environment is changing rapidly and Al-Rabie's original [ERP package] was incapable of sustaining performance in line with anticipated future demands... The in-house system was fragmented and lacked the means of integration for us to move forward," explains Al-Rabie's deputy general manager, Robert Parsons.

By implementing the IFS solution, Al-Rabie hopes to improve its systems integration and accelerate the flow of information through the company, something that will help its senior management make better informed business decisions.

"By implementing IFS, we will be able to successfully integrate our existing advanced process technology, have rapid access to relevant management information to quicken the decision making process and generate meaningful reports in double quick time to keep everybody informed," says Parsons.

The implementation is being carried out by a combination of Al-Rabie



SET MENU: Al-Rabie Saudi Foods Company has selected 20 modules from IFS's ERP solution.

and IFS Arabia staff. To ensure that the company will be able to begin benefiting from the ERP application as soon as it goes live, the Al-Rabie team has been involved in an extensive knowledge transfer process with IFS' local partner.

"We realised from the start that any system is only as good as its users, thus effective training in the operation of the various facets of the IFS system was an absolute must for there to be a truly noticeable and cost effective improvement in Al-Rabies overall performance," explains Parsons.

"With this in mind there were many familiarisation and training sessions (and) from a management standpoint the knowledge transfer

was designed to ensure that we know how the system worked, what its advantages were over the old system and how certain components could be best applied to our business," he adds.

To ensure that Al-Rabie can utilise its existing customer information, the implementation team has used a combination of IFS' configuration and builder tools and Oracle RDBMS offerings to migrate the company's data to the new app. At the same time, it has carried out a significant amount of data cleansing to ensure information accuracy.

"A lot of data cleansing took place both before and after the data migration to ensure that we had the required information in the required format. We took out unnecessary data and completed the incomplete data to ensure information accuracy," comments Parsons.

The ERP application will run on an IBM-X370 Xeon-700 server. Storage will be provided by three RAID sets and, once live, the company's depots will access data over a virtual private network (VPN). Although an Al-Rabie employee will manage the application, the company will work with IFS Arabia in order to maximise its investment. "We will work with IFS to extract optimum performance from the system and ensure that our personnel are kept up to date with system technology," states Parsons.