ASK THE EXPERTS: WHITE PAPER

From Operational Pain to Financial Proof:

How to Build a WMS Business Case That Gets Approved

Overview:

Most WMS business cases stall not because the need isn't real, but because they're built in a way finance can't approve.

A WMS touches labor, inventory, service levels, customer experience, and long-term growth. That breadth is part of the value, but it also creates a challenge. The benefits don't sit neatly in one place, and they're often described in operational terms instead of financial ones. The result is a case that resonates with operations but feels uncertain to finance.

This paper draws on Gartner research and practitioner insight from Made4net, Zion Solutions Group, and St. Onge Company to show how to bridge that gap. The goal is simple: translate operational pain into financial proof, build a case that gets approved, and ensure it delivers after go-live.

Meet the experts:

Drew Eubank
EVP & Co-Founder, Zion Solutions Group

Kail Plankey,
Project Manager, St. Onge Company

Amit Levy
EVP of Sales & Strategy, Made4net

Why WMS Business Cases Stall

"WMS initiatives stall not because the need isn't real, but because the risk feels larger than the guarantee of the return. Operations knows the value is there—it shows up in labor dollars, headcount, inventory carrying costs, chargebacks. But until you quantify that risk, assign ownership to the business case, and make the 'do nothing' option visibly more expensive, finance will continue to hesitate."
Amit Levy, EVP of Sales & Strategy, Made4net

Most business cases fall apart for a simple reason. They rely on broad claims like efficiency, visibility, and flexibility that don't hold up under financial scrutiny.

Operations sees the value every day in labor costs, headcount pressure, inventory carrying costs, and chargebacks. But unless those issues are quantified and tied directly to financial outcomes, they remain abstract. Finance isn't rejecting the need. They're rejecting the uncertainty

To move forward, 3 things need to happen:

- Operational pain must be quantified in financial terms
- Ownership of the business case must be clearly defined
- The cost of doing nothing must be made visible

Inaction isn't neutral. Inefficiencies compound. Growth gets constrained. Service levels erode.

"The cost of inaction is real. Go back to 2020—you can't make money if you can't get your product to customers, period.

If inaction leads you to a point where you can't grow market share, can't get product to customers, can't service your customer base—that's not a technology problem anymore. That's an existential one."

Drew Eubank,
EVP & Co-Founder, Zion Solutions Group

Understanding the Full Investment

A WMS investment goes far beyond software.

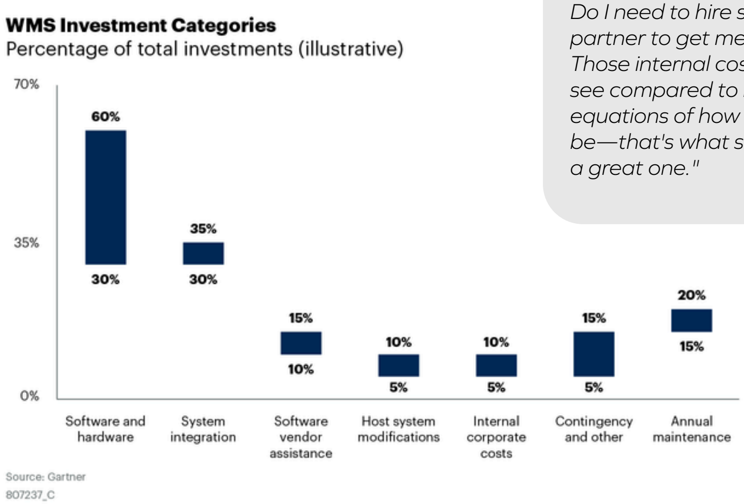
Most organizations don't underestimate the need for a WMS. They underestimate what it takes to implement one successfully.

As the figure below shows, software and hardware represent only part of the total investment. The rest is distributed across integration, vendor support, internal resources, system modifications, and ongoing maintenance. Individually, these categories may seem manageable. Together, they often rival or exceed the cost of the system itself.

This is where business cases start to break down.

"A lot of folks fall short when it comes to honestly assessing their internal capabilities and resources. Do I need to hire somebody? Do I need to find a partner to get me through it so I can train up to it? Those internal costs—the soft costs that are hard to see compared to labor on the floor and mathematical equations of how much more efficient you're going to be—that's what separates a good business case from a great one."

Drew Eubank,
EVP & Co-Founder,
Zion Solutions Group



Gartner

When these costs are overlooked or minimized, the financial model becomes incomplete. The project may still get approved, but expectations are misaligned from the start. Timelines stretch, budgets tighten, and confidence erodes.

The less visible costs are often the most underestimated:

- **Internal time and resource allocation**
- **Training and change management**
- **Process redesign and testing**
- **Temporary productivity loss during ramp-up**

These are not edge cases. They are part of every implementation.

A strong business case reflects the full scope of the investment—not just what it takes to go live, but what it takes to reach steady-state performance.

Because the risk isn't in the software. It's in underestimating everything around it.

Building the WMS Business Case

A credible business case has two parts. A financial model grounded in real assumptions, and a narrative that explains where those numbers come from and why they matter.

It also isn't built in isolation.

Bringing finance in early changes the conversation. It moves from selling a project to validating an investment. Metrics like Net Present Value (NPV) and payback period become shared tools rather than hurdles.

Savings are not evenly distributed. They show up in specific places such as put-away, picking, inbound, and outbound processes. The more precise the model, the more credible the case.

A strong approach includes:

- Process mapping across all impacted functions
- Modeling both aggressive and conservative scenarios
- Running sensitivity analysis to test assumptions

Leadership will ask what happens if results fall short. The model should already answer that.

"Process-map every functional area the WMS will touch—from order release all the way out the door. Then take an aggressive approach on what it could look like and a conservative approach, and compare the two to find the most realistic outcome. Capturing all of that is what makes you most successful in building your business case."

Drew Eubank,
EVP & Co-Founder,
Zion Solutions Group

Categorizing Benefits

Not all WMS benefits carry the same weight—or the same level of scrutiny.

Gartner groups them into three categories: tangible, intangible, and hybrid. But the value isn't in the labels. It's in how you apply them to build a case that finance trusts and leadership can act on.

Intangible	Hybrid	Tangible
• Misplaced orders • Startup time	• Employee satisfaction • Customer service • Safety • Warehouse employee performance measurements • Management information • Value-added services • Electronic data interchange (EDI) requirements • System availability • User group networking • Upgrade path	• Labor savings • Inventory visibility and cycle time • Shipping accuracy improvements • Warehouse capacity and equipment utilization • Increased sales • Reduced demurrage and expediting • Administrative costs

Strong business cases do three things well:

1. They anchor on measurable financial impact
2. They support the case with operational and strategic context
3. They separate what is proven from what is expected

Tangible Benefits: The foundation of the case

These are the benefits that belong in your financial model. They are measurable, defensible, and tied directly to cost or revenue.

In most operations, they show up as:

- Reduced labor cost per order
- Lower inventory carrying costs
- Fewer errors, chargebacks, and rework
- Increased throughput without adding headcount

This is where finance will focus first. If these numbers aren’t credible, the rest of the case won’t matter. The more specific you are about where the savings come from, the stronger the model becomes.

Intangible Benefits: the performance layer

These benefits are harder to quantify, but they shape how the operation performs every day.

They include:

- More consistent execution across shifts, sites, or customers
- Improved service levels and customer experience
- Better onboarding and retention of labor
- Increased visibility and decision-making confidence

These don’t belong in the core ROI calculation. But leaving them out entirely weakens the case.

They explain why performance improves—and why those improvements are sustainable.

Hybrid Benefits: the growth lever

This is where many business cases fall short. Hybrid benefits connect operational improvement to strategic impact. They may be partially quantifiable, but they require assumptions and context.

They often show up as:

- The ability to scale volume without proportional cost increases
- Supporting new customers, channels, or fulfillment models
- Absorbing growth without adding facilities or labor at the same rate

These benefits rarely make or break the ROI model on their own. But they often make the difference in the final decision.

They answer the question: What does this investment enable that we can’t do today?

"Being data-driven means being precise about where your savings opportunities actually live.

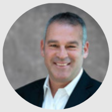
Don't lead with a bottom-line number—'we think we can save 10%' won't survive scrutiny. Be discrete by work area. You might have a bigger opportunity in put-away than in picking, or within picking, a larger opportunity in full-case than each-pick.

That level of specificity is what makes a business case credible."

Kail Plankey,
Project Manager,
St. Onge Company

"Too often, the benefits conversation stops at labor and error reduction.

Don't overlook future growth—the ability to scale your operation with existing resources, bring on more customers, add volume, acquire companies, and continue running on the same infrastructure. That's real value that belongs in the narrative."



Amit Levy
EVP of Sales &
Strategy, Made4net

Bringing it All Together:

"The golden rule: only put benefits in your financial model that you can hold someone accountable to.

Intangible and hybrid benefits are still important and should be included in the business case—but they live outside the math of the ROI." says Kail Plankey, Managing Principal, St. Onge Company

Strong business cases make a clear distinction:

1. What is expected (Supported with Data)
2. What is committed (Modeled Financially)
3. What is enabled (Framed Strategically)

Blurring those lines creates risk. Separating them builds trust.

Measuring ROI After Go-Live

ROI is not a single number. It evolves over time.

Most operations experience a dip after go-live. Productivity slows before it improves. Processes stabilize and adjustments are made.

Real measurement should begin once the operation has settled, typically around month three.

This is why baseline metrics matter. Without them, there is no way to measure progress or prove success.

Focus on a small set of meaningful KPIs:

- Labor productivity
- Order accuracy
- Throughput
- Inventory accuracy

When ROI falls short, the instinct is to question the system. More often, the issue is execution. Processes, adoption, and discipline determine whether value is realized.

"A lot of folks go live and think they're going to be more efficient out of the gate.

But you have a ramp. It's important to have a ramp schedule—how long it's going to take that workforce and those processes to get truly efficient."

Drew Eubank,
EVP & Co-Founder,
Zion Solutions Group

Taking Action

A WMS business case does not fail because the value is not there. It fails because the value is not clearly proven.

The organizations that move forward are the ones that:

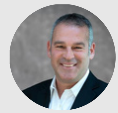
- Anchor the case in measurable operational pain
- Translate that pain into financial impact
- Assign ownership and accountability
- Build a model that holds up under scrutiny

This is not just about justifying a system. It is about defining how the operation performs going forward.

"Anchor the business case on measurable operational pain—where you're losing money, time, and customers.

Quantify those metrics, show how the WMS improves them, and translate that into financial impact. When the business case is tied to metrics that directly impact EBITDA and strategic goals, the approval process becomes a financial decision."

Amit Levy
EVP of Sales & Strategy, Made4net



The framework is clear. The path is established. The remaining question is whether the cost of waiting is one your operation can afford.

Start with the Right Partner

Building a business case and delivering on it requires more than a list of benefits. It requires connecting operational reality to financial outcomes in a way leadership can act on. This is where we can help.

In this WEBINAR, we walk through the proven WMS business case framework from Gartner and share real-world implementation expertise that's helped companies turn "we can't afford it" into "we can't afford not to."

Additional Garner research is available HERE.

MADE4NET

With 800 customers in 30 countries, Made4net is a leading global provider of best-in-class, cloud-based supply chain execution and warehouse management solutions for organizations of all sizes to improve the speed and efficiency of their supply chain.

Made4net's end-to-end SCExpert™ platform offers a robust WMS solution that enables real-time inventory visibility, labor management, and equipment productivity with performance analytics that drive faster, more accurate order fulfillment and improved supply chain efficiency. In addition to the best-of-breed WMS, the platform offers integrated yard management, dynamic route management, last mile delivery and warehouse automation solutions that deliver a true supply chain convergence.

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