

Information Overload

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Welcome:

Communicating the value of IT sounds like a no-brainer really. We all know that technology has become a standard but important part of our daily lives, especially our working ones. But what happens if you need to change the way people work and change some of the old software for new? How do you convince people of the merits of the new system, when it looks like the new system does the same as the old one?

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this edition onto friends, colleagues and other interested readers. Please note that all back issues of this edition, as well as our registrant resources edition can be read and/or downloaded from our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au> should any of the topics be of interest and use.

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In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Communicating the value of IT
- Notes from the office
- A Thought to ponder.

In today's technologically driven world, it seems we are bombarded with new this, upgraded that, and you have got to have this latest and greatest whatchamacallit, it will make you do your thingummy much quicker. Not only will you be able to work far more efficiently, but we will give you a second one for half price (*just in case the first one breaks – no I didn't say that*).

So you give in to the hype and sure enough, some of the promises they made did actually come to pass, but others – well by the time you finished learning the ins and outs of the new fangled whatsit, they're releasing the first round of fixes for the bugs they found after they'd sold it to you. You heave a big sigh and set about installing the band aids they've provided, hoping the backup procedure actually worked. You keep your fingers crossed, wondering idly whether or not you should have stayed with the previous version because at least you knew that one, it didn't fall over and you knew where all the buttons, drop downs and shortcuts were.

You fix a big smile on your face and you set out to convince the people that are going to be using it, that it IS better than the last one, no really it is.

Communicating the value of IT

Communicating the real value of IT can be hard. Especially when the last “big thing” became the biggest dud in a very short space of time. In the records management arena especially, we often hear of organisations who tried a particular brand of software, they didn’t like it, it didn’t do what they were hoping it would do, so they started the process all over again, hoping the new software provided by a.n.other organisation will fix their particular problem for them.

And it may. But what some organisations seem to have forgotten is that people use it, and it is those people who will ultimately determine whether or not they will make the software work for them, or not. It is no good having management decide that something is a good idea and everyone is going to use it – or else. If the value of the new system cannot be seen to be aligned strategically with core business values, if there is muttering about band aid solutions, and what a waste of money, and it’s all right for them – they don’t have use it, then you can almost hear the death knell sound before the box has been opened and the server fired up.

So before you step on to the band wagon lets sit down and chat for a while....after all it is nearly Christmas.

What software do you really need?

Of course I am not talking about the usual “stuff” we take for granted such as Word, Excel, Web creation software, the Email and Internet (although if I were to hazard a guess not everyone really needs access to this last one!) etc etc. But those things that are supposed to make your lives easier. OK maybe I am talking about Word, Excel, Web creation software, the Email and Internet etc etc.

So maybe the question should be – why do you need it? What business improvements is a particular piece of software or a new system supposed to bring to the organisation? Is it a genuine attempt at making lives easier, quicker, more efficient. Is it to ensure that you meet your legal compliance or keep track of manufacturing, production, job status, you tell me, after all this is your organisation we are talking about.

When deciding on whether or not you need additional software, you need to look beyond the features, and try and determine whether or not those features have any benefits they can offer to the organisation. And do those benefits align themselves with the organisation strategically.

In other words you need to get beyond the sales hype. Anyone who is a skilled orator can “sell” a product to someone else. The trick is to know when all they are trying to do is sell you the features. You need to determine the true benefits. Only then can you as the person who’s job it is to “sell” to the organisation can you “sell” it to the people who will be paying the bills, but just as importantly – the people who will be using it.

Why should it be aligned strategically? Well those bits of software that have been purchased and integrated successfully were needed by the organisation to move the organisation forward. Everyone knew what it was supposed to do, and they accepted that they needed that particular piece of software in order to do their jobs. However, there are some functions within organisations that may never be deemed to be a core business function, for example - libraries, information centres and records management departments to name just a few. There are still some people who see these parts of an organisation as

somewhere, where money gets put, but nothing tangible comes out of. They have trouble recognising the true Return on Investment these particular departments can offer their parent organisation.

Which is why, some Records Managers have trouble selling the concept of a new Electronic and Document Records Management System to senior management. After all – everyone keeps their own records don't they.

Communicating those benefits to the workforce:

In order to sell a new system to the powers that be, and just as importantly those people who's jobs will be affected by the change, you need to understand the system and what that system can bring to the organisation. You need to explain the strategic benefits having that system in place can offer.

You also need to put it in words that they can understand. Do not fill the gaps with jargon and sales speak, because you don't know how the software/system will benefit the organisation. If you know where the organisation is going, what is going to impact on that organisation, then you should have no problem convincing everyone just what this new product will bring.

The "What's In It For Me" adage is still one of the essential components of "selling" to another person.

- Will it make it easier for people to find things? How?
- What will they have to do differently? Is that going to make their jobs slower or faster? Easier or harder?
- Will they still have a job once the system is implemented?
- What will the system look like? Will they spend more time looking for how to do something, than actually doing that something? A new system should be intuitive, or as intuitive as it can possibly be. Given the rate of staff turnover, the last thing you want to be doing is spending all of your training dollars on initiating new staff into the quirks and foibles of the new system.
- Will there be support when they stuff up?
- Will there be training offered or will they have to sink or swim?
- Assuming that initial training is on offer (and if this is a major change, then please ensure that training **is** on offer), there should also be some additional assistance available. We seem to have the retention spans of a stapler when it comes to learning and applying anything new, especially when it comes to understanding the ins and outs of how the new technology works. If we don't have it to play with when we get back from the initial round of training we are going to forget most of what we have been taught. And even then, if some items are not used on a daily basis, then chances are good, these additional features will become forgotten about.

Don't believe me – then consider Excel spreadsheets. Can you remember being taught how to link spreadsheets together, so that the figures update across each spreadsheet and graphs as you make changes to the front page? Unless you use this type of function on a daily basis, chances are going to be good, you will spend more time hunting through the help screens and drop down menus than actually doing the work that you are supposed to be doing. And so it is with everything. It is all very well being taught something initially, but unless you provide ongoing support for those people who need it, you will find people bypassing the system. Grumbling about how much better the old system was (even with its inherent problems).

Change management and user buy in:

Change management seems to be the latest buzzword doing the rounds. Everyone thinks they know what it is, and will try and take into account everyone's needs, wants and desires. Well some times.

When implementing anything new, there is a presupposition from management that there will be employee buy-in, that they will instinctively understand the supposed values and benefits.

Unfortunately if management has tried many times to implement changes and major systems upgrades without the support of the people using the system, and it didn't do what they were told it was going to do, then they are going to be wary of using it.

Is it any wonder that systems fail in some organisations and not in others?

So, before throwing more money and technology at a problem, it is worth finding out if the last system really was (excuse the word – CRAP) or was it the attitude of the people who were supposed to be using it!

If you find staff by-passing the processes and procedures because they don't trust it, don't like it, or it doesn't seem to do what the old system did, or wasn't as good as the system they used at their last place of work, then you have got some serious problems that need addressing.

If you annoy the people who are supposed to be using it they will vote with their feet. Like any product or service that fails to live up to our expectations, we either:

- accept it (because we have to -but will find ways around using it),
- like it (and tell everyone how good it is), or
- never use it again (and would sooner go someplace else that does meet their needs and expectations).

So what can go wrong?

One of the biggest killers of change management projects is we haven't aligned the new thing with the core business objectives.

You haven't been able to convince the masses of the benefits it can offer.

The sales rep was just too good at his/her job, and you fell for the hype.

And our specification was wrong. If we don't know what the core business values are, if we don't know where we are supposed to be going, how can you work out what benefits the new system will bring to you?

Understanding what your users will need means that the system specification can be written correctly. If you don't understand what it is these people actually do, how on earth do you think you can then assure them that the new system will help them do their jobs better.

Understanding their needs means that you speak to them about their concerns, what is wrong with the way things are being done at the moment. And if they cannot tell you – because they've always done something in a certain way, then get a consultant in to review the current systems BEFORE you write the specs.

Failure to do these simple steps, can mean failure. Whilst they may be time consuming initially, you will save yourself time and money in the long run.

If our specification was not as good as it could have been, we may find that what we actually needed from the system cannot be delivered with the product that we purchased. Which means we either have to live with a system that fails to do what we want, which then means that people will bypass it, or we end up modifying the system so it does do what we want. The problem with that of course is that any new versions will also have to be modified, which will add to the ongoing cost of implementation and roll out.

Add cost overruns and time delays to the equation and you have a very costly mistake on your hands.

Kind Regards

Lorraine

Notes from the Office:

Tis the season to be away from the office. Just a quick reminder that the office will be closed from lunchtime on the 22nd December 2006 until the 8th January 2007.

Whilst we may be able to answer some of the email traffic, questions and queries during this time (a couple of us have home logins) we are unable to help you with any staffing inquiries during this time. The reason is not because we are all off sunning ourselves on some beach somewhere (although that's not a bad thought), but because we are having the office re-fitted during this time, and everything is being packed away for safe keeping.

So if we don't get a chance to speak to you in person before we finish for the break, we would like to wish you all a safe, festive and joyous Summer Solstice, Christmas and New Year and we will be back with you in January.

A Thought to Ponder:

"Too many people let others stand in their way and don't go back for one more try."

Rosabeth Moss Kanter b, 1943

American Writer and Educator

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