



“ Unfortunately, most people tend to rush the move and underestimate how long the “unpacking” stage will take to get their new product running efficiently. ”

TECH TRAP NO. 5 — ENOUGH TIME AND RESOURCES HAVE BEEN ALLOCATED

Editor’s Note: *Following is the fifth of our ten part series called “Technology Traps and Mishaps,” by Fred Ode, CEO, chairman and founder of Foundation Software.*

Hi honey, I’m home! The last time my family and I moved was in 1991 during the most hectic time of my career. I was juggling many jobs for my growing business, and moving day was no exception. I was traveling to Detroit and back to make some sales calls that day, so my wife handled the move by herself with two small kids in tow. When I arrived home that night to our new address, I naively mentioned how great it was to be all moved in. That, of course, was a serious misjudgment.

Remember your last move? The process leading to it was exciting and

stressful and very time-consuming—then came time for the move itself. It was a blur of packing and boxing and supervising the hired moving guys. (Hopefully you did hire moving guys!) And then, bam, you were in your new home. But, do you remember how long it took to get settled?

Implementing new technology, after the hard work of finding just the right product, is a lot like moving. You’ve done your research, you’ve weighed your options, and you’ve located the perfect system that you believe will carry your business to the next level. Unfortunately, most people tend to rush the move and underestimate how long the “unpack-

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ing” stage will take to get their new product running efficiently.

The weeks and months following a new technology purchase is often the most critical stage. As flawless as your research and selection processes may have been, there is no guarantee that the implementation process will sail along without a hitch, especially if you have neglected to allocate enough time and resources.

Set a Realistic Timeframe

Let’s assume that you have chosen the best technology solution for your business objectives. And let’s assume you have tested the product, checked references and made certain it fits your specific needs. Congratulations! But now, before that software is shipped or you take delivery of the product, your new assignment is to develop a feasible implementation plan.

Most software vendors will oversee the implementation of business software, but there are things that owners or managers should do to minimize risks and simplify the process. First, ask questions and consider what is involved. Implementing a new accounting software program, for example, will involve the transfer of historical data. But how exactly is this done? Is it manual data entry, or can it be automated? Perhaps the number of jobs or vendors in your current system will affect how long the process will take. Depending

on your technology solution, there are many variables that may affect initial setup and implementation, as well as the time it takes to complete these tasks.

Training and user support are other key areas that must be scheduled realistically (and, of course, should have weighed heavily in the decision-making process). But even before setting a timetable, you must make sure that employees will embrace the new system. Chances are, if you have chosen a product that will vastly improve efficiency and save time, most new users will be eager to use it. More time may be needed, however, if you have less-than motivated employees, or perhaps someone who has a low aptitude for learning something new.

The key to a workable timetable comes down to “time.” Underestimating how long training will take is a common—and costly—mistake. It’s simply unrealistic to expect employees to learn a new system in a day or two of training, especially if these new users must cover their ongoing duties at the same time. Without a clear message from management that training is important, an employee will simply decide, “I don’t have time for this,” and will give up on the solution before even trying it. From my own experience, I know this is true. Back in the early 1980s, the construction company I worked for installed word processing software on every

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Technology Traps and Mishaps

computer. Over a year later, we learned that almost no one knew how to use it. I immediately put a training program into effect, which consisted of one-hour sessions each week for about six weeks. This may seem like overkill today, but considering this was "leading-edge" technology back then, it was absolutely necessary. And it worked!

Set a Realistic Budget

The total cost of your new technology product is usually not limited to a one-time purchase price. More sophisticated programs will likely include maintenance fees as well. But do these costs include regular updates to the program? Do they cover unlimited tech support? And what about costs for adding new users, additional modules or customized training?

Assuming that you are dealing with

a respected and reputable vendor, devising a realistic budget should be easy. A good company will make every effort to give you ALL costs upfront and won't make promises that they can't keep. Unfortunately, I've heard from far too many contractors who have abandoned new technology products because the costs escalated out of control or the product they received was nothing at all like the one promised. Sorting through the competition is tough, but ultimately, it is the owner's job to find the vendor that cares as much about the long-term relationship as the short-term sale.

It's been fifteen years since we moved from our last home...and yes, we are all moved in and settled. But whenever the subject arises, (never by me) I am reminded (usually by my wife) that expectations and reality

are often years apart. And when it comes to significant investments, such as technology, trying to rush the move will only put you further behind. ■

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