



## TECH TRAP NO. 9 — THINKING A PROJECT IS 100 PERCENT COMPLETE

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

A great philosopher, comedian and actress Lily Tomlin once said, "The road to success is *always* under construction." Okay, you may not want to take advice from the woman who brought us "one ringy dingy, two ringy dingy," but if you think about it, these wise words (in the first quote) can apply to just about every aspect of your life. In fact, regarding new technology, I would say Lily is 100 percent correct.

Thinking a project is 100 percent complete is one of the most common pitfalls that owners and managers succumb to after investing in new technology. In my fifth tech trap topic, "Enough Time and Resources

Have Been Allocated," I talked about how easy it is to underestimate all that needs to be done when implementing new technology—the weeks and months following a new technology investment is the critical period for getting your new technology product up and running efficiently.

Now, let's assume you've had that new technology product for a year or two. You've long finished hardware configuration, data conversion, implementation and initial training. And users of your system say they are working much more efficiently today than ever before. Are you finished?

Not exactly, because chances are good that the technology product you are using has layer upon layer

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### Technology Traps— A Ten Part Series

1. Technology is Always the Answer
2. New is Always Better
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4. The Research is Thorough
5. Enough Time and Resources Have Been Allocated
6. Selecting Products Based Solely on Price
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of feature-rich applications. And chances are, you are merely scratching at the top layer. Research studies have shown that the typical software/technology user employs only

a fraction of a system's overall capabilities. Why? Well, it's not because we couldn't benefit from additional time and money-saving processes. It's more likely that we just stopped learning.

Take, for example, a contractor who has invested in a vertical software application, such as construction accounting. Initial training sessions were devoted solely to getting the program up and running smoothly. New users, some of whom had low levels of computer experience, are happy to have learned new functions in AP, AR, payroll and job costing because they are accomplishing much more in less time. But now it has come to the contractor's attention that several project managers continue to export data to spreadsheets even though these reports come standard with the system. Or, the contractor learns that his bookkeeper is manually calculating indirect and administrative costs despite the fact that the software can automatically allocate overhead costs to jobs. Or worse, these time-consuming inefficiencies continue on without anyone discovering that there is a better way.

### Learning Is an Ongoing Process

The business world and the world of construction are constantly changing. The only way to stay ahead and stay competitive is with continuous training and education. Contractors who wish to make the most of their technology investment will continue seeking ongoing technology training. And most technology vendors have plenty of educational opportunities available to clients, including online training, customized consulting, seminars and user conferences.

To those who think they have learned all they need to know about their technological products, feel dissatisfied with some aspect of their

system or perhaps feel perfectly content, my advice remains the same: Call your vendor and ask questions. Tell the developer what you are doing now, and ask how you can do it better. Unless your technology is old and antiquated, chances are you will discover deeper levels of functionality and efficiency.

### Technology Is Forever Changing

More so than any other industry, computer software and hardware companies must adapt to changes and innovations or die trying. That means that the technology product you purchase today will not be the same package in three or four years. Users must keep themselves educated about updates, feature enhancements and even program fixes if they are to make the most of their investment.

As much as we hate to admit it, no technology project is ever 100 percent complete. We must think of successful technology adaptation as a road always under construction. In order to continue gaining the benefits of improved productivity and efficiency, we too must continue to dedicate our time and resources to our technology solutions. To this, Lily Tomlin's Edith Ann character would surely say, "And that's the truthhhhh." ■



*Fred Ode is the CEO/chairman of Foundation Software, developer of construction job cost accounting software called FOUNDATION for Windows. For further information on FOUNDATION for Windows, visit [www.foundationsoft.com](http://www.foundationsoft.com). Fred Ode can be reached directly by phone at 800.246.0800 or e-mail [fred@foundationsoft.com](mailto:fred@foundationsoft.com).*

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# HEY FRED!

by Fred Ode



**Editor's Note:** Looking for answers to your tech issues? Send your construction-related technology questions to [heyfred@foundationsoft.com](mailto:heyfred@foundationsoft.com).

## Hey Fred,

I am an electrical contractor with a labor force that has doubled to over forty employees in the last year and a half. I struggle with getting the billings out on time, and I have no idea if I am making or losing money on my jobs. Our current paper method of tracking my employees' time is always late and filled with mistakes. I am thinking of getting PDAs for all of my people so that they can enter their time electronically. I've seen demonstrations at trade shows, and PDAs appear to be the perfect solution. What do you think?

— John

## Hey John,

Bill Gates once said:

*"The first rule of any technology used in a business is that automation applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency. The second is that automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency."*

The fact that you say your "employees' time is always late and filled with mistakes" makes me think that you fall into the second rule. I have my own saying, "people, processes and then technology."

The first question you need to ask yourself is: "Do I have the right people in place?" Since you have doubled your workforce in just a year



and a half, this is something you need to address.

Next, you need to examine your processes. What do your timesheets look like? Do your employees have the right information (i.e., jobs, cost codes) to enter their time against? Have they been educated as to why this needs to be done? Have they been trained to perform this task? Do you have construction-specific accounting software that knows what to do with this information (e.g., job cost and billings)?

Once you have all of this in place, then you will be ready to fully lever-

age what PDAs can do for your business. Otherwise, as Gates points out, you will "magnify the inefficiency," while spending a great deal of money and resources along the way.

— Fred

*Disclaimer: "Hey Fred" reserves the right to change names and edit questions for privacy, length and readability issues.*

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