

Tips for a Successful Software Implementation

Do your homework.

- Choose the application that best fits not only your current needs, but your projected position over the next five to ten years.
- Check references of the software company and the vendor (if different).

Assign a competent (preferably experienced) Project Manager.

- Every segment of your business (owner/CEO, accounting, IT, management, and end users) has different needs and different expectations.
- The Project Manager must understand and balance these varied (and sometimes conflicting) responsibilities, while coordinating between your team and the software vendor's team.

Set a realistic budget.

- The rule of thumb for new software is that the total cost of implementation (software, hardware, installation, customization, training and first year support) runs 2-3 times the cost of the software licenses.
- Don't plan to skimp on customization and training! These may seem like "extras" if this is your first major software project, but these are the elements that actually make this investment work for you and your employees.

Develop a reasonable timeline and stick with it.

- The vendor will recommend a time frame for implementation based on their experience. This is valuable information.
- If the suggested timeline includes major holidays, your busy season, or scheduled off-time for key people on your staff, the recommended time frame should be expanded accordingly.
- The implementation requires a lot of back-and-forth between the vendor and your team. Timely responses are necessary from all parties for the timeline to be maintained.

Remember: garbage in, garbage out!

- Carefully prepare your data for import. It can be very difficult to correct a botched import.
- Clean your data -- delete invalid records, archive history where possible, remove or consolidate duplicate records.
- Consider the possibility that your data cannot be cleanly imported and new entry may be the best solution in the long run.

Reporting needs can determine initial configuration.

- Most enterprise applications have significant flexibility built into the database, so some customization is usually required. A careful review of the standard reports available will give you a good indication of how you want to structure your data.
- A Project Manager with experience in various applications (and an understanding of accounting principles) will be invaluable in this exercise.

It's easier to prevent a problem than to solve one.

- Initial configuration choices often are not easily changed once a project is underway.
- If you aren't certain of the answer to a question on an implementation worksheet, ask for clarification.
- Consider the consequences (ease of input, adaptability to changing business structure, reporting requirements) of every choice made in the implementation phase.

The Net Effect, L.L.C. is a consortium of consultants and programmers experienced in providing information management services to a variety of industries. The company was founded in Mobile, Alabama in 1996 and has worked with businesses across the US, in Canada and in Europe.

Glenda R. Snodgrass, President and lead consultant for The Net Effect, specializes in software implementation and project management. She has experience with a variety of database applications (POS, accounting, e-commerce, CRM/ERP) in the US and in France, and has developed browser-based applications in PHP and MySQL. Glenda holds a B.A. from the University of South Alabama (1986) and a maîtrise from Université de Paris I - Panthéon-Sorbonne in Paris, France (1989).

