

Preparing for Technological Transitions

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We've all been there: The day comes when business-as-usual must face a major change. Often, this is a change of hands: a shift in management, a new hire or a longtime employee leaving the company. Most businesses anticipate these kinds of disruptions with a careful succession plan.

But do they do the same thing with technology?

Successful business leaders must learn to anticipate, embrace and respond to the innovations around them. Has your company planned for the turnover of old technology? Perhaps you've noticed a major system can't meet your business' current needs, or that a provider's service record has left you with unacceptable downtime. Or maybe a more cost-effective and feature-rich solution has reached the market. Regardless of the reason, companies must strive to make the best choice and make the switch as efficiently as possible.

To aid in planning your technology change, ask yourself three questions:

- What do I wish my system could do?
- What are my customers asking for?
- What other changes am I making?

The last question is the most critical. Overhauling everything at once can preclude you from achieving your goals as your attention may be scattered over too many different items keeping you from focusing on any one completely.

While the impulse to innovate is good, remember that incremental shifts are most effective in the long run as work disruptions are kept to a minimum. If you are upgrading to a more robust system, make sure you get that done first, then add on modules so that you are certain the components will integrate seamlessly. Make sure your company and your customers have ample time to adjust to changes in major management systems. While the timing for this varies by undertaking, make sure that day-to-day business tasks are being completed correctly before moving on — training is always key.

Of course, it can be difficult to know where to start when phasing out old or inefficient systems. Take the time to review what technology is required to help you diversify and grow. Identify and understand the pain points, pressures and challenges your next generation of technology may need to address. Create an inventory of the current shortcomings, develop a wish list of outcomes and, importantly, seek input from your team. Once you have a handle on your needs, carefully assess your options.

During that review, consider the information system providers themselves, including management. Do the people behind the software solutions have a handle on your needs? Do they have a history of

success in your market?

More importantly, research the vendor's "road map" or their strategies and plans when developing their solutions. Ask other questions: How successful has that provider's technology been? Is it likely to be supported, enhanced, secure and effective in the future? How has the technology evolved and adapted to industry changes in the past? Investing in a new system is a marathon, not a sprint, so make sure the company you select has a good track record and can keep up with your business for the long haul.

Next, consider the people on your team who will interact with that technology every day. Tech-savvy employees will expect full-time connectivity to the office and their jobs.

These are the people who rely on mobile apps and integrated smart devices for most facets of their lives, work included.

In addition to powering your business forward, your new technology can help you attract and retain valuable staff, and maximize their talents by streamlining their jobs, upping their productivity and easing pain points.

One technology that holds this potential is algorithmic pooling, which uses historical data to create efficiencies. Algorithmic pooling can combine shipments from several customers onto one truck while optimizing the most direct route. Another is artificial intelligence, which can take over more mundane tasks, freeing up your team for higher-level projects. Or, as another example, there are truck sensors that can work with mobile apps to keep customers informed about their delivery status, providing better customer service while alleviating staff time answering inquiries on freight locations.

Plan now to adjust your course and begin carefully vetting and implementing new systems into your business model. The road ahead might look different, but it leads to the same destination: to deliver the best service in the most efficient way.

You have a succession plan for the people in your company. Now make sure you have one for your technology, too. And when you do, have a performance plan in place, accept upgrades, add functionality and leverage your investment.

Perspective



Ben Wiesen is president of Carrier Logistics Inc., which provides transportation software to less-than-truckload, combined truckload and LTL, package delivery and asset light and non-asset logistics providers.