

Investing in your business systems?

Don't overlook the user training

Organisations typically invest in new or upgraded business systems as a way of improving the effectiveness of their operation and increasing their cost efficiency. However, what is often overlooked is the fact that it isn't the system in itself that will bring the efficiencies but how it is used.

This means that training everyone who will use the system at some level is the best way to realise the anticipated business benefits. But how do you identify the most effective user training programme for your organisation, particularly with budgets and resources under pressure? Sarah Kirk, MD at Optimum Technology Transfer Ltd, offers the following advice:

The choices are very broadly: give your system 'super users' responsibility for training other users, either themselves or by using in-house trainers; rely on the training provided by the software vendor; hand over the project to a professional training consultancy; or a combination of these approaches.

Carrying out a detailed analysis of the precise project training needs, including evaluating the available resources, is the first step in determining the optimum programme for your organisation. The amount, type, content and timing are all critical factors, as are the audience, the delivery and the supporting documentation.

There are ten key questions which can help inform your decision:

1. What level of resources will you need to employ? It is easy to under-estimate the amount of planning, communication and administration required to deliver a major IT training roll-out programme with critical deadlines.
2. Will your training solutions be tailored to the specific system build and the users' requirements based on their roles?
3. How versatile and extensive are the available training options to address the differing skills and needs of the users? Do they go beyond standard classroom presentations and 'drop-in' surgeries to offer a bespoke programme that can include e-learning, floor-walking, one-to-one coaching and customised documentation?
4. If the users need to also work with other integrated systems as part of their role, will the design of the training programme have the flexibility to take this into account?
5. Do the trainers have the required skills and knowledge - are they used to training on IT systems? Ideally they should be fully experienced and accredited IT trainers.
6. How will the training programme be managed? An experienced training project manager will ensure that the training programme keeps on track with the system design and build or upgrade project schedule.

7. Is there enough administrative support available? Handling the complex logistics behind training course bookings, communication, feedback and analysis is very time consuming.
8. If external training resources are required, how will they integrate with your internal resources and will they be available for ongoing rollout, upgrade or refresher training?
9. What documentation will be required and how will this be kept up to date in the longer term? Any training documentation and plans prepared externally should be available for hand over after the initial training programme to help your in-house trainers extend the long term benefits.
10. Finally, take into account any previous systems training experiences - what lessons were learned? Check that any external training provider being considered has an established client case study list with available endorsements and references.

According to the National Computing Centre, incomplete training of system users results in organisations not fulfilling the potential from their technology investments. A report by Lifelong Learning UK also determined that almost half of workers say training would make them feel more confident using technology in the workplace.



In addition, the analysts Gartner estimate that each hour of effective system training is worth five hours to the employing organisation. This is attributed to well-trained users reaching the required skill level in a quarter of the time, needing less support from peers and helpdesks and spending less time correcting errors.¹

The key to the decision of which training route to follow is bearing in mind that any business system, however complex and powerful, is simply a tool. It is the way that it is used that makes it valuable. Focusing training on the user, both at the initial implementation and subsequent upgrades, is usually a small cost compared to the total investment. It can be the best way to realise those business benefits that justified the investment in the system in the first place.

¹ Aldrich, C. (2000). The Justification of IT Training. Gartner Research Note DF-11-3614.