

Business Information Zone

How to Get an Upgrade to Your Information System

By Kevin Lee Elder

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We've probably all experienced an upgrade to information technology (IT) or an information system. You know the normal process. You leave work late on a Friday. You leave lots of loose ends, half entered data in the middle of processing some information. It can wait until Monday to be completed. A fresh week, well rested, that will 'fix' it. Unfortunately when you come in to work on Monday you find that the IT guys have been in all weekend. Your old system is gone and a new 'upgraded' system is in its place. Many thoughts come to mind, most of them can't be printed here. The ones that can be printed would be something like this:



- § Who authorized this?
- § Who tested it?
- § Who paid for this?
- § Where is the old system?
- § How long will it take to get the old system back?
- § Who knew and when did they know about this?
- § Someone is going to pay for this.

Welcome to the direct cutover approach to system conversions and upgrades. It looks the cheapest on paper; however, it rarely is and the loss is more than monetary. The staff will lose confidence in the IT guys, who had little support as it was, and it all could have been avoided. It would be the cheapest and best method if everything runs smoothly but it rarely if ever does. If the upgrade isn't significantly better, if all the old data is not properly loaded, and most importantly if the large majority of users did not know it was coming they will most likely sabotage it. It is human nature to not like change.

We all have someone we work with who can break IT and systems, any IT or system. We'll call him Ben (as in been there done that!). The rest of us can sit back and be unproductive that Monday morning when the new 'upgrade' arrives. Oh, the first time you get direct cutovered you might jump in and try the new

system out. You might actually put some data in the system and see if you can find the old data to be productive. Most of the rest will be waiting for Ben to bring the upgrade down. By lunchtime Ben has usually done his 'job'. The message comes from the IT guys to take a long lunch while they look at the problem and 'fix' it. While everyone is buying rounds for Ben, the old system is loaded back on your desktops. The people who tried the new system have learned the lesson to sit back like the rest of us and be unproductive when new systems arrive, waiting for Ben to do his 'job'. Therefore, the direct cutover is rarely the cheapest or the fastest since you have to cutover, again and again and again until Ben is finally defeated or bored.

How can this be avoided? Use a different upgrade approach. Try prototyping the new system. Convert the old data over to the new system and let some power users give you feedback and possibly help design some of the new features they really need. You might also want to Beta test the new system. Let Ben and a few others get the 'upgrade' version 1.0 before everyone else. This way only a few actually see the first faulty version before it breaks and is replaced with version 2.0. Either of these approaches will allow the word of the new system to leak out slowly so that fateful Monday is not so much of a surprise and more users will be involved in the process which is always a good thing. It might look like it costs more on paper to use these approaches, but the not so easy to quantify loss in productivity and respect for the IT and systems is not to be overlooked. The highest price approach appears to be running the new system and old system in parallel, only cutting over to the new system when all the bugs are worked out. But this approach will lead to the smoothest conversion and least amount of loss in all those intangibles.

You can upgrade your system many different ways, through beta testing, prototyping, phased approaches, parallel conversions or the most often overused approach of the direct cutover. If you want to save the most time and money in the long run, don't let Ben ruin your Monday by winning another bet and bringing your upgrade down by lunchtime. Learn how to get an upgrade to your information system that actually works the first time.