

Introducing new IT systems

The introduction of new systems exposes any organisation to risk. A successful training strategy, by establishing the necessary knowledge and skills together with a plan for their implementation, minimises this risk by reducing or removing the following potential problems:

- lack of support for the change process through poor understanding of what is happening, and why and how the individual will be affected
- poor preparation for the launch date leading to confusion, error and frustration
- teething troubles in the use of new IT systems due to poor or incomplete knowledge
- misunderstandings in relation to working practices where training has focused solely on the technology
- failure to optimise the investment made through poor and/or inconsistent application/integration of new processes and IT systems
- lack of ability to identify opportunities to use the new 'toolkit' proactively to provide a better service
- additional investment being required to support early post-change operations
- increased resistance to future changes and IT systems if the initial implementation is racked by problems
- delay in accruing the financial benefits sought from the new system.

New systems generally induce changes in working practices: the system is being introduced to improve performance, not just to speed up the way in which things are done currently.

The success of the new system lies fully in the willingness and ability of its users to adjust to the new technology and effectively apply the new working practices required. In this environment, information, education and training are recognised as critical success factors.

- **Inform:** It is essential that everyone in the organisation knows, in advance, that the system is being implemented, understands the business rationale for its introduction and feels part of the implementation process.
- **Educate:** New systems generally mean new ways of working. Staff need to know how the sales process will change, including any adjustments to interacting with clients, administration, documentation, sales approach and the resulting change in procedures.
- **Train:** Users have to be trained to effectively and consistently operate the technology. Training must focus on application of the new system in the context of the process and the user's role.
- **Support:** On-going support is required to build user confidence and to facilitate productivity. Reference materials, and manager support will ensure that users continue to operate effectively.

The nature of the impending changes demands the construction of an implementation training strategy that is comprehensive and integrated. It is essential that all elements of the training strategy focus on the business issues as well as the system requirements.

The programme needs to support:

- the internal 'marketing' and launch of the new system
- any attitudinal changes necessary for adoption of the new working practices
- the transfer of the required knowledge and skills to implement the system / process
- the long-term training and support needs of existing and new employees.