# Quick guide: Implementing an IT solution

This Quick Guide is part of a series of information products aimed to assist small to medium sized businesses purchasing an Information Technology (IT) solution.

The focus of this Quick Guide is on assisting businesses with the implementation of a new IT system. This includes advice regarding installation arrangements, staff training and the management of ongoing operational issues.
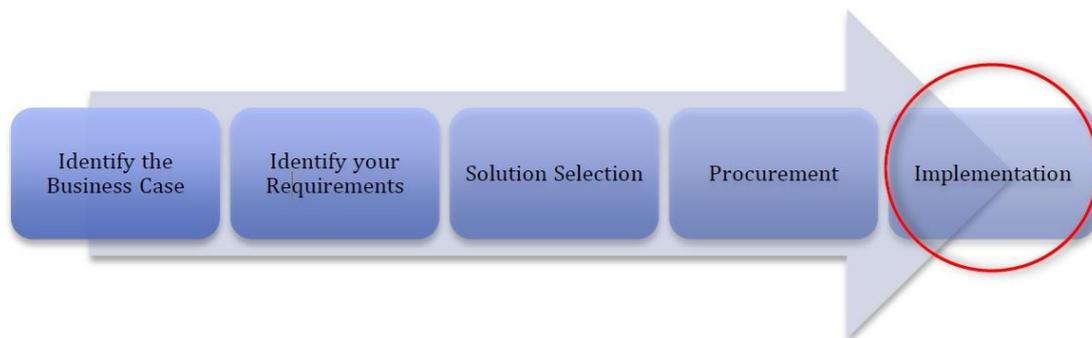
Implementing a New IT Solution

Implementation of a new IT system should be regarded as a specific project. The following provides a useful framework to manage the overall implementation process.
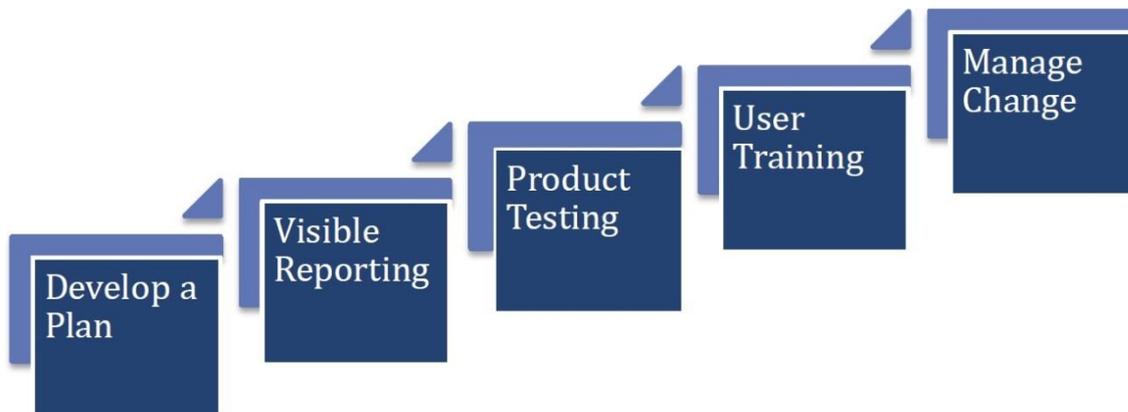
Step One: Develop a Plan

Like all projects, the purpose of the Plan is to organise and allocate the time, cost and resources necessary to achieve the effective implementation of a new IT system. It is also the means by which you can identify and control potential risks.

While implementation of the IT system is primarily a task for the vendor, and development of the Plan their responsibility, it is highly recommended that the business is involved in the process. This ensures that the business is aware of the details of the Plan and satisfied that these are consistent with the undertakings provided by the vendor regarding delivery of the product/service.

Because implementation has the potential to disrupt day-to-day business operations, it is important that the business has clear visibility of timeframes and delivery milestones. Poor management of these has the potential to add additional costs and negatively impact business as usual processes and production activities.

Potential risks also need to be identified and appropriate control mechanisms agreed. For example:

- What are the potentials impacts on production and how will these be managed?

- Will customer service be affected?

- How will service expectations be managed?

- Is there any risk to data integrity or security?

- Is all data appropriately backed up?

Appointment of an internal project manager or internal resource to track the implementation process is recommended. A key responsibility of this role is ensuring there is a clear point of contact within the business for all issues relevant to the system implementation process. This includes responsibility for both internal (from within the business) and external (from the vendor/supplier) contacts.

This is important to ensure the business is fully aware of and can respond to, issues and concerns as they emerge.

While implementation activities are the key responsibility of the vendor, it is critical the business retains a high level of control over the overall process. This ensures the objectives and expectations of the business are met and potential risks mitigated.

Components of a Typical Project Plan:

- Identification and documentation of tasks/ activities

- Appointment of a Project Manager

- Specification of timeframes for when tasks will be done and completed

- Allocation of responsibility for who will be doing each task

- Understanding potential dependencies, i.e. one task cannot commence until another has been completed

- Specification of agreed delivery milestones

- Clear articulation of agreed deliverables

- Identification of key risks

- Development of risk mitigation strategies

- Reporting arrangements, including reporting and documentation requirements for management

- Stakeholder management

- Change management.

Step Two: Progress Visibility and Reporting

Establishing a structured reporting arrangement with the vendor enables the business to maintain clear visibility of the progress of the implementation process. This should include regular, scheduled updates to the designated internal project officer and an agreed format for reporting progress to the overall manager of the business or the business management team.

Engagement with management is essential to ensure their ongoing ownership of the project and to alert them to any issues that could impact the business. This is good risk management practice and ensures mitigating actions or contingency plans are executed as required and with the relevant authority.

Tip:

- Don't feel obliged to implement a system all at once. In some instances, it is both appropriate and feasible to phase implementation to reflect the needs and operations of the business.

- Where appropriate, options for staging implementation should be discussed with the vendor.

Step Three: Product and System Testing

All components of the system need to be thoroughly tested prior to release to the operational environment of the business. This includes:

- Testing that the overall system works in accordance with the specifications developed

- Testing that the different components of the system work together as specified

- Where the system has to integrate with other internal or third party systems, testing that this integration is seamless and achieves the anticipated results

- Testing the performance of the system such as its stability and reliability under different conditions, i.e. under both normal and peak load conditions

- Where required, testing that the designated number of multiple users can access the system at the same time and without any degradation of performance

- User testing to ensure the system functions as expected and that all the required functionality is operational to users

- Ensuring the system is secure and cannot be compromised by unauthorised users

While this is also the role of the vendor, it is important that the business is fully aware of what needs to be done, and can check that it has been done, to ensure the system is implemented correctly and ready for use.

Step Four: User Training

Training staff that are the users of the system is critical. A businesses' ability to achieve the anticipated return on its investment will only be realised if the system is used to its optimal capability. This requires users (staff) to fully understand the functional capabilities of the system and be familiar and comfortable using the system to undertake their business activities.

Vendors typically offer a range of training materials and packages. These can include on-site, personalised training; personalised, remote (ie over the internet) training sessions; webinars; online videos; and training manuals and documents.

It is also important for users to understand what to do when something goes wrong and to ensure the right support mechanisms are in place to resolve issues as they occur. This is critical to avoid users losing confidence in the product and their ability to use it.

Step Five: Manage Change

While often forgotten, managing the process of change in the organisation resulting from the introduction of a new system to the business is critical to success.

The discipline of Change Management refers to the process of assisting individuals, teams or organisations accept and adopt changes in their business environment. The focus is on the people in the business and helping them to adapt to the new arrangements. This could include the use of new software tools and applications; new hardware; updated business processes; new service offerings; revised lines of control or management arrangements.

External changes may also need to be managed such as where invoices to customers change appearance or customer data needs to be revalidated. In these cases, management of the change process also needs to extend to customers and suppliers.

If people do not use the system to its full capabilities, there is a risk that the business goals will not be achieved. Staff should be advised of what they need to do if a problem occurs. This includes how to report issues and ensuring they receive feedback regarding the solution.

Tips for Managing Change within a Business

- Inspire people to want to change by making objectives relevant, real and achievable

- Engage a team of people with enthusiasm and commitment, and the right mix of skills to support and champion change

- Articulate a clear and simple vision and strategy for the future state

- Communicate clearly, simply and regularly. Communicate progress and achievements

- Remove obstacles for change. Encourage constructive feedback and input to the change process

- Set milestones that are achievable. Finish current stages before starting new ones

- Foster determination and persistence to achieve identified goals and milestones

- Make change stick - incorporate acceptance of change into the culture of the business.

Operating the System

Once the system is operational, it is important that it is maintained and kept up to date. This ensures the business benefits from the latest upgrades and functional enhancements provided by the vendor. This also improves the longevity of the product and its relevance in the face of emerging technology trends. Furthermore, this will underpin the continued competitiveness of the business.

Induction and ongoing training related to the product enables all staff to optimise the capabilities of the product, including its latest updates.

Providing feedback to the vendor about product functionality or performance helps them focus future product or service developments and improvements on the needs of their customers.

Further information

Visit the business website at business.gov.au.