

Basic IT Planning Steps

Every worthwhile project is built three times, once in the mind of its designer, once on paper and once in the construction.

This unwritten rule applies whether the project is a building, a bridge, a park, a company or an IT project.

The first glimmer may just be a fleeting vision of the desired product seen in the mind of the visionary. He or she is recognizing a need or a way to fulfill a need. The visionary may or may not have the wherewithal to finish the project alone. In most instances the project will require a team effort. As an example, the visionary may "see" the finished building with people coming and going and using the facilities. The nuances of the foundation design, interior framework, electrical wiring, heating and cooling ducts and more may not even be in the mind of the visionary. The fact that some of these items are needed may not even occur to the visionary. Yet all of this and then some are required if the structure is to stand and be a credit to its visionary.

An Information Technology project is no different in that it requires the same depth of planning. It requires a team of professionals just the same as a new structure requires a team of architects, engineers and tradesman to bring it to completion and plan for its maintenance. Just as no structure can be built and then ignored, an IP project requires maintenance (preferably proactive maintenance) to keep it running in an efficient and effective manner.

Step 1: Is the envisioned need the entire need? Should more be done? Are there any constraints on the design? (e.g., budget, schedule, use of current infrastructure)

Step 2: What is the software that will fulfill the need? Can it be purchased off-the-shelf ready to use? Will it need modification? Must the software be developed from scratch?

Step 3: What is the foundation needed to support the desired software? What are the requirements for networks, servers, storage, work station computers, printers? data cabling and electrical facilities, etc?

Step 4: What will be the cost to install and maintain? What are the trade-offs?

Step 5: How long will it take to install? How does this time frame fit into the timing of other projects that may be underway?

Step 6: How will we transition from what is now to what is envisioned?

Step 7: How much training will be needed and when should it start?

Step 8: What will be required to keep the new system maintained and running?

A good plan requires designers who have a current working knowledge of the disciplines and current experience in multi-faceted planning. The goal is to do it once and do it right on time and within budget.