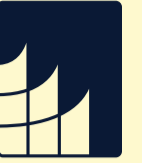




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13 STEPS TO AVOID ADVERTISING AGENCY SOFTWARE DISASTERS



13 steps to avoid advertising agency software disasters

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Fine, so you can detect a person's waist size as they glance at your billboard and then tweet them an appropriate, branded fashion tip as they pass a beacon an hour later in the shopping mall. That's all great, but can you actually send out the correct invoices for the campaign?

The trend in marketing has always been to latch on to the sexiest new bit of tech while neglecting the core machinery of running an efficient business, the critical systems that do all the heavy lifting of accounting and project management. Maintaining inefficient business processes puts your clients at a competitive disadvantage as well as your own business.



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Secrecy has no place in an implementation project

You should declare your budget up-front and challenge the vendor to say whether project objectives can be met within that constraint. Too good to be true? Don't be afraid to challenge low as well as high estimates. Inevitably, something will have been missed.



Avoid the temptation to start the project with a lengthy sales cycle

Don't try to understand all requirements in order to obtain highly accurate estimates and commitments from vendors. Although this looks like an attractive idea at first glance, this detailed RFP approach is more likely to contribute to project failure, because the RFP and formative design will be based on as-is functions and processes which may be swept aside when improved by the new functionality.



Vendors are experts at extracting the truth

Vendors are experts at extracting the truth from reluctant process owners. A day spent on functional analysis without your supplier's input is a day wasted – they will have to go over it again properly and pose the awkward questions that your staff may not be brave enough to ask. Worse still, your subject-matter experts will resent having to cover old ground.



Don't try to cram your agency into a one-size-fits-all system

It won't suit you. Why pay for a tailored suit and end up in a straightjacket? Your business management system should complement your unique agency culture rather than impose rigid system processes. Ensure your vendor has the development skills and resources to customise the system to your needs.



Beware consultants who rush straight into the solution design

Beware consultants who rush straight into the solution design without having a complete understanding of the whole business function (including the unhappy path). Missed requirements can cause a complete redesign – these last-minute changes cost ten times more to fix than timely requirements, because everything has to be recoded and retested.





Ask the the tricky questions

Interview every design stream lead and ask them the tricky questions about your processes. Find some little-known function and ask them to design a process that uses it. If they say that development is required, you have an amateur on your hands.



Agree the right vendor implementation contract

Never agree to a vendor's implementation contract without stated deliverables and a price for each deliverable – one for each business objective. Do not accept vague promises to 'help' you deliver, 'assist' your team or 'manage' the objectives. You are paying the vendor to design, build, configure, populate, rectify, deliver, implement and guarantee the performance of your system – accept nothing less.



Don't buy too many licences ahead of time

Vendors make a sizeable margin on licence sales and may be encouraged to sell into quarterly targets. There is no sensible way to predict your client licence requirements before analysis, design and organisational change are fully defined. It is perfectly feasible to start the application build on a 10-user system and add more seats on a just-in-time basis. You will be paying support fees on all licences from day one of their purchase, which has zero ROI – do not allow the supplier to pressure you into buying licences ahead of time.



Resource the project properly

You must resource your project properly. Ask in your office for anyone with 50% time to spare to put their hand up... Do not delude yourself that a major software project can be accomplished solely by process owners and super-users who already have a day job. Yes – you must put your best people into the design effort.



Do your data cleansing NOW

The single greatest cause of a go-live postponement is poorly planned and executed data migration. If you can't sort out your data when the pressure is off, you don't stand a chance when the heat is on.



Be ready for testing

Gear up adequately for the huge testing effort needed when your software build is delivered. If you can't test software, configurations, migrated data and security settings promptly as they are being delivered, your warranty will have expired long before you find the defects.



Ensure the vendor's system is capable

Ensure that the vendor's system can capture concise data for each business objective/work-stream, and insist on Monday-morning progress reports. These must state the percentage complete/time to finish. You must challenge slippage as soon as it occurs. Reserve the right to replace team members who don't keep up.



Make sure your system is future-proof

Technology moves forward at warp speed, and getting left behind leaves you at the mercy of the competition. Your management system should not only be able to scale with your agency, but also have the R&D backing to keep it on the leading edge. Make sure your vendor is resourced for the long haul.





Like any business relationship, that between software vendor and client is a balance of trust and circumspection. By following the steps above – valuing your vendor’s expertise and demanding from them the highest standards – you help build that trust.

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