Why Technology Fails
Our Editorial Advisory Board knows the reasons.

By John Tredennick

I

RAN TECHNOLOGY AT Denver-based Holland & Hart for more than a decade, first as a guerrilla fighter and then as a C.I.O./C.T.O.

Here are my irreverent thoughts on how to really screw up a technology plan.

1. Form a committee
One sure way to screw things up is to appoint a technology committee. Committees are guaranteed to study things to death and reach the wrong result at the wrong time. If you want a committee for “buy in” or window dressing, fine. But don’t fool yourself into thinking a committee is going to make good decisions.

2. Hire a consultant
The first thing you do after you form a committee is hire a consultant. There are probably a couple out there worth hiring but I doubt your committee will find them.

3. Do a “Request for Proposal”
After you get your committee formed and your consultant hired, an RFP is the next step. Your consultant will charge you $50,000 to prepare the RFP, which will say, “Buy Microsoft Office for a firm word processor.” At the least your consultant will get some practice using the search/replace function in his/her word processor. A great way to waste time.

4. Appoint a technology partner (and give her no authority)
I love it. Let’s have a technology partner but not put him in charge of anything. What you really do need is a technology partner who runs the technology — otherwise your firm is just wasting time. That means hiring/firing authority over the I.T. staff, ownership of the technology budget and power over the purse. And, by the way — the first step of a good technology partner is to fire the Technology Committee and probably the existing I.T. director (and maybe much of the staff).

5. Change management every year.
This is my favorite. After you get your tech partner in place, with authority to do some good, change your managing partner. Guaranteed to create a change in priorities.

6. Make you decision based on how we’ve always done it.
Lawyers drive by looking out the rear view mirror. Guarantees you’ll crash.

7. Let the staff make all the decisions
Well-meaning staffers aside, if you are going to use technology as a strategic weapon, you better have somebody who understands the big picture — and the top of firm management.

8. One size fits all.
That is almost never the case, particularly at a law firm. The exceptions usually lead to innovation.

Some firms are still studying this Internet phenomenon and trying to decide whether there is anything to it.

10. Take yourself too seriously.
Smile, relax, enjoy. Set realistic goals and get something done. Even at a walk you will leave most committees behind. If I failed to offend anyone, my apologies.

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