

Brown Smith Wallace Consulting

Successful Software Selection Whitepaper Series

Are You Under-Utilizing Your Technology?

By Steve Epner, CSP

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Are you and your management team getting the information you need to make the right decisions at the right time for the right situation? Is the information you get from your computer system:

- Current
- Accurate
- Reliable
- Meaningful
- Relevant

If not, you may not be using your computer to its fullest capacity. According to most surveys, businesses use less than 15 percent of the features and functions that are available on their computer systems. While automation systems are one of the largest financial and time investments that most companies make, most owners are pitifully unaware of what can be done. It is a tremendous waste of resources.

What you want to do to be more successful is to get a greater return on your information investment?

You must begin by documenting what you are doing today. This is imperative as most companies have created entangled masses of paperwork based on system failures of long ago. These quick fixes have never been reviewed as systems have been upgraded, enhanced, or replaced. As a result, most people force their current system to try to do things the old way. The bottom line result is that we use very little of what the system can do for us as we try and duplicate or imitate old procedures that are no longer necessary or appropriate.

We also need to look at what steps have been added to your paper and information flow because you just “want to be sure”. Many times we add steps to review, revise, and approve computer-generated output because there is no trust in what is being created.

Proper planning and execution of your paperwork flow will correct this situation. Our many years of experience have allowed us to find that most companies can easily reduce 20 percent of the time they spend handling paper. In some cases, the number will go as high as 75 percent. Don't be embarrassed if, as you look around, you find many things that just don't need to be done.

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Another area of analysis that we find very helpful is to look for bottlenecks. When we do a bottleneck analysis, we take a look at the forms that enter, are created in, and leave each desk. It is quite an eye-opener for most executives to see how paper is processed in their offices. There are many times when people get paper “just to look”. They add no value.

We are very conscientious as we eliminate duplication, bottlenecks and efforts that don't add value for the company or the end user.

More importantly, we take a look at the numbers that you use to run your business. It always amazes us how many people spend time re-entering data into spreadsheets so they can get valuable management information. Most systems today have many of these features built in. We will help you find what is already there to reduce the time and effort you need to find the answers to help you make decisions. Furthermore, we will reduce the number of errors caused by transcribing numbers and the time and effort involved in running multiple systems manually when the answers can be provided on an almost automatic basis.

To make things even better, we can often help you create graphical output which will show you exactly where the company is and where it is going. These reports can be produced on a daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis. By using “running averages”, we are able to smooth out individual peaks and valleys so that a trend is more easily recognized. Executives should get an End of Day Report that shows how they did. This is available in all of the systems we have reviewed and we would guess that it is available in what you already have if you are willing to look for it.

Some time ago (or in the recent past), you made a major investment in automation for your company. You spent a lot of money to buy hardware, software, and services. You took valuable resources (people) and put them through weeks of training, conversion, and start up. The end result is one of the largest non-inventory investments that you will ever make (other than brick and mortar). If you are using only 15 percent of this investment, you are not getting the return you deserve or should expect.

Step back from what you are doing, take a look at how things operate, be prepared to make changes, and you can increase the effectiveness of your information investment. Just doubling your return to 30 percent should have major impact on your ability to operate the business effectively and to reduce the cost of servicing your clients.

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About The Author

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Steve Epner has been directing traffic on the information super highway since 1966. A highly regarded industry expert, Epner is widely published and has provided comment for national business publications including the *Wall Street Journal*. His experience in business, technology and strategic planning makes him a nationally renowned technical speaker.

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About The Brown Smith Wallace Consulting Group

The Brown Smith Wallace Consulting Group has been serving the distribution community for more than 20 years through the publication of the Distribution Software Guide, speaking at industry programs, giving free telephone advice to distributors and providing fee-based consulting services to companies who need help selecting the best software packages for their business.

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