
FEATURE ARTICLE

For More Information Contact:

Danielle Oser
314.983.1266 or 314.983.1200
doser@bswllc.com

Mindy Lally
314.983.1288 or 314.983.1200
mlally@bswllc.com

For Immediate Publication

There's No Such Thing As An Easy Conversion

By Steve Epner

There is only one thing that can be said about conversions: "There is no such thing as an easy conversion!" Conversion is a word that strikes fear in the heart of anyone who has ever participated in one. Vendors tell you: "No problem, we do this all of the time." Then they cross their fingers and hope they are not around when it hits the fan.

A conversion sounds simple enough. Spend some time training on a new system. Convert the master files in your spare time. Then "cut over" to the new system and turn the old one off. What is difficult about that? Plenty!

Over time I have learned some basic truths about converting from one system to another. Here is a simple list followed by some ideas on how to minimize problems:

1. It will take longer than expected
2. It will cost more than budgeted
3. It will not work as you thought
4. It will be much harder to do
5. It will not be received well
6. It will cause pain and suffering

Everyone underestimates the time necessary. They figure: "My people are smarter and work harder than the average. They want to get rid of the old system as soon as possible and will go the extra mile. Therefore, we will get the work done faster than the plan."

Do not kid yourself. The vendor has been through many more conversions than you will ever do. They have learned what it really takes. Accept their estimates as closer than you will be able to guess. Realize that their knowledge base is solid and they have heard it all

-MORE-

There's No Such Thing As An Easy Conversion

Page 2 of 4

before.

Most companies are surprised when they see the cost of purchasing and implementing their selected system. The natural tendency is to look for places to cut. The first two are training and conversion. These are the last two that should be adjusted down. There is never enough time, training or assistance.

Give yourself all of the benefit you can get. The investment of dollars for the system is just the tip of the iceberg. The largest costs are associated with the wear and tear on your people. Do not stress them out further by limiting the help they deserve. Take whatever the best budget estimate and add at least twenty five percent. You will be glad to have it.

Systems rarely work as they appeared in the demonstrations. Make sure there is plenty of time for experimenting and understanding how the systems will really work. Start with a limited amount of data (4 customers, 3 suppliers, 6 products, etc.). Then plan to test all of the aspects of your business. Enter orders, payments, purchase orders, inventory movement, everything. Then print all reports, look at on-screen displays and generally see how the system handles your workflow. Check everything out. Make sure the answers are predictable.

Next, make sure you check out the year-end processes. Most companies wait until the end of the year to find out what does not work. To find out that if they had only changed the entry process, the answers would be right. Run all year-end processes and make sure that all departments get the right information in a form they can use.

The conversion itself will be more difficult than expected because no one ever thinks about keeping the old system running while training on the new. This is like giving everyone a second full-time job. People will get stressed. Be sure to give them sufficient time to be successful. Bring in temporary services to keep the old system operational if needed. Allow staff to play with the new system from their homes if possible. The more time to check it out, the smoother the final conversion.

During the testing, it will suddenly become very obvious that everything is not better and easier about the new system. There will be grumbling, complaining and gnashing of teeth. Each time something does not work perfectly, you will hear about how well it works in the current (old) system.

Some people who were afraid of change in the first place will jump on any problem to prove their point: The whole project is a mistake. Keep them from getting the upper hand.

There's No Such Thing As An Easy Conversion

Page 3 of 4

Admit to any problems right away. Publish the solutions and explanations just as fast. Keep everyone informed and up-to-date. This includes customers and suppliers as well as employees. They will hear all about it and need to be part of the loop, as it will affect their relationship and procedures.

Finally, the people most involved with the new system will be sought out for public floggings and other forms of punishment. Those who have to work overtime to keep things running will curse the project. Anyone who has to learn something new, and find out it is a moving target will be concerned and even frightened.

Have patience. Soon, the grumbling will die down. New procedures will start to feel right. The initial bugs will be worked out. Things will start running smoothly. All of the sudden, people will start to wonder how you ever lived on the old system so long: "We should have converted years ago."

Conversions may not be easy, but they are controllable. The most important advice – manage expectations. If people are aware that this will be a difficult time, they can be prepared. If business partners know change is coming, they will work with you to make it successful. If everything proves to work easier than expected, you will be a hero. If it does not, then you were right and the company was prepared. Either way, you win and the new system will be there to support you long into the future.

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. Epner can be reached at sepner@bswllc.com.

St. Louis based Brown Smith Wallace Consulting Group, founded in 1976, is a leader in the strategic use of technology to create competitive advantage. While other firms may bring answers based on their experience, we use our experience to help our clients find the unique answers to their unique situations.

Brown Smith Wallace, which has revenue of \$13 million, is the second largest locally owned independent full-service CPA and business consulting firm in Missouri. Brown Smith Wallace, with offices in St. Louis, St. Charles and Chicago, makes a measurable difference in clients' lives by making sure clients get more than just a good return on their investment, finding hidden value, looking where others forget, bridging gaps to form long lasting

There's No Such Thing As An Easy Conversion

Page 4 of 4

relationships, being accessible and by putting a guarantee in writing. For more information visit www.bswllc.com or call 314.983.1200.

#

EDITORS NOTE: Permission to reprint is hereby given to all print, broadcast and electronic media. Permission is also granted for reasonable editing, including article title change and customizing for your audience/industry. **Please send a copy of the published information to: Brown Smith Wallace, Mindy Lally, 1050 N. Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63132**