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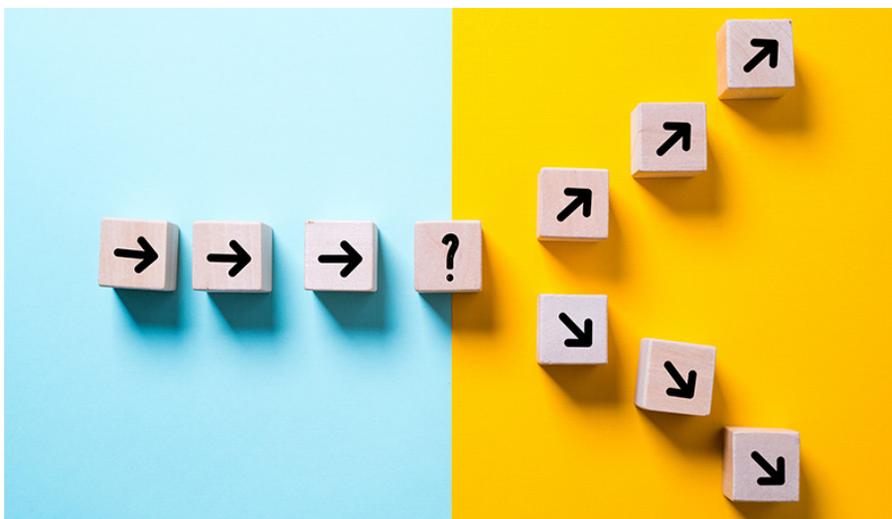
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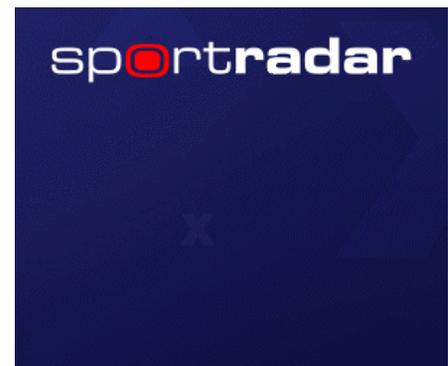
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Best Practices: Purchasing a New System

 Claudia Winkler  Gaming Operations



How to establish a formal process for major projects



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The definition of a “best practice” is a commercial or professional procedure that is accepted or prescribed as being correct or most effective. If you Google “best practice,” there are MORE THAN 1,270,000,000 results! The challenge is to define the “best practices” that will work for your organization.

There are many factor that can influence your best practices. Key factors include:

- Company culture
- Regional characteristics
- Technology
- Your target audience/guest

Understanding that every company has a unique culture and, in many cases, regional characteristics and traditions also play a major role in the lives of both the team members and the guests. The target audience may also be determined by the product offering. If the enterprise’s main offering is slots, it would not be the first choice for table game players. If the enterprise has mostly food court offerings, it will not attract players looking for a fine dining experience. The one thing that is universally the same is the technology that runs the business.

Yes, there are differences between manufacturers, but all systems basically provide the same core functionality based on the specific need for which they are designed. For example, Micros and InfoGenesis are both point of sale systems that take orders and process guest payment. LMS and Opera are hotel/lodging management systems that control room inventory, assign guest rooms, enable additional services for the guest, etc. These systems and their respective manufacturers, as well as all the other vendors that support the gaming and hospitality industry want to earn your business. You will need your vendor, working with you as a partner, to achieve the following best practices.

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With decades of experience in the gaming and hospitality industry, I would like to share my top three best practices that I would consider “universal.” This means that they should be adopted by all organizations, small and large, tribal, privately held or publicly traded.



ONE: Establish a formal process that initiates, prioritizes and provides the business case for technology projects.

This process will identify the following key requirements: the ROI analysis, project timeline and training requirements.

Every project proposal must include an ROI analysis. What is the project going to do for the business? Is it going to increase revenue? For what departments? Does the increased revenue also require additional head count?

Every project proposal must include a timeline. When is the expected start and end date of the project? Has the requesting department verified that the Information Technology department has the resources available during the project time period to provide the necessary services?

Project size and complexity: Is the project small, medium or large? Based on budget and impact to the organization, what is the level of effort that will be required? Is the project easy, moderate or complex? This includes identifying how many departments will be affected, the length of time required to implement and the number of components involved (which may include more than one vendor, integration, etc.).

As a consultant who regularly meets with clients and colleagues, I attended a CIO event during G2E this year and listened to a CIO who told our group that his department had over 130 projects in progress, either on the calendar or under consideration by the steering committee. One hundred and thirty projects is a mind-boggling number of

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initiatives for any organization, let alone one that has the regulatory requirements that the gaming and hospitality industry must observe for ANY system change, no matter how small or how large. At issue, is the fact that at the majority of gaming and hospitality enterprises, leadership has not developed and published a clear set of RULES when it comes to “shopping for new technology or systems.” Leadership must establish clear “rules of the road” when it comes to who can investigate new technology and systems, along with the process that should be followed. Otherwise, every level of leadership will spend countless (wasted) hours looking at new systems and technology that the enterprise cannot afford, may not be relevant to the enterprise or the enterprise does not have the bandwidth to implement in the next 12 to 24 months.



TWO: Do not be afraid to bring in consultants to provide input about major decisions or to lead major projects where expert experience is required. Major projects require additional resources; your leadership team is already fully employed. Their role is to act as the project’s executive sponsor. When decisions or issues need to be escalated, the project manager will turn to the executive sponsor for decisions and direction. There are many highly qualified consultants who can join your team with extensive prior experience leading projects like the one you are about to launch. Having a qualified resource with past experience that can join your team for a short period of time not only relieves the leadership group of the day-to-day responsibility, but it also provides an additional layer of risk management, since the consultant has prior experience and has developed tools, templates and a list of “lessons learned” that will streamline and expedite the project.

THREE: Know what systems you have and what they are capable of doing BEFORE you or your associates begin a search for a new system. I cannot tell you how many times I

have sat in front of clients who have told me that they need a system that does X, Y and Z, and I have explained to them that the system they currently have already does X, Y and Z. It may not do X, Y and Z exactly the way that they want to do it, but the functionality exists. Another hot button is analytical tools and report writers. Microsoft Power BI, Tableau, Cognos, etc., can all produce reports, graphs, dashboards, etc. Within most organizations, you can standardize on one, two at the most. The major consideration is the subscription costs and training. Most software is now sold as an annual or monthly subscription, so if you subscribe to more than one product, you are paying a subscription fee every month for each product. Also, depending on your organization, building a solid user base is important for business continuity. Having more than two of anything will dilute the number of users for each product and erode the skill set that will be available to your organization.

Implementing these “best practices” will not be easy. Change is HARD. Especially when there have not been any rules in the past. Creating the process to initiate, justify and approve projects is the first step. Understanding what licenses you already subscribe to or own in your software portfolio usually requires a research project to find all the necessary information (because some of the software is actually locally installed on individual desktops – which is a big NO-NO). And finally, overcoming the objection or fear of bringing in an outside consultant may take a leap of faith! What I can attest to as a consultant who has worked with many gaming and hospitality enterprises, small and large, tribal, private and publicly traded, is that we are not there to replace anyone or take away anyone’s job. A consultant is there to ensure the success of the project and to make sure that the key stakeholders receive the recognition they deserve for all their hard work. For my team, sharing our knowledge and network will provide the next generation with the tools and knowledge base to continue the process into the future.

Claudia's Three Takeaways

Establish a formal process

Bring in additional resources

Know your current system capabilities



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