Qualified Remodeler®

November 2014

PROJECTS | PRODUCTS | PROFITS

PRODUCTS

EXTERIOR
KITCHEN/BATH
TOOLS
TRENDS: HVAC 28

PROJECTS

HOME REBORN

An addition and radical rehab of an old home produces a total transformation 24

PROFITS

- Estimating
- Design details
- Data center 35

40th YEAR Qualified Remodeler

Properly introduce technology in your company

Jeremy Martin, a third-generation contractor, is a graduate of the University of Texas with a Bachelor of Science in engineering with high honors.He is a Certified Graduate Builder, Certified Green Professional and recently attained the highest certification offered by the National Association of Home Builders: Graduate Master Builder. Additionally, he is current chairman of the Austin Area Remodelers Council and a member of the Home Builders Association of Greater Austin Board of Directors.

In prior *Qualified Remodeler* columns, I've discussed our firm's journey to becoming a paperless, cloud-based and mobile remodeler. During that time, we've implemented a variety of technology solutions across various departments — estimating/purchasing, accounting, customer relationship management, scheduling, document management and digital plan management.

As owners, we constantly strive to make our teams more efficient. We know that increased workforce productivity will lead to improved profitability. At the same time, technology is advancing at a dizzying pace, and the cost to procure these magical tools is dropping rapidly. The risk, which is very real, is that remodeling companies will haphazardly purchase and deploy a variety of disparate technology solutions without following any real road map for implementation.

Much like we've all learned the best practices for flashing windows or installing wainscot, we've had to learn the proper methodology for deploying technology within our company. What we've settled into is a five-part process.

Once you've determined which broken process inside your company you intend to address and have selected what you think is a functional technology solution, you must identify an internal champion. This champion will acquire the tool and be responsible for learning its capabilities, costs and applicability to your specific business problem. The champion will test the system in real world scenarios, and where necessary, solicit input from key stakeholders within the firm.

While in this stage, you will be running parallel systems. The goal of this phase is to determine suitability of the system in a low risk environment, and if promising, to develop a set of company-specific practices for implementing this tool. If the system does not deliver, then the disruption to your core operation has been minimal and your cost investment little. It is common to misfire at this stage. The goal is to do so quickly and with minimal disruption.

> "The best systems are adopted broadly, are easy to update and facilitate consistency."

Next, the champion must rol out the solution departmentwide (or companywide). This will entail classroom-style training as well as on-the-job, one-on-one training. If the champion is not a natural trainer, it may be necessary to bring in professional help for this all-important task. It is critical to understand this is not "one and done" training. It will require repetition and patience.

Once the system has taken root, it's time to solicit feedback from the entire team. Technology solutions always provide far more features than any one company may care to implement. Implementation is also highly personalized from one company to the next. For that reason, all users of the system, once they've had ample time to become familiar with the inner workings, should have the opportunity to provide feedback on how the system should be implemented within your firm.

Often these team members, who may not have a deep understanding of the technology, do have a very concrete understanding of the real world problem the technology is meant to solve. This is a critical link that can't be overlooked. In addition to getting all their valuable input, you stand a much better chance of having these stakeholders fully support the solution, simply because they had an opportunity to participate in the process.

The next stage is the most difficult — determining which feedback to incorporate and which to discard. You must guard against the temptation to overcomplicate the system. Utilizing too many features, collecting too much extraneous information or holding out for the "perfect" system are common mistakes. Remember that the best systems are adopted broadly, are easy to update, and facilitate consistency. You can always add features and capabilities down the road, once the core system has been successfully adopted.

Now it's time to go into full production mode. At this point, you are looking for consistent and disciplined usage. It is critical that you not constantly tweak how the system is being used. Even if the software provider releases shiny new features, and they will, resist the urge to continually "improve" your system. Focus your team on successfully implementing the solution you've adopted, without the added pressure of continually integrating new and improved capabilities.

It's taken us three years to fully implement six systems, so a good rule of thumb for our firm seems to be one system every six months. That said, it's important to know your team. Some companies are smaller or more open to change, and therefore are able to integrate and acclimate to new technology more rapidly. More established companies, with more employees and well established existing systems, may require a slower adoption cycle. **QR**