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## Pump the Up Value

### Six Ways to Maximize ROI on Technology You Sell

Technology has dramatically changed the way we do business today. Our ability to work virtually, communicate effortlessly, research and analyze information faster and store vast amounts of data means that each worker has the ability to be infinitely more productive.

But I have yet to see the BlackBerry that answered itself or CRM software that begins calling customers on its own. The human factor is the critical part not only to making the technology work, but in maximizing its effectiveness for the user. When the needs of the people who are going to be using the technology are not factored in during the planning for implementation, several conditions can develop.

First, people may resist using the new solution. They liked the old way better, and because the benefits and rationale for the new system have not been explained fully, they are slow to embrace it. Second, they may adapt to the new techniques, but without adequate instruction, they don't fully realize all the tools and the subsequent benefits. (In the productivity training course I conduct, I still find Microsoft Outlook users who are only using a portion of its capability.) Third, some people may abuse the new technology by using it in a way that was not intended — or worse, not wanted.

So who is responsible for ensuring the technology is fully and properly utilized? Who is responsible for ensuring the company gets the maximum return on investment and the users are fully engaged? Would you say it's the provider, the purchaser or the end user? While there are degrees of accountability for all three, savvy providers will recognize this as an opportunity to differentiate themselves from their competitors by becoming a "Technology Value Provider." It's more than just providing user manuals or setting up technical support centers. Achieving maximum value from technology requires careful planning, which includes understanding the work environment, anticipating barriers and challenges, formulating an effective communication strategy, developing education, and the support and monitoring of customer satisfaction.

So how do you achieve this? Let me offer you six guidelines.

- First, appoint someone in your organization accountable for ensuring that the user is able to achieve maximum value from the technology. This individual must have both the time and the capacity to develop an intimate understanding of the customer's business. This person should be carefully selected, but may not necessarily be the account manager or the lead technologist. He or she must be able to bridge the gaps between the technology, the business application and the human element. Create this position at the outset of the project, clearly define your expectations for the individual, establish metrics, and hold him or her accountable. If you don't have this competency within your organization, consider outsourcing or hiring a consultant.
- Second, make sure that your customer has clear expectations as to what the technology will and won't do. Mapping this out formally and early is key to being able to measure customer satisfaction and avoid problems down the line. Develop metrics that are specific and measurable and agree up front on how these will be measured and over what period of time.
- Third, involve the users in the planning process. Conduct surveys or focus groups of employees to identify what's important to them. Use your past experience from other implementations but don't assume all customers will have the same needs, issues or concerns.
- Fourth, identify the level of education needed for various types and levels of employees. Some may need hands-on, in-depth training while others only may need an online manual. It's important to take the time to understand needs in this area and provide solutions at the outset. Seldom does a company go back and try to educate its users after the

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## Factoring Human Capital Into Your Business Plan

fact and thereby miss an opportunity to maximize the full value of the technology. Also, if there is a training program, don't just list it on the company training calendar and say, "This is available to everyone." In today's business world, most are too busy and probably won't take advantage of such offerings. Make training obligatory.

- Fifth, develop a communication strategy. Explain to your employees the rationale behind the new technology. Don't try to sugarcoat or put the company spin on it. Remember that people are smart and they are always asking, "What's in it for me?" So tell them. Describe what they can expect from the new introduction and what you expect them to make of it. Anticipate all possible uses, abuses, issues and problems. Then, develop guidelines and policies to address these areas as they're being rolled out.
- Finally, develop a process for measuring the users' methods of using the technology as well as their satisfaction levels with it. This will enable you to adjust the technology, provide more training or support where necessary, and ensure that you get a maximum return on your investment. As part of this process, you should have some reporting mechanism that regularly gets viewed by the process owner.