

Ten golden rules for getting your technology right

Many IT system deliveries promise the earth through applying new and improved technology – why wouldn't you want one of these says the salesman, it's the way the industry's going....look how it's helped your competitors.....you're technology is way out of date.....

These are all great incentives to bring on new technology, but be careful of the risk you are adding to your project – you need to make wise technology choices to avoid unnecessary complication.

We have compiled the ten golden rules below to help you build an effective team at the start of the project and how to keep it that way through to delivery.

10 golden rules for getting your technology right	
1	Ask the supplier to prove the technology works. If the supplier can't show you the same technology working at another client, then you need to be careful about what you are committing to. It may sound like a small upgrade, but IT systems invariably take much longer to stabilise than anyone predicts. You need to avoid turning into the suppliers test environment.
2	Be wary of "Version 1". Early versions of any software have bugs – no matter how much the vendor has tested the product. If you want to avoid early teething troubles, steer clear of early software versions – even if the functionality looks inviting – remember, it's marketed that way! Platform upgrades are another risk which can often be hidden – you may be buying 'version 6.0' of a product, but could be unaware that it's a complete re-write from previous versions – make sure you ask your supplier.
3	Make sure it is really needed – not just a sexy bit of kit. If the technology isn't really needed to solve the problem, you'll just get the blame for adding unnecessary complication. If the technology has teething troubles and isn't essential you are going to find it difficult to convince the business to put the effort and money in to getting it working.
4	Go and see it working somewhere else. If you are unsure if a technology will work in your environment, go and find somebody who's already using it. Your supplier should be able to identify some of their customers you can talk to – if not, try user groups and forums. Not only will you get to see the technology in action, you'll also get an honest opinion about how well it works and some insight into the implementation issues you may have ahead.
5	Invest in people who know the technology. While you may have a team of people that have worked on similar products, it is essential to have a number of your team who've worked with the exact technology before. There is no substitute for knowing where the issues are likely to be and how to resolve them quickly.
6	Don't over engineer the solution. The key here is 'Keep it simple'. Most projects that fail due to the technology tried to deploy an over complex solution to a problem which was often quite simple. The majority of successful projects have deployed a simple solution very effectively. If you have to implement something more complex, make sure the risks are clearly understood, you have the right technology experts on board and you isolate

	the complexity to areas where it is absolutely necessary.
7	Validate the design early. The system design may look great on paper, but even the designer won't have 100% confidence it is going to work. Identify the most critical elements of the design and get proof that it is going to work. You can use prototypes, simulations or real trials to increase your level of confidence that the design is going to work as a complete solution.
8	Test it in its real environment. Many solutions work fine on the development and test environments but fail when they are moved into production. Make sure your development and test environments are as near to the production setup as possible. Many production issues can be attributed to fundamental design decisions made early in the project. Getting your solution working on a near-live environment – or getting it onto a production-test environment early will help you resolve identify these problems while there is still time to fix them.
9	Be prepared to remove it rather than get it working. If you are struggling to get a component to work, be prepared to replace it or switch it off in order to keep your project on track.
10	Build a good relationship with the support community. Understand how you are going to be supported once your technology is up and running. Make sure you talk with the support organisation as well as the sales and product delivery organisation – they're different parts of the business and will have a completely different view on the product. Also invest some time to investigate customer interest groups and forums – both on the supplier website and in the public domain.