

Systems Implementation Best Practices

1. **The skills required for creating and operating an effective online store are widely diverse.** You're unlikely to have all the requisite skills in-house. Identify your organizational needs and hire as quickly as possible to ensure a solid project team. Work with your provider to help you identify resources you may need to effectively carry out the implementation and ongoing support.
2. **Identify a team of super-users.** Each department that is using the new solutions should have a representative that will speak on their behalf at meetings and facilitate providing input. They will also be the ones responsible for training their teams. Identify these key resources early in the selection process to ensure success.
3. **Manage your timeline.** Both you and your provider will have identified tasks to be accomplished. Manage those tasks and make sure you have the resources to support accomplishing those tasks. Implementation requires additional time above and beyond the regular work day. Acknowledge the additional responsibility on your staff and give them the time to focus on their implementation responsibilities.
4. **Hold Weekly Meetings.** It is important to stay in constant communication with your team and your provider. Weekly meetings should occur between the team and the provider. Identifying roadblocks or challenges will allow for changes/rerouting to occur so that the timeline will be met.
5. **Train early and up to launch day.** Training should not wait until launch day. Users should have access as soon as possible so they have reached a comfort level by the time launch day arrives. Furthermore, the earlier they have access, the more they can add input to procedures and processes.
6. **Clearly define procedures and take the time for process reengineering.** Implementations are a great time to relook at your existing processes and procedures. Why are you doing things the way you are? Is it because of the current system's limitations? Create new procedures that make sense and use the new system you have selected to achieve better processes. Do not recreate procedures and processes in your new systems without taking a hard and honest look at why you do the things you do.
7. **TEST TEST TEST.** The last thing you want to do is launch without your users feeling comfortable with the solution. Testing is critical to validating procedures and software configurations. Make sure that you have a working test site to allow for ample training and testing time prior to launch.
8. **Be realistic about what can be accomplished.** Do not overly tax your project team and be forced to delay a launch date. This is one of the biggest pitfalls and risks to a successful implementation. Stay on task and manage your team's turnaround time to deliverables required of them. Make sure you are being managed appropriately by your provider as well.
9. **Identify phase 2 and phase 3 initiatives.** Put them on your roadmap with clearly defined dates. If timeline constraints force a Phase II and Phase III initiatives, identify those early and commit with your provider to get these projects accomplished. Too many times the later phases fall to the wayside. Providers tend to be much more responsive in the implementation phases instead of post launch.
10. **Have a clear and objective way of measuring success.** What is the end result that determines success? Is it documentation, processes, a decision, a successful launch day? Understand your options, if success is not achieved. Identify a back-up plan.

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eCommerce Diligence™ Checklist

Systems Implementation Key Questions to Ask Providers

Company

1. How long have you been in this business?
How many clients? How many have you lost and why?
2. What clients fall into your “sweet spot”?
3. Is your practice geared more toward enterprise, mid-market, or the SMB space?
4. What peripheral or supporting services do you offer (e.g., design, email marketing services, SEO guidance, customization, best practices)?
5. Where are you located and if you are not nearby, will you provide a team to be on site during the entire implementation?

Products/Services

1. Are your services a fixed fee or monthly?
2. Do you provide customization and implementation services? Can outside third parties be used?
3. Do you provide upgrade support?
4. Describe a typical team and what it is made up of: project management, developers, business analyst, etc.
5. Will an account manager be assigned to the retailer?
6. How long to launch a basic site? A complex site?
7. Would you support other third-party relationships as well?
8. What skill does my organization (or hired third party) need to work closely and aligned with your organization?
9. What is your SLA for support issues?
10. What technical services are available post-launch?

Features

1. Which platforms do you support?
2. What additional functionality have you developed (extensions), if any?
3. Do you do integration services?
4. What is your competitive advantage over other implementers? Why?
5. Do you provide project status reports weekly?
6. How often do you meet with management to update them on successes and challenges?
7. Do you offer additional services post-launch to help grow the business? Consulting services? Webinars? Audits?

Pricing

1. What are the typical implementation cost ranges?
2. Do you carry the license or does the retailer?
3. How do you charge for annual support? What about maintenance?
4. Are there any additional fees (e.g. gateway, integration with back-end systems)?
5. Are there additional fees for strategy or retail consulting?

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