5 Steps for a successful internal IT system launch

Being focused on end user adoption we are often asked to help customers with their internal IT system launches. Purchasing, implementing and rolling out an internal IT system involves a number of challenges. IT departments are usually very well equipped to go through the technical steps of the process – architecture planning, application testing, installation, configuration and user acceptance testing. But in many cases their expertise ends there, so when it’s time to roll out the system to the business users, the important step of the launch is often overseen, or executed without much notice. Unfortunately this unrightfully dooms the system to low user adoption and poor return on investment. In this week’s article I wanted to share five important steps to take in order to ensure a successful internal IT launch.

1. **Define a goal**
As for any project or initiative it’s important that you have a clear goal defined. What is the objective of the launch? Is it to increase adoption of a product? Perhaps you have implemented an enterprise social media platform and you want more users to create and participate in groups and discussions. Or is your goal to increase productivity? Perhaps you have upgraded to Office 2013 from a previous version and you want users to save time by using the new functionality provided? In order to measure the success of your launch event it’s best to put one or multiple metrics for your goal. If your goal is user adoption of a system perhaps you set a goal of 90% active user accounts. If your goal is productivity (which is always a tricky one to measure) you can set other goals such as time saved (perhaps on average 10-15 min/daily). Make sure that you can measure the outcome in some way, either using data from using admin logs, monitoring tools or collecting data from surveys.

2. **Understand your audience**
In order to plan a launch event suitable for your audience you need to know certain things about them.

- What type of business are they in?
- How many are they?
- Where are they located? Are they all in one physical location or are they spread out?
- What time zones are they in?
✓ What is their preferred method of communication – email, newsletters, Intranet, social media, meetings, video?
✓ What is the culture – is it young and hip or conservative, is it innovative or traditional?
✓ What would incentivize people to participate in activities – a prize or recognition?
✓ Do the employees need training in order to properly use the system? If so, what is the best way to get everyone trained?

When you have answers to these questions it’s easier for you to plan the theme and a format for your launch, whether it’s all online, offline, or a combination of both online and offline activities.

3. Decide on theme and format

Decide on an overarching theme for your product launch. The theme should be aligned with the IT system you are launching. Say for example that you are launching a new customer relationship management (CRM) system, in that case your theme might be, “Happy customers”. Or if you’re launching a new real-time communication system your theme might be, “A new era of communication”. Messaging and activities should then all go in the same theme.

The format of the launch and the types of activities you plan will depend on what you know about your audience and the type of IT system you are launching. Below are some examples of activities you can include in your launch event:

**Online activities:**
- Email invitations/newsletters
- Intranet banners
- Intranet launch site with training videos and articles, Q&A and forums
- Pledges that employees can sign online
- Web casts or recorded videos
- Online courses
- Articles
- Status updates (on social media platforms)
- Blogs
- Competitions/quizzes with prizes

**Offline activities:**
- Posters on office walls/toilet doors/cafeterias/elevators
- Branded cups, placemats, t-shirts, brochures
- Trainings/awareness sessions/brown bag lunch sessions/breakfast sessions
- Ambassador programs (train the trainer concept)
- Raffles/Lotteries/auctions/competitions
- Signing of pledges
4. Get management buy-in across business units
In order to deliver a successful launch across the entire organization it’s important that you get buy-in from key stakeholders across the organization. There is no use planning an auditorium awareness session if business unit managers will not let their staff attend. The easiest way to do this is top down. Ask the CIO/IT Director to bring up the topic at a leadership meeting, or ask him or her to send an email to the leadership team informing them about the planned launch and asking for their support.

5. Encourage participation
Even though most IT systems are implemented to provide users with additional value, this in itself is often not enough to get people excited about using it. By nature, most people are reluctant to change. It’s important that you encourage participation in the event by incentivizing people. To do this you can offer giveaways and/or prizes for their participation in various activities. The giveaways and prizes will of course vary depending on your budget, but try to be creative. Perhaps you can get someone to sponsor some prizes in return for exposure?

Examples of giveaways:

✓ Candy
✓ USB memory sticks
✓ Pens
✓ Umbrellas
✓ Business card cases

Examples of prizes:

✓ Gadgets – laptops, tablets, mobiles, headsets, hard drives, gaming devices, portable speakers, etc.
✓ Experiences – Dinner for two, hotel weekend, movie tickets, chocolate/beer/wine tasting, cooking course, spa treatment
✓ Gift vouchers

Carrot or stick?

As with all organizational initiatives you can ask yourself whether you should use a carrot or a stick to get people where you want them. In my opinion you need a little bit of both. Attending launch events and participating in launch activities should in my opinion be fully optional. You don’t want people to feel forced into something, if they do, they will get a very negative opinion about the initiative. However, when it comes to training, I believe some training should be mandatory to ensure certain basic skill levels. If your employees are ambitious and they thrive upon professional development, I’m sure they will not mind going through high-quality courses that will help them improve their productivity. Let us know if you need help with an internal IT system launch or employee trainings – we are always happy to help!