

NOT

for the faint of heart

Thinking how to better manage your media integrated business systems? Should you integrate or interface? Were you inspired by presenters such as Ray Kurtzwell, who spoke about using information technology to foster organizational innovation?

If you are in the planning stages, you'll be reassured to hear that the results are outstanding. But get ready because it's not for the faint of heart, with most initiatives taking more than five years to complete.

Sheila Calhoun, Vice President of Traffic Services at Canwest Media, spoke to Broadcast Dialogue about re-engineering broadcast business systems. As the business sponsor for Canwest's S4M (Success for Media, Integrated Business System), Sheila led the design and implementation of an integrated back office system.

What is S4M?

"S4M was designed to re-engineer our business systems as it is a seamless content, sales and traffic system that enables Canwest to create business opportunities and achieve client service excellence."

What was the reason for embarking on such a large undertaking?

"We saw our business world changing—broadcasters were getting bigger and there were fewer standalone stations. Operations were becoming more complex; new competitors had arrived in the form of Specialty and Internet; and the business of broadcasting itself was rapidly evolving. We had 30-second spots and now more often billboards, 10-, 15- and 60-second spots along with closed captioning. Canwest needed to administer program changes faster to be even more reactive to client needs.

"Analyzing information took weeks as we attempted to merge data from multiple systems to deliver results to clients and produce critical internal documentation. We decided to move to a large, integrated state-of-the-art system to improve

our best practices, provide superior customer service and introduce new business analytics."

How did it affect workflow?

"Previously, and although we worked side-by-side, work would be performed in one area then handed

BY CELESE FLETCHER



off, reworked in another area with new elements added then handed off, reworked and so on. When you take four to five systems across multiple users and change to one integrated system, you in essence change the entire process—the interaction, workflow and procedures all change.

“Today, any work performed has an immediate effect in multiple areas of business. It requires people to communicate continuously. Workflow and deliverables improve as you gain efficiencies and greater understanding of how systems work.

“Challenging transitions for any organization, people intellectually appreciate the technology but don’t realize the full impact until working within the new process and experiencing the benefits. What was once an effortless process, during implementation becomes a learning experience. They must consider the actions they take within their specific job function and ensure that any effect on other areas of business is considered.”

What were the biggest challenges?

“Implementing system changes takes many years. At the same time business keeps evolving, which requires constant adjustment to the environment. Elements arise that you didn’t even dream of when you started; the business keeps shifting and adaptation must be accommodated.”

How did you manage through constant adaptation?

“The single most important factor is to have a committed senior management team willing to stay the course.

“Communication was critical in all areas—never making assumptions that people knew or fully understood the implementation. In frequent face-to-face meetings and written documentation we explained each step in the transition. To over-communicate is a key lesson for anyone undertaking a large integrated project as not everyone sees the big picture.

“It’s not a quick win, and certainly not a big personal win for individuals. You need to have a group of people able to keep the vision and stay the course. There is no painless way to go through a big change like this. It takes huge commitment from management and is not for the faint of heart.”

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Celese Fletcher

What did you do to respond to business changes?

“We strategically re-assessed and re-evaluated our approaches throughout the process. A task force of various business leaders across the company collectively discussed our progress; assessed risks and educated one another on business impact. We gave people the opportunity to be heard and understood.

“Essentially, we constantly re-engaged people and kept moving forward because there was always another commitment to meet and another deadline to achieve and measure.

“We extracted key stakeholders from sales, research, programming, and IT right out of the day-to-day business to work closely with the vendor and the core implementation team to make sure we were building the best system possible. We contracted expertise outside of the business in certain areas like project management, change management and software testing.

“Canwest formed a strong working relationship with the vendor, who was very flexible and worked with us through any setback encountered.

“Key stakeholders were repatriated back into the business as the system went live. This allowed us to pay attention to small details and always think of the business and people using the system.”

What was the greatest learning?

“Teamwork. In all my years, I never fully appreciated or understood the meaning of team until this project. Even when we disagreed, we always talked through the challenge and ALWAYS moved forward together.

“The beautiful thing about a team is going forward together and achieving collaborative solutions for our business and our clients.”

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