

Selecting the system is just the second step!

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So you have contemplated purchasing an Asset Management System. For what reason?

- Other organisations are doing it;
- It will satisfy your immediate needs;
- It will satisfy your future needs;
- It will satisfy your Executive;
- It satisfies your requirements to the Regulator and;
- If you don't get in first other departments will and leave you with a system that is not to your requirements.

Well consider this, whatever your reasoning; the fact is it will take time; money, heartache, labour and other resources to successfully implement it. These are the things you really need to focus on.

The “Software Solution”

Have you been sold on the idea that purchasing the system is the solution to all your needs? Have you then 'on sold' this idea to your Executive? If not, you are in trouble from the start. This marketing practice has been around for thousands of years yet we still fall for it. Like the used car salesman who sells you the perfect car, which you then drive and discover all its idiosyncrasies. But you must admit, the car did look good. Sound familiar?

Let the truth be known, the software is not the solution, it is the tool to be used.

So Why Would You Select a System?

Not to dwell on it too much, the asset management system is required to support the organisation's service delivery. It, along with other systems used by the organisation provide the supporting software infrastructure to store and report data and support the processes used by the organisation in its service delivery. Without the system, an organisation cannot claim with confidence to be efficient or competitive in its operations.

Selecting the System is Just the Second Step.

The second step you say! How can this be? Simply put, the first step is identifying the organisation's need for the system, defining the outputs, scoping the requirements and identifying the potential benefits.

So how many steps are there? This is open to speculation and as good engineers we like to delve into

the detail. So debate it at length however, as the author of this paper, I consider there to be nine steps, identified as follows:

1. **Identifying the Needs** including defining the outputs; scoping the requirements; and identifying the potential benefits.
2. **Selecting the System** including short listing; the tendering process; and contract negotiations.
3. **Installing the System** including system delivery; and testing the system performance.
4. **Implementing the System** (getting it up and running) including data capture, validation and entry; and training on the system.
5. **System Application** including using the modules in line with the required functionality.
6. **System Operations** including implementing appropriate asset management practices; and appropriate ongoing staffing levels.
7. **Managing the Change** including training; education and business process redesign.
8. **Delivering the Outputs Ongoing**; and
9. **Management of the System** including: software upgrades; additional modules; software licensing; and supporting software.

How many steps have you covered in the implementation of your system?

The nine-step plan is a discussion paper in itself so it will not be covered in this document. It is a guide however, as to the amount of effort required to move through the steps from conception to best practice. Each step in itself requires significant resources.

Some of these resources can be easily identified and quantified. Others will depend on the sophistication of the system you adopt and the interfacing requirements expected. There will be some resources, which will only be identified with time.

Recognising the Resources

So what are these resources? They include hardware; software; appropriate annual budgets; management support; technical support; appropriate staffing; contractors; and consultants.

Hardware

Depending on the sophistication of the system, additional hardware may be required. For example, an additional server may be required for the test system as opposed to the 'live' system; workstations may require upgrading, and communications may require upgrading or installing between sites. Additional peripherals such as printers may also be required.

Software

Even though you have purchased the system an allowance needs to be made for the following:

- Supporting software e.g. Report software, Database licences (Oracle, Sql Server), Mapping tools;
- Additional modules in the future;
- Future enhancements and updates;
- Additional Licences as the system grows in demand; and
- Software customisation.

Appropriate Annual Budgets

Look at the system from a 'whole-of-life' perspective. Plan for future expenditure and allow for appropriate annual budgets. Whatever you do, do not treat the software as a single capital cost. You may find it sitting on the shelf for quite a long time!

Management Support

To successfully implement the system, management support will be required. This involves input by management in decision making. Therefore there will be a need to provide appropriate training and education as well as ongoing selling of the system.

Technical Support

When software is purchased the supplier will require an annual support fee. This fee will generally be of the order of 10 - 15% of the retail price of the software depending on the provider. In addition to the support fee, having the provider's staff on site to undertake various support functions throughout the implementation will be an additional cost. This may include report generation, data manipulation and transfer.

Appropriate Staffing

The number of tasks required to implement an asset management system are numerous. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to the provision of appropriate staffing throughout the implementation and ongoing operations of the system. A variety of personnel will eventually use the system and will require appropriate training to suit their needs e.g. field staff, administrative, operations, front desk and management.

The training is an ongoing commitment not just a "once off". Not only for the existing staff but also for future staff as the system evolves.

As well as training, one of the most important aspects is the education process. This process is critical for the ongoing success of the system. Staff need to be reminded why the system is necessary, and what the major objectives are and what benefits will be derived. This applies equally at operator level as well as Executive and Board level. Commitment needs to be continuous. To achieve this requires continuing education and involvement from appropriate staff.

Contractors

Throughout the implementation depending on the availability of internal resources the use of contractors will be required to support the system and its use. Contractors may be required for data collection, validation and input, data cleansing, report writing, site inspections, asset identification and condition assessments. Contractors may also be required to provide general support when internal resources aren't available.

Consultants

No matter what you think of consultants they will be required at some point throughout the nine steps. The experience consultants have accrued over time will assist greatly in the delivery of a successful output.

If for no other reason, they should be used to keep the focus on the end objective, protect the client from repeating the same mistakes of others, and provide additional resource support where required.

Summary

This paper has been produced to assist organisations to understand the commitment and resources required to successfully implement asset management systems. The resources required do not imply that organisations should not implement systems but rather they should be aware of the commitment in time, money and resources.

There are too many instances of organisations making a minimalist attempt at this task only to find in time that they have not received the benefits they thought they would receive.

The industry has now evolved to the point where it can learn from the experiences of others and assist in preventing organisations from falling into the traps of the past.

In reading this paper you should ask yourself, "How well do I fit this model?"