

REFRESHING CHANGE

Peter Morley explains when and why you should consider an accounting system refresh.



Peter Morley: only natural that businesses evolve over time

A few months ago, I wrote about the need to regularly update your core accounting system and how you might choose between fully replacing, upgrading or 'refreshing' your existing software.

This month, I want to focus in on the 'refresh' option, given that in most cases that's all that's needed to ensure your accounting system is re-configured to match your current business requirements.

It is only natural that businesses evolve over time, so it is not surprising that systems may need a business refresh just as much as they need technical upgrade. It is just a case of deciding when to do it and what to cover.

So if your system is not currently producing optimal results, it might be time to consider a refresh – do not automatically assume the software must be changed. Through your software licence, you can get access to the latest version of the current product. And most software packages have a long heritage and are updated constantly.

So when considering where to go next, do not overlook this option and the opportunity to jump a few steps in the process.

A refresh is a major opportunity to both extend the functional scope of your finance system and to improve its integration with other systems in your organisation.

For example, loading data and invoices from suppliers, sending out remittances by email or reporting data directly into Excel dynamically, are all possibilities that if not already in operation, can be implemented through a system refresh.

When should you do it?

A finance system can be refreshed at any time and various factors influence it, such as business demands and busy times, and times when you are doing other system maintenance work.

The main dilemma is usually whether or not to combine it with a technical upgrade. Our experience shows that:

- If you are reasonably up-to-date with technical upgrades, it is best to keep the two projects separate. Do not make one dependent on the other if it is not really necessary.

The decision would then be whether to do the business configuration refresh first, or the technical upgrade. It does not matter whether the implementation of one follows the other in a very short space of time, but it is not advisable to mix the technical change issues with business change issues unless you have a good reason to do so.

- If you are a long way behind on the technical upgrade path you can choose to skip the upgrade work in between and build a new instance, probably on new hardware and supporting infrastructure.

This way the budget you may have put aside for the technical upgrade can be used to fund your complete refresh. This could be a very good reason for combining the technical and business change.

Planning a refresh

Like any initiative, it is necessary to have a good business case. However this should not be too difficult to achieve as, if you can make a good case for a system refresh to make the system more efficient and effective, then you should be able to make a good financial business case to support it.

Finally, to be successful, a system refresh project must be planned like an implementation, as follows:

- Project plan – there should be a clear project, with a proper manifesto, agreed scope, budget, timescales, governance and object.
- Communication – it is important to engage and involve all stakeholders of the system to understand their requirements and needs. You need to maximise your gain from the exercise and build the best business model you can. Document your design and get the stakeholders to sign it off.
- Training – this can be a very important aspect of a refresh. It involves not just explaining how to use new features, but how old features are presented in a new way. It is also an opportunity to reinforce business procedures and to explain techniques and methods that may not have been properly understood before.
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