

4 Essential Steps to Eliminate Database Drama

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by Beth Schneider

Back in the day when I was still apart of corporate America, I found myself tasked with the huge job of figuring out what spiffy new company wide software system we needed and what would work best for us.

Which computer system would work best? How do I know?

Hour after hour of boring computer system presentation, endless trade shows and phone calls and I still didn't have an answer. By the time you figured everything in, each system I looked at was priced somewhere around \$170,000.00.

With \$170,000.00 on the line, you can imagine I was not about to make a snap decision. So I changed my approach a bit. I really dived into why the old software wasn't working and what the team really wanted the system to do.

What kind of difference could finding out what the team wanted make? Well, it turns out that 85% of the system we had was fine. But because I was able to nail down the processes behind what we needed, I hired a programmer at \$25.00 per hour to come in and make the upgrades. The whole project cost about \$2500.00 NOT \$170,000.00.

You're probably not sitting around thinking about spending \$170,000.00 on new software, but you, like many of my clients may be scratching your head wondering if you should buy that new database or new software program that your friend has been raving about.

Your pal maybe raving about a software packages like Outlook, ACT!, Goldmine, Filemaker Pro, or Access, which are all excellent programs. BUT, (there's always a big but) in order for them to be effective for YOU, you need to figure out what you need them to do for you.

Here's what I mean. Think of a blank piece of paper. That paper could be anything. A love letter, a list, a piece of stationary, you could fold it and make it a card, you could crunch it up and make it a ball or you could get out your origami instructions and make it a swam. There are tons of things that you can do with that piece of paper.

You have to think of software the same way. While it may not seem like it on the surface, software is really like that piece of paper. You have to decide what you want it to do for you. So before you make a snap decision and spend \$170,000.00 or what might feel like that, ask yourself a few questions.

What will I be using this software for?

Do you really know what you want the software to do for you? Or are you secretly throwing money at a problem. Have you thought through your systems and processes to know what you really need? Think about what you want to track. What kind of reports you want. What information you want to keep that the software can spit out at you. (For more help on developing your systems check out my home study kit, [Your Business Machine Basics](#).)

Does it really do that?

Now that you know what you want the software to do, find out if it really does that. A client of mine jumped the gun a bit when she bought a new software program before making sure it did what she needed. She wanted a contact manager, but what she got was an accounting program. Lots of money, time and frustration later, she ended up scrapping it and going back to some she already owned. Speaking of which . . .

Do I already own something that will do what I need?

Look at the software you already own. Do you fully understand all the features and benefits? If not, call the customer service line, call a friend who uses it or play on the internet to learn about the items you have already paid for. I've been using Outlook for years and a friend of mine just gave me a tip that helped streamline my process. In other words, look through your closet, before going shopping.

What will I need to do to get this set up and implemented?

So now you know what you want the software to do, you know it really does what you need it to and you are ready to buy. Do you have the skills to set it up? If you are buying ACT! or Goldmine, it might make more sense for you to hire an expert to make sure your program does exactly what you need it to. It's kind of like hiring someone to fold a piece of paper into a swan for you, rather than struggling with the origami instructions.

Buying new software doesn't have to be scary (or cost an arm and a leg). The right tools will enhance your processes and make your business run smoother giving you more time, money and freedom.

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