

Integrating a New Technology

The benefits offered by new technologies are often offset by the trials and tribulations of integrating them into the workflow of employees and the interactions with customers. While the internal issues are real and can lead to significant challenges, adherence to the new technology can, nonetheless, be imposed. It is therefore, in Tudog's view, with your customers that the new technology integration challenges truly lie. Thus article offers some helpful hints with regard to integrating a new technology into the existing relationships and ongoing interactions you have with your customers.

There are a number of things you can do with your customers when you have decided to integrate a new technology that will serve to keep the relationship steady. These include:

1. Communicate

Perhaps the most important thing you can do is communicate with your customers. Let them know ahead of time that you are planning to introduce a new technology and let them know why. Make certain that they understand any and all changes this will impose on them and that they have sufficient time to execute any changes that might be necessary. By communicating you are striving to be inclusive. While your customers do not have a veto on your decision, you want to give them the sense that you are eager to hear about and respond to any concerns they may have. This will allow them to feel that the changes are not being imposed, but rather are part of a natural progression toward higher degrees of technology.

2. Understand Their Apprehensions

If you understand their apprehensions you can address them. If you are unaware of the reasons your customers may be uneasy about your move, you will wind up ignoring their concerns and exasperating the problem. Customers are concerned that integrating a new technology could lead to cost increases, delays in supply, the imposition of new and costly procedures, the requirement that they follow suit, and more. By recognizing these concerns and either addressing them or demonstrating that they are misplaced, you will be placing your customers at ease. And customers who are at ease buy more.

3. Explain the Technology

Nearly every company is contemplating some increase in their technological capacity and some change to their technological infrastructure. If you explain the technology you are introducing and give the reasons for your actions, most of your customers will not only understand your actions, but identify with them. This commonality of experience will make them more tolerant to any inconvenience it may cause them.

4. Detail Any Changes in Procedures

If your new technology is going to require or cause any changes in how you interact with your customers or how they interact with you, provide the details for these changes in clear and precise language, using examples and visuals (charts and diagrams) so that the changes can be implemented as smoothly as possible. If your customers feel unprepared they will resent the changes. If they feel well prepared they will feel a part of things.

5. Share the Benefits

If possible you should strive to transfer some of the benefits you receive from the new technology to your customers. Perhaps this can be done with a one time reduction in prices or a rebate of some kind. Another way might be to show them how the new efficiencies the technology is enabling in your company will also result in efficiencies for them (in ordering, logistics, tracking, etc.) and through these efficiencies you are sharing the benefits and giving them an opportunity to reduce costs.

6. Cover Integration Costs

There are times when your decision to integrate a new technology places demands on your customers that cost them money because they have to integrate your new technologies into their procedures (and maybe even into their existing technological infrastructure). When possible and feasible, you should cover the costs of their integration either through a product credit or a gradual rebate. This will earn you their appreciation and cooperation.

The trick to integrating a new technology that affects your customers is to make it as painless as possible. If you do this, and do it in a way that demonstrates that you are making every effort to lighten their burden, you will not only benefit from the advantages of the new technology, but also from the goodwill of your customers.

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