

How to do it: implementing IT solutions

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New information technology products are vital, but they are seldom inexpensive. That makes it critical for providers, who are typically saddled with tight budgets, to learn how to implement new IT products as economically as possible. Experts advise how providers on a tight budget can make the most of what they have.

1. Be sure to have standardized business processes before attempting newer IT implementation, advises Udi Polonsky, CEO of LINTECH.
Then, when you do adopt a product, perform utilization reviews. "You might not be using all of the product features you are paying for to the fullest extent," notes Dave Wessinger, VP and chief technology officer of PointClickCare.com.
2. Also on the planning front, be sure to take the following expenses into consideration: software, hardware and staffing needed to train on the applications, says Carrie O'Connell, vice president, Clinical Development for HCS.
3. Get the most from your vendor, including strong implementation planning, urges Joshua R. Shupp, executive vice president of marketing and administration for //SOS/ Corporation.

"They should be able to tell you how they are going to work with you to successfully implement their solution based upon your needs and deadlines," he said.

LINTECH's Polonsky also emphasizes working with the vendor enough up front. You don't want to further customize an already complicated implementation.
4. True integration is always a goal, says Aric Agmon, president and CEO of AOD Software.

"Many vendors claim they are integrated financial and clinical solutions, when what they really mean is that they interface to other systems," he explains. That means a core built and managed by a single vendor, "not a hodge-podge of different financial systems coupled with clinical systems from different companies. This disparate arrangement will double your due diligence efforts and costs."

5. "Leverage the human capital through in-session training," recommends PointClickCare's Wessinger. "If you have a staff member particularly adept with technology, ask him or her to host learning/mentoring sessions that can improve adoption and utilization for the entire staff."
6. Look to Uncle Sam. "Check out what's available from the government. The 2009 economic stimulus bill (was) planned to have \$20 billion for incentives, low interest loans and grants to stimulate the adoption of health information technology," Dan Cobb, chief technology officer for HealthMEDX Inc., explains.
7. Also realize that software can be acquired two ways: the traditional licensing model and software as a service (SaaS).

"The SaaS model doesn't require a large, up-front payment and consists of a single monthly payment covering both the software and back-office infrastructure. Its total cost of ownership may be higher, but it should have cash flow advantages," Cobb points out.

They can come in doubly handy when dealing with "new wave" products in areas such as staffing, notes Stan Rosen, president and CEO of Intellicost Enterprises Inc.

"Control these costs on a prospective basis before the money is spent, with comprehensive labor stats and forecasting tools that could potentially save tens of thousands of dollars and be cost-effective in short order," he says

8. Finally, remember that implementing new systems can be done incrementally. Celebrating successes at each step can be helpful, Polonsky notes.

"It's not necessary to wait until funds are available to fully automate your business," adds HealthMEDX's Cobb. "Value can be gained by selecting high-impact areas first and adding others later."

Mistakes to avoid

1. Play off current employees' strengths to avoid duplicated efforts
2. Don't forget to look for grant or pilot project funding sources
3. Although you need comprehensive system, remember that you don't have to roll it all out (or pay for all of it) at once