

The other side of the 'happy button'

Alexander Zarovsky explores why there is such a high probability of failure during complex systems integration projects, and how consumerisation has led users to think that everything will work at the touch of a button.

Many large-scale implementations, which require consultancy services, end up going nowhere. The result is just a completed project, with little measurable effect or real value for the customer in terms of increased productivity, control or cost savings. This applies to business applications, automated banking systems and information security solutions.

There are many reasons for this, but a key factor is the lack of will on the part of the client to participate in the implementation process. The principle 'We pay you money, so you do the work,' has taken firm root as the basis for relationships between clients and integrators. Clients are interested in the results of the projects, and the financial returns, but often do not see the point in working together with the project team contracted to carry out the work.

It seems to me that this is down to psychology. In the mind of the client, the boundary between 'boxed' products and complex solutions, which need to be integrated into existing infrastructure and require additional consulting services, has become blurred. The producers of smartphones, mobile devices, cars, and software products have trained us to believe that technology is simple: one button, two pedals. We only realise that the automatic gearbox is a complicated piece of equipment when we get to the service centre. And then only indirectly, as a result of the number of zeros on the repair bill.

The way we perceive information technology has been transformed from something mysterious into something ordinary, simple. Technicians in white coats, computers in cabinets in dozens of machine halls – all this is in the past. We don't use technology but products, tools to carry out our tasks, and we are now able to interact with IT without intermediaries. Can you imagine an iPad or Windows user writing a multi-page bug report for Apple or Microsoft? I can't. The user pays money for a product, for that button they can press to bring them happiness. He switches off the feedback collection function in MS Office as soon as the pop-up window reminds him it's there.

Consumerisation, a focus on convenience and business advantage instead of a functional approach – this is the contribution product marketing has made to the user's ideology. CEOs are also users. When they sign off on the budget for an expensive ERP, DLP, CRM or BI, they are not acquiring a solution, but a marketed product.



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The managers of client companies are genuinely surprised when the 'buy, it'll work by itself' approach breaks down, when, in order to achieve results, it is necessary to put in some effort, sometimes in line with the cost of the solution itself. This kind of situation can be seen in the relatively new data loss prevention (DLP) system market. Here, the client is required to carry out a whole range of actions: to understand the volume of confidential data which they need to protect, to classify their information, to localise where it is stored, and finally, to define the criteria for the effectiveness of the project.

A DLP project is a large and complex undertaking, since it is particular to each individual organisation. A whole range of factors – industry specifics, document circulation rules, security policy and regulatory requirements – come into play. 'Boxed' solutions are not applicable and standard methodologies for adapting business processes to a system do not work.

Of course, it is impossible to find a universal recipe to correct clients' perceptions. Not all developers of information solutions are prepared to describe complex things as complex. So the need to produce a collision between illusion and reality remains: take the client by the hand and lead him through a pilot project, showing all the difficulties of the forthcoming implementation. During the pilot process, between the agreements, meetings and test runs, the client will understand that a complex IT system can be built only through collaboration with systems integrators, it cannot simply be bought. Software is only a small part of the whole. The rest of the solution comprises audit, consulting and analysis services. Only then does the project stand a chance of success. ■