

Sage Construction and Real Estate

Top Ten Ways to Make the Most of Your Current Software



Introduction

Drastic staff reductions have caused people to take on multiple roles in companies, often without proper training, expertise, or processes in place to handle this change.

Even though in the past year staff members have worked harder to compensate, this is definitely not a sustainable long-term solution. Overworking your already thin staff is a good way to increase risk and mistakes and lose money as a result. A recent study from MetLife found that companies across all industries saw increases in productivity over the past year as their workers stepped up efforts to compensate for staffing shortfalls.⁵

Some of these companies may have been able to see gains by working smarter, not necessarily harder. You should aim to get more out of the software you already have before investing money in a new system and devoting precious resources to additional training.²

Unfortunately, many businesses don't use their software fully—but it's not their fault that they only use a percentage of the software's functionality. Many have been using the software for years and have formed habits and routines, and they need to break out of those habits and learn more efficient ways to use the software.

Due to layoffs, people are using new areas and functions of the software and don't have the necessary expertise or training. Learning more about the features and functionality of your current software system can allow you to maximize your investment and improve business operations and processes.

Better use of accounting and operations software also gives construction companies a competitive advantage because it allows them to achieve the same or better results than others, even with fewer employees and resources.

Software Gives an Edge in the Construction Industry

Construction companies have integrated technology into their operations to work smarter and achieve greater efficiency. However, many businesses that have turned to software to meet their project management and analytical needs have been disappointed with the results.

According to a survey from ESI International, only a small group—10.5 percent—of agencies that had used project management or business intelligence software reported that their expectations had been met or exceeded by the tools. Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents said that using integrated training that displayed the value of the software would both improve their satisfaction and make the software more effective in achieving their companies' goals.⁴

Companies can achieve a higher return on their investments and see a more meaningful solution to the problems they hoped the software would fix by making sure their staff is trained on the ins and outs of the technology's functions and features. Only then can a business gain the full advantage it seeks.

“In the critical integration of people-process-tools, too often software purchases lead a change effort, when it is an organization’s people and the development of their skills that should be at the forefront,” said Sean McDonald, director of strategic alliances at ESI.⁴

Training can improve satisfaction with a system, as it is often the case that employees think the software is the problem when they don’t actually understand all of its functions.

Tips for Maximizing the Return on Your Investment

Accounting, business intelligence, document management and project management, systems can be major investments for some companies, and unless employees are well-versed in a software solution’s capabilities, the company will only be able to benefit from a portion of the application’s functions. Here are a few ways your company can make the most of the technology it has already implemented at little or no extra cost.

- 1. Invest in training**—Sign on for training offered by your current software vendor to learn about the applications that you already have. This way you will be using the system to its maximum functionality. For example, Sage Construction and Real Estate offers its customers training options in the form of live online sessions or recorded courses that can be accessed at any time. For in-person training, Sage Construction and Real Estate’s, business partners also offer local training across the United States and Canada.
- 2. Updated software**—Be sure your company has the latest version of its software. Running an older version of the software and skipping upgrades could mean you are missing out on a recently added function that could mean the difference in helping your company be more efficient and as profitable as possible.
- 3. Add more applications**—Research add-on modules or applications that can be integrated with your existing software suite. Sage 300 Construction and Real Estate (formerly Sage Timberline Office), for example, enables users to add on applications (for example, payroll, project management, and document management) that are fully integrated with its accounting and other applications. Sage 300 Construction and Real Estate, Sage 100 Contractor (formerly Sage Master Builder), and Sage 300 Trade Specialty (formerly Sage Timberline Enterprise) also offer the option to add on construction-specific estimating software that is integrated with job costing applications.
- 4. Identify process inefficiencies**—Conduct an internal audit of how employees are using the software on a daily basis. Are they using workarounds or manual processes that could be achieved in a more efficient way? For instance, Sage 300 Construction and Real Estate offers hundreds of standard report templates, but its Report Designer application also provides users with the ability to draft and develop their own customized reports.
- 5. Extend your software**—Look for available third-party add-on solutions that can extend the capability of your current software. For example, with Sage 300 Construction and Real Estate, users can choose from multiple third-party add-on solutions such as mobile time tracking, builder production management, and field reporting.

- 6. Centralize information and disseminate throughout your company**—If your office currently lacks an official process for sharing important business information between departments—instead of using sticky notes and the occasional email or hallway comment—consider adding more users to the existing software. Putting the entire staff on a centralized system can increase efficiency because information is shared between departments so everyone can stay informed.
- 7. Perform a system and workflow audit**—Bring in a consultant who has been certified by the software developer to conduct an evaluation of how your company uses its current software. Having a fresh pair of eyes on daily processes may help you learn how to maximize how you use your software every day.
- 8. Attend user conferences**—Software publishers often hold educational user conferences—so go to one. These informational sessions can fill you in on the latest innovations and additions as well as future development plans for your software. One conference, Sage Summit, is an annual event where users of Sage 100 Contractor, Sage 300 Construction and Real Estate, Sage 300 Trade Specialty, and Sage Estimating can learn about what's new and what's coming soon. Conference attendees receive hands-on training and get personal consultations with Sage customer support professionals to get answers to their toughest questions. Sage Summit also features an exhibit hall where third-party providers inform users about all the add-on options for Sage Construction and Real Estate software.
- 9. Learn from other users**—Networking with other software users is another great way to optimize your use of current technology. Ask colleagues how they are getting the most out of their software by joining groups such as the Construction and Real Estate Users Group, which connects Sage 300 Construction and Real Estate users so they can learn directly from each other. The group offers local training sessions, online forums, and an annual users' conference.
- 10. Expand usage of software throughout the company**—Internally, encourage all employees to use the software, rather than just training one or two people on its applications. They will work smarter, which can free up time and potentially lead to greater innovations that improve business operations.

Conclusion

Just because your company may be forced to work with fewer resources does not mean you cannot be as or more productive than ever.

Part of the spirit of the economic recovery, with everyone learning to make the most of what they already have, can be applied to software use. Investing the time to learn the ins and outs of your current system and seizing on the training opportunities offered by your software publisher may help you realize new capabilities and functions that can improve processes across your company.

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