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Where the rubber meets the road in a data warehouse or data mart implementation is the end user tools used to access, analyze and distribute information. Your users really don't care if you've got ATM to the desktop and a 128 way SP2 in the basement or a warehouse full of monkeys pulling index cards, they just want answers. They want them fast, they want them accurate, and they want them consistently. Regardless of what you've got behind the screen, the end user's view and perception of your entire multi-million dollar investment is what they see on their monitor when they double click on that DW icon. If you give them a clunky tool, with a bad UI, non-intuitive interface, overly complex operation, and buggy to boot, they will think the entire data warehouse an abject failure. By the same token, if you give them the latest, greatest, make the coffee in the morning, data access/analysis/slice 'n dice/distribution/floor wax/desert topping piece of wonder code from DSS Gods, Inc., but don't train them what the data is, how to use it, how to access the meta data and how to effectively use the tool in your environment with your data, you're equally doomed.

One common trait I've witnessed among the tool vendors and those of us who implement their products is a lingering impression that these tools are another form of office automation. From the vendor side, it is reflected in the dearth of practical, how-to guides on building, implementing and sustaining a successful environment with their products. Almost every vendor of DSS software has a beautiful and flashy evaluation guide, designed to lead evaluation teams and the press through the features and capabilities of their products. Unfortunately, most vendors don't have a companion "cook book" volume for those of us left to implement their products once the evaluation teams make the selection. Instead, we get boxes of software dropped on us and a couple of weeks to figure out the product, build and test an environment, and deliver it to the pilot team of users. There's very little in the way of ongoing resources to help us build and deliver a successful implementation of the chosen tool.

On the customer side, most managers consider these tools to be "just another" office automation tool. They tend to lump these tools in the same category as Excel, Word Perfect and CC:Mail in terms of required training and training methods. Many sites consider a half day of training to be adequate and a full day a waste of users' time and company resources.

Unfortunately, these tools are not anywhere near Excel, Word Perfect and CC:Mail in terms of their training requirements. The reason is, the training challenge is not to communicate the functionality of an isolated tool. The training challenge is to communicate the functionality of a system, of which the tool is only a part. It is impossible to prepare a generic training manual or data set for any DSS tool used to access your data warehouse or data mart. To your users, a generic Widget Inc. sales demo data base and accompanying examples are irrelevant to their missions of accessing, analyzing and leveraging the data in your data warehouse or data mart.

In my experience of training hundreds of data warehouse and data mart users in the use of various decision support tools I found it critical to train users in the entire context and system of the data warehouse or data mart environment. Start by teaching the trainees what is available in

the data warehouse, i.e. what subject areas are available. Until the users understand what data is available, and how you use it, and what you use it for, any training of the tool(s) is useless.

In order to greatly increase your chances of success, prepare a custom usage guide for the user community. The best I've ever seen are "cook book" in nature. They contain practical "how to" examples using the available tools to answer real-world questions pertinent to the target user audience. Most also include hard copies of the table level meta data. If you've got the room, include the field level meta data as well. For the table level meta data, estimated size, frequency of update, content description and known caveats is the minimum meta data set required to be useful.

A practical framework for a training/roll-out methodology is:

1. User places request for data warehouse/data mart access
2. Manager approves request
3. User computer system is checked to see if it can support the tools, upgrades are ordered and installed if required
4. Required network connections are made or upgraded
5. Network ID's & passwords are established
6. Database ID's & passwords are established
7. Tools are ordered or pulled from stock
8. Tools are installed and tested on the user's system
9. User attends introductory training (one day minimum)
10. Upon completion of introductory training user is provided with passwords, documentation and user guides.

Note that the user is not allowed to "play around" on the system prior to training. Letting untrained users out into the playground will lead to infinite support costs and an equally infinite supply of queries from hell bringing your server to it's knees.

11. About a week after training a user coordinator/coach/mentor pays a visit to see how the user is doing with the new tools, offer encouragement, and answer questions
12. A month or two after introductory training an advanced class is offered. Power users will snap up this chance to learn advanced querying, analysis, reporting, distribution and application interoperability methods and techniques.
13. Periodic "brown bag lunches" and seminars are conducted demonstrating practical examples and techniques to utilize your tools on your data to answer everyday business questions.

The most important point to remember when planning and executing the "tool training and roll-out" element of your project plan is that these tools cannot be viewed as individual elements of technology like a spreadsheet. They are part of a holistic system, and if the user is not trained in that context, all of your efforts to build and deliver the data warehouse or data mart are likely to come to naught.

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