TECH SERVICE TODAY

Best Practices for IT Rollouts in The Restaurant Industry

Restaurant ownership is a high risk business enterprise. Sixty percent of restaurants succumb to failure within the first year of opening. Businesses that successfully stay alive beyond the first year mark are continuously dealing with a multitude of challenges to break even, let alone make a profit. Information technology encompasses a huge slice of the restaurant operations pie. Establishing a well-thought-out plan with an excellent project management team is critical for success.

Drawing on TST's extensive experience running hundreds of IT projects per year, this white paper addresses critical points to ensure effective and efficient IT project rollouts.

Intro

Rollouts of network and telecom infrastructure, data and phone cabling, network hardware, Wi-Fi/AP, A/V & digital signage systems, CCTV, computer and operating system upgrades and reimaging, fiber optic cabling, printers, and electrical are essential to stay competitive in the restuarant industry.

Cost-effective rollouts require careful planning, piloting and coordination to remain within the budget, on-time, and deliver complete functionality to all of the business end users. The effectiveness of your project management is key to determining success or, without proper planning, failure.

In this white paper, we outline strategies and tactics for restaurant IT infrastructure executives and managers to successfully and professionally deploy all system installations, upgrades, cut overs and replacements.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN:

- Most common IT Installation and upgrade pitfalls
- Best practices for IT planning and communication in rollouts and site acquisitions
- Why piloting is critical to success
- Importance of working with experienced, credible, knowledgeable, and professional field technicians.Why piloting is critical to success

BEST PRACTICES FOR IT ROLLOUT

PLAN IN ADVANCE

- Do not wait until the last minute to begin planning
- As the project rolls out your ability to control what happens decreases and your costs increase, so take the time to plan up front
- Consider what can go wrong. You do not have to plan for every possible contingency, but it is better to anticipate than be caught flat-footed

INSTRUCTIONS & INSTALLATION DOCUMENTS

- Have detailed instruction documents with photos and diagrams
- Provide a FAQ section
- Validate with field technicians

PILOT SITES

- Failure to pilot is the #1 cause of projects not meeting budget/schedule/scope targets
- Ensure the instructions are effective
- Find unforeseen or problems
- Both central IT and on-site staff understand SOW and troubleshooting
- Revise instructions and procedures
- Estimate completion time

SITE PREPAREDNESS

- Financial personnel (especially management) understand the importance of the project and how it will improve their lives
- Ensure necessary equipment is on-site
- Reminder calls/emails
- Right people on-site w/ keys to provide access, be early

SCHEDULING THE FILL ROLLOUT

- Ensure there is sufficient coverage at central help desk to handle call volume for checkins, troubleshooting, testing and checkouts
- Be mindful of time zones
- Be realistic about completion times based on pilot site results-- about the "it should take" trap
- Nothing is perfect, plan for 10 to 20% extra time on average to deal with problems

COMPLETED WORK DOCUMENTATION

- Photos and videos
- Acceptance docs and diagrams
- Knowledge base for future work at sites

CLOSE OUT

- Review completed work
- Ensure any mistakes or exceptions made are documented
- Lessons learned

PLAN IN ADVANCE

It is crucial to not wait until the last minute to start planning. TST's Project Management team is finely tuned for this specific purpose. The inception of the project is the most important as it sets the stage for everything that the rollout will entail.

If you wait, as the project rolls out, your ability to control what happens decreases and your cost increases along with it. It is essential to take the time to plan up front. You cannot reverse mistakes in that timeframe. As time passes after these choices are made, you are stuck with the outcome. It is critically important to plan on spending several weeks before you even pilot to think everything through and get it strategically schemed and structured. The bigger the project, the more preparation will be necessary.

Control & Cost vs. Time
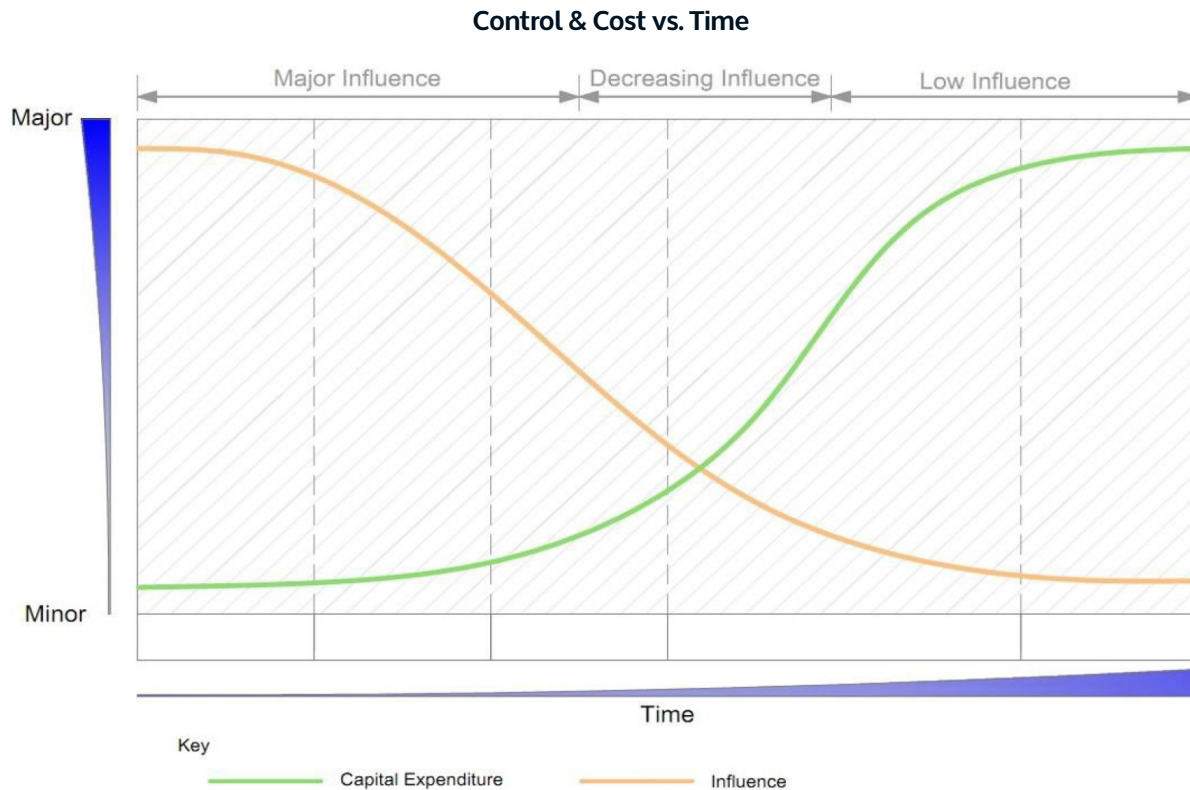
In the preparation process, you will need to consider what can go wrong. You do not have to plan for every possible contingency, but it is better to anticipate problems you can encounter so that you are better able to prevent or mitigate those problems from happening. For example, you have a technician that needs to enter your restaurant at a set time. You need to ensure you have the correct personnel showing up with the right keys, at the right time. That is something you can plan for. Too frequently this does not happen and the amount of time a technician is waiting and not working is more money out of your pocket.

NECESSARY DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS & INSTALLATION DOCUMENTS

It is very important for any part of a rollout to have detailed instruction documents for technicians to follow. The scope of work should be as detailed as possible to avoid mistakes and misses.

Provide pictures and diagrams as reference guides. This can include equipment being installed or removed, cables that techs may need to find and plug in, the network environment, and an overall indication of where things are located. Clear, visual documentation enables smooth and easy installations.

A FAQ section helps to answer common questions that the on-site technicians are likely to have. By listing all of the specific questions and answers, you avoid unnecessary phone calls. Ultimately, this will decrease extra time spent on-site talking to your help desk or assigned technical contact.

After these documents are created, the next important step is to review and validate them with your project management team and field technicians. Field technicians may not have the familiarity with certain systems, so it is important to review these instructions with them prior to your pilot.

IMPORTANCE OF PILOT SITES

"NO BATTLE PLAN SURVIVES INITIAL CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY."

- HELMUTH VON MOLTKE

Any brilliant plan, once it enters into the real world for the first time, runs the risk of failure. This is why pilot sites are crucial to the success of an IT rollout. Even with careful planning up front, after validating your SOW documents with field techs, when you get out into the field, you will inevitably come across some unforeseen problems. Failure to pilot is the #1 cause of projects not meeting budget, schedule and scope targets.

Pilot sites will enable you to ensure that your instructions and documents are effective not only with your field techs, but with your help desk. Piloting will give you the ability to run into any unanticipated problems and adapt. This will give you the ability to revise or change your instructions, documents, processes and procedures.

It is also very important that everybody, including the central IT and on-site staff, understand the SOW and troubleshooting. For example, with applications that you may know by second nature, what may seem obvious to you, may not be obvious to the techs in the field. Pilots are the best way to bring these issues up. They will allow you to learn if your internal staff needs some training before rolling it out into the field.

Additionally, pilot sites will aid in the capability to obtain much better estimates on completion times. Do not get caught up in the "It Should Take" syndrome. Frequently people estimate times that are not accurate and then fail to consider all of the practical, real-world steps that go into completing a task. For example, let's take a wireless access point swap out. In theory, performing the task may seem very quick and simple. Normally you would just unplug and remove an old AP and put in a new one. In and of itself it only takes a short time. However, what if the access points are not readily available or visible, what if office personnel were not on time for tech entry, or another infrastructure problem presented itself? A seemingly simple job could then take several hours.

A pilot site would enable you to anticipate all of these problems and have systematic improvements in place to cut the time and reduce costs by having a realistic estimate of completion time. This is why pilot sites are absolutely critical before rolling out as it saves you a lot of time and money at the end of the project.

SITE PREPAREDNESS

It is integral to have your sites prepared ahead of time prior to your rollout. Restaurant personnel, especially management, need to be notified and understand the importance of the project and how it will positively impact and improve their lives. Informing them of how it will be a better user experience and easier process for them will more likely get them invested in the rollout. This will help make the scheduling, deployment and working through the project a much smoother process. They will be more apt to be helpful participants, substantially reducing delays and costs. Personnel not showing up at the right time, at the right place, with the right keys is a potential problem you must anticipate. By gaining their buy-in before the project commences, you increase their willingness to ensure that the process runs smoothly.

You need to ensure that the necessary equipment is on-site prior to the pilot and rollout. When the technicians arrive on-site, make sure they have everything they need to begin the work to avoid any error and delay. Having an inventory list is extremely important. A lot of projects have been pushed off due to equipment not being on-site when the rollout begins. You need to be tracking the equipment or be sure that the equipment vendor is tracking it, and you need to verify it is on-site prior to the technician's scheduled arrival.

Make sure everyone is clear on when the technician is going to be on-site and what exactly they will need access to. TST takes health and safety seriously and follows all local guidelines. It's important to ensure technicians know and follow all protocols. Before the technician arrives, be sure to have the equipment in one secure, accessible place and clearly marked. It is a waste of time and money to have techs arrive on-site and search around (sometimes opening and going through boxes) for equipment. To avoid unnecessary delays, it is best for designated staff to be early, so that technicians can begin work immediately upon arrival.

AFTER ALL THE SITES ARE NOTIFIED,

reminder calls need to be made and emails sent to the site contacts and everybody involved. The best method is to have a Project Initiation Call with all of the parties involved. Get them invested, instill the importance of having the right keys and being early for risk mitigation. You should then follow this up through regular email and calls.

SCHEDULING THE FULL ROLLOUT

When scheduling the full rollout, you need to ensure there is sufficient coverage at the central help desk to handle call volume for all the necessary processes which include check-ins, troubleshooting, testing and checkouts. Without the proper amount of staffing in place this will impede the smoothness of the process requiring long wait periods for technicians trying to reach your help desk. For example, if you have thirty locations set up for one night, you need to be sure your help desk has enough personnel to handle that call volume. If you have only two people at the desk with thirty technicians calling over a span of four hours, this may result in long wait times for technicians and an overwhelmed help desk. It could take the help desk two hours to even call back a technician to go through the process. This means not only time wasted, but money wasted. Every hour a technician is not able to do his/her work, is money out of your financial institution's pocket.

Another method would be to spread out the project. Instead of thirty locations in one night, plan on a handful instead. It is better to complete the project properly than to rush through it. If you cannot extend the completion date, you may have to schedule additional resources to handle the support load.

Be mindful of time zones: it may not be realistic to schedule financial personnel on the West Coast to be on-site giving a field tech access at 5 AM local time to accommodate an 8 AM start time for your East Coast help desk. Be sure time zones are double checked prior to all scheduling.

Again, be realistic about completion times based on pilot site results--avoid the "it should take" trap. We want things to occur and happen quickly, but we want to leave room for any possible mistakes and unforeseen issues. Nothing is perfect, plan for 10 to 20% extra time on average to deal with potential problems that may arise.

COMPLETED WORK DOCUMENTATION

Your project is not complete until you have received all of the deliverable. You should obtain the close out information, completed check lists and documents and all of the photos. Have a project completion call with your Project Manager and then review the lessons learned so you can go into the next rollout worry free.

The close out process starts with making sure you receive the photos, videos, documents and diagrams that were created during the rollout. Most likely the company you work with will put this information together for you. The best method is access to a shared portal or drive to obtain this information. It is important to have an accessible area to navigate and export from. The guides will help tremendously and will be your knowledge base for future work at those sites. This is especially important for locating network equipment or to understand the layout of the site
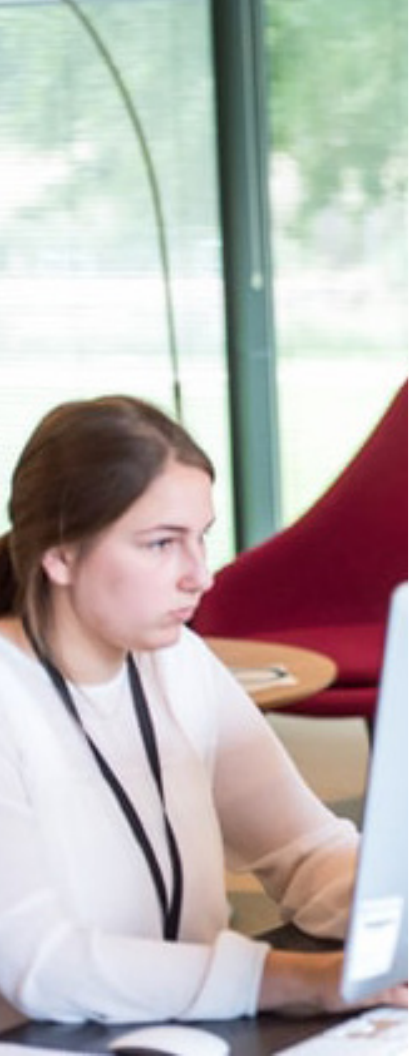
CLOSE OUT

From these documents, you want to review all completed work to be sure it is up to your standards. If any mistakes were made, you want to ensure these are documented for future installations. Revise your instructions and scope based on previous visits. You also want to do this for any exceptions that you made that differ from the original documents, making sure any and all of these are updated.

Finally, you reached the last step in the rollout process. You want to review the entire project with your team in order to comprehend all of the lessons learned. This is a very important aspect of the process as it will aid in improving your efficiency on future projects.

Conclusion

In conclusion, following the practices delineated in this white paper will ensure your success in implementing any IT rollout for your restaurant.

- Advanced planning anticipating all problems that may occur.

- Clear cut instructional documents and guides for organizational effectiveness of the rollout plan.

- Pilot sites are essential to enact trial runs ensuring all possible problems are seen and rectified. This will enable you to have the best system implementations in place.

- Education and site preparedness for all of those involved in the process.

- A clear cut schedule for the full rollout that includes sufficient staffing to handle all the aid that is required.

- Everything is properly documented via photos, videos, documents and graphs. This is crucial for future installations and upgrades.

- Review of all work and any issues and problems were documented.

The success of your restaurant means everything and you want to be sure you are doing everything in your power to set any and all rollouts up for success.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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