Today's Trucking

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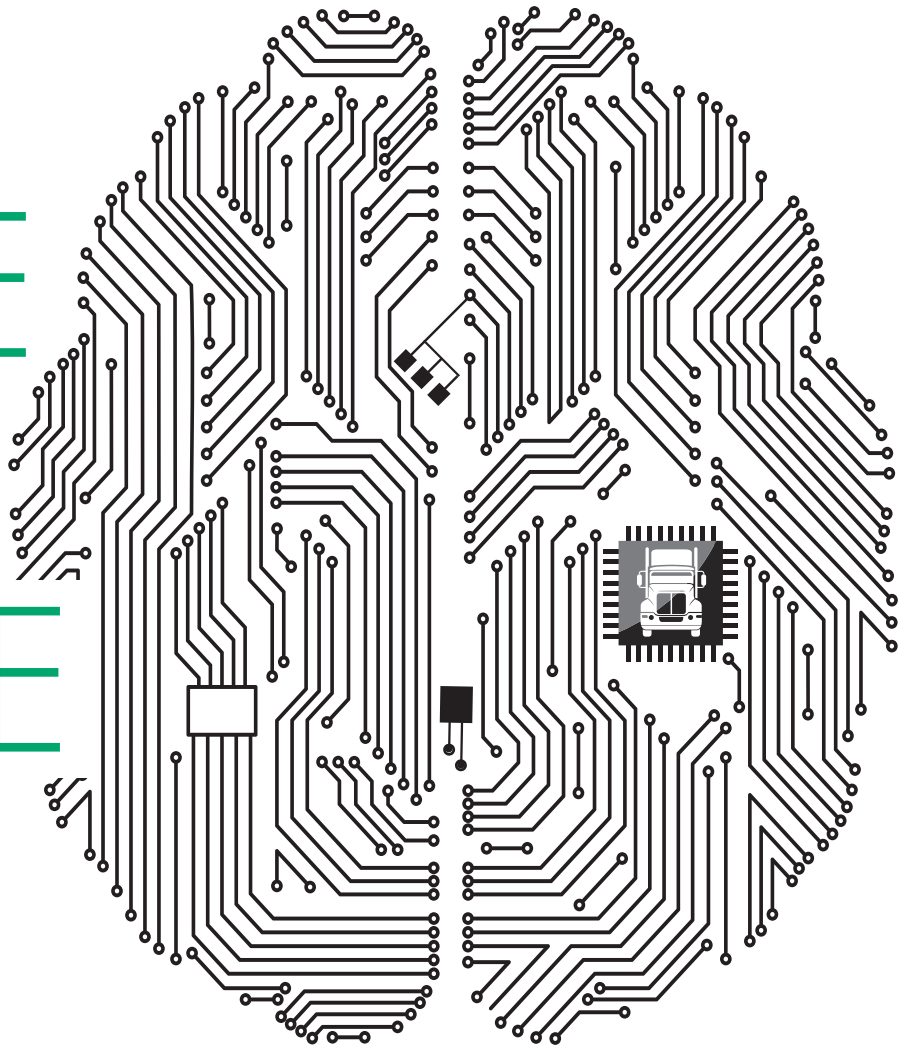
Terry Rhode doesn't have a job title. At Rosenau Transport, an express LTL carrier, Rhode is responsible for the IT department, specialized operations, major customers and customer review. He sits on the management team and takes care of their building's infrastructure and expansion. He's likely got other duties, too.

It's typical these days: One person in many jobs; dragged in many directions simultaneously.

Customers want more done with less, too. More information, as fast as possible. That means your company has to get more complex and faster. That means new technology, but it also means throwing out old organizational systems, old habits, and taking a good hard look at where you are now, and where you need to be.

A few years ago, Rosenau was looking to upgrade their systems.

"Trucking is all 'right now, right now, right now,'" Rhode says, referring to express LTL, "and that gives you very little time to make up for mistakes. So when there is a mis-direct or mistake, it is immediately a service failure. There is no way to recover from it by shaving a day off or putting it on an express truck because everything in our world is express."

In a world where everything has to be done two minutes ago, the one place you should take your time is when it comes to implementing software workarounds. Garbage in remains garbage out.

BY JASON RHYNO

But they were also expanding. "With our growth, and trying to maximize efficiencies and the space we had—with growth comes more facilities, more infrastructure—as we grew, we had to do something to make the dock operation more efficient."

As Rosenau began researching a new freight-management system, they discovered that included both dispatch and dock operations.

"They go hand-in-hand. In order to complete the circle of information, we couldn't do one without the other."

Their research led them to Carrier Logistics Inc. (CLI). Rhode had a few, very particular requirements of his new system, and CLI was able to provide him with the module he wanted, but also customize it to match his particular needs.

Thing is, when it comes to installing new technology, it isn't plug and play.

"What we always talk about is trying to help companies understand a concept called 'As-Is, To Be'", explains Mike Ham, vice president of Shaw Tracking.

"'As-is' is what you are doing today: what you're are doing to monitor fuel, how

you locate an asset, or how you dispatch an order or complete a billing cycle. That's all what you do today and how you do it."

That's also the first thing CLI did with Rosenau.

"We did an analysis of their operation, both on and off the dock," Ben Wiesen, vice president of products and support, CLI, said.

"To really understand the 'as-is', that was the most important step in the project: working with them upfront to understand the business flow 'as-is', identify the areas that needed some configuration changes to make the software fit properly, and give them the opportunity to automate and apply technology without having to completely change business practices, that in many cases were working properly, just manually."

The time and expense that go into the manual processing of paperwork shouldn't be underestimated, either.

Zoran Pandiloski dispatch manager with APPS Transport Group, out of Brampton, ON., says that before they installed TMW Systems' TruckMate, everything that was happening behind the dispatch scene was done manually.

"All that manual paperwork went from here to somewhere else, then to someone else—it was too much manual work."

The 'to-be' part of it, explained Ham, is establishing "what the world should really be like? What are we moving to? What will technology help us become?" Before you begin implementing, you really need to understand where you are and where you want to go. "Don't put in the technology, spend hard-earned money and hope a bunch of things are going to happen."

Pandiloski stressed the same approach. "What you do and what exactly do you need. Then you can start searching software companies, and then it's going to be easy for you."

Somewhat easy, that is. During the implementation phase, Rhode says that the main challenges they faced were on the periphery.

"Finding the right handhelds and getting the network infrastructure to handle the flow of information" were a couple of his challenges. Installing new technology doesn't just affect one or two things, and it's best to get an idea of what those things could be.

One of the biggest challenges during implementation is your people.

"People aren't subject to change," Rhode says; it's a battle that they fight to this day.

Rhode advised giving people initial buy-in, and collecting their input.

Pandiloski stressed the same.

"During the testing practice, we ask, 'What do you like? What do you think of this or that? What are your suggestions?' and then collect all that information, put it on a piece paper and see if it was feasible with the software or if we would have to do something else. We did tons of SOPs for people just in case they needed to remind themselves," Pandiloski says.

In fact, people may be the most important aspect of a new program.

For Ham, it's a key component to a successful transition to a new system.

"All the stakeholders have to be aligned." The technology will mean different things for different departments.

"IT: what is this technology and why are we doing it? OPS: what am I supposed to be doing with this technology and how is it going to improve the experience of my drivers and customers? Management: what is this ROI and how do I get it? Ownership: I invested money in this technology at x number of cents per mile, am I getting the return on investment each and every day or not?" Sales, too, Ham said. "How are they going to provide better information, better level of support, better opportunity to their shippers?"

The first six months of training was the toughest part for APPS, Pandiloski admits.

"They had been working with the previous software for years and years, and this is totally different. You have to watch what you do, and if you miss one step, it's going to create problems."

Pandiloski said that once you prove it's good for everybody, once they see the benefit, everything is fine.

That benefit is undoubtedly the information a new system can provide your people. For Rhode, "the key has been getting the right information to the right people at the right time." That's what their CLI systems let them do.

"With the technology that is out there right now, there is no getting back to you tomorrow or the day after; people want an answer right now, and if you don't have a system in place to look things up and see where they are, then you are spending time and money to go research and call people back."

One of the biggest boons for Rosenau is that they can now provide information to their customers before they ask for it.

"If we can prevent them needing to call us for information because they already have it, that saves us time and them time, and makes everything more efficient."

In fact, he says, they supply information to their customers' back ends, helping them with delays and turnarounds. "We are providing better customer support, making it more attractive to do business with us." And making it much more difficult for customers to leave.
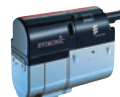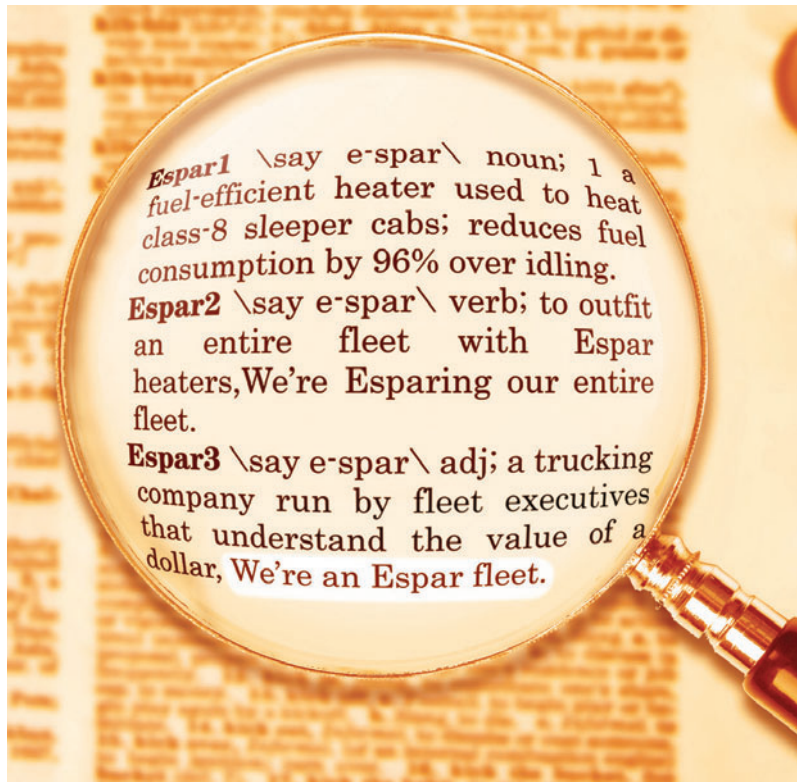
The post-implementation stage is as important as the pre-implementation stage. It's why companies like CLI and Shaw have teams to help during the transition. You have to look at the data and analyze the data, Ham stressed. "It can't be something you sink your teeth into for two months and then forget about it."

This isn't just for the big companies, either. "If you are running a trucking company and you've got assets on the road, you need to be managing that.

"When that truck has left your yard, it is your responsibility to manage it tightly: the cost, the opportunity, the utilization of that asset, and the information you share to and from a customer," says Ham. "And if you don't, somebody else will." **TT**