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## People Powering Technology

In today's world, property management vendors are continually talking about the value of technology and how it can improve the lives of those who employ it. Whether it is automating tasks, driving efficiency, or improving overall profitability, vendors are constantly challenged to prove to prospective clients how their technology will have an impact on an organization. As a vendor of property management software, I do have a bias towards believing in the types of improvements that can be achieved through the use of technology. I have seen first-hand the impact technology can have on a business. I am always challenging myself to ensure that clients are better off operationally and financially than they were before we started working together.

As much as I might like to believe that these improvements come solely as the result of our solutions, I am routinely reminded that technology is only one component of the success equation. Having spent over a decade and a half in the technology space, this truth is not always an easy thing to admit. As a software company, it is both convenient and dangerous to believe that database structures, business logic layers, and user interfaces are the key to success. However, as anyone knows who has ever relied on software to get a job done, a technology mindset ignores one of the most influential and powerful aspects of software—the people behind it.

### POWERED BY PEOPLE

There is no doubt that technology must be well designed and reliably delivered to be effective. Simply put, a software package has to work and perform the tasks it was intended to perform. What many technology firms forget is that their technology must work as a subsystem to a much more advanced and variable technology—the human being. Technology has to support, not dictate to, real people trying to solve real problems whose only interest in technology is how it is going to make their life easier or better. This aspect is where the people component of technology comes into play. People and the services they provide typically impact three areas that directly affect how

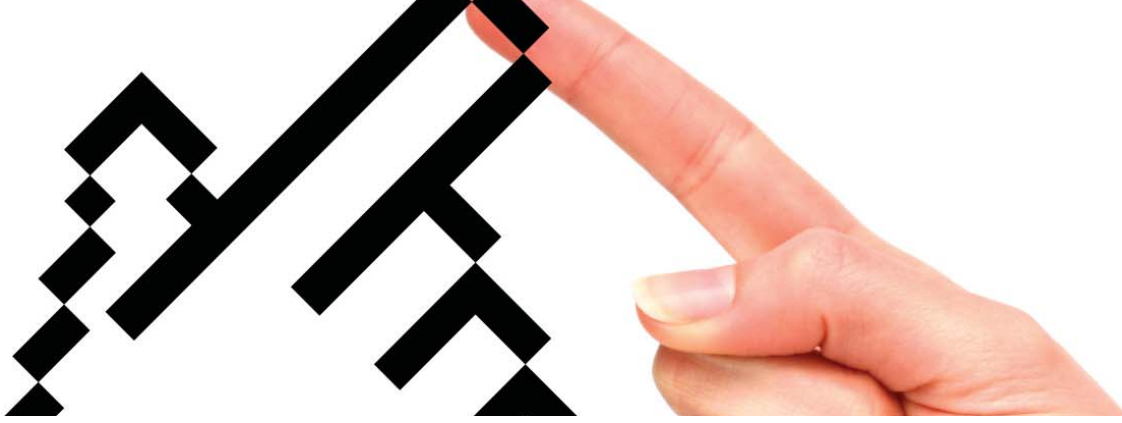
well technology is adopted, deployed, and used in an organization. These areas are guiding, training, and supporting.

### GUIDING

I recently helped my mother buy a DVR (Digital Video Recorder). For me, it was like being a kid in a candy store. I talked to her about configuration options, season passes, HDMI outputs, and interoperability with her TV. She patiently listened to me and, throughout most of my monologue, even managed to show a level of interest. When I was done, I asked what she thought. She responded, "I just want to know if you can set this one up so I can watch the *Today* show every morning." And there it was. All of my technology was passed over for a much simpler and more practical objective. Could I make it work? The underlying question my mother asked is equally applicable for technologies that you will use in the course of your business. Does the technology provider possess the experience and expertise to ensure that you are successful? The three questions I encourage everyone to ask themselves about any technology company they work with (and one I always ask of those I work with) are:

1. Do the people I am working with really understand what their technology is supposed to do?
2. Are they proficient in both the business and technology challenges I am faced with?
3. Do they seem more focused on solving my problems or on making a sale?

The answers to these questions are often a very powerful indicator of how well a piece of technology and the people who stand behind it will work for your organization. They also are very revealing as to the true focus of a company. If the answers always come back to technology (or requires a Google search to decipher what they said), odds are pretty good you will end up with an expensive investment that never realizes its full potential. If, on the other hand, you develop a level of confidence in the people you are



working with and they demonstrate that your success is really their key objective, you will be well on your way to finding a good technology partner.

### TRAINING

My daughters recently started taking foreign language classes at school. Not wanting to be left behind (and not really wanting them to start conspiring in a language I couldn't understand), I purchased a program where I could learn the same language on my computer "at my own pace". According to the box, I would be speaking proficiently by next weekend. Score one for Dad.

Well, no doubt it was a slick program and I did learn how to ask for some water, but my two daughters still managed to say something to each other, looking at me, and then start giggling without me having any idea as to what was going on. Clearly there were benefits from learning from a real person. Their teacher could interact with them, take questions, and then direct them how to meet a specific objective they were facing—mocking me.

The same is true when attempting to train yourself and your organization on how to use a new technology in your business. Although standard modules can be helpful in laying down basic fundamentals, live one-on-one interaction has a proven advantage when it comes to the assimilation of new information. The interaction not only gives direction to how we use a new technology, but it also accelerates how quickly we adopt it.

### SUPPORTING

If you have ever doubted the role that real, live people play in supporting technology, I encourage you to call my local cable company the next time your Internet service goes out. I have no doubt they have invested millions and millions of dollars in building a really "cool" technology that will handle my every need with pre-recorded segments. For every question I carefully pronounce into the automated voice system, they confidently prescribe a solution. In fact, they are so confident in some of their solutions that they recommend them regardless of what I ask.

- "Unplug your modem for 30 seconds and plug it back in."

- "Check that your computer is connected to your modem."
- Or my favorite, "For additional support, visit us online at [www...](#)" Trust me, I'd love to.

The reality is, particularly with business applications, although some questions do fit into neat buckets, the ones that seem to matter most do not. One person with the patience to understand what you are facing and the experience to work through your issues is worth more than a thousand hours of canned responses.

The next time you are evaluating an application, ask the sales person if you can speak to the help desk. The responsiveness and helpfulness of the help desk staff will give you a good idea as to the type of people you will, or will not, be talking to when it really matters.

### PEOPLE INSIDE

The combination of great technology and a team of people who can give outstanding support for the technology is difficult to find. Some organizations understand how important this combination is to your success. Other organizations do not. Do yourself a favor and put in a little extra research up front to ensure you work with organizations that do understand. Outstanding service-oriented people will ensure the technology pays for itself many times over. 🏠

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