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2003 Book
Amazon.com listing for the original book Make Sure You Get Paid (And Other Business Basics)

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Golden Oldies

For years, my consulting firms have helped big companies, including some of the world's largest multinationals, make more money. Those tunes are our Golden Oldies, a Big Band sound that we still love (alongside our new tunes).

What makes us stand out from other firms is that we care about the client's business. A system should match the business, not the other way around!

I have been known to play-act being a shop floor operator, using furniture as props, in front of a client's upper management. Although it wasn't dignified, I insisted, and it paid off. In half an hour the client recognised their planned new workflow was going to cause problems, and decided on one of three alternatives that my firm suggested. The chosen alternative has been pivotal to reducing their time-to-ship from 2 days to 2 hours.

We still love big projects like theirs. But the cold hard truth is that our big clients can get through the current downturn with what they have—and too many smaller businesses are on shifting sand. I decided we should make more effort to reach small firms. Is that you? Then read on!

New Chart-Toppers

Small businesses tell me that you want fresh, smart, energetic chart toppers. You want them sized to your budget and your overstretched staff. So let's get started.

Inexpensive (Some of it Free) Information

I'm well known among my peers for consistently getting paid on time by a giant that was notorious for late payments. I'm publishing all my tricks about how I do that.

In 2003 I published a book about how small businesses can get customers to pay without resorting to slow, expensive collection agencies or lawsuits (and other basics for small business).

Now you can get an updated, expanded, complete rewrite of the material about getting paid—as an inexpensive download (and any updates for 3 years are free). I'm working on more material for you, as fast as I can!

You can also get free reports, and access to any discounts I negotiate for small businesses on your behalf.

More Emphasis on Pay-For-Performance

Many small businesses can't pay much up front for services these days. We realize we've been offering mostly 'full length albums.' Now we're

adding 'hit singles' on a pay-for-performance basis.

This is simple. You tell us what's going on in your business. You don't pay us anything yet. We give you advice on how to improve your business. When acting on our advice increases your profits, you pay us an agreed percentage of the extra profits.

Since we only make money if we help you make more money, you know we'll do the best we can on your behalf.

There's one catch—you have to measure how you're doing. But you're supposed to be doing that anyway, and the result for you is 'free money.'

Choosing a Computer System

Let's say your company decided upgrading the computer system is necessary—so essential that the company will scrimp elsewhere to fund it—and you are in charge of the upgrade.

Should you start shopping for the "latest and greatest" system?

Sure, if you want a costly failure. It may run, but most likely it will make your coworkers miserable for years instead of making the business run smoother.

Start the way we do—look at the business. Make sure you understand exactly what the business needs to do. Then look for a system that can help to do that.

A Personal Tale of Choosing

Once upon a time, when CP/M was popular and DOS was the new kid on the block, my father decided to buy one of those new-fangled desktop computers for my mother. She could write her dissertation with a word processor, instead of retyping endlessly like she had for her master's thesis.

But my parents thought they could take a short cut. The next time I visited, they asked, "So, which computer should we buy?"

I refused to answer. I told them to visit computer stores and "test drive" word processing programs. Back then, some word processing programs used key combinations to embed formatting commands. Others used special syntax to distinguish formatting from text. My mother is a touch typist with unusual word processing needs. Such differences would matter. When she found the program she liked best, they should ask what machines could run it and buy one of those.

Let's just say my parents were less than delighted with this advice.

I stood firm, so they went to computer stores in the big city.

My mother's specialty is medieval British literature. Modern English no longer includes some alphabetic characters that used to be in the language. Those characters are represented by striking one modern letter and overstriking at a half-width offset with another modern letter. None of the word processing programs could do it. WordPerfect could be modified to do it. Only two combinations of computer and printer were available that could do what my mother needed. One system cost $1500 and the other, on a state of the art computer, cost $3000.

My parents bought the cheaper one. It did exactly what the dissertation required.

Even Big Companies Can Do It Wrong

I have seen Fortune 500 companies make mistakes similar to the one my parents avoided. The most common are:

- Putting in a computer system to simply do everything the same way it was done before, with the new computer system involved wherever possible.

- Getting a computer system that a sales agent says will do everything they need, but that does not really fit, and then forcing the business to fit computer system.

Either mistake is expensive.

The first costs money to put in the new computer system, but misses the opportunity to make workflow more effective. It happens because people who understand the flow of work in a business rarely understand what a computer could and could not handle, and the two groups don't really collaborate in selecting the new system.

Remember, my mother did not realize overstriking with an offset of half a width might be almost impossible for word processors when it was easy on her typewriter. She needed to collaborate with sales people who knew what each word processing program could do.

The second mistake is worse. After costing money to buy the new system, the business has to distort its procedures to suit the convenience of a software vendor (typically at the expense of effectiveness). Productivity can actually decline!

Doing It Right for Your Business

You will not make these mistakes and others similar to them if you begin by getting a clear understanding of not just how your business is doing everything now, but what it really needs to do. Like my parents, you need to understand that thoroughly, not just at a surface level. Small details like the characters that are no longer part of English can be important.

Walk through what shop floor operators do to make your product, or what forklift drivers to do to load your trucks, or what agents do to start a new insurance policy for a customer—whatever your business does. Find the bottlenecks. Walk through revised versions of your business procedures until the new workflow is the way you want it and you know exactly what you want a computer system to do in that workflow.

Then, and only then, it is time to look at the hardware and software available, because at last you know what you want it to do. You are no longer an easy mark for a polished sales pitch. Instead, you will look at what the available systems can do with an eye toward how well that suits the ideal new workflow. You might find, as my parents did, that you have a choice between the latest and greatest, or something older with a solid track record that can do the same job at half the cost. Also like my parents, you might find that nothing on the market is a perfect match, but something you can buy "off the shelf" can be readily tailored to fit well enough without the need for entirely custom software.

This approach is at the heart of how we approach your computer projects. If you aren't sure how to go about it, we'd love to help.