



# White Paper Why Do Some Information Management Projects Fail

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## Why Some Information Management Projects Fail

Information and Content Management projects have unique challenges that aren't always to be found in structured database development.

Whilst content management offers incredible returns on the initial investment, over the years, they have sometimes proved less successful than they should.

Various industry research and consulting companies have cited many of the reasons, and the senior members of NetMonkey's IM team concur with them and have described the key ones below. By avoiding many of the pitfalls, companies will considerably increase the chances of success:

1. Lack of senior management backing or input – whilst senior managers are not always able to play an active role in information management systems, they are as important to a company as management of the other two key assets: finance and personnel. In some projects, senior management have completely delegated all decision making to an IT department or junior manager. This often means the system is not built to target business benefits. Ultimately, systems which are just “nice to have” have no future.
2. No business case, or focus on benefits – no-one would ever build a new factory without knowing the costs, or what the anticipated savings will be. Information Management projects should be treated in exactly the same way. The benefits of an IM system can be far reaching and, sometimes, hard to always quantify. However, all benefits should be identified as it enables a clear focus on what is important. Surprisingly, this often does not happen. At some point in the future, someone will query why the system is being built – usually when the project is encountering a short term difficulty. Instead of this being addressed and overcome, it usually leads to scrutiny of why the project is being undertaken at all.
3. Projects lead by technologists – the essence of information management is about how people, teams and organisations manage information, how they think and behave, how doing things differently will bring benefits. Technology merely supports this. Unfortunately, the emphasis is too often placed on the technical side and left for an IT department to undertake. Usually IT departments are expert at writing code, at installing software and providing support. They are rarely experts in working with users to define taxonomies, or to think in terms of business process change.
4. Projects too complex – often the scope of projects grows and grows into something that is far too complex for users to come to terms with quickly. Once this happens, systems are rejected by users and it is hard to reduce functionality. It is important to be firm during projects with additional requirements that creep in.
5. Projects too trivial – on the other hand, sometimes information management systems are introduced as “quick wins”. In other words, very light functionality that anyone can use. Unfortunately, this functionality can be so trivial that there is no real compelling reason why the system should be used. It is just seen as yet another system and isn't used. Consequently, the whole system is judged a failure.
6. Best practice not used – because the underlying technology can be easy to install, IT departments with no experience in information and content management, build the system

on best endeavours rather than using best practice. There are some books on “best practice”, but even these fail to cover some of the key aspects such as taxonomy design in any detail. In any case, best practice is often contextual – only experience can really guide how best practice can be applied.

7. User adoption is a major part of a project, but overlooked – because information management projects aim to deliver an “easy to use” system, companies assume that means no training is required (after all, who needed training in using email, or the world wide web?). However, this misses the point that users still need to know about concepts and underlying processes. Without sufficient training, users will reject the new system and revert back to their old ways.
8. Lack of testing – there must be two different rounds of testing, and the testing must be planned and comprehensive. Testing need not be difficult, just well thought out. This, however, is often a hugely misunderstood area. System developers must test thoroughly, and end users must be absolutely certain the system will work in practice.

Whilst this whitepaper has focused on many of the negative aspects of a project, it should not obscure the fact that, in the right hands, information management projects can be extremely successful.

Customers should, however, go in with their eyes open and understand that, just like building a house, there will be difficulties along the way and there will be de-snagging at the end. However, with correct management, experienced project staff, and realistic expectations all difficulties can be overcome.