



## **Preface**

A niche healthcare software company (Company X) was experiencing a backlog of implementations after having re-tooled their flagship product. Sales were not lacking, but the implementation staff could not keep up with demand, and many clients experienced long and painful implementation processes. It was thought by senior management that hiring additional staff in the implementation department would solve this problem. Existing clients were beginning to become dissatisfied and the company, which previously had stellar client recommendations and approvals, was beginning to see the reversal of this. Taking a systemic, company-wide approach, Austin Strategic Partners did a top-to-bottom assessment of Company X which included organizational, process, functional and strategic views.

## **Discovery**

The discovery process targeted the following departments: Sales & Marketing, IT Development & Technical Services, and Implementation & Training. One-on-one interviews were conducted with selected individuals in each business area of the company. Processes and workflows were analyzed. Organizational and reporting structure of staff was assessed, as well as the need for additional or differently-skilled human resources. Meetings – both internal and with clients – were attended over a period of several weeks and assessed for their productivity and effectiveness. The tools (software applications and methods) staff used to execute their jobs were evaluated. The company's website and those of their competitors were reviewed. The technical architecture of their software product was assessed with an eye for how the product needs to be positioned for maximum competitive advantage, as well as ease in implementation. Findings were categorized as “pluses” – organizational, process or functional items that seemed to work in the best interests of the business as a whole, or as “minuses” – organizational, process or functional items which were seen as detrimental or counterproductive to the business, and thus represent opportunities for improvement. Recommendations included addressing the opportunities for improvement both from an operational and strategic standpoint.

## **Assessment**

Every software company, if they are in business for an extended length of time, is faced with re-tooling or updating their product(s) to take advantage of newer operating systems, programming languages, program tools, and advances in the information technology field. This is necessitated by market forces, demands from customers, and competitors entering the field using these newer technologies. Migration of a flagship product to new technologies and control of the requisite change and upheaval accompanying this, is perhaps the most necessary and challenging aspects of running a software company. As with most things in business, timing is critical. Being able to make these changes adeptly (if not seamlessly) and quickly, with little “down time” (span of time until the new product is available to install) and improved functionality, is critical to maintaining one's pre-eminence in the marketplace. Prolonged lags in getting the new technologies to market or having the new technology falter when deployed allows competitors – whose products were originally built on similar newer technologies and thus did not require re-tooling – to begin gaining market share. Thus, Company X found itself in a catch-up mode when once it was the market leader.

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Company X suffered from the immediate and long-term effects of re-tooling their product, a lack of stringent development and testing procedures, a lack of internal tools (particularly for Help Desk issue tracking and statistics), a lack of strategic vision for their product, poor management and planning, an inadequate phone system, unnecessary/unproductive meetings, inadequate valuing and accounting of their time and services, and insufficient capital and human resources. There were a noticeable lack of standards, test plans, process documentation, procedures, and methodologies to ensure that the basic goals of the business and clients were being met.

It bears noting that many of these problems are quite commonplace when a small company undergoes rapid growth. Too often they become a mid-sized company seemingly overnight without having the structural and organizational foundation to adequately support the enterprise. This usually manifests as a deleterious culture throughout the organization where “fire-fighting” rules every minute of every day and unpleasant human dynamics begin to surface. Moving from “fire-fighting mode” to a pro-active, strategic management approach is necessary for the long-term survivability of the company. Austin Strategic Partners helps management grow the leadership, organizational and strategic skills to be able to move the company forward into the next phase.

### Outcome

Within four-months of beginning this project, Austin Strategic Partners produced a report uncovering the root causes of many of the problems, and detailing a multitude of changes and recommendations. Though each of the changes and recommendations cannot be instituted overnight, many were time-critical, as the window of opportunity for a turnaround was shrinking daily. Austin Strategic Partners helped Company X to adopt a laser-like focus on a few key aspects immediately, and laid out a plan to begin working on the others over time. Sensitivity to the need for additional capital investment and human resources were taken into consideration. Austin Strategic Partners helped Company X to weed out from the many recommendations those that would provide the biggest bang for the buck. With the help of Austin Strategic Partners and a comprehensive plan of action, Company X will begin reaping the benefits, including a more stable product, predictable workflow, and happier customers.

As a companion project to this business assessment, Austin Strategic Partners recommends doing an assessment of current and former customers. This would typically entail open-ended phone interviews with current and former customers, as well as personal on-site visits to a few high profile customers. It is important that these interviews be conducted by an *independent* party, *not* by a company employee or “customer survey” tool, as the customer is apt to feel more at ease and thus apt to give more candid feedback. Gaining the customer’s perspective is critical for managing the business and the product, both from a strategic as well as operational standpoint. However, Company X chose not to do a customer assessment as part of this preliminary business assessment.

### In Their Own Words

*“We continue to be impressed with Cheryl’s insight. She is quite talented in the ability to analyze systems objectively, in a short period of time, with little to go on. ...She did a fantastic job! This is exactly what I wanted.”*

*“Cheryl’s extensive background in healthcare IT and understanding of organizational analytics are exceptional. Her work was thorough, expedient and amazingly comprehensive. The report of her findings has been studied by all managers and senior management. Her objective feedback is presented constructively and facilitates productive dialogue within management to find creative solutions. I can highly recommend Austin Strategic Partners to analyze other companies’ workflow processes, dynamics, product development, customer service and internal departmental structures to identify weaknesses and present possible solutions.” --- President & CEO, Company X*