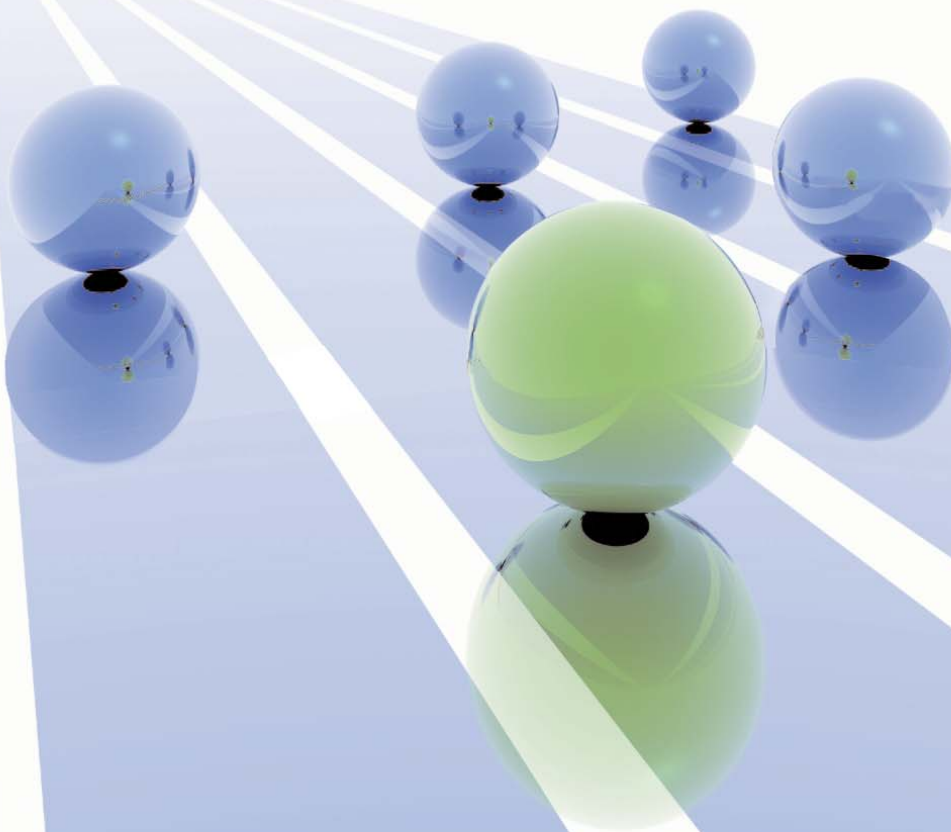# The
Five Simple Secrets
to a Successful Software Initiative

Let thirty years of experience help you create a business breakthrough.

You have been tasked with finding the software solution that will allow your organization to breakthrough current business system barriers, streamline business processes, elevate efficiency and productivity to their highest levels, wow the customer, slaughter the competition, and send profits skyrocketing.

Directing a major new software initiative is an exciting responsibility. It is also a complex task that can feel a bit daunting and can even become somewhat overwhelming. With high expectations, and so much at stake, you'll want to be sure you are doing all you can to insure your success.

At Slingshot Software, we've had over thirty years experience partnering with such companies as Apple Computer, Exxon Mobil, CNA Surety and General Electric to help them realize significant business objectives through the successful launch of major new software initiatives.

Based on what we have seen first hand, and what we have learned through personal experience we have identified five simple secrets that have led to the business breakthroughs and success stories of these and other companies and we want to share them with you.

Get Everyone "In the Boat"
Set Your Eye on the Prize
Collaborate with Your Vendors
Manage Expectations Going In
Publish a Scorecard – Measure Results

Following these five simple secrets right from the start will allow you to take control of your initiative, improve your aim so you hit your targets, and realize the business success that is your goal.

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Success depends heavily on "360 degrees" of support.

1. Get Everyone "In The Boat"

> *"Before everything else, getting ready is the secret to success."*
> *Henry Ford*

In archery, the goal is to hit the bull's eye. The three most important attributes of a good archer are style, form and concentration - all of which happen before the arrow is loosed.

Similarly, the following three characteristics can prepare your company to reach your software initiative goals before you even begin your search.

Commitment
A budget that includes a 'change budget,' a timeline, and sufficient resources are all indications that your company has the level of commitment needed to assure the success of your software initiative.

Support
Success depends heavily on "360 degrees" of support. It is essential to get buy in not only from the corporate sponsor or committee, but also from the operational representatives and especially the users themselves.

Accountability
Is accountability clearly identified? With clear accountability comes clear decision-making, assuring that the functional direction of your project will remain in clear focus at all levels of the hierarchy (starting at the top).

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Identify, in advance, which key metrics you are trying to impact

2. Set Your Eye On the Prize

"The art of reaching business targets is not to aim at the impossible, but to aim at the championship level."

Charles Forte, Forte Hotels

In order to aim at the championship level, you have to define what 'championship' means for your team and for this specific project. Here are three ways in which you can enhance your vision, focus in on the target and thereby improve your aim.

Identify & quantify expected gains from your new solution.
Define which specific elements of your business process you hope to improve with this software initiative. Next, identify, in advance, which key metrics you are trying to impact with these improvements and by how much.

Confidently add or eliminate vendors from your short list.
Once you have identified the business process improvement goals and metrics, take it to the next level by clearly defining how a new software solution will help you meet these goals in ways that your present software system cannot. Next, be prepared to communicate your unique requirements clearly and succinctly to prospective software vendors.

Find the best solution- even if it is hiding in plain sight.
Guard against relying on brand names and impressive case studies alone. Instead look for evidence that the prospective vendor understands your specific business processes and drivers, and that they demonstrate the ability to continue to meet your changing future needs *quickly and affordably*. Don't trade brand recognition for the fit, attentiveness and agility that many smaller vendors are better able to provide. Don't overlook the possibility that the best fit is hiding in plain sight.

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Empower Vendors to bring their expertise to bear for your benefit.

3. Collaborate with Your Prospective Vendors

"Great discoveries and improvements invariably involve the cooperation of many minds."

Alexander Graham Bell

While choosing a "close-to-the-vest" strategy may give you a competitive edge in some business circumstances, other situations call for a more open and collaborative approach. The more information you share with your vendors the better able they will be to collaborate with you in prescribing appropriate, creative, and personalized solutions to alleviate your current business 'pains.'

Engage your Prospective Vendors
Let the vendor in on your goals and biases. Empower them and require that they come back with more tangible information showing how they will meet your needs. This gives you something to hold them accountable for later.

Vendors Compete, You Decide
Inform your vendors of whom they are competing against.   You will get more useful information about how they are specifically different from each other. You will also gain valuable insight into the character of your vendors.

Avoid the "Cone of Silence"
Vendors have the expertise and experience to find solutions to your problems that you may not have considered. The more you treat them as a partner in your business and the more you tell them about your business objectives the more you enable them to bring their expertise to bear for your benefit.

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Get agreement about protocols for dealing with potential changes.

4. Manage Expectations Going In

"When it comes to stakeholder expectations, nothing beats documentation! Get Stakeholder expectations in writing as soon as possible."

Joseph Phillips, The PMP Study Guide

One of the most crucial skills in project management is managing expectations – especially with respect to inevitable changes in requirements, scope, budget and timelines. Take control of expectations by carefully setting them in the beginning, anchoring them to metrics, and frequently adjusting them throughout the life of the project.

Define
Define not only desired outcomes but also identify areas where change is likely to occur. Get agreement about protocols for dealing with potential changes in project scope. Based on business drivers and other internal priorities, decide in advance how you will evaluate the risk and value of new opportunities that arise as a result of a proactive and iterative discovery process.

Align
There are likely to be both stated and unstated expectations and business drivers. Tie the stated and well-defined objectives to concrete projections, metrics and milestones. Search out and unearth any unstated expectations, business drivers, or hidden agendas. Actively adjust to seek a path that includes and addresses what you uncover. Get everyone aligned around a clear set of goals. Document and make known anything that could have a potential impact on your project.

Refine
Monitor and measure the progress toward your milestones and also the evolving expectations of the people around you. Plan to spend as much time actively monitoring and refining people's expectations as you spend adjusting documented timelines and targets to reflect the changing reality of the project.

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Strengthen new productive relationships by rewarding positive collaboration.

5. Publish a Scorecard - Measure the End Result

> *"The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it is the same problem you had last year."*
>
> *John Foster Dulles*

The successful completion of a project should be a time for celebration. This is the time to recognize and reward success.

Keeping Score
Identify the metrics and reporting that need to be in place in order to accurately measure and communicate how new software is helping you improve your business process.

Evaluate Your Aim
Gather feedback from everyone involved, including your vendor. Evaluate your aim – did you hit milestones, deadlines? How well did you course correct throughout the life of the project? How did the project measure up to budget and timeline goals? Be sure to identify and include ways in which unexpected and unplanned process improvements and other benefits were attained.

Did you uncover any opportunities to improve your organization's core competencies or to better define business drivers? Write up a formal evaluation of what went well and where you see opportunities for improvement.

Most Valuable Players
Here is an opportunity to use the positive momentum of completing this major initiative to sail through the training learning curve and ensure user adoption. Acknowledging and reward the key contributors who helped make this a success. Strengthen new positive relationships by rewarding positive collaboration.

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You can lead the way to breakthrough success for your company.

Onward and Upward !

With a thoughtful plan, organizational commitment and clear accountability, you will start your software initiative on solid foundation that will support a successful conclusion.

As you move forward, working with your prospective vendors and take advantage of their expertise and creativity you will gain unstoppable momentum.

Careful management of changing scope and timely adjustment of expectations will keep your project true to course. Stay that course, with the help of an experienced and attentive vendor support team, and you will soon be celebrating a win and enjoying your just rewards.

You can lead the way to higher productivity and profitability, happier customers, and the competitive advantage that creates a breakthrough success for your company.

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