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BEST PRACTICES FOR IT ROLLOUTS IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

Tech Service Today White Paper

Restaurant ownership is a high risk business enterprise. Sixty percent of restaurants succumb to failure within the first year of opening. Businesses that successfully stay alive beyond the first year mark are continuously dealing with a multitude of challenges to break even, let alone make a profit. Information technology encompasses a huge slice of the restaurant operations pie. Establishing a well-thought-out plan with an excellent project management team is critical for success.

Drawing on TST's extensive experience running 100's of IT projects per year, this white paper addresses critical points to ensure effective and efficient IT project rollouts.



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INTRODUCTION

Rollouts of POS, BYOD WiFi, DMB, KDS, drive-thru systems, network/telecom equipment and cabling are essential to stay competitive in the Restaurant industry.

Cost-effective rollouts require careful planning, piloting and coordination to remain within budget, on-time and deliver complete functionality to business users.

The effectiveness of your project management is key to determining success or failure.

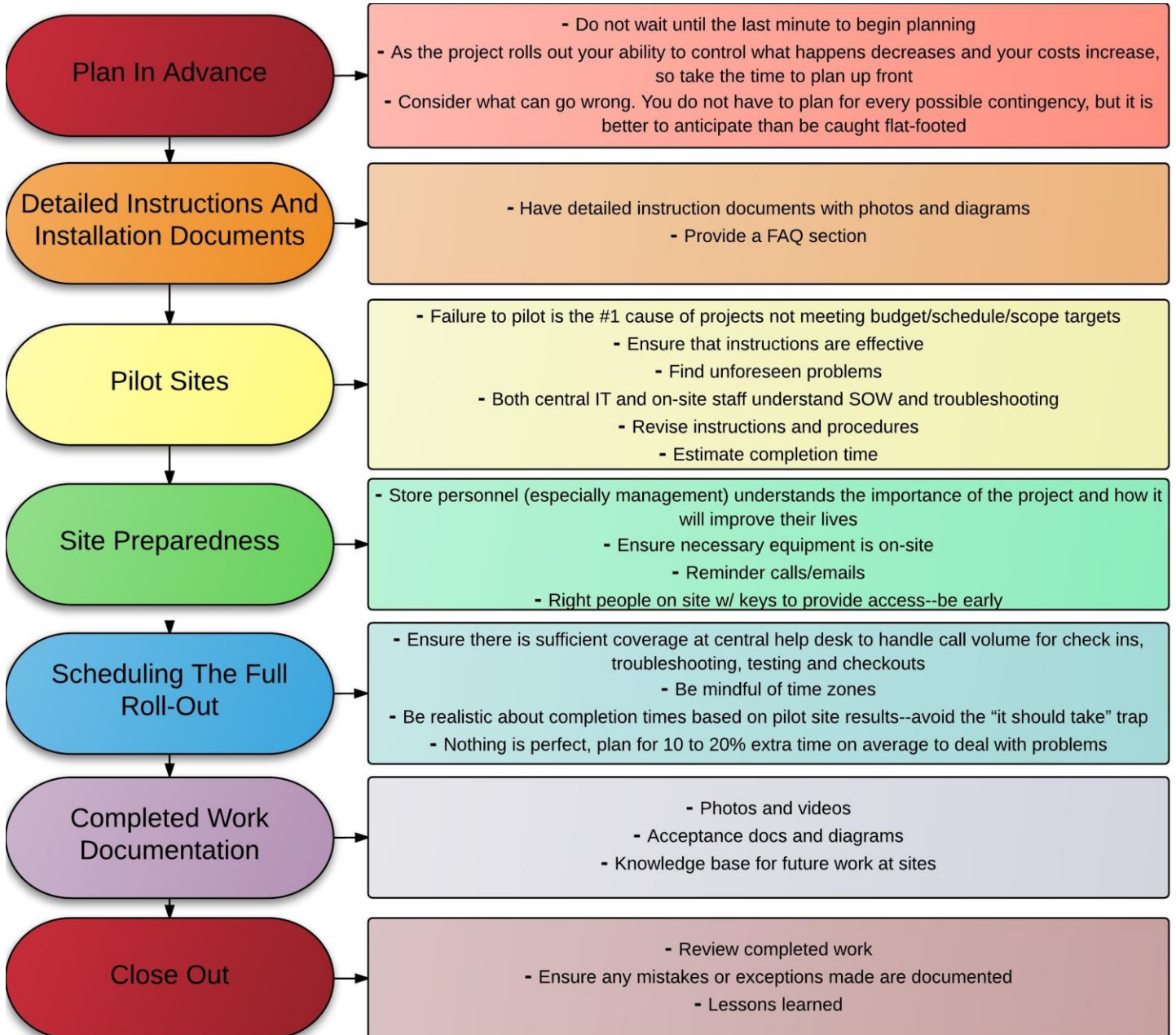
In this white paper, we outline strategies and tactics for Restaurant IT infrastructure executives and managers to successfully prepare for and deploy system installations and upgrades.

What You Will Learn:

- Most common IT rollout pitfalls
- Best practice for planning and communication
- Why piloting is critical to success



BEST PRACTICES FOR IT ROLLOUTS

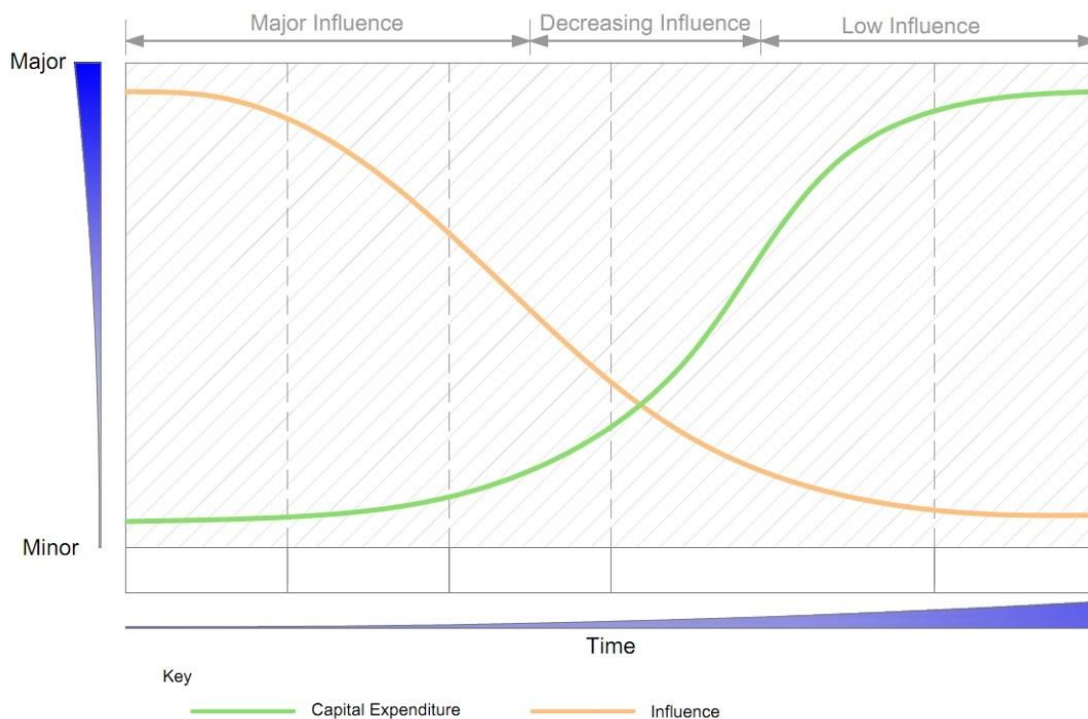




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PLAN IN ADVANCE

It is crucial to not wait until the last minute to start planning. The inception of the project is the most important as it sets the stage for everything the rollout will entail. As the project rolls out, your ability to control what happens decreases and your cost increases; therefore, it is essential to take the time to plan up front. You cannot reverse that arrow of time. As time moves along, you are stuck with the decisions you make at the outset. So it is critically important to plan on spending several weeks before you even pilot to think everything through and get it strategically schemed and structured. The bigger the project, the more preparation time will be necessary.



Control
&
Cost
VS
Time

In the preparation process, you will need to consider what can go wrong. You do not have to plan for every possible contingency, but it is better to anticipate problems you can encounter so that you are better able to prevent or mitigate those problems from happening. For example, you have a technician that needs to enter a restaurant location at a set time. You need to be sure you have the correct restaurant personnel showing up to the store with the right keys at the right time. That is something you can plan for. Too frequently this does not happen and the amount of time a technician is waiting and not working is more money out of your restaurant's pocket.

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NECESSARY DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS AND INSTALLATION DOCUMENTS

It is very important for any part of a rollout to have detailed instruction documents for technicians to follow. The scope of work should be as detailed as possible to avoid mistakes and misses.

Provide pictures and diagrams as reference guides. This can include equipment being installed or removed, cables techs may need to find and plug in, the network environment, and an overall indication of where things are located. Clear, visual documentation enables smooth and easy installations.

A FAQ section helps to answer common questions on-site technicians are likely to have. By listing all specific questions and answers, you avoid unnecessary phone calls, decreasing extra time spent on-site talking to your help desk.

After these documents are created, the next important step is to review and validate them with your project management team and field technicians. Field technicians may not have the familiarity with certain systems, so it is important to review these instructions with a couple of them prior to your pilot.



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IMPORTANCE OF PILOT SITES

“No Battle Plan Survives Initial Contact With the Enemy” - Helmuth von Moltke

Any brilliant plan, once it enters into the real world for the first time, runs the risk of failure. This is why pilot sites are crucial to the success of an IT rollout. As much planning you do up front even after validating your SOW documents with field techs, when you get out into the field, you will inevitably come across some unforeseen problems. Failure to pilot is the #1 cause of projects not meeting budget, schedule and scope targets

Pilot sites will enable you to ensure that your instructions and documents are effective not only with your field techs, but with your help desk. Piloting will give you the ability to run into any unanticipated problems and adapt. This will give you the ability to revise or change your instructions, documents, processes and procedures.

It is also very important that everybody including the central IT and on-site staff understand the SOW and troubleshooting. For example, with applications that you may know second nature by troubleshooting all the time, what may seem obvious to you may not be obvious to techs in the field. Pilots are the way to bring these issues up allowing you to learn if your internal staff needs some training before rolling it out into the field.

Additionally, pilot sites aid in the capability to obtain much better estimates on completion times. Do not get caught up in the “It Should Take” syndrome. Frequently people estimate times that are too low and fail to consider all the practical, real-world steps that go into completing a task or assume perfect information. For example, let’s take a wireless access point swap out. In theory, performing the task may seem very quick and simple. Simply unplugging and removing an old AP and putting in a new one in and of itself only takes a short time. However, what if the access points are not readily available or visible, restaurant personnel were not on time for tech entry, or another infrastructure problem presented itself? A seemingly simple job could then take several hours. A pilot site would enable you to anticipate all of these problems and have systematic improvements in place to cut the time and reduce costs by having a realistic estimate of completion time. This is why pilot sites are absolutely critical before rolling out as it saves you a lot of time and money at the end of the project.



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SITE PREPAREDNESS

It is integral to have your sites prepared ahead of time prior to your rollout. Restaurant personnel, especially management, need to be notified and understand the importance of the project and how it will positively impact and improve their lives. Informing them of how it will be a better user experience and easier process for them will more likely get them invested in the rollout. This will help make the scheduling and working through the project a much smoother process. They will be more apt to be helpful participants, substantially reducing delays and costs. Restaurant personnel not showing up at the right time at the right place with the right keys is a potential problem you must anticipate. By gaining their buy-in before the project commences, you increase their willingness to ensure that the process runs smoothly.

You will also need to ensure the necessary equipment is on-site prior to the pilot and rollout. When the technician arrives on-site, make sure they have everything they need to begin the work to avoid any error and delay. A lot of projects have been pushed off due to equipment not being on-site when the rollout begins. You need to be tracking the equipment or be sure that the equipment vendor is tracking it and you need to verify it is on-site prior to the technician's scheduled arrival. You also need to be clear on when the technician is going to be on-site and what exactly they will need to get access to. It is also critical to have the equipment in one secure, accessible place and clearly marked. It is a waste of time and money to have techs arrive on-site and search around (sometimes opening and going through boxes) for equipment. To avoid unnecessary delays, it is best for restaurant staff to be early, so that technicians can begin work immediately upon arrival.

After all the sites are notified, you will need to make reminder calls and emails to the site contacts and everybody involved. Usually the best method is to initially have a conference call with a group of restaurants to go through the process, get them invested, instill the importance of having the right keys and being early for risk mitigation. You should then follow this up through email and calls.



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SCHEDULING THE FULL ROLLOUT

When scheduling the full roll-out, you need to ensure there is sufficient coverage at the central help desk to handle call volume for all the necessary processes which include check-ins, troubleshooting, testing and checkouts. Without the proper amount of staffing in place this will impede the smoothness of the process requiring long wait periods for technicians trying to reach your help desk. For example, if you have thirty locations set up for one night, you need to be sure your help desk has enough personnel to handle that call volume. If you have only two people at the desk with thirty technicians calling over a span of four hours, this may result in long wait times for technicians and an overwhelmed help desk. It could take the help desk two hours to even call back a technician to go through the process. This means not only time wasted, but money wasted. Every hour a technician is not able to do his/her work, is money out of your company's pocket.

Another method would be to spread out the project. Instead of thirty locations in one night, plan on a handful instead. It is better to complete the project properly than to rush through it. If you cannot extend the completion date, you may have to schedule additional resources to handle the support load.

Be mindful of time zones: it may not be realistic to schedule restaurant personnel on the West Coast to be on-site giving a field tech access at 5 AM local time to accommodate an 8 AM start time for your East Coast help desk. Be sure time zones are double checked prior to all scheduling.

Again, be realistic about completion times based on pilot site results--avoid the "it should take" trap. We want things to occur and happen quickly, but we want to leave room for any possible mistakes and unforeseen issues. Nothing is perfect, plan for 10 to 20% extra time on average to deal with potential problems that may arise.



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COMPLETED WORK DOCUMENTATION

Your project is not complete until you have received all the work documentation. You should obtain the close out information and all the deliverables and review the lessons learned so you can go into the next rollout worry free.

The close out process starts with making sure you receive the photos, videos, documents and diagrams that were created during the rollout. Most likely the company you work with will put this together for you. Best method is access to a shared portal or drive to obtain this information. It is important to have an accessible area to navigate and export from. The guides will help tremendously and be your knowledge base for future work at those sites, especially for locating network equipment or to understand the layout of the area.

CLOSE OUT

From these documents, you want to review all completed work to be sure it is up to your standards. If any mistakes were made, you want to ensure these are documented for future installations. You also want to do this for any exceptions that you made that differ from the original documents, making sure any and all of these are updated.

Finally, you reached the last step in the rollout process. You want to review the entire project with your team in order to comprehend all the lessons learned. This is a very important aspect of the process as it will aid in improving your efficiency on future projects.



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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, following the practices delineated in the white paper above will ensure your success in implementing any IT rollout for your restaurant.

- Advanced planning anticipating all problems that may occur.
- Clear cut instructional documents and guides for organizational effectiveness of the rollout plan.
- Pilot sites are essential to enact trial runs ensuring all possible problems are seen and rectified. This will enable you to have the best system implementations in place.
- Education and site preparedness for all of those involved in the process.
- A clear cut schedule for the full rollout that includes sufficient staffing to handle all the aid that is required
- Everything is properly documented via photos, videos, documents and graphs. This is crucial for future installations and upgrades.
- Review of all work and any issues and problems were documented.

The success of your restaurant means everything and you want to be sure you are doing everything in your power to set any and all rollouts up for success.

“There are no secrets to success,
it is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure”

-Colin Powell



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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