



IT Strategy Workshops at Walkers Snack Foods

A series of tailored Graphic Facilitation workshops provided an effective forum for Walkers to review their IT strategy.

Background

The Commercial Systems and Emerging Technologies departments at Walkers required help in devising a technical strategy to put into place from 2002. They had already carried out a review of the retailer, financial, and sales and marketing information currently being used within the company, and requested assistance from Thorogood to help them devise a technical strategy to consolidate the proliferation of systems currently in use, and set a framework for future reporting requirements. One of Walkers three key focus areas had already been defined as Business Intelligence.

Issues

Walkers currently have many small, tactical systems. These fulfill their current needs, but there has been little long-term thinking. They take data from a range of different sources: EPOS, market research, promotions, logistics; in a variety of formats: paper, Oracle Sales Analyzer, Excel, Business Objects, Crystal Reports. This has proved difficult to manage.

Objectives

There were five main objectives for the project:

- To develop a Vision and Strategy for Business Intelligence at Walkers;
- To understand what information the business needs and values, both now and in the future;
- To define what Walkers will look like in terms of Business Intelligence in three years time;
- To identify the steps to achieving this goal;
- To ensure full buy-in from both business and IT users.

Process

The process of defining a technical strategy comprises several steps:

1. Scope definition – Define which departments, data sources and layers of technical architecture will be included and affected by the review, and the priorities;
2. Understanding of business goals and technical possibilities – Joint workshop held to enable Thorogood to understand the business goals and for Walkers participants to understand the technical possibilities;
3. Visioning using Metaphor Based Graphic Facilitation (see below);
4. Detailed data mapping – in order to be able to identify where integration could take place;
5. Identification of stages in transition from the current situation to vision;
6. Identification of risks and risk management process.

Thorogood assisted Walkers in every stage of the process including the two workshops, facilitated by Thorogood and attended by key decision makers from Walkers.

Graphic Facilitation

What is a Graphic Facilitation Workshop?

Graphic Facilitation is based on four elements: Facilitation, Graphics, Strategic Planning and Change Theory. It involves the pictorial representation of the discussions and outputs of a workshop. Graphic facilitation gets away from the lists on flipcharts approach, replacing them with large graphical charts that help share ideas and create 'group memory'. The graphical metaphors embodied in the charts are taken from well-established strategic planning approaches, for example, SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats) analysis and Porter's Five Forces model. Another useful exercise is defining a timeline showing key external and internal events. The impact of these events on the business can then be discussed.

The fact that the facilitators are independent of the company helps to confirm to the stakeholders that they can influence the outcome of the strategy review. The facilitators are also experienced at using the interaction to build consensus and commitment.

Thorogood Input

Thorogood was uniquely placed to assist Walkers in defining their IT strategy for many reasons:

- we are experienced in facilitating strategy workshops for our clients;
- we have many years of practical experience in a wide range of application areas;
- we have extensive experience of a wide range of technologies and since we are independent of the technology vendors, can provide unbiased answers to technology questions;
- we have much experience of the use of continuous market research and EPOS data, particularly in FMCG companies;
- our use of the Prince project management framework ensures that the strategy project is run smoothly.

Benefits to the Client

Walkers now have:

- a recognition that change is needed;
- a shared vision;
- identification of critical success factors and insights into why some past initiatives have failed;
- an action plan to implement a new Business Intelligence Strategy – phased, costed and with stakeholder buy-in.

In today's technological age there is no shortage of information, but how do you access the facts you want, when you want them and in the best possible format? To help you, Thorogood makes sense of data. We combine our skills in IT and numerate analysis with business understanding to provide you with solutions to help you get ahead in today's marketplace. Independent since 1987, our focus is to find exactly the right system to match your needs.

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