

Pastrami and the Pain of Change

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My dad used to always say "...the right tool for the right job". Actually that was my brother. I think it was my dad who always said "you are such a tool... why don't you get a job!" Anyway, sometimes we find ourselves building applications that are the "wrong tool." We often get customers who ask us to build things for them that sound neat, but are not really going to save them time or money. We usually try to steer them right, but sometimes we end up building the widget anyway. To be honest I'm often humbled to find out that I don't know everything - especially about someone else's business. *The Customer* often knows exactly what will work and just needs someone to build it.

Still, there are many cases examples of working "harder not smarter" out there. As an aside, I'd like to give myself extra credit for using two well-worn clichés in a single blog post - now we may continue. We have a customer who was using FTP to copy files around. He has 3 or 4 sets of people (vendors, contractors, customers etc.) that all need access to various files. His procedure has been to manage a large pool of FTP accounts and manually copy files around from the various directories to the users who need them. Up until recently this was all done with an off the shelf PC running XP Home and no firewall. It makes me shudder just thinking about it. His IP address is..... *just kidding*.

We built his growing business a nice little tracking system running blue dragon. It allows him to bundle projects together and manage files on a per project basis - replacing his FTP system. We installed it on a brand new Dell server (dual core procs - very nice) and showed him how to use it.

The problem is that switching from his current system to a new system is very painful and detracts from valuable time he needs ... mostly to copy files but still.... did I mention that he now copies files to his new server as well? He's a file copying machine this man! I'm being humorous, but there is a point here. It has to do with the "pain of change".

A wise man once said "change occurs when the pain of change becomes less than the pain of remaining the same." He said it right after the deli informed him that they ran out of pastrami. There's more than a nugget of truth in that statement. Don't assume that your new application is going to change the world just because it does things so much better than the current system. Change is uncomfortable.

Change requires someone to go "back to school" and learn something brand new. It puts them in a position of ignorance again after they have mastered the current system. The truth is that few people really enjoy learning something brand new. Very few people are able to say "I don't know" without any pretension or feeling of inadequacy. When you find someone who can, hire them immediately if they are over the age of 11. Before the age of 11 "I don't know" is a mantra. After that age of ten it shifts to "You don't know..." (followed by "what I'm going through").

But back to my original point, change is hard and complex and involves personal dynamics and modifying well-worn routines. Many folks have learned from hard experience that change sometimes results in things getting worse instead of better.

Don't be afraid to coddle your users and help them over the hump. Remember, if they *do* use your ap and it *does* save them time they will be back for more.