Quick Wins - Top Tips that could help your business

Achieving results from the outset of a project is important to drive project momentum. In order to achieve this, the focus is often put on Quick Wins to deliver value an early Return on Investment (ROI).

A “Quick Win” needs to:

• Be low risk
• Have a narrow and focussed scope
• Require minimum capital expenditure to be implemented
• Be focused on an issue with a known root cause with an obvious solution
• Almost certainly create positive results
• Be implementable in the short term

The devil is in the detail

Implementing a Quick Win often requires a company to focus on the all-important details. Before anyone even talks about making changes, you must research the business with a fine tooth comb. Looking at the day-to-day operation of the company is essential, especially the minute details which previously may have been overlooked.

Often, the best way of understanding a business is by communicating with the staff, since they generally know best! However, focusing on the day-to-day running of the company is useless if you completely ignore the management aspects. Any proposal must also fit in with the business model, the business’s underlying aims and their current status.

Researching both perspectives thoroughly allows you to formulate a proposal that will match the day-to-day running of the company with the business model. This is the formula for a successful Quick Wins strategy.

Formulating a Quick Wins proposal

Formulating a proposal requires two things: consideration and communication. These must both be used when undertaking the following steps for formulating a Quick Wins proposal:
• Meet with the key team to discuss ideas
• Ask technical and business stakeholders for their input
• Ensure everyone in the team understands the purpose and details of the project
• Be open to solutions
• Listen to consumer suggestions – often the proposals that work best come from the people they concern
• Provide feedback on consumer opinions. Give credit where it’s due

Look at these areas; they often hold the key to a Quick Win:

• Processes – are there more steps than there need to be in your processes?
• Personnel and training – are employees knowledgeable enough, and do they need training on best practices?
• Production – are there substitutes for more expensive parts in your production process?
• Storage – do you have too little or too much safety stock?
• Compliance – are parts of your business not compliant with policies?
• Suppliers – are they willing to work for less? If not, are their competitors?
• Communication – is poor communication forcing you to take on more safety stock or making your processes less efficient?
• Software – are you using the software you have properly? Are you using all of the software packaged in with it?
• Error proofing – are there too many mistakes? Can you find ways to avoid these?

What makes a successful Quick Win proposal?

Once a proposal is formulated, it should be evaluated to ensure that it meets these requirements:

• The financial impact has been calculated
• The specific criterion of the company has been taken into account
• It fits in with the larger business model
• It provides realistic and quantifiable targets
• It will deliver measurable benefits to the company
• The probability of errors in the implementation process have been measured
• How widely does the proposal need to be implemented in the business – does it need to be incorporated into different divisions
Case Study: UN Millennium Development Project – the importance of adequate planning

In 2001, the UN set out a series of goals designed to improve the lives of people living in developing countries- the UN Millennium Development Project. In 2005, the UN developed a series of ‘quick wins’ designed to have an immediate positive effect (within 3-5 years) including:

- eliminating school uniform charges;
- providing impoverished farmers in sub-Saharan Africa with affordable ways to replenish the nutrients in the soil;
- providing free school meals and ‘take home’ rations;
- designing ‘Community Nutrition Programmes’ for pregnant and lactating women, and children under five;
- providing annual de-worming to all children in affected areas, and improve health education;
- eliminating fees for basic health services in developing countries;
- financing community based slum-improvement projects;
- providing access to electricity, water, sanitation, and the internet to all hospitals, schools, and other social service institutions;
- reforming legislation to ensure women have the right to property and inheritance;
- establishing an officer of science to advise the government in each country on the role of science in policy making;
- empowering women to play an active role in poverty reduction strategies; and
- providing community level support to plant trees to improve the quality of the soil and provide fuel, shade, fodder, watershed protection, windbreak and timber.

These goals were considered to be ‘easy wins’, however many of them were not met by the end of the decade and some haven’t been met as of now.

It has been argued that the failure to achieve the goals of the larger project was the UN’s fault. While telling the governments in question what to aim for, the IMF (a UN specialised agency) imposed budget ceilings and told governments to freeze payrolls, rather than telling donors to increase their contributions to the internationally agreed threshold of 0.7% of GDP. This problem persisted after the introduction of the ‘quick wins’ policy.

This problem, especially in regard to the role of the IMF, is compounded by the fact that not all of the ‘quick win’ proposals are sustainable- for example providing basic healthcare that’s free at the point of use could cripple an economy without adequate planning. This is where long-term planning comes in- something that’s often considered to be of secondary importance by donors.

The ‘quick wins’ involved in the UN Millennium Development Project became harder to achieve because of poor planning: the ‘quick wins’ involved were often hard for governments to implement, and wider IMF policy was not coherent with the UN Millennium Development Project.
Implementation – Make or break stage

Once the proposal is accepted, it must be implemented. However it is during this stage that many Quick Win strategies fall apart. Although Quick Wins don’t require a formal strategy, if they are implemented haphazardly or if there aren’t adequate systems in place to measure compliance, targets could be impossible to reach.

Before implementation, a plan must be developed to select what devices will be used to measure the success or failure of the project.

Communication is also key: It is imperative that all the relevant people have an in depth knowledge of the Quick Win strategies before they are implemented, and are also aware of any restrictions that would challenge them from delivering the predicted results.

Case Study: The UK Government – Implementation failure

The Government’s commitment to sustainability led to a policy of minimum environmental standards in procurement across all central Government departments in 2003. In its 2005 ‘Sustainable Development Strategy’ the Government set a goal to be recognised as one of the leaders in sustainable procurement in the EU by 2009.

The goals were set without an adequate measure for success - there were no quantifiable targets given to departments. A flexible framework can be useful in cases like this, especially as technological advancements may easily render previous targets inadequate, however even this was vague. The stated aim was to become ‘one of the leaders’, with no reference to how that would be measured: would sustainability be measured by the number of contracts awarded based on sustainable credentials, CO2 output, or any other criteria for sustainability? And would the stated goal- to be ‘one of the leaders’- be measured in the deficit between the best to the UK or simply being in the top handful of nations?

The Government did however delegate responsibility for the project to a definite body; however their power to enforce the policy was not clear and there was little attention put on systems to measure compliance.

For 2007-2008, only 15 out of 21 Government departments reported that they were compliant with the standards set out in 2003. Of those 15, six of those departments reported that they did not have adequate systems for checking compliance.

In a 2009 report by the National Audit Office, the failings were put down to these factors:

• The Government’s primary goal contained no quantifiable targets. Where the flexible framework of the target- to be recognised as a leader within the EU by 2009- allows for some progress, there is no way to check consistency and there is no way to measure outcomes.
• Staff have been uncertain as to how and when to take the costs and benefits of sustainability within the procurement process, as ‘quick wins’ were historically set at market average levels.
• There was uncertainty amongst staff as to how far EU legislation allowed them to take sustainability into account during the procurement process – many mistakenly believed that they were legally prevented from seeking more sustainable suppliers.
• Not all departments have been complying with the mandatory ‘quick wins’ policies.
• There are few systems in place to adequately measure compliance.

New policies were implemented in 2008 leading to significant improvements in the sustainability of procurement. iv

Success Breeds Success

The successful implementation of a Quick Win strategy creates an environment of improvement. When employees know that their feedback may actually lead to change, they are more likely to offer suggestions and opinions.

When one Quick Win is successfully implemented, employees become less reluctant to see the same kind of change in the future, which in turn encourages the business to uses the Quick Win strategy again.

Quick Wins can not only dramatically enhance your company’s short term positioning, but successful implementation can also lead to long term change and development within the whole company.

If you are looking to achieve Quick Wins for your company, SpringTide can help you to devise a strategy. We’ve got a great track record in identifying areas for immediate cost reduction.

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Call us 0333 9000 350, or drop us an email contact@springtideltd.co.uk to see how we can help your business.

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i Information regarding the goals of the UN Development Project taken from 2006 pamphlet ‘A Q & A on the Millennium Project and Millennium Development Goals’ commissioned by the UN <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/UNMP-QandA-E.pdf>
ii Information taken from the UN publication ‘Achieving the Internationally Agreed Development Goals: Dialogues at the Economic and Social Council’
iii Information taken from ‘Sub-Saharan Africa and the health MDGs: the need to move beyond the “quick impact” model’ by Richard, Hercot, Ouédraogo, Delvaux, Samaké, van Olmen, Conombo, Hammonds, & Vandemoortele, published in Reproductive Health Matters - November 2011 (Vol. 19, Issue 38, Pages 42-55)