

Questions and Answers

As a service to our readers, we have decided to start a 'Questions and Answers'-column. If you have a problem in information technology, do not hesitate to send it to one of the editors. We will publish your question and elicit an answer from our readership. As an example:

Question

How do I start automating our office?

Answer

Nine golden rules for office automation:

1. If you are the top manager, appoint someone to do it and give him the fullest support. If you are not, convince your management at the highest level you can reach that you should do it. If you cannot convince them, don't start. It will then grow on its chaotic own without compromising you.
2. Do not go for it alone. Appoint a think-tank of people from departments who are most likely to be involved in the process. Let them work out coherent projects as a form of voluntary co-ordination.
3. Tell your management not to expect drastic changes in staffing level in the short term. In the longer term there might be a decrease, but the real profits will be in saving managerial time.
4. Tell your staff the same story, but add to it that for them the real profit will be a general up-grade of their jobs, if they can adapt to drastic changes in procedures.
5. Do not start by trying to build the 'Big Brother'-system. Identify opportunities for cost-effective applications in small areas, even if the system is dedicated. However, keep in mind that these systems will have to be able to communicate with other systems. Your approach should be 'from bottom up' and not 'from top down'.
6. Be very suspicious of one-brand total systems. They will soon be out-moded and you will discover that if a competitor launches another wonderful gadget, you will not be able to hook it up.
7. Be equally suspicious of very sophisticated contraptions from small firms with insufficient long-term financial backing. In this fast-moving market there are lots of them. If they fall flat on their face, you will follow them.
8. Do not move too fast. To-morrow all systems will be even better.
9. Do not move too slow. Your organization will lose money and, probably, you.