

Gain, not Pain

To consult or not to consult? Gain or costly pain? We asked Andrew de Bray, MD of Factum, a fast-growing US-British logistics consultancy, to answer the questions posed by the sceptics.

Why is it a good idea to use a consultancy service? Isn't it just unnecessary extra cost?

That's an unfortunate myth in business. A good consultancy should never be an unnecessary cost. It provides tangible and intangible benefits a business cannot ordinarily obtain themselves, a greater understanding of the steps needed to achieve an objective, and a quickly scalable team of experienced resources that have done the activities previously.

As in many areas of life, you can attempt to accomplish something on your own. However, that requires educating yourself, obtaining the necessary tools and resources, and hoping you hit the mark. You have no barometer for success. And you make do with what you have. That's working hard.

Working smart means you work with a consulting firm, seeking the advice and guidance of a team who has already done the job and knows what it takes to be successful. In this manner, you can expect a better result—faster and with less effort.

Moreover, beyond the logistics (no pun intended), consultancies have the added benefits of approaching the situation from an objective perspective, being keenly aware of the 'unknowns', and not abiding by limiting assumptions

or preconceptions stemming from being too close to the issue.

Organisations that use consultancies effectively not only have lower costs, but more streamlined projects and better outcomes. In contrast, organisations that do not use consultancies may achieve their goal, but often at a higher monetary cost, a higher intangible cost to their business, and usually with one or more sub-optimal areas of the end product.

What can you tell me that I don't already know about my business?

So, this is a further perpetuation of the myth. The role of a consultancy is not to walk into your business, show they know more than you do, and expose your weaknesses. Instead, a consultancy makes available to you more tools, knowledge, experience, competence, and capability to help you be better at what you do.

Still, often a consultancy will have certain insights stemming from work with other organisations. For example, your business likely has processes that, while efficient, are inhibiting or restricting your business's potential. The systems, people, data, and requirements may evolve over time, but processes typically don't (even though they should).

A few other examples: your business will have at least one IT system that is out of date, restricting the business, or not



delivering as intended. Your business will have more than one internal control or compliance deficiency, which potentially exposes your business to negative actions on behalf of someone inside or outside of your organisation. And your business may be unaware of changes within your markets that would be of benefit to you.

Now, readers may say the above examples are obvious and are easy predictions; however, because they are less often considered, many businesses are surprised by the number and size of the knowledge gaps above.

Why? Well, businesses are naturally forward facing and outward looking, which means the opportunity for internal review and assessment is limited. It is the turning of the focus back on to the company that often yields the most reward. That's what we practice at Factum. By working with businesses and solving problems from within, we find where can best deploy our talents and, in turn, provide the best outcome for the client.





I want to digitalise my business. What are your main do's and don'ts in terms of advice to me?

Digitalisation is a key enabler for a business if delivered correctly, but it can also be crippling to a business if a well-thought-out and considered solution is not provided.

DO analyse all your data inputs, outputs, data processes, and data uses before you start looking at digitization solutions. If you don't, you will build limitations into your solution.

DO have good data management policies to ensure digital data is retained, maintained, protected, version controlled, and compliant to regulatory standards governing data.

DON'T pick a data repository that's just data storage. For data to be worthwhile, it needs to be centrally provided, easily accessible to all, easily analysed and mined for information purposes, and kept up to date.

Data storage may be cheap, but the cost grows as more data is collected. And every company has volumes of digital data that is outdated or inaccessible and, therefore, of no value to the business. Companies that look at data holistically have the opportunity to make better use of that data.

OK, I want to look at WMS selection and implementation. What questions are you going to ask me that will help me decide which solution is appropriate?

First, what are you trying to accomplish? You need to paint a clear picture of your goals and what you want your operations to look like with a new WMS.

Second, what are your current pain points? In other words, what is working and what isn't about your current system and processes?

Third, what core functionality must the WMS offer? You need to consider what you want the system to do to enable your team to work faster and more accurately.

Fourth, what must the WMS integrate with? Take stock of your current systems and roll them into your requirements for the WMS.

Lastly, what's your budget? Cost will likely be a major concern for your business. Understandably, you may not know an exact number, especially if you haven't gone through a software selection process before. However, you know whether you have €100,000 to spend or €500,000. This will help determine which WMS in the market are viable options.

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