

## ***ASK THE EXPERTS:***

What are the Top Mistakes You See in  
Supply Chain Solution Implementations?

*What Steps do You Take to Ensure Success?*

I talked to four industry experts from leading supply chain consulting firms and asked them about the top mistakes they see in software implementations. Collectively, these industry veterans have implemented software and automation in hundreds of warehouses, solving distribution challenges for their customers. Their list of challenges encountered is long and their methodologies run deep. Here are the top missteps to watch out for with your software implementation.

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## THE TOP IMPLEMENTATION MISTAKES CONTAIN SHORTCOMINGS IN THESE AREAS:

- Planning and discipline with assignments and timelines
- Early alignment between operations and IT
- Demonstrable buy-in from leadership
- Training / strong user adoption
- Testing, Testing and more testing
- Facility preparedness
- Change management preparation

**Let's break those down.**

### DETAILED AND COMPREHENSIVE PROJECT PLANNING

Every project needs a plan, and that plan needs to be detailed and comprehensive. It should list all of the major activities required of the software vendor, the system integrator and most importantly, the customer. Customers sometimes forget they are part of the project team, and they need to ultimately own the success of the project.

There will be multiple threads of tasks from the start to the end, but all threads should trace a path from beginning to end. Every task should have resources assigned, and every task in each thread has a link to a preceding task – there should be no tasks hanging alone.

“A well-developed plan can be executed to success by a team with average skills. But a poorly developed plan – or an implementation without a plan – will end in partial success at best, and failure at worst, even if the implementation team are rock stars at what they do,” said Michael Wohlend, Principal, Alpine Supply Chain Solutions.

### ALIGNMENT BETWEEN OPERATIONS & IT

Ensuring goals, roles and plans are in-sync at the beginning of a project is key to success and eliminates missteps, delays and finger-pointing down the road.

“Early alignment between operations and IT that produces a clear and detailed solution design with thoroughly-defined roles and responsibilities between the client, the software vendor and the third-party implementation partner are crucial to a project's success,” said Greg Puckett, Principal, 4SIGHT Supply Chain Group. “And it is critical that the project team includes resources with deep implementation experience and adequate bandwidth.”

## THE EXPERTS

GREG PUCKETT,  
4SIGHT Supply Chain Group

MICHAEL WOHLWEND,  
Alpine Supply Chain Solutions

JOHN SIDELL,  
New Course Group

CHRISTIAN NIXEL,  
enVista

“The reasons for failure in software implementations are pretty much the same whether you are talking ERP, WMS, TMS MES or other type of software, and that is lack of planning, lack of training and a failure to test”

–MICHAEL WOHLWEND, ALPINE





## **BUY-IN FROM LEADERSHIP**

Showing strong buy-in from leadership is the best way to demonstrate the importance of the project and to bring the entire organization along for the journey. Customers should assign an executive sponsor to the project at the start, to support a successful implementation.

“Show the involvement from the top down to demonstrate that leadership believes in the project and are out front leading it,” said Christian Nixel, Senior Director, Supply Chain Solutions, for enVista. “This is not just an IT project. It’s a journey and you have to bring everybody along for the ride. Top leadership has to be out front, leading and pulling the organization with them.”

Continuing the involvement throughout the project will keep the momentum going. Nixel recommends giving the project a name – perhaps even have a contest to name it to involve the staff. Get buy-in and drive excitement throughout the project with banners, countdowns, signs and pocket guides. Have project champions to get people excited.

**“It’s critical that the project team includes resources with deep implementation experience and adequate bandwidth.”**

**–GREG PUCKETT, 4SIGHT**



## TRAINING & STRONG USER ADOPTION

WMS solutions are complex and gaining the requisite knowledge takes time and requires hands-on involvement in the software implementation process, shared John Sidell, CEO and Managing Principal, New Course Group.

"Training starts at the beginning of the project and continues throughout – from initial vendor software orientation and setup / configuration training, to design discussions, conference room pilots, configuration of the software by operational project team members, development of standard operating procedures, training program development, supervisory and end-user training, testing and startup support," continues Sidell. "Knowledge transfer on how to configure and use the software does not happen quickly."

According to Alpine's Wohlwend, training comes in two forms: training the trainers and training the users. The two are equally important.

"Training the trainers sets the keel for each department," said Wohlwend. "The trainers must train on more than standard processes; they must be trained on 'what ifs'. How do they know when they are going off track? How should they handle issues? How do they recover from them? The trainers need to be able to run the operation with no help from day one."

Training the end users ensures they can do their jobs on day one. Timeliness is key. If you train too early, the users forget the training before the go-live date. If you train too late, you may not get all of the resources trained before the go-live date. This causes large delays and could kill or scuttle the project depending on the project size.

The goal is to train the users within one week of go-live by utilizing multiple trainers to ensure the information is fresh and training is complete. This also provides the added benefit of reassuring that the trainers are prepared and ready to support their teams at go-live. It exponentially shrinks the ramp-up time and improves the time to ROI realization. Project leaders should consider including tests or exams as part of the training process to verify the users truly understand the capabilities and use of the system.



**"Training is a process, and final end-user training and the education of the supervisory leads should be developed and conducted by company resources."  
-JOHN SIDELL, NEW COURSE GROUP**

Several experts stressed the importance of having your staff involved in the hands-on training. "Training is a process, and final end-user training and the education of the supervisory leads should be developed and conducted by company resources," said NewCourse's Sidell. "In order to help facilitate company-wide acceptance of the new system, the operations team needs to play an active role."

The active involvement in training helps companies be more self-sufficient to deal with the constant change that takes place in distribution and logistics. This requires you to have a good understanding of most aspects of the software so that you can adapt quickly to new industry, facility and customer requirements. Plus, it helps with change management. It is easier for staff to get on board when an internal person is showing the changes and helping to sell the story.

## TESTING, TESTING AND MORE TESTING

The importance of testing came up with every one of our experts. The rule of thumb: test the system and then test it again. Below are some of the areas that need to be tested. Often, these areas are managed by separate groups of people and skillsets.

- *Testing* - End-to-End Validations
- *Test data* – Ensure that the data you are testing is validated and accurate. This would include; Item Master, including all critical dimensions for every available Unit of Measure that will be received, stored, picked and shipped. This becomes even more critical when using dimensional data for key WMS functions, such as Order Cubing, Putaway Algorithms, Replenishment Levels, etc.
- *System and Integration Testing* – Integration is often the “long pole” in the tent. If integration between systems (WMS, TMS, LMS, ERP, etc.) is compromised, the Implementation will fail.
- *Volume Testing* – Often times, testing is done with only a small subset of orders, receipts, etc. Make sure that you “stress” the system with volume tests to ensure that all systems and interfaces will “hold the load.”
- *Include a “day in life” test scenario* – prepare a day’s worth of real data which can be used to cross test the system, end to end (data, integration, processes) and include your key users (shift leads) to validate the test results.
- *User Acceptance Testing (UAT)* – Often overlooked, or saved until last, most go-lives struggle because there was not enough User Testing. Confidence in the system will likely fail if you have not engaged the actual users.

“More and more clients are asking us to perform user testing, but we are not the end users. If you’re buying a car, you don’t ask the dealer to do your test drive.”

–CHRISTIAN NIXEL, ENVISTA

“Every company plans some level of testing,” said New Course’s Sidell. “What’s often missed or not fully considered during the development of the implementation testing plans are the testing the organization is required to perform; the effort it takes to prepare granular test scripts and/or testing

mechanisms; the level of documentation required; and the resources and man-hours required to perform each level of testing.”

Integration testing compressed timelines and failing to stress the system were mentioned time and again by our experts. You need an adequate timeline for testing. If you rush, you can go in with a defective project. And integration testing is when things can really start to fall apart with a snowball effect.

“A lot of times people test just the ‘happy path’ where they test how things go 90% of the time,” said enVista’s Nixel. “The problem is that those 10% can have a huge negative consequence. It might start as a small problem in the WMS and snowballs in other systems.”

Setting an inflexible go-live date can cause problems, and 4SIGHT’s Puckett agrees that an adequate timeline for testing is vital for success. “Full and comprehensive testing that is not compromised by a compressed or unrealistic project schedule or scope creep is key,” shared Puckett.

### *Typical types of testing that are required to be led and executed by you, the customer include:*

- Functional Testing
- Pre-Formal Testing (testing of the test scripts and mechanisms prior to Integration Testing)
- Load / Volume and Response Time Testing
- End-to-End Integration Testing
- Dry-Run Testing
- User Acceptance Testing (UAT)
- FDA Certification
- Bioterrorism Act Validation
- Sarbanes-Oxley (SOXs) Compliance



## CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Preparing staff for change is far more than just training. People can be naturally resistant to change and may be worried about their job security. Software implementations frequently impact staffing levels, roles, responsibilities and sometimes pay scales. Failure to deal with human resources-related changes may impact user adoption.

“Resistance to change is common because certain people are entrenched in processes and they may be afraid or worried,” said EnVista’s Nixel. “There is a concern for job security and worry whether they will still be relevant. Some people may even sabotage the project. There are other changes to consider, as well. Are you going to new building? Are you changing shifts? Whose lives get changed? Are there changes to seniority? Identify the obstacles to change and then determine your paths to adopting.”

Sidell commented that many WMS project charters fail to recognize the need for change management until late in the project, or simply believe that change can be managed through training alone.

“New software impacts not only the distribution center (DC), but other departments in the company, as well as customers, carriers, and suppliers,” said Sidell. “Additionally, most organizations must meet inbound, outbound, labor and other key performance indicators (KPIs) during the transition, or shortly thereafter.”

## PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Solution implementation success relies on careful planning, training, testing and strong leadership involvement throughout the process. The experts we consulted for this paper are happy to help you with any projects you are considering to improve your distribution processes. We encourage you to reach out to any of our consulting partners – you can rest assured you are in good hands.

### ABOUT THE EXPERTS:

Christian Nixel, Senior Director, Supply Chain Solutions, [enVista](#)

Greg Puckett, Principal, [4SIGHT Supply Chain Group](#)

John Sidell, CEO & Managing Principal, [New Course Group](#)

Michael Wohlwend, Principal, [Alpine Supply Chain Solutions](#)



## ABOUT MADE4NET

Made4net is a leading global provider of best-in-class, cloud-based supply chain execution and warehouse management software for organizations of all sizes to improve the speed and efficiency of their supply chain. The company’s end-to-end SCExpert™ platform offers a robust WMS software that enables real-time inventory visibility, labor management, and equipment productivity with performance analytics that drive faster, more accurate order fulfillment and improved supply chain efficiency. In addition to the best-of-breed WMS, the platform offers integrated yard management, dynamic route management, proof of delivery and warehouse automation software solutions that deliver a true supply chain convergence.

For more information, visit [www.made4net.com](http://www.made4net.com).