

Developing a Technology Standing Ovation

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One of the most important and viable tools for any organization today is technology. In order for your organization to be successful you should have a plan in place for how you will evolve with technology. The biggest question for any organization is “how do I do that?” According to online resource TechSoup (<http://www.techsoup.org>), there are a number of steps to take in order to create your organization’s technology plan. Just like a playwright takes time to write up how each character needs to interact with the other, and the dialogue that creates an imaginative story, your organization’s technology plan will please your audience if created and implemented in the right way.

Developing and Assessing Your Characters

First of all, assess your needs. What technology do you have in place in your organization? What skills does your cast and crew have? Who will help support your technology? Take inventory of what you already have. This includes hardware, software, operating systems, memory, etc. What do you already have? Are you utilizing it to its fullest?

Creating the Dialogue

Secondly, define your needs. Although there are lots of neat software programs out on the market for developing webpages; and operating systems that almost have their own personality; hardware that truly could fit a small village into, and it is important for you to determine what you really need to be effective with your audience. What do you want to do? How will what you spend your money on help make your technology better and more accessible for the cast and crew and your audience? How does technology fit into your organization’s mission? Survey what your audience wishes you had, and ask your cast and crew what they think would be useful. “The more you can connect your technology needs to your larger mission as an organization, the better your plan will be.”

Developing the Plot

The next step is to make a concrete plan for how to meet those needs. This phase of your plan will require the most technical knowledge. Web research and information from the other areas of TechSoup can help you get started. Take advantage of what information and technical resources are on your campus. Call your Informational Technology department; ask them to meet with your adviser and a few students. Give them time to take a look at your assessment and your current structure prior to the meeting. Make sure they know what your budget range is, and what sort of support you will have or need for your technology plan. Your campus should be able to help negotiate your needs. A number of campuses already have agreements with various vendors (Microsoft, Gateway, Dell, Hewlett Packard, Apple, Compaq, etc.)

The important thing is to go back to your original vision of how technology can help you accomplish your mission. What are the key new functions you want technology to fill? What is the least expensive system that can perform those roles reliably?

TechSoup suggests that you take these questions into account when establishing your final plan:

- What type of network do you need?
- What hardware purchases or upgrades should you make?
- What software should you choose?
- What is the best way to connect to the Internet?
- How should you go about getting your organization a presence on the web? What sort of information will you need to have online? Do you need to have an interactive website? How accessible will it be to all of your audience?
- How can you take care of your database needs? Will students maintain it? Will the staff? Do you have support staff that can assist you?
- What is the best way to train your cast, crew and staff?

The Performance

- **Organizational profile**

Who are you as an organization? How are you organized and what kind of services do you provide? Your technology plan should open with a short description of your organization that will set the context for your technology needs. A good organizational profile should include your mission and vision as well as practical details on your current work.

- **Technology vision**

How will this technology further your organization's mission? What is your long-range vision for technology use?

- **Projects**

The body of your technology plan is a description of the technology projects you will undertake.

Description: A brief description of what it is you plan to do.

Benefits: What will this technology do, that your organization could not do before? It helps to describe the benefits up front, so that it is clear how much of a priority the project is.

Tasks: What tasks will it take to complete this project? Listing the tasks will be extremely useful in establishing a timeline and beginning the implementation of the plan as a whole. Plus, creating tasks and finishing them is a great way to have a little celebration about what your organization has accomplished.

- **Cost:** At the end of your description of a project, list the costs associated with each step.

- **Budget**

No technology plan is complete without a budget. Creating a budget is the only way to tell whether or not your plan is practical.

TechSoup.org suggests that, “The budget should include estimated costs for all aspects of the projects you have listed. A common mistake is to include only hardware and software purchases in the budget. Actually, a good rule of thumb is that approximately 70% of your

technology spending should go to technical support and training, and only 30% to technology purchases.”

You should also make sure to budget for costs that will recur predictably, such as your University’s Ethernet connection monthly fee (yes, some campuses have to pay this one), backup tapes, or the cost of new printer cartridges (which is often times the cost of a down payment on a car). TechSoup.org has great worksheets that you can download and utilize for your organization’s specific needs.

- **Timeline.**

What are the phases of work and the deadlines for implementation of your plan?

The Final Act

As a number of organizations know – you create a plan over a few months and it sits on a shelf until it collects dust, and then is way past due. Technology cannot wait! Technology has become very fluid. Something that is hard to capture at one moment, because it can change the next. When you purchase a computer and monitor, you will recognize that a month later, that computer is now very very old in comparison to what is out there currently. Figure out a plan to implement it all.

Make sure you have a system in place for how you are going to purchase all of your new technology. Discuss it with members of your Student Government and/or your Student Life Office. Whichever funding body is a part of your organization you should include them in the discussions at an early stage. Sometimes it is better to not surprise your funding party with a technology plan budget of \$5,000 to 10,000.

Have a member of your organization serve as the main director for the project. However, this doesn’t mean the plan should just rest on that person’s plate, everyone should have a continual conversation about where the plan is at, what has been completed, and what needs to be worked on. Just like a play is not written without a cast, you need the entire cast and crew to make that Final Act happen.

It is important to constantly evaluate what is working, and what needs work. Take time to discuss with your cast and crew how you will all put your Technology Plan into action.

The Standing Ovation

Technology is there for positive change... and you know the saying, “The only thing that likes change is a wet baby.” Don’t be afraid to adapt to your audience’s needs. In the long run, there will be two award winners – your organization’s ability to communicate with the audience, and the audience for gaining knowledge and understanding about your organization. If you are successful, your audience will be giving your organization a *standing ovation*.

Resource:

<http://www.techsoup.org> information used with permission from Sheetal Singh, Senior Content Manager, TechSoup.org CompuMentor