

Case study

CAD

a. Background and objectives

One of MCL's clients had had an approach from a CAD vendor and this had prompted the Design Director to find out what benefits it might bring to them. The culture of the client was not one that embraced technology and so the Trading Director asked his IT colleague for an analysis of the overall validity of CAD.

Included in the brief were requests for recommendations for how to change the culture to make user acceptance more likely and – assuming that this would be achieved – evaluations of potential suppliers. And any new technology had to work within the client's existing IT infrastructure and, as far as possible, use industry-standard hardware and operating systems.

MCL was retained to deliver this work because of its experience with graphics technology and change management.

b. What we delivered

The team started by researching the market to see what the client's competitors in the UK and Europe were doing with CAD, if anything, including retailers and manufacturers. We identified what technologies and processes were being used, and the likely costs and benefits of introducing and using the technology on an ongoing basis.

This analysis had to inform our client's Executive Board about their real current internal and external costs, including the "free" designing undertaken by their suppliers. Soft benefits included the client gaining complete control over the design of its products and ranges and the shortening of product development lead times. Estimated hard benefits were significant because the technology and skills would give them the capacity to be able to select suppliers more on abilities related to manufacturing and supply than "free" product designs.

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We then carried out an analysis of the gap between the CAD skills needed and what existed in the design studio at the time. Other change management issues were highlighted and a programme of change suggested.

MCL then recommended a supplier that could deliver not just the software but also the necessary specialist printers and implementation expertise (technical and training). The solution worked with specially configured server and storage hardware to cope with the large files being produced. The recommended software also had to be capable of producing files in a format that could be used by the client's suppliers.

The MCL team had one IT specialist trained on the software and she developed a user-based training programme with a focus on how to design clothes, rather than pure software training. This maximised the creative abilities of the client's designers, which meant that they continued to do what they were employed to do – design winning products.

The specialist trained a team of five super-users, who then cascaded the training to the rest of the design team. A total of 50 workstations were operational by the time the client signed off the project.

c. Results

The predicted benefits – hard and soft – were delivered, with the cost being paid back in each of the divisions in three to six months.

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