## Safeguarding Your System Selection, Implementation, and Results
*Hiring a Consultant May Be the Best Insurance*

By Rick Ludolph, President, Productive Solutions LLC

At a recent Technology Solutions seminar, one seasoned industry executive characterized hiring a consultant to support a PLM initiative as "cheap insurance" for its success. Effectively capturing the attention of the audience, he went on to share examples of how consultants can cost-effectively assure the desired results of many business and technology initiatives by providing subject matter expertise and advice that is not often available within today's lean and fast-paced fashion companies.

Of course, not everyone agrees on the value that consultants bring to the table. Afterwards, one CIO in attendance told me that he chose not to employ a consultant as he felt this would add too much time and cost to his project. While some base their opinions of consultants on specific past experiences, I find that most executives and managers are simply not aware of the benefits that a qualified consultant can deliver in technology and related business process initiatives.

So what are some of the key deliverables that a good consultant can bring to your tech projects? Let's start by identifying the opportunity for significant time and cost savings. Yes, just like technology, the consulting investment should deliver measurable results to the business. For starters, there is a clear case for outsourcing skill sets that you rarely or only occasionally need, like creating the request for proposal (RFP) and administering the evaluation and bidding process for new software. Here are a few specific examples of how competent technology guidance services can help ensure the success of your technology initiatives:

- **Process & Technology Assessment** – objectively review how your current business processes and systems stack up against peers and competitors; determine business improvement opportunities and prioritize achievable technology initiatives that will provide the biggest benefits.

- **Leverage Existing Technologies** – identify and update your company's business requirements and analyze how well current technology supports them; increase efficiency and benefits of existing systems; uncover functionality that you already own but do not use or fully leverage.

- **Technology Planning** – provide a forward-looking view of new technologies and their potential impact on the fashion industry; create an outline of innovations that your company should exploit; develop a plan of action to integrate technology initiatives with business process improvement.

- **Process Improvement** – objectively review, propose, and implement improvements to operating processes to better align with business needs; lead change management of organizational policies and practices; provide a fresh-eyes approach to process challenges and problem resolution.

- **System & Vendor Selection** – provide in-depth knowledge of vendor technology products to facilitate thorough evaluation and better informed system selection decisions; create effective RFP document and analyze responses; advise on all pricing proposals, service and contract terms.

- **Project Management & System Implementation** - oversee all system planning, documentation, configuration, and implementation steps; create project and resource plans with timelines for tasks and milestones; provide system scope control; insure that the project is on-time and within budget.

In all cases, you have the option to use periodic consulting services to keep projects and improvements on track, or ask the consultant to develop the tools and skills needed to self maintain. Of course, I am not promoting the need for outside consultants in every tech initiative. Most every company I know has strong, in-house expertise in some, if not all, of these areas.

But many are challenged to muster the full range of resources necessary to thoroughly identify, evaluate, select and implement each new technology project that the business needs to compete and grow. And even fewer have the time and perspective that a technology consultant does to stay on top of best practices in a complex technology market. For these companies, the right level of technology guidance may well provide the insurance needed to avoid the missed deadlines, cost overruns, and lost opportunities that are all too common in fashion industry tech initiatives.

**Productive Solutions, LLC is a boutique consulting services firm specializing in the fashion industry's concept-to-delivery processes and enabling technologies. It brings a uniquely focused and personalized approach to an international client base of retailers, brands, manufacturers and vendors. Contact Rick Ludolph at r.ludolph@productivesol.com or visit www.productivesol.com.**