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If you saw the Warner Bros. movie *Get Smart* this summer, you know that eager analyst Maxwell Smart wows the CONTROL agents and leaders early in the movie with the extensive information he has gathered. Briefing them on archenemy KAOS, he explains how he has analyzed critical details and used them to understand the opponent. One of the agents asks how Smart could possibly have acquired this information. Smart's incredulous reply is something like, "What? You didn't read page 642 of the report I sent?"

Agent Smart is dead serious in his question, but it's obvious to everybody else that no one has read his lengthy report.

Once is Not Enough

How often do we act like Agent Smart in communicating our business intelligence and data warehouse initiatives to our fellow "agents" and the leaders in our organization? It's not so funny when the answer to a question about the warehouse is, "I covered that in the memo I sent out last month."

We invest considerable time, money, and human resources throughout any data warehouse project, yet we expect others to understand how our project will benefit them and provide needed support just because we sent out a memo or wrote an article for a newsletter.

Communicating the value of our initiatives requires more than one pass. If we want our project to have legs, we need to talk it up. Otherwise, it might go to waste.

Formulate a Message Plan

Appropriate communication throughout your data warehouse project is important because it will help you:

Educate and raise awareness of the business impact of your data warehouse and its part in the organization's business intelligence efforts

Obtain and sustain management support both throughout the project and once it is in production

Provide visibility to and maintain support from all those affected by the project

Share successes

How do you get started? Put together a communication plan. Create a table (in a Word document or Excel spreadsheet, for example) with the following columns:

Audience. Who needs to hear your news? Who will be affected? Consider organizations, teams, and individuals. Expect to have several audiences identified. Is there anyone specifically who should *not* receive your communication?

Message and Desired Action. What do you want your audience to learn (what is changing, how they are impacted, etc.) and what action do they need to take?

Trigger. What timing or event initiates your communication (for example, the first week in the quarter, a monthly management meeting, or when a project phase is complete)?

Communication Vehicle. What method of communication (including in-person presentations, Web meetings, e-mail message with file attachments, Web site postings, newsletter articles, or phone calls) will you use?

Development. Who will develop and create the communication and who will provide content and input?

Delivery. Who will present the communication? (This list may be the same or different from the list of people responsible for development.)

Other Action. What other action is needed to complete the communication?

Target Date. When will you begin to communicate your news?

Complete Date. When will your communication be finished?

Start filling in the template with whatever you know. Maybe you have a number of audiences you want to reach—write them down. Perhaps you have specific messages you need to get out, but don't know the audiences yet—write down the messages and desired action.

Spend 10 minutes making a list of the communication vehicles available to you in your organization. You may include e-mails, newsletters, Web sites, and presentations at staff meetings and larger organizational sessions. Many companies offer opportunities for employees to hear about new ideas over lunch, often referred to as "brown bags" or "lunch and learns." Remember the all-important personal communications such as individual meetings or inviting someone to lunch. Determine how you can take advantage of each communication vehicle as you create your communication plan.

Include other information in your plan as you go along. Use the template as a starting point and add or delete columns according to your needs. Here are a few helpful hints for using the communication plan effectively:

Create your plan early in your data warehouse efforts

Refer to it, update it, and use as a reminder for communicating

Complete the communications

Capture results and feedback from your communications

Follow up on action items resulting from your communications

Experts agree that people need to hear a message several times before they can remember what they've heard or read. One memo, one meeting, or one presentation will not do the trick.

Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

Let's return to our movie example. Have you noticed that when a new film is released, you seem to hear about it everywhere? It shows up in magazine ads, posters by the bus stop or

in the subway, movie clips on television, and star interviews on popular talk shows. Sometimes you learn about the movie before it is released by watching trailers in a theater.

This visibility doesn't happen by accident. All of the publicity is part of a well-thought-out plan. To best achieve results, your communications must be part of a carefully prepared, comprehensive plan.

In data warehousing and business intelligence initiatives, it is often the human factor, not technical issues, that prevents success. As difficult as implementing the technology can be, dealing with the people and personalities can be even more challenging. Communication is one critical aspect of the human factor. Although communicating takes time and effort, failing to do so will ensure wasted time and effort. If you *don't* communicate, your project will most likely fail to meet its goals or the data warehouse will obtain only limited use. *Ignoring* communication won't help you gain anywhere near the return on investment you envisioned.

Get Smart

You want to do more than "come that close" to a successful BI/DW initiative. Be smarter than Agent Smart. Make your plan and communicate!

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