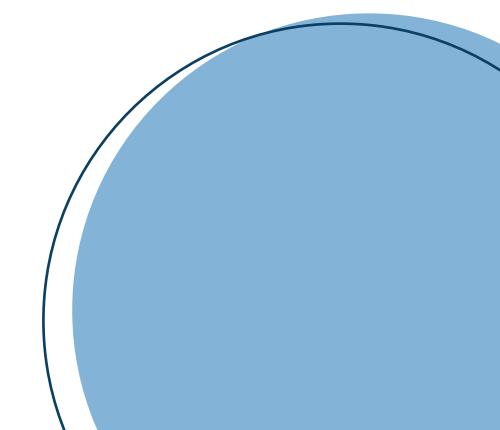# Eliminating Departmental Friction within *MSPs* is Critical to Business Success

Contents

Chapter 1: Think Like a Customer to Remove Friction

Over the last decade, the most fundamental change to business has been the removal of friction between different stakeholders in a process. Whether we are talking about secure, contactless payments, finding accommodation, or knowing when your lift home is arriving, technology has completely changed our expectations and engagement levels.

Within any managed service provider (MSP) you will most certainly find points of friction. These may manifest as bottlenecks in business processes, cause irritation within your team, slow invoicing and payments, or reduce the overall customer experience. Some common signs of friction are processes where multiple clicks are needed in a system when it seems one would work or the inability to seamlessly and accurately move information between departments such as sales, technicians, finance, or project managers. It may be a user interface that is confusing and doesn't let the user get through their task easily. For a customer, it could be something like being referred from one person to another in order to gather important information.

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Chapter 2: Finding the Friction

The best way to identify friction in your business is to watch and listen. Observe how customers interact with your business. Talk to staff and ask them why they are doing what they are doing.

This can be done in a number of different ways. You may run small workshops where specific processes are mapped out. Swimlane process diagrams, where the points of interaction between different parties are clearly shown, are a great way of detecting handover points where information is exchanged between people and systems.

Metrics are also important. Transaction throughput, the number of times a customer has to contact you for further information, conversion rates, the number of clicks or taps on a screen it takes to complete an interaction, and other metrics are important.

When Jeff Hawkins invented the Palm Pilot in the 1990s, well before the era of today's powerful smartphones, he wanted to create a device where the number of taps for the user to find the information they wanted was minimised. He wanted to make using this new class of computer as frictionless as possible. He put himself in the user's shoes and looked for ways to make using the computer as simple as possible.[1]

Today, we call this user-centred design. We look for where a process or system causes frustration, is inefficient, or puts unnecessary complexity into a process, system, or interaction. By putting yourself in the user's place you can identify where the friction exists in your business.

When you identify a source of friction in your business, it may be tempting to apply a quick fix to eliminate it. A better approach is to take a broader view and **look at the entire process**. For example, if the point of friction in a process is the collection and sharing of a particular piece of data, ask why that data is collected. You may find there is an unnecessary step in the process and that data is not actually needed.

[1]**https://medium.com/@AlbertoSavoia/the-palm-pilot-story-1a3424d2ffe4**

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Chapter 3: Don't Shoot the Messenger

When friction interferes with the process outcome you want, it's easy to blame the last link the chain. But when we conduct a serious root cause analysis, it's possible to identify that upstream friction is the reason there is downstream frustration.

A typical purchasing process in a business is likely to have different levels of management approval depending on the value of the transaction. However, there are times when a high-value purchase needs to be made quickly but one of the approving parties is busy or unavailable. This may cause the purchase to be delayed resulting in a downstream process failure. The late delivery could end up being blamed on the person who made the initial order, whereas the root cause was outside their control.

In some case, incorrect data can result in a process being slowed down or failing. That data entry error may have been the result of an overworked employee making a simple mistake, such as misplacing a decimal point, when transposing data from a paper-based form to a computer system or copying data but pasting it into the wrong field.

Abandoned shopping carts are an example of the effects of friction. One of the reasons Amazon has been so successful is that it vastly simplified the payment process. That process was so important that the company patented and licensed its '1-Click' payment system. Before the patent expired, it was estimated that the **frictionless payment system** was worth US$2.4B annually.[2]

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[2] **https://digiday.com/marketing/end-era-amazons-one-click-buying-patent-finally-expires/**

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Chapter 4: Lubricate Your Business

Car engines, whether they use fossil fuels or electricity, are designed to overcome the effects of friction. Surfaces between components are made as smooth as possible and lubricants are used to ensure those smooth surfaces can glide over and past each other without the expenditure of more energy than necessary and to reduce the wearing of parts.

If you take a mechanistic view of your business, you can look for ways to mitigate the effects of friction. But it's important to recognise that businesses are also made of people and their actions are a critical factor. This is why a human-centred approach, that looks at processes, systems, and people is critical for finding and eliminating friction.

For example, customer onboarding is critical for MSPs. When the process is easy the time to value for the customer is fast which, in turn, means inbound revenue is accelerated. If the customer requires new or expanded services, a frictionless sales funnel ensures the customer gets what they want quickly and **payments to your business flow faster**.

Whether you are looking at external processes, where you interact with customers and suppliers, or internal ones, it's important to identify between where friction is getting in the way of your business goals, what the causes are the friction, and the impact. The impact of friction can be wide-ranging, impacting customer experience, company culture, worker productivity, and business and brand reputation.

Map and document the processes in your business and question why specific actions are taking before simply accepting that this is "what you've always done". Then look for how the friction in these processes can be eliminated. That might be as simple as rearranging the fields in an online form, **using automation to move data from one place to another**, or training staff in how to use the systems they have more efficiently.

When the B-17 bomber was flown for the first time during World War 2, it crashed with many saying the aircraft was too complex for a pilot. But a pre-flight checklist enabled a pilot to ensure the plane could be flown safely, giving the United States a strategic advantage.

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Chapter 5: What Can be Done to Reduce Friction?

Identification

- Where is the friction?

- What's causing the friction?

- What are the ramifications the ongoing friction has within the MSP, the customer experience, internal culture, productivity, and business reputation?

Alignment

- Map out what needs to happen to eliminate the friction

- Implement new business processes and workflows

- Undertake further employee training

- Implement new technology

- Remove information silos

Measurement

- Ensure that the activity is measured. This could be in the form of time saving, reduction in customer complaints, change in employee job satisfaction and retention, increased profitability through increased operational efficiencies.

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Chapter 6: There is Good Friction

There may be times when well-placed friction can be beneficial.

While the elimination of friction is normally the goal, there are instances where adding friction can be considered a strategic move. With today's **evolving security landscape**, for instance, creating points of friction to slow down processes has the added benefit of giving people time to think.

For example, adding some friction to the change process for a supplier bank account details can ensure you don't become the victim of **business email compromise**. Or stopping a user from opening a file attachment or web link can protect you from a ransomware attack.

Friction may be inevitable in your business. But it can be overcome. Look for where friction occurs in your business and ask your customers, staff, and suppliers what the specific problems are. Then find ways to solve those problems by taking a process-wide approach.

Eliminating inefficiencies are hard; knowing where they hide is even harder. **Learn how ConnectWise solutions can help you uncover friction** across your MSP and put you on the path to business success.