

7 common hurdles to overcome during a data migration

In the digital age, customer demands and technological advancements are growing and changing. Now more than ever, it's necessary for your systems and databases to provide functionality that keeps up with the pace of change. For organizations with mainframes or systems that are multiple decades old, it is often necessary to migrate to newer technology platforms. The challenge, however, is that when it comes time to move the data from legacy systems, many hurdles can get in the way. To overcome many of these challenges, it is important to know what to expect and to plan accordingly. Here's how.

1. Poor data quality

According to our 2018 global data management benchmark report, data quality issues happen to be the leading challenge related to data migration projects. In fact, 38 percent of organizations in the United States consider data quality to be their greatest challenge during a migration. These data quality issues can lead to delays, increased budgets, and, in the worst of cases, prevent the usability of the new system to which the data is being migrated.

Often, new systems have higher thresholds for data quality built-in. This means that issues in the legacy data that may have gone unnoticed will need to be addressed. Getting a handle on your data quality before embarking on a data migration project will help you to reduce timelines and drastically increase the likelihood of success when it comes time to cut the data over to the new system.

2. Lack of standardization

New systems often have set rules about data quality standards, which frequently include rules for the formatting of data. A lack of standardization can slow down the migration process if the data being moved does not conform to the target system's formatting standards. If, for example, you have 18 different formats for phone numbers in your legacy system, you will want to standardize them into a consistent format

before committing them to the new system to avoid last-minute conflicts. Plus, having data in a consistent format makes it much easier to analyze and compare like-for-like information in the long term.

3. Insufficient talent and labor

Many organizations focus a lot of time on choosing the right tools for their data migration projects, but having the right people is just as important. In our 2018 global data management benchmark report, we found that 32 percent of agencies cited "limited skills and expertise," as a challenge for their data migration efforts, and 24 percent cited "not enough man power."

This is not all that surprising. Data migrations are intensive, and they require specific expertise and manual labor to effectively extract, transform, and load (ETL) the data from the old system to the new. Whether you plan to execute a migration in-house or by working with a vendor, ensuring that you have the right expertise and representation from both technical staff and business stakeholders will help set you up for success.

4. Ineffective tools

The importance of having the right tools for your data migration cannot be understated. Ineffective technology can create problems at each stage of the migration process and can quickly lead to delays, frustration, and

failed user acceptance tests for the new system. When choosing the tools for your migration, you need to be sure that you have a reliable approach to the ETL and strong data quality components to prevent data quality issues from hindering success.

Whether you need a more robust solution that can complete the migration end-to-end, or you choose to mix and match more specialized tools, you want to be sure that data quality is addressed early and often throughout the project.

5. Budget restrictions

Two of the most common issues that prevent the successful execution of a data migration are budgets and timelines. After investing huge sums of money into a new system, some organizations underestimate how much it will cost to complete the migration phase of the project. The problem with short-changing the migration, however, is that running out of money can lead to workarounds and shortcuts that ultimately render the new system inoperable.

Securing the budget needed to adequately plan and prepare for a data migration upfront can help to keep things running smoothly throughout its execution. Investing a bit more in the initial phases of the migration can, paradoxically, lead to cost savings later down the line.

6. Not enough time

Data migrations often need to be completed as quickly as possible to start delivering return on investment or because they are part of a larger organizational initiative. But the pressure to get a migration completed quickly can sometimes lead to unrealistic timelines. We know that data migrations are time-intensive processes—there's no way around it.

That's why you should build in time initially to analyze the volumes and types of data in your systems, as well as to assess their overall levels of data quality. This will help to avoid surprises in later phases that can lead to failed user acceptance tests and project delays.

7. Poor communication

There is a common misconception that a data migration project is solely the responsibility of the IT department. The issue with that thinking, however, is that business users must ultimately access and use the data in the new system. Poor communication between the business and IT can lead to delays and the need to rework data, even after the migration is complete. By including both technical staff and business stakeholders throughout the process and ensuring frequent communication, you can be confident that the data that is moved over to the new system will be practical and useful.

A successful data migration is one that is completed on time, within budget, and with a high degree of data quality in the new system. And, while a data migration project is a major undertaking, the end goal of a migration is often more about what the new system will enable the business to accomplish. A migration will allow your organization to operate more efficiently, conduct better data analyses, and use information to power decisions.

Taking the time to plan ahead and incorporate some best practices into your approach can save you time, money, and frustration. With so much at stake, it's crucial to be aware of these common hurdles so that you can prepare accordingly and overcome them with ease. By avoiding the potential pitfalls that these seven hurdles can create, you will be well-positioned to achieve a successful migration.

Don't let poor data stand in the way of your data migration success. We can help you to ensure data quality every step of the way.

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