



Time to Spring Clean Your Business - Here's How

A note from Battiston Consulting

It's spring!

Days are longer, weather's improving, business conditions are looking up. It's time to energise your business to deal with better times ahead. The last few months have been difficult. In a subdued business climate focus has been on the things that are both important and urgent. Now is an opportunity to catch our breaths and attend to things that were not urgent, but are still important. Cash flow is king so we are not talking about throwing money around. Even so, here are some great spring cleaning initiatives that even your cleaners wouldn't do.

Let's get started.

1 Preliminary stuff

You'll need a team to initially scope and plan the project. Pick a couple of energetic and persuasive people. Have them report to a steering committee (an existing management committee will do fine). They will develop and present a project plan that will include the following activities as appropriate and perhaps others that fit the theme. Here's a list of suggestions to investigate.

2 Business process check-up time

You have business process and procedure manuals? Of course you do. You have an ISO 9001/AS 3563-compliant quality management system? The whether-to-or-not discussion is outside our scope. But right now, energising your people for an improved business climate is a very good idea: turn them loose on the documentation. The project team will assemble a list of documentation to be reviewed, ready to allocate to process owners. Focus should be on specific departures from what the documentation specifies to what is actually happening. (Sometimes it may be what is happening that needs to be fixed).

3 Preparing for the unthinkable

We are talking about your **disaster recovery and business continuity plan**. It is important but never urgent – until it is.

You have the plan already. But as top athletes are aware, *knowing how* is not the same as *doing*. The spring cleaning plan should call first for a review and currency check. What has changed since the DR plan was last updated?

- personnel & contact information
- premises
- business systems
- technology infrastructure
- external service providers

After it is up to date there will be no better time to practise it unless you have exercised it recently. Plan to do it twice. You will need to.



Disaster?

4 Clear out digital clutter

What about obsolete digital data and unwanted software? Server storage space continues to get cheaper and servers continue to pack more and more data into the same sized box – but we are creating and storing more digital data than we used to. There is a big issue to do with secure long term storage of digital data in a form that continues to allow retrieval; but let's leave that aside for now and concentrate on not so much low hanging fruit, but high growing weeds.

- **Spreadsheet amnesty:** Come on, confess: almost everyone below executive management has them. It's time for personal spreadsheets, document templates and other personal tools to come out into the open. They should all be out in common space on the server. It's not always practical to make them into common user tools. A spreadsheet with a few macros that took ten minutes to construct to answer an *ad hoc* question might take ten hours to document so that everyone might use it – if they ever face that question again. But all quality thinking, analysis and business creativity work needs some sort of audit trail. Any personal tools that could be generally useful should be inventoried for subsequent review and general adoption.
- **Personal computers and other electronic device storage:** It is cheap to add more storage to a corporate server or intranet farm, but not to a personal device (it's not the purchase cost of another memory chip or additional disk drive but the management cost of installing it). Digital device cleanup afternoon is not a jeans and t-shirt event but it may be a good reason for Friday afternoon drinks at the end of the working day.
- **Euthanasia for orphan files:** No business likes losing good people, but people move. As Mark Antony might have said if he lived in the digital era, the files they create live after them, although we have no desire to see their bones interred. There may be stuff that needs to move to open access on the server. There may be rosters that they kept for their tennis comp that posterity does not require. Get rid.
- **Maintenance agreements:** You may still be paying maintenance for hardware and software that you no longer use.

- **Telecommunications services:** Telco bills are a notorious jungle where charges for services you no longer use or wrong charges for services that you do infest the invoices. Time to check?

5 Interfaces

How easy is it for customers, suppliers, the media to do business with you? Time to check your interfaces. Consider:

- **Phone directories:** the days have surely gone when the listing is headed, not by *Customer Service*, but by *Administration*, or *Head Office*. Look at how your competitors are listed. Any good ideas there? And who uses the paper directory anymore? What do you find at www.whitepages.com.au? What about www.yellowpages.com.au? You may not expect what you find there.
- **Web site:** tread carefully. There may be ego attached to this. Helpful feedback will concentrate on ease of navigation and finding things; and clarity and comprehensiveness of content. Unhelpful feedback is stuff like "I think you should use a different shade of blue". Again, check out your competitors' sites for comparison: any good ideas there worth adapting? To maintain perspective, there are web sites that showcase some of [the worst sites on the web](#).
- **Help desk:** customers can find you, but what happens next? It may be time to revisit problem analysis and resolution processes. Do niggling customer complaints highlight business processes that are due for improvement? The aim is not only to resolve a customer's problem, but to prevent problems like this from happening again.
- **Internal problems:** your people do business every day with *each other*. Is the corporate intranet up to date and well organised? Time for a health check. Is there an effective avenue for handling staff suggestions? Is it time to launch a campaign to encourage more of them?

6 Physical environment

There are two activities to scope: jeans and t-shirts stuff that everyone can join in on a Friday afternoon.

- **First afternoon:** clear out those old PCs, printers, telephone handsets, cables and anything else that is obsolete, no longer works or is no longer needed. The project team will have identified a collection spot near a loading dock or service entrance and a firm that will subsequently take away the stuff to recycle. Collect a list of items with make, model and serial number, as some of this stuff may still be on the asset register and need to be written off. *Ensure that all data is erased* from backup tapes, hard disks, personal organisers and mobile phones. If the recycler will not commit to do this, it may need a session out in the loading dock with some screwdrivers and a large hammer.



Out it goes

- **Second afternoon:** clear out all paper that is no longer of value: obsolete reports, superseded manuals, accumulated newspapers or periodicals, interim working papers, contents of filing cabinets and cupboards to which the key has long been lost. *There is a statutory requirement to preserve certain business records*, so plan to have someone from the Financial Controller's office on standby to rule on marginal cases.

7 Bringing it together

Once scoping is done the project team will present their proposal to the steering committee for endorsement and authorisation to proceed. An all-staff meeting is a good way to present it. After all, almost everyone will find a way to contribute.

The team's proposal may not include everything we suggest; but you may have found other worthwhile things to do as well, do tell us so we can share them.

And once the clean-up is done, you'll be poised to cope with the increased business volume and business tempo that we all hope the next few months will bring.

Let's plan on the assumption that the economic improvement we are currently seeing is going to continue. Confidence breeds confidence after all.



Light at the end of the tunnel?

About [Battiston Consulting](#):

At Battiston Consulting our goal is to help our clients solve their business and IT problems and drive valuable outcomes. Our clients benefit from our effective approach to problem solving, our adoption of best practices, our goal of making our clients successful, our ability to transfer knowledge and capabilities, and our business-based approach to delivering advice and leveraging experience.