

## Tech Line



### Defining an Effective Statement of Work for Technology Implementation Success

By Lori Bocklund and Brian Hinton, Strategic Contact



Create a compelling SOW that meets your center's unique needs and sets the tone for a successful partnership with your vendor.

Anyone taking the time to read a column about building an effective statement of work (SOW) is probably in the throes of a technology project or has lived to tell the harrowing story of a technology implementation gone awry. We freely admit that this isn't the sexiest of topics. However, a good SOW pays solid dividends with projects that are on time, on budget and deliver business value.

Whether you've had a lengthy courtship with prospective vendors or a hurried shotgun wedding, there is great temptation to get on with the process and give the SOW a cursory examination. Buyers are usually driven by the requirement for a solid price and predictable timeline. The easiest way for vendors to comply is using "typical" and "proven" processes that replicate the buyers' status quo with shiny new hardware and sophisticated (*often underutilized*) software. Professional services to attend to process redesign, system integration and configuration may get short-changed for the sake of keeping overall costs within budget. Unfortunately, that dynamic does not deliver the added value that makes a technology initiative truly successful. Moreover, a vague SOW often creates misunderstandings about scope and services, driving price variability. A brief honeymoon can move quickly into a rocky buyer-vendor

relationship.

An effective SOW defines the implementation process, the roles and responsibilities for the vendor/distributor and your company, and key deliverables and outcomes. It captures the uniqueness of the implementation, as well as all of the gory details to "get it right." It demands the same care and attention as the RFP process and vendor evaluation due diligence. Taking the SOW lightly jeopardizes project success.

#### Recognize Your Situation Is Unique

Since vendors typically provide draft SOWs for review, you'll likely start with standard templates and tools that are steeped in their experience and organizational constructs. That's a reasonable starting point so long as you are mindful that every contact center technology project is distinct. Make sure the SOW will accommodate your unique environment and project characteristics.

A prime factor in determining the vendor role is the IT and operational support resources that you bring to the table. The structure, staffing and support strategy will impact the role they expect

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to play during implementation and ongoing support and application optimization. This role needs to be fleshed out with the vendor and documented in the SOW. Among other things, it impacts training requirements before, during and after implementation. If IT provides post-implementation support, the SOW should specify where, when and how staff will receive formal training, how knowledge transfer will be addressed during implementation, and what constitutes the hand-off process. Staff who will manage routing scripts, apply desktop tools or configure applications must be similarly educated. In-house staff must be “taught to fish” so the vendor will not be expected to fish for them after implementation.

Consider how much you are changing versus duplicating your current environment. Vendors might encourage an “as is” implementation because it’s easier and faster. Be careful not to be too confining in your expectations. Implementing with reasonable change to deliver business value—which we always encourage—drives a requirement for a more consultative design phase. You must clearly call this out in the SOW or it probably won’t happen.

Timeline goals and implementation phasing by site or group will differ in each project. You need to balance your knowledge of your culture and drivers with the vendor’s knowledge of what it takes for a successful implementation. Be prepared to educate senior management on the risks if they are driving unreasonable timeframes and show the tradeoffs of speed versus effective execution.

Your ability to match the SOW to your specific situation will be enhanced if you include your unique requirements in the RFP earlier in

this process. Visit our website ([www.strategic-contact.com/tools.asp](http://www.strategic-contact.com/tools.asp)) for more information on RFP structures and SOW outlines.

### Involve the Appropriate Stakeholders

Defining an effective SOW requires a cross-functional team. A project manager will generally guide the process as you transition from the requirements and evaluation process to contracts and negotiations. Procurement or contract people, who should have been involved early on, are likely the owner of the process at this stage. They worry about corporate requirements, lead negotiations, and guide the process based on experience with other contracts of this size and scope.

Operations and IT project team members weigh in for clarity on what needs to be done, by whom. They will live with the technology every day so need to be involved. Procurement will depend on them to ensure that all requirements are included and stated accurately (including changes to existing operations and environment). You may also want to include subject-matter experts (SMEs) on the technology who can shed light on issues and risks and bring unique insights to the process. They can provide important input on the products, professional services, maintenance/support and pricing, helping to ensure that it is complete and competitive.

A key question you will address is whether you will use the vendor/distributor’s standard contract or yours as the starting point. Most vendor/distributors want to use their own, so if you want to use yours, plan on a longer negotiation cycle.

Table 1, below, frames who should be involved in the various SOW steps and their potential role to help a company pursue the appropriate terms in a contract. In all cases, contract resources will conduct the actual negotiations, but the roles here define who provides what level of input and review.

### Include the Necessary Elements

However unique your situation, there are standard sections that should be included and reviewed for completeness in an effective SOW. The following items ensure that all appropriate sections are included (visit [www.strategic-contact.com/tools.asp](http://www.strategic-contact.com/tools.asp) for a more detailed list).

- **Scope**—the overall project definition including technology, functionality, sites/locations, professional services, phases, etc.
- **Approach**—the vendor’s implementation process including steps/tasks, roles and responsibilities, accountabilities, etc. Expect the same details on any vendor partners.
- **Deliverables**—all project document requirements specifying who is responsible (vendor or you) and including roles at each stage (draft, review, final).
- **Staffing**—refers to vendor details on the staff that they bring to the table. Expect details on resource type, number, percent of time. Look for some roles to be fully dedicated (e.g., PM). You should

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Table 1: SOW Team roles and responsibilities

CONTRACT ELEMENTS	BUSINESS AND IT EVALUATION TEAM LED BY PM	INTERNAL/EXTERNAL SME	CONTRACTS/ NEGOTIATOR	LEGAL
<b>Core products/services</b>	Primary	Input	Review	–
<b>Professional services for implementation</b>	Primary	Input	Input/Review	Input/Review
<b>Maintenance/support</b>	Primary	Input	Review	Input/Review
<b>SLAs/performance</b>	Input	Input	Primary	Input/Review
<b>Contract Ts&amp;Cs</b>	Input	Input	Primary	Input/Review

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require provisions to prevent the vendor from changing key players mid-project. Make sure the vendor includes estimated on-site time for each role at each stage of their process. “Face time” is essential for effective consultative design and knowledge transfer. Vendors/distributors try to work remotely, which compromises the design and the goal of “teaching you to fish.”

- Timeline—setting date milestones for each stage of the implementation process.
- Assumptions—requiring the vendor to call out the assumptions on which they base their approach. It can also include items that you have stated as your expectations so you can ensure the vendor has heard you.
- Acceptance criteria—stating specifically what you will use to evaluate the implementation prior to accepting the project as completed. This is absolutely crucial as the timeframe specified for acceptance is typically extremely short and usually starts the clock for your final payments to the vendor.
- Change Management process—the process that you and the vendor will follow when you want scope changes. This section may also define the rules and timing for when you put a “freeze” on changes. An important aspect of the change process is defining the impact on timelines and milestones—especially if you have included any penalties on meeting timelines in the contract.
- Issue resolution process—refers to a clearly defined process for registering complaints or problems, including replacing project resources if there is a bad fit.
- Cost—the pricing section of the SOW. There are options for professional services pricing so this section must be clear on whether this is a fixed price contract—

which means the change management process becomes even more crucial—or a time and materials contract—which requires estimates and approval for changes to estimated costs or not to exceed levels. In either case, you will want to include the contractor’s process for invoicing expenses, including travel time.

- Terms and conditions—the standard contracting clauses that legal and procurement resources seek.

Beyond these critical SOW elements, there are a few other important items to ensure that are included with appropriate detail, depending on the scope of your project. Monitoring and management tools and roles become critical for VoIP implementations. The vendor or distributor may offer network and component monitoring and management, but that may overlap with or duplicate what is already done in house, especially for your data network. So dive into what they offer, look at what you do internally, and determine roles and responsibilities and approach.

Testing is another key area that requires some scrutiny, as there are many different types of testing to consider. Vendor/distributors generally do little testing and count on you extensively. Make it clear who is doing what, considering developing the plan, testing, fixes and regression testing. List different types of testing such as: component (what vendor typically does), functional (aka user-acceptance testing), usability (particularly important with technology that introduces user interface changes), performance, integration (aka component integration testing), business continuity/recovery (including component failure/recovery), and load testing.

Training is the last area to highlight and must consider in-house, classroom, remote and train-the-trainer options. Define what and how much (i.e., how many seats) you want, considering end users (e.g., CSRs, supervisors), analysts, administrators and technical support staff. You should also clarify the level of customization to your world, including documents. If you don’t ask for training to be customized, it may be little more than their standard, general training.

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## Sourcing Strategies Impact the SOW

Your sourcing strategy determines the structure and elements of your statement of work (SOW). Whether you are implementing premise-based solutions, hosted applications or a fully managed service influences the emphasis to place on individual sections of the SOW.

When implementing premise-based solutions, include required training for those administering the technology in operations and IT (often two different user interfaces and therefore two different sets of courses). Also, spell out ongoing support requirements with detailed service level agreement (SLA) definitions.


For hosted applications, implementation puts much less burden on in-house resources and should take less time. However, you still need to define who is responsible for integration with other premise applications. Beware: Some hosted applications market themselves as “plug and play” when, in reality, this simple implementation will offer little beyond access to the application. Achieving your goals takes more time and effort, and requires a more detailed SOW. Also, for hosted applications, the SOW should specifically state where application data resides and who has access to it while in operation and if the contract is cancelled. Also, define the backup strategies for your data and, in the case of an outage, the data recovery strategies.

There are many variations in vendor-provided managed services, including levels of service offered during implementation and for ongoing support. Be specific in defining your service expectations because, if it’s not listed in the SOW, you probably won’t get it. Also, define SLAs covering every service you expect—even day-to-day operations. Don’t forget to include penalties for down time, delays in delivery, etc. Consider how much you actually want the vendor to do for you as costs for routine functions such as moves/adds/changes can add up quickly. And make sure you understand how ongoing optimization and consultative support occurs—and if it’s chargeable. ⓘ

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## Define an Effective SOW for Long-Term Success

Both buyers and sellers want implementations to go smoothly and the support structure to work effectively for all. Long-term technology success, in large part, depends on the relationship you develop with your vendor/distributor. Every interaction from the RFP response through contract negotiation influences that relationship. Defining the SOW effectively puts you in charge of your own destiny and sets up a future of mutual success.

Negotiating an effective statement of work is a win-win for you and your vendor. You will build a relationship that demonstrates your commitment to get it right and your reliance upon them as an equally committed partner. Don't be afraid to provide directed input, demand clarity and specificity to your world, and negotiate for the best pricing. Most vendors appreciate clearly defined expectations since they want a successful project as much as you do. Ensuring clarity on roles and responsibilities, outcomes, deliverables, timelines and commitments will produce a SOW that provides you and your vendor a roadmap to success. 

## Don't Forget Clarity on Support

While a statement of work (SOW) may primarily focus on the tasks for implementation, make sure that your contractual agreements are clear on support, as well. The SOW will include details on the transition to support after acceptance, so it is pertinent to ensure that your contract includes details on the processes, resources, roles and responsibilities, and service level agreements for support. **Top considerations include:**

### Warranty.

Define the duration and when the clock starts ticking. Caution: The clock often starts on delivery and is expired before you even go live... so has little value.

### Support inclusions/exclusions.

Review support options and pick the right one for your needs, considering factors such as upgrades (software, firmware), version vs. release vs. service pack/bug fix, who does what, and customization impact.

### Support processes.

Address availability, where/who support resources are (partner, contractor, overseas, etc.), response and escalation commitments (by alarm level), and dispatch scenarios and resources (who comes, from where and how quickly).

### Spares/crash kits.

While these are less "typical" in a world that is more software-focused and site independent, with much equipment in data centers, it may be appropriate for some mission-critical elements. Consider what should be on-site spares (vs. local depot or shipping from the vendor), where it should reside, and what the refresh plan is for this equipment.



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