

PRODUCT AND PROCESS LIFECYCLE MANAGEMENT



When we talk of business growth, what comes to our mind first up is increase in the business top line and revenue earnings. This is usually the Sales perspective and can be regarded as the most instinctive response. A Business Management perspective is a lot more holistic and takes into account all possible avenues of growth. The possibility to reduced expenses, efficient use of resources and process refinement and re-engineering are some areas most organization explore.

The fact that technology has been evolving at pace that has been challenging Moore's Law and its derivatives every single day, the sphere of possibilities is enlarging. This only means that what a product or process promised to deliver a year back, there is a lot more that can be achieved with the right changes and refinements.

Every product is like a car – it internally comprises of different processes which in tandem offer us the comforts and benefits that we seek. When the government proposes the use of a new fuel, all companies get down to evaluation of how the car and its different process will perform with this change. There can be changes which may be needed in a process, enhancement in some other area, there may be another model where some issues have been resolved – everything needs to be evaluated for possible impact and possible resolutions.

This is where having a system which has details of every product, every process, every detail for changes and resolutions undertaken – a Product and Process Lifecycle Management System, comes in handy.

How does a Product and Process Lifecycle Management (PPLM) system actually deliver?

Let us take an example of a recent trend used by organizations across domains – use of WhatsApp messaging as a means of communication with customers. A team from a business process has come up with the idea to use such a service as a part of the order confirmation and tracking channel. The idea is practical but as a process needs to follow a journey from its germination as an idea to a concept to implementation and post implementation impact.

This kind of idea would typically require approvals from business owners as well as other departments in an organization. The Procurement will need to identify possible vendors who can provide the services from WhatsApp, Finance will need to sanction a budget for the services, the IT will need to facilitate access for the service, the Legal and Compliance to validate the



data policies of the vendor and WhatsApp etc. Only once the require clearances, clarifications and constrains have been established, do projects move up to its implementation.

The PPLM system is designed to make this a formalized and pragmatic process where every product and process is evaluated and taken further only if it has true potential to realize when implemented. The below can illustrate how tracking of various stages of PPLM can be understood for our example.

Stage 1: Preliminary Assessment:

This is the starting point where the product or process is evaluated on an extremely basic level. Is the proposed concept a completely new process or is this already present in some form? Will this be replacing an existing process or will be coexisting? Will this impact business as it stands now? Analysis for the cost and benefit. A basic business proposal can be created and debated.

This stage is critical as the need is gauged and key decisions can be taken at the department level itself. Also, if there is any further understanding and information required at the initial level, it can be addressed. The concepts which clear this basic filtering can be then built into a full-fledged proposal.

Stage 2: Approval Committee:

If a concept clears the first stage, a proposal is now submitted to a committee comprising of representatives or HODs from the Procurement, Finance, IT, HR, Marketing and Legal & Compliance. The role of this committee is to review the proposal and provide their feedback.

What can happen at this stage is that one might find that the same idea has been implemented in some other team in another business process. This saves the effort to reinvent the wheel and

basis the performance parameters of the implemented process, a further call can be taken. If the concept is totally new, it serves as a platform where all departments to raise queries or refer it to other departments or teams for more inputs. In case of our example, it could be the customer support or Ops team to be engaged and a further referral to an IT team could be recommended.

Stage 3: Final Review:

When all the queries resolved and supporting data is ready, the concept can be taken for a final review to the Approval Committee along with the CTO, CFO, COO, etc. The decision is made and if taken forward, deadlines for the project can be assigned.

Stage 4: Go-Live:

Once the POC and integration is completed, the idea is taken into the Live environment. The performance is mapped across the expected parameters to see the efficacy for the system. This becomes the benchmark for further systems and processes which may be planned on similar lines in future.

Stage 5: Life Cycle Evaluation:

The performance of the process is evaluated on a half yearly or annual basis. This is indicative of any rise or dip in the usage, efficacy, or value proposition. Depending on the assessment, the process can be reviewed, and possible corrective actions or enhancements can be planned.

This becomes a continuous process for monitoring the product or process and an active record of usage is always available.

Why have a system for Process and Product Lifecycle Management (PPLM)?

As organization grow, keeping a track of all the products and processes running in the organization becomes a daunting task. It may so happen that some products have been in the running in the organization for a long time, but their usage has declined. It does not make business sense to be paying heavy license fees for such products.

At the same time, there is also a formal process to review, evaluate and approve new product and process requests. This is an effective way to avoid duplications, better use of available products and processes within the organization and higher efficiency in terms of usage and costs.

MobiTrail has been working with its partners and developing a system which is designed to take the existing systems a step forward through alerts and notifications to product and process owners for routine review and performance metrics. With higher efficiencies in the delivery, the system is already making a noticeable impact through valuable contributions to the bottom lines.

CANVA

GRAPHICS AND EDITING SIMPLIFIED.

The world today is being driven by graphics and images. Be it Instagram on social media or use of infographics and imagery in marketing and presentations; we are a lot more receptive and responsive to images and graphics. Traditionally, one would need proficiency with imaging and photo editing tools or a creative agency to get things delivered. But Canva is a tool which can change things as they have been.

Canva is probably the most simple and impressive tool to set you up for doing your own graphics without needing expertise in any editing software and over your own mobile devices. What is most impressive is the level of flexibility, the number of pre-sets for various media platforms and availability of templates under each platform that it can offer.

Is Canva actually so simple and useful?

Starting with a blank canvas, the first step is conceptualizing the idea. Canva has actually jumped this in a big way by offering over 50,000 template options to begin with. This is further categorised to your possible need to use the graphics like social media, presentations, printed matter, videos, marketing campaigns, office and corporate requirements etc. It can also be used for other personal use like desktop wallpapers, reports, planners, comic strips or blog posts. This could by far be the most comprehensive coverage across categories.

A fair number of the templates for graphics and video clips are available for free, which is really the big bonus for anyone who probably like to have a new look to appear in every design. Besides, it has the size presents for Instagram and Facebook posts or stories, LinkedIn posts, backgrounds and cover pages, YouTube thumbnails, intros or even for printed material like flyers, business cards, Logos, letterheads – in a nutshell, a no point one would be left to ponder what is the most suited or prescribed size for an image or video.

The next big advantage is that the layouts and templates are all customizable. You can tap on any element and edit the text or the image or change colours for the design layout as required. A user can replace an image with another image or a graphic from its libraries. Alternatively, you can also use images from your own device and camera to be inserted in the design.

What is possible for images is also possible for videos. There are elements in the video graphics which can be defined, altered or modified like text, colours, animation movements etc to make you own signature clips. As always, there is an option to add in clips, sounds etc. from the library or from your device .

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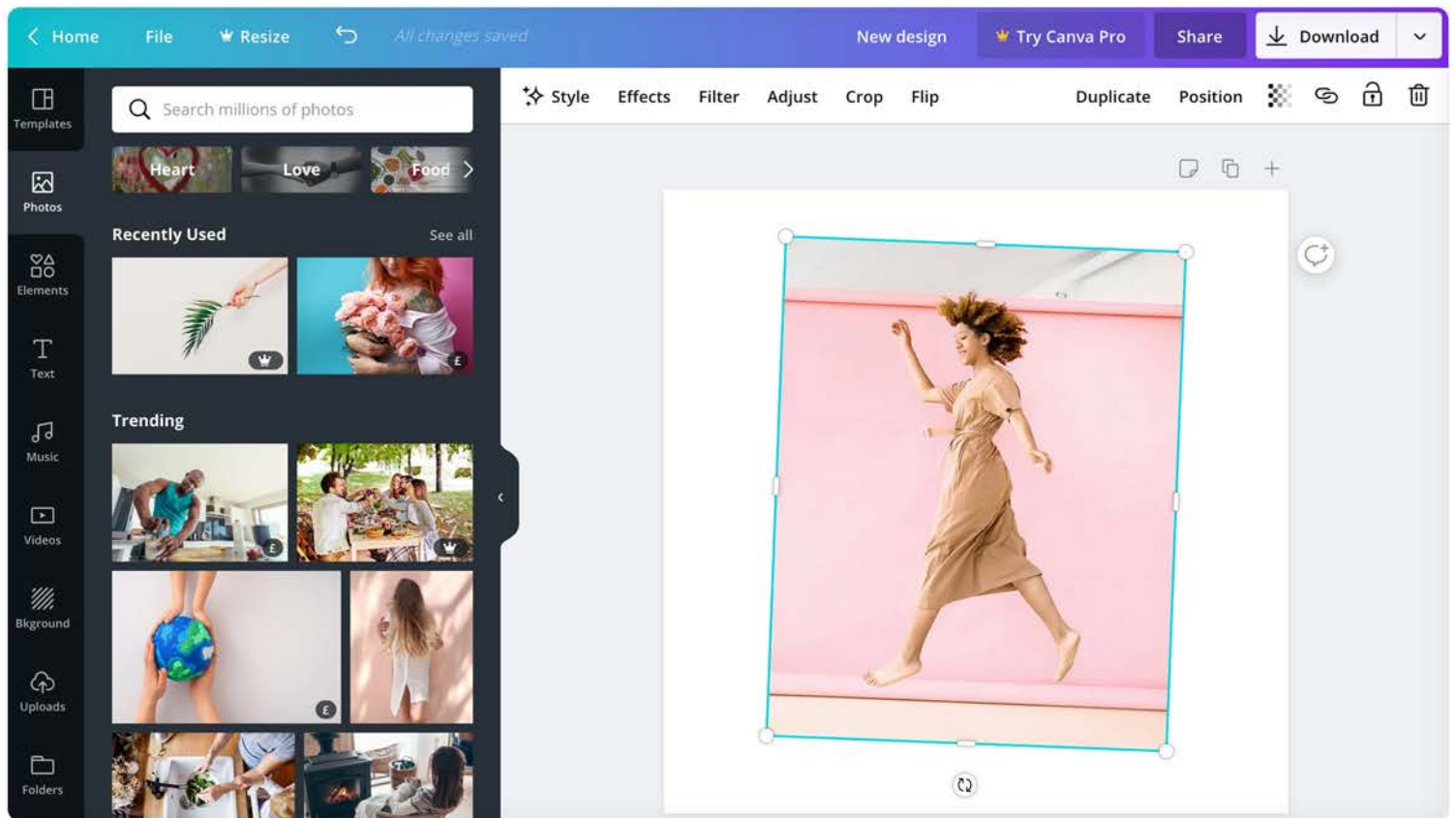
Can Canva be useful to a Designing professional?

If you have been using design software like the Adobe Suite, you may at first find that Canva lacks a lot of editing tools normally associated with designing projects. Also the limitation of fonts, styles etc can be seen as a drawback. But there are still a few upsides in terms of the pre-sets and image sizes that can still make life a lot easier for lighter design requirements. It can also be used in conjunction with a design software where the editing is done on the editing tools and integrated on Canva.

Using the Pro or Enterprise version of Canva for a small organization or a team which may not necessarily have access to designers can be ideal. It can also be good for freelancers or smaller agencies. There are two major benefits of the Pro and Enterprise – the license cost and the ability to make Brand Kits where you can keep multiple brand assets ready for use at any point in time.

Brand Kits is an interesting concept where all collaterals as per the brand guidelines like colours, fonts, spacings etc. can be locked and made available under the templates. Now, any person in the organization can access these templates and create their required designs within the defined parameters. This offers flexibility for people not proficient in design tools to make small adjustments in the text or content without needing the designers to make a change.

Design Team: Hemant Khushale



CANVA

GRAPHICS AND EDITING SIMPLIFIED.

What's Hot

Very few apps have the kind of acceptance and appreciation like Canva; largely due to the fact that it has the usability and simplicity to make even a novice seem like a pro at design. The user interface and elements are simple and thereby it does not take a lot of mobile or design literacy to churn out great looking images. This can reduce the load on design teams for basic design activities.

Canva also is available for mobiles, tablets and windows-based desktop machines, which gives a remarkable flexibility across platforms. Also, the fact that the licenses under Canva are marginal as compared to an Adobe Suite, it offers a significant cost advantage to small organizations and agencies. Also, it has a feature called One-Click Resize; a set design can be resized to match the required size with no adjusting needed.

Under a Pro Account, the stock image, video, audio options go from 50,000 to up to 75 Million.

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What's Not

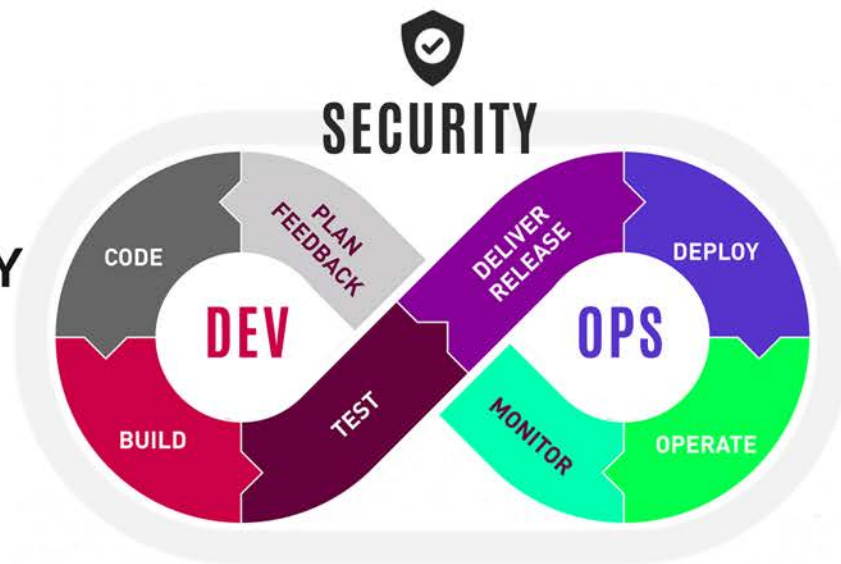
Yes, it is not a full-fledged design software and may lack capabilities. But the scoring point here is the ready to use templates and pre-sets. In the Pro and Enterprise versions, Canva also offers transparent background option which is missing in the free accounts. The limitations towards adding fonts and lack of regional scripts, designs being a bit linear in its approach, limitations on photo adjustments are left to be desired.

Have or Not

The best answer to this can be – just give it a try and you won't regret. Nothing works like appreciation, and this app might just guarantee a lot of it coming your way if you have used the right designs in your posts and creatives.

Design Team: Hemant Khushale

INCORPORATING INFORMATION SECURITY INTO THE IT PROJECT MANAGEMENT



When one talks of Project Management, the thought anyone can get is to run things in the most efficient way and Plan – Design – Execute an idea to deliver maximum returns and optimized resource utilization. When it comes to IT Project Management, all of the above is valid. Keeping the end objectives in mind, the project is planned, the suitable software platform is selected, and system design is drafted. The system is then developed by developers and the system is deployed.

The big area where a software system differs from most is the need to think of information security as a part of the complete project management process as well as the service life cycle. Information security also is an important function in the software delivery area as there is a ubiquitous and ongoing threat in the form of cyber-attacks. The knowledge that there can be critical information that can be accessed means attackers is always trying to up their ante and break in. The rewards of success are high and often fetch a price for the information or a ransom from the system owners.

Data leaks are a modern-day reality, and a single leak has the potential to compromise information regarding business and finance, customers, personal data, and patented technologies, etc. with far-reaching effects. It is thereby important to think of developing an IT project on the lines of a security vault where access, fortifications, threat detections are a part of the design and development process rather than the security measures of commercial office space.

Why the Information Security armour has chinks?

The duel between cyber attackers and security systems is a game where it can be a matter of tools, technology, and robustness of a system to detect and repel an attack. There are multiple reasons why there can be vulnerabilities inherent, or which can develop in the information security measures:

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1. System design and protocols

It is highly recommended to use and validation of session tokens, encrypted data transfers, etc. are some basic measures which can be built as a part right from the design and development stage. This as an intent can go a long way, as there is always a conscious effort to safeguard data. Most often when such actions come as an after-thought after the entire software is almost in a deployment state, it amounts to extra time invested in rebuilding the system and data calls as per the desired protocols.

Involving the Infosec team at the end of software delivery cycles also results in an alteration to the code and which is often a painful and expensive exercise.

2. Lack of trained testing personnel

In almost all organizations, testing teams are the most underrated and ignore the side of the staffing process. To go by the words of James Wickett, the Head of Research at Verica and a noted authority on DevOps and Security, in large companies, the ratio of a person in Infosec is 1 for every 10 in infrastructure and per 100 developers. This ratio is clearly indicative of where Infosec is perceived as a part of an organizational force as well as their role and possible involvement in the design and development is closer to decimals.

The spending on Infosec teams and tools is also perceived as an expense and the perception of a cost center adds to leaving many areas unattended and susceptible.

3. Use of uninformed development practices

When developers are usually briefed about a new project, the desired coding standards and ethics are defined at the onset. Keeping the Infosec team away at the design and development stage can result in many developers being ignorant about the common security risk standards. Models such as the OWASP Top 10 are not common knowledge and not knowing the risks,

a developer is also unaware of the way to prevent them from causing harm. This can leave a lot of gaps in software that are waiting to be explored and exploited by attackers.

The above is just some of the most common areas of concern that have the potential to compromise information security and cause irreparable damage to the integrity of the software and the data.

Effective incorporation of Information Security under IT Project Management

To be one step ahead of attackers, there is a need to first match up on the same level as the other side. This means that there are some very basic and yet effective measures that need to be taken to make IT projects more secure.

1. Adoption of a DevSecOps approach to IT Projects

It is always better to build a wall that is strong to begin with rather than build a wall and then reinforce it to become stronger. The DevSecOps approach promotes this very thought by having an active and definitive role for the Infosec team in the project planning and design.

Infosec experts should contribute to the process of designing applications, attend and provide feedback on demonstrations of the software, and ensure that security features are tested as part of the test suite.

Impact:

- a) Building security into software development not only improves delivery performance but also improves product security quality.
- b) Companies with high delivery performance spend significantly less time remediating security issues.

2. Redefine the roles and responsibilities in the development process:

Since the idea is to make software inherently secure, we need the developers to do the right thing when it comes to infosec. This can be achieved by ensuring that there are easy to consume, pre-approved libraries, packages, toolchains, and processes available for developers and IT operations.

The shift would involve the information security teams doing the security reviews by giving the developers the means to build security in

Impact:

- a) It's much easier to make sure that the people building the software are doing the right thing than inspect nearly completed systems and features to find significant architectural problems and defects the involve substantial rework.
- b) Information Security teams lack the capacity to be doing security reviews when deployments are frequent. In large organizations, security and compliance are looked at as significant bottlenecks for taking systems from "dev complete" to Live. Reducing the load offers a faster means of product delivery.

The Visible Shift

Promoters of the DevSecOps philosophy who have prophesized the idea of involving infosec professionals throughout the development process have recorded improvement of the communication and information flow at all levels within the IT Project management chain. This is a big win-win for teams that may be working isolated otherwise.

When building security into software is a part of the daily work of developers, and when infosec teams provide tools, training, and support to make it easy for developers to do the right thing delivery performance gets better. This translates into better adherence to timelines.

Furthermore, this has a positive impact on security. It has been found that high performers are spending 50% less time remediating security issues than low performers. In other words, by building security into the daily work, as opposed to retrofitting security concerns at the end, performers spend significantly less time addressing security issues.

