

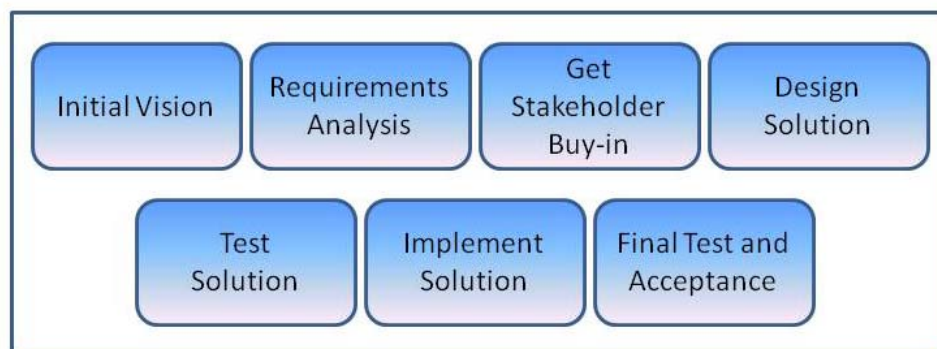
## Getting the Requirements Right is Fundamental

If your business is expanding, or if you are thinking of ways to improve your business, you might think you already know what needs to be done, upgraded, improved or replaced and it is tempting to rush in and get started.

But before you commit to the change, take a step back and do a careful analysis of your processes. When you make changes, upgrades or improvements, and in particular if you are investing financially in the project, then making sure you understand exactly what you really need is fundamental.

A requirements analysis is the process of defining the scope of the project. It includes everything from what your end result should accomplish, what problems it should solve, and technical specifications that a solution needs to meet. If you have legacy systems, processes or procedures at work in your business and you don't want or need to change them at this point, then integrating with them becomes part of your requirements. If you have processes, systems or procedures that are not working, then this is a good time to develop a better understanding of why they are not working and develop requirements for better processes.

A requirements analysis is typically the first thing you do. The figure below captures the other steps that should occur before a solution is completely implemented. The design for your solution is driven by the requirements. We can use a simple example to illustrate the importance of proper requirements analysis. Let's say that a component of your business is to take payments from customers. Your requirement might state exactly that and your designer may provide a cash register. But what if a customer shows up with just a credit card? A thorough requirements analysis needs to accommodate payments of different types. When you translate that into a design, you may end up with a cash register for taking cash and checks and a computerized credit card machine for accepting credit card payments.



Prototyping or testing your environment to ensure you have defined the requirements appropriately is a good way to find out if the new system will work before you make a heavy investment in the solution. Using our example above, let's say that the system is implemented and the first customer shows up with a \$100 bill to make a \$20 purchase. You open up the cash register to provide change and find there is no money in the till. If you have not gone through a dry run of your system you may have forgotten to fund the cash register with a float for making change. Providing a float should have been part of the requirements, but testing will help you determine that is was a missed requirement.



For bigger operations or systems, mistakes may be bigger than forgetting to fund the cash register float. That's where an expert with a proven track record in implementing solutions can truly save you money. Someone with experience in System Development Life Cycle knows how to take your project from start to finish and end up with the result that is best for your business without incurring costly mistakes.