

Core Systems: Getting Upgrades and Conversions Right

Core system conversions are on the rise, with credit unions everywhere deciding to make a significant change. Sometimes, that change is driven by necessity. Vendor consolidation often results in product consolidation – with many older data processing systems being “sunset.” Other times, it’s growth. To meet market demands, credit unions are redefining their offerings and responding to members’ changing needs – often discovering that their current core system simply can’t keep pace. While researching new core systems, these credit union executives are also seeking out a different type of relationship with their vendors. Instead of simply reviewing system functionality, more credit unions are looking for a strategic technology partner with a full solution set.

Credit union executives and board have a fiduciary responsibility to protect its members’ interests. That responsibility includes learning what tools are available in the marketplace, and which companies employ proven Best Practices in their implementation. A credit union’s business strategy should be a major driver in the selection of a core system provider. Most institutions have a long-term plan with specific annual benchmarks, including the addition of new products and services. To be successful, credit unions need a partner with the flexibility, experience and capacity to support these strategic long-term goals.

Although the words “core system conversion” strike fear in the hearts of many, the process doesn’t have to be excruciatingly painful. A successful conversion starts with communication. Every employee in the credit union should understand the conversion procedure, the preparation process, how they will be trained and the benefits the new system will bring. This ongoing information flow eliminates fear and confusion that often comes with change.

Harland Financial Solutions assembles a top-notch Conversion Team with an experienced Project Lead for each installation. This team works closely with the credit union’s Conversion Coordinator and appropriate staff to tailor a comprehensive conversion project plan that is divided into specific phases. Not only does this phased approach ensure each task is achieved, it enables the conversion to be accomplished in “bite-sized portions,” with less interruption to the credit union’s day-to-day business operations.

Harland keeps the lines of communication open with weekly status team meetings and conference calls to make sure all the scheduled benchmarks are being achieved. Working directly with credit union staff ensures a timely entry of parameters and controls in the new system. And to make sure everything is working correctly with accurate information on its go-live date, a full test conversion is conducted that includes detailed balancing and data checking. Just as important is a comprehensive hands-on training plan ensuring each credit union employee using the system has the knowledge, skills and confidence to be self-sufficient in its operation.

A core system conversion is never easy, but with proper planning, scheduling and monitoring, it can be a smoother process. If you work with the right partner, your new core system can become a vehicle for reaching your strategic goals, and a critical component of your credit union’s ongoing success.



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Patricia Stark is Vice President of Client Services for Harland Financial Solutions. She leads the client services organization for Credit Union Core Systems in Pleasanton which includes customer support, client services, training & implementation, project control, and product specialists for the UltraData® core processing system. She has worked in the credit union industry for more than 25 years holding several senior management positions at credit union core providers always in client-facing business disciplines such as implementations or client services. Harland Financial Solutions supplies software and services to thousands of financial institutions of all sizes, offering its solutions in both an in-house and service bureau environment. The company is a leader in core systems, item processing, enterprise content management, branch automation, customer relationship management, business intelligence, origination and document solutions, risk management, compliance training, financial accounting, open documents, mortgage solutions, card programs, electronic funds transfer (EFT), fraud prevention, self service solutions and performance advisory services.

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