

The changing face of IT departments

Jason Connolly of Next Generation IT explores the changing dynamic between companies' IT departments and business teams



There has always been a love-hate relationship between businesses and their 'geeky' IT departments.

In the past IT staff have been treated with a fair degree of suspicion and contempt by the business teams. IT staff in return could come across as aloof and unhelpful. But recently that dynamic has changed with leaner, customer-focused IT support teams, often much more integrated into a business's operations.

Demise of the empire

Leaner times have spelled an end to monolithic IT empires, which used to exist with inwardly focused technical agendas seemingly very distinct from the host organisation. IT teams have evolved to be leaner, service-focused, reactive and share the aims of the business to which they belong. In the current, more competitive business environment, IT teams need to earn their keep by enabling the business to work as efficiently as possible, incorporating technologies to drive the business forward. But more than this, IT needs to provide value by enabling businesses to gain competitive advantage, utilising technology to improve customer service and responsiveness, high levels of security, more accurate decision making from analytics and reporting, plus finding innovative ways to connect and communicate with potential and current clients, for instance personalised web portals and custom built apps.

The make up of IT teams has changed too; technology is so complex and far reaching that no one person can know everything. IT professionals have needed to specialise meaning that an internal IT department would have to be very large to be able to employ all the skills they need in-house. To overcome this issue most businesses have evolved a small, business focused IT team that is tightly integrated with the rest of

the organisation and then partner with third party IT service providers to buy-in the additional technical expertise they need to fill the gaps. Other businesses decide to entirely outsource IT to the experts, freeing up their own resources to focus on their core business, reducing costs and increasing productivity.

An awakening

In the face of increasing competition, regulation and pressure on budgets; local organisations are striving to become more streamlined in order to survive and ultimately grow their business. Many successful businesses have embraced outsourcing and have partnered with local IT companies to buy-in services that enable them to focus on their core business.

Globally, IT outsourcing is set to grow 5.9% a year from 2013 when it reached \$288bn, according to American research company Gartner. Closer to home, this year's UK IT outsourcing study, which looked at more than 800 IT outsourcing contracts held by 160 organisations, highlighted just how important outsourcing has become. IT outsourcing in the UK is now estimated to be worth around £20bn and it is set to continue growing, with 40% saying they will outsource more.

Business benefits

The ability to focus on core business activity is the main driver for companies wanting to outsource. With sustained downward pressure on the economy, we have seen Guernsey companies striving to become more efficient and effective in order to survive and ultimately grow their business, despite limited headcount and available finance. Benefits include cost savings through economies of scale and flexibility with the ability to grow and shrink the service. Minimising costs in austerity and

providing the capacity to grow resources rapidly, when growth returns. Risk is mitigated, as IT providers employ a pool of people to call on, with experience of supporting similar organisations.

Next Generation IT offers a comprehensive range of IT services to a diverse mix of clients, but we continue to see a rise in the number of companies seeking help in managing their IT requirements. This does not mean we always provide a full-time on-site engineer, but often provide a mixture of proactive weekly site visits, health checks and reactive support.

Outsourcing can also include the hosting of a client's IT environment through cloud services, which enables an organisation to buy-in IT systems, without needing to invest in costly IT infrastructure.

Conclusion

Forward-looking businesses are using outsourcing and cloud services to ensure that day-to-day basics are taken care of, freeing up their organisation's staff to drive the business forward.

Good IT is so critical to business success in the current environment and having the right IT team composed of passionate, hard working and knowledgeable staff is crucial. Technology moves so quickly it is a challenge for businesses to keep up. Key to this is the humble IT team, composed of the best staff from inside and outside the organisation all working together to drive the business forward.

Many of our clients outsource the provision of their IT systems and support for those very reasons, and rely entirely on us to meet their current and future IT needs and challenges. That is a trend that we believe will continue.