

STRATEGIC IT LEADER 2015

...SOMETHING HAS TO GIVE

The 2015 IT Leader is first of all a leader of people and a builder of strategic customer-centric human networks

The timeless legacy of Peter Drucker reminds us that “the purpose of a business is to create a customer”. In this context, the purpose of an IT Leader is to create a customer easier, cheaper and faster. That’s the CIO’s value proposition in business today. Yet, this is not always the case.

“The purpose of a business is to create a customer”
Peter Drucker

Can the 21st century IT Leader become a superior business value creator?

In the hyper-competitive 21st century, IT Leaders are expected to focus more on people and communication; aligning IT with the business, delivering superior customer service internally and externally, and working with management to innovate and drive value by successfully interfacing people with technology. It’s about insights and communication.

Yet, in an everyday scenario, where the competition-beleaguered CMOs constantly demand faster and uninterrupted access to new communication technologies and the CEOs push for lower costs and stronger profits, there is little bandwidth left for insights, let alone more personal communication!

The risk for CIOs is that of becoming a reactive, support function in business. Some forecasts say the CMO will soon be calling the shots for IT and IT Managers who choose to wait for “the business” to tell them what to do, will be relegated to managing the “plumbing” of the infrastructure.

Not a good scenario for a career and an even greater loss for business!

There is no doubt that IT Leaders are operating under enormous pressure.

Something has to give.

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“If you want something new, you have to stop doing something old”
Peter Drucker

Today IT Touches Everything

Regardless of your industry, chances are every department at your company has a need for some sort of IT support. Everybody looks to technology to improve performance, drive efficiency, save costs and ultimately, outsmart the competitors.

The top leadership expects the CIO to stay ahead of trends, not only in technology but most importantly, in business. Companies want IT Leaders to be able to see over the horizon to recognise emerging technologies and how they can be applied to their business objectives; providing input for strategic, ‘disruptive’ business decisions.

Let’s be realistic for a moment. There are at least a dozen “urgent and important” priorities on every IT leaders’ agenda, and they all include some aspects of the Big Two:

1. Strategic Exploitation of Big Data: making sense of this data, and making it accessible to those who need it; and,
2. Cybersecurity [Cloud Security]: ensuring integrity of that Data and of business continuity.

Interestingly, budgets that keep shrinking, rather than growing with the needs, are the most often quoted hurdle to meeting these priorities. The thing is that when strategic solutions that add high business value emerge from addressing the main two issues, money will follow.

Fortunately, both these issues are closely related and by strategically addressing one will help address the other.

Here are some thoughts on how IT Leaders can urgently transform the IT department from a back office function into a key business driver.

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Taming Big Data: 3-D Mindset of a Strategic IT Leader

There are countless publications proposing an impossible list of expectations from a CIO.

I would like to propose three mindset dimensions that will aid in taming the Big Data to create business value.

1. Race for time: Less Integration and More Innovation

While it's good to be needed by everyone, as a strategic IT Leader you need to treat your time and your Team's as an investment in creating business value. For example, in the old paradigm the IT function would devote 70% to 80% of its resources just to run and maintain what they've already got, leaving as little as 20% for innovation. This budget drain makes it almost impossible for CIOs to fund value-add initiatives. It's time to re-design the IT function for agility.

CIOs need to start rapidly withdrawing themselves and their business-technology teams from the IT project mentality and devoting more of their time to growth-oriented and customer-centric innovation.

Outsourcing non-value-add activities and automation already is quite common. The question is: can this be optimised further? And, what is really important to the core business purpose of creating customers?

Are you prepared to take a step back and re-think the path to mastering a 360 degree customer-driven view of business?

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2. The Chief Networker: Building Alliances for an Agile Enterprise

The IT Leader in 2015 must first of all become a “people” leader and, instead of managing technology, learn how to manage people networks

The IT Leader in 2015 must first of all become a “people” leader and, instead of managing technology, learn how to manage people networks. The objective here is to not only to open the flow of insights from all parts of the organisation, but proactively seek and cement internal alliances to leverage expertise of others to co-create value. This is also how you can make things happen faster and with fewer resources of your own.

An ability to skilfully advocate these initiatives within the C-suite and ‘co-promoting’ them to get a broad buy in from all employees, is critical. For example: a CIO in charge of optimising an IT portfolio of investments will have to join forces with the CFO, who has expertise in maximizing return on investment.

“If the corporate goal is operational excellence in using a new system or a desired behaviour, such as commitment to data security, HR needs to become your new best friend

Craig McDonald

There is no need to always lead an initiative. As other leaders help pull the cart, you can re-invest your time in taming the next competitive technology trend.

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3. Turning on The Magnetic Power of the Engagement Economy

While the terms 'brand engagement' and 'employee engagement' are reaching the point of saturation, we *do* live in the 'Social Age' and engagement is the key driver of people's behaviour. People always 'want' to be part of something bigger, something successful.

The most innovative technology initiatives are a direct result of 'stakeholder' engagement: customers and employees. Engagement helps break through the fog of indifference and creates advocacy for future initiatives. Think: Apple evangelism!

CIOs and their teams need to adopt Customer-Centric Thinking to Technology Decisions by breaking down the silos of the 'Back' and the 'Front' office, and creating one Customer Office where they can be part of the 'village' chatter.

One of the privileges of being a CIO is the ability to be involved with, and understand all of a company's end-to-end processes. The CIO and the business-technology team have tremendous insights into the company's operations, its priorities, its vulnerabilities, and its opportunities. This provides massive potential to harness the collective innovative thinking to transform Big Data into Big Insights, Big Opportunities and superior value creation.

If you are already onto it, you should feel gratified and perhaps can pick up the pace...

Part 2 of 'Strategic IT Leader 2015' will be published next week.

About the Author:

Craig McDonald is the CEO and founder of MailGuard, a leading authority on Cloud email and web security; and a serial Entrepreneur who owns multiple successful businesses.

He founded MailGuard in 2001, pioneering the cloud-based spam and virus filtering technology delivered as SaaS. MailGuard, winner of many entrepreneurial awards, is one of Australia's leading technology brands and the world's largest privately owned provider of cloud-based email and web security.

MailGuard is the flagship brand, exclusively providing cloud email filtering. [Check out the [FREE 14-Day Trial](#)] Other specialist brands include: MailGuard Live [email continuity and disaster recovery], WebGuard [website malware filtering and content control], ImageGuard [illicit image monitoring], SafeGuard [online email archiving]; and HostedMail [hosted mailboxes], servicing businesses from SME to large corporate and government.

Craig connects with like-minded people on [LinkedIn](#), and is happy to share his expertise in cloud technology, cloud security, SaaS or entrepreneurship.

Feel free to [send him a request](#) or call his office on: 03 9694 4444.