



it news

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IT STRATEGY: VALUABLE BUSINESS ASSET OR SHELFWARE?

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While most sewn products companies agree on the need for a documented information technology strategy, many different approaches are used to develop and execute on this potentially valuable business asset. As a result, the benefits achieved from IT strategy vary widely.

Too often, the strategy document winds up as 'shelfware', collecting dust along side some of the very software projects named in the plan. To avoid such disastrous results, we must consider the fundamental mistakes some companies make in this process, and what can be done to make IT strategy a more valuable component of your overall business plan.

Traditionally, an IT strategy document is prepared once a year. It typically includes a review of corporate business strategies and IT initiatives that may support them. It also establishes priorities for these initiatives, detailing procurement and implementation plans for the coming one to three years. The plan may also include details about the computing infrastructure required.

Relying on this, the most common form of IT strategy is actually the main reason why many companies fail to realize significant value from the process. The traditional annual approach fails to deliver on its promise due largely to the velocity of the fashion industry, the need for a deeper level of strategic planning at the IT level, and the rapid pace of technological change.

In an industry characterized by intense global competition, extreme time compression, and ever-changing regulatory constraints, IT strategies must become more agile to deliver true strategic value. Just as with overall corporate strategy, analyzing IT strategies once a year is simply not effective in today's fast-paced business environment. We must also remember that not all strategies are long-term. While some IT strategies may span multi-year time frames, others have windows of opportunity measured in weeks or months.

In the case of information technology, once-a-year planning often results in IT department-sponsored initiatives based on overall business goals rather than the preferred team-sponsored projects supported by specific department or user group needs. Of course, aligning IT to corporate strategy is essential. But IT delivers the greatest value when it works closely with individual departments and end-users to help them accomplish their individual contributions to overall goals. Clearly, the development of sound IT strategy requires a deeper involvement with stakeholders to understand their specific tasks and to determine how technology can enable them to perform in a more cost-effective way. And, to effectively match technology to business needs, IT must also stay current on available tools and techniques for the industry.

When should IT work with internal teams and suppliers to set and review strategies, and define and prioritize IT projects? Constantly, of course! Discovering strategic solutions must be an ongoing, dynamic process. It requires a fresh approach, a willing and able staff, and perhaps some professional guidance along the way. The result will be an IT strategy that results in better execution and delivers greater value to the business.

Productive Solutions, LLC is an Atlanta-based consulting firm providing measurable results in business strategy, integrated marketing, and technology guidance. Contact Rick Ludolph at r.ludolph@productivesol.com.