CIOs and IT Reclaim Their Seat at the Table

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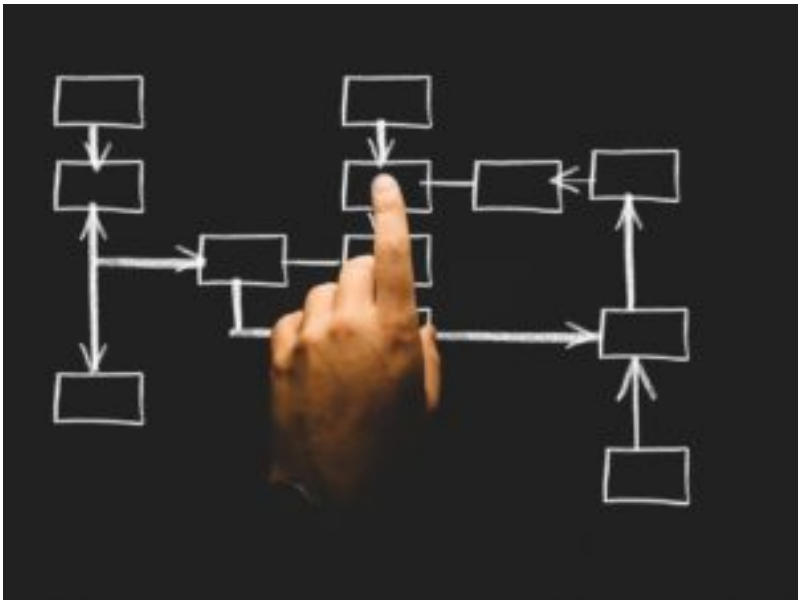
How this Critical Department is Driving Innovation throughout Organizations

With a continual onslaught of changes rapidly affecting industries and companies worldwide, businesses are bracing for what is next in most areas. However, it's clear that some areas are accelerating their innovation including technological adoption. Information Technology (IT) teams and CIOs are seizing on this moment to expand internal offerings and build up internal technology systems by considering new vendors and increasing adoption rates. Having had a historical view of the entire company and focused both on growth and the customer, CIOs are entrenching themselves in conversations to help businesses make better and stronger decisions for the long game— an astoundingly solid strategy.



CIOs and IT departments have long known that marketing, sales, and service can no longer exist in siloes and as these other departments are now coming to this realization, IT is being involved in more key conversations uniting the departments for critical business technologies that exist across companies like that of a CRM. There are key areas that have been missed historically by other departments because they fail to view the CRM implementation holistically as IT departments—across both the company and the customer journey because at the heart of the matter is the customer.

Important Considerations from an IT Perspective for Business-Critical Technology

While focusing back on the customer is the ultimate business goal that IT never loses sight of, it's also critical for them to ensure that the attributes of the business-critical technology enables the company infrastructure rather than inhibits it. In this sense, the CIO has the task of testing integrations, technological considerations, and implementation standards considerations for compliance before a new software or technology can be adopted.

Integration Capability

The average amount of applications that a business utilizes is 73 and each of these, in some way, is designed to make employee's lives easier. Depending on the company and its size, the percentage of these applications which companies need to integrate can vary but overall, a staggering amount of those 73 applications will have to be integrated with business-critical technology.

Assuming for a moment that the number of required integrations is only roughly 50%, that is *still* 36 applications that potentially need to be tested for integration with any new business-critical technology.

One of the valuable things that IT can look for is open APIs, reliable partners, or other integration-specific technology that can quickly help to alleviate the need to custom code the connection and security protocols that connect two or more software platforms or technologies together. This coupling is critical then to testing the integrations rather than surmising what might or might now work based on custom integrations. Custom integrations can be a costly addition to new software licensure agreements and a hidden cost that a vendor may not inform potential buyers about until they are very far along in the buying process.

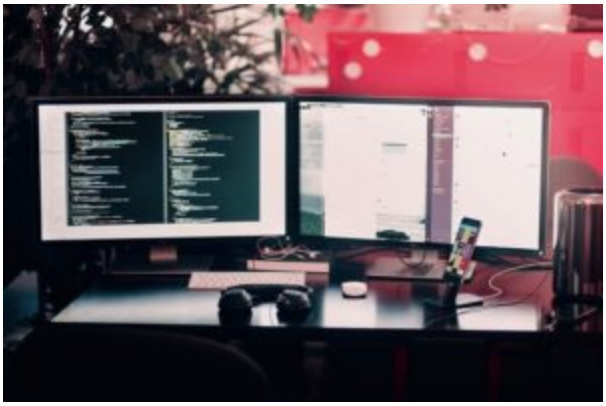
While realistically, not every vendor will have every integration that a company may need, but they should offer ways to integrate with large players in the sector—even if it's not their own product. Most companies are not naïve to the fact that customers are loyal to what is best for their own customers, though some vendors continue to use their cult-like followings to push new proprietary internal technology. IT departments know what works and what doesn't, providing key insight on where red flags arise based on integration capability with a potential vendor.

Some technologies that are business-critical may be a bit more nuanced for a specific department like that of marketing automation platforms (also frequently referred to as MAP). This business technology works within the marketing team but requires far-reaching integration which is why IT must take an active role in getting out the platform before

implementation. These MAPs are critically integrated with CRMs and potentially customer service software to effectively route leads and customer communications to the appropriate teams which means that their integration capabilities are in the spotlight by IT.

While many of these platforms began because of CRM, they have transformed beyond that to the nuanced capabilities required by the average marketing team for lead generation and nurturing, campaign management, communications, and that's just the start of the list. Marketing teams know they don't exist within a silo…most of the time…but this is where it is absolutely critical for CIOs and IT to take an active role in aiding the technological evaluation of their preferred marketing automation technology.

Technological Considerations IT Must Make



Additional key insights that CIOs also can evaluate to enhance recommendations of CRM platforms include security and scalability. These considerations are vital to business-critical systems not only because they are used by the majority of the company for daily activities but because IT is very focused on the long-term gains that they provide in concurrence with business objectives.

It extends beyond just accepting vendor numbers in this case; any vendor can claim whatever they want but it does not make the numbers truthful or backed via customer data. While other departments can evaluate technology via customer-backed data, IT understands that there is a deeper level relating to their company. That's not to call out other departments on their evaluation because those details do matter, they just cannot be the sole focus on an IT evaluation of technology.

Scalability

CIOs have the monumental task of not only aligning their teams to other departments and job functions, but they also have the additional task of matching long-term company growth with their decisions that they make now. With contracts often extending beyond a single year, IT must consider the long-term impact of technology on the entire company and the planned trajectory of growth. Organizations must be able to scale and thus, their technology must be able to scale alongside them. With an estimated 99% of businesses in the US not being classified as an enterprise business, scalability is an important part of companies' plan for sustained growth on an acceptable scale. Scalability not only pertains to additional seats being added to technology like their CRM but also the pricing model. Non-enterprise businesses must continue to maintain a budget that works for them rather than what works for an enterprise. It may be not much of a change for an enterprise to add 20 seats, but to a

SMB or mid-market company, that growth is exponential and yet, must remain affordable and scalable within their company. Understanding the lifetime cost of an application is necessary to invest in new software.

Security

Security is a critical undertaking for all companies. Organizations must be able to assure and show customers their security protocols and guidelines. However, the IT department plays an active role in maintaining and understanding the nuances of what occurs in this arena. From HIPPA compliance to government regulations to financial encryption requirements, each of these avenues must be evaluated to a strict standard that IT must evaluate. Business-critical applications that secure customer data must attain the required levels of security because it is simply unaffordable to compromise in this sector.

Stability

Most of all, technologies like CRM systems and marketing automation are used throughout a company for daily activities. The technology and deployment, in-house or cloud, must be stable because any failure in this area can cost a business dearly. Platform or cloud outages on a CRM can cost companies upwards of $5,600 per minute according to calculations Gartner. CIOs and their teams must understand the stability of the platform, the historical outage rates, and downtime related to maintenance to gauge the stability of new business-critical software service to assure that it will not cost the company more than the licensure during the life of the contract.

Implementation and Adoption Requires IT Input

This phase of the technical evaluation is usually farther down a company's selection of a vendor but can also be a deal-breaker based on both cost and time. The best weapon for understanding the investment needed during this phase is IT. They know how long their typical SLAs are with other vendors of critical technological integrations plus understand the time needed to push it through internal review processes.

An effective CIO understands the capabilities of their own team and what specialists they have available—each of which plays directly into the implementation of new technology. While the IT team may not be the end-user of the technology, they are the ones who will have to

Maintain, update, and secure it. This consideration is not often addressed by other business units until too far down the negotiations and can leave IT scrambling to support or commit to a new system that the company wants to purchase.

The implementation phase is one of the most critical of new technology because it can make or break the release of new software in a key area: Adoption. While many leaders claim that they make technological decisions with employees in mind, many employees don't agree. This is where IT can also play a crucial role because they monitor the technology currently used in-house and can aid in predicting the adoption rate based on similar roles and prior technological utilization.

Additionally, employees want software that works more like the technology that they use in their personal lives, meaning that they want remote connectivity, mobile ability, and automation of repetitive tasks. While many business-critical technologies have these features, it is up to IT to verify the application's security and cost for these features to aid in adoption. Feature additions including mobile applications, custom information storage, and others can greatly increase the cost of implementation by adding onto the original licensure of the technology to promote user adoption.

Implementation and adoption are two aspects that go hand-in-hand, making them crucial to IT and the CIOs role in technological evaluation because this is where the bulk of the responsibility will land for the entire company. When evaluating a vendor and product like CRM or marketing automation, IT teams must consider the overall cost of the platform, what add-ons may be required for a successful implementation, and how to increase internal user adoption through possible additional features. These recommendations will also help to determine the final pricing and, ultimately, flesh out the thorns in vendor pricing tactics.

Assuming the Role of Counselor

The final word extends to the CIO, who fits the role of a counselor on the executive team to guide and shape the organization from a holistic perspective. The importance of having these leaders alongside a strong IT department cannot be understated because they truly are part of the inner strength of a company. When evaluating new software, and exploring alternatives, it's essential to make sure these key players have a seat at the table to further the conversation and shape the future of any organization.

Now is the time to innovate internally, take your seat at the table, and lead new conversations to spark your organization's innovation.