

The Latest Fall Fashions - Evolving IT Systems

IT, by nature, is innovative - changing and adapting to remove the constraints of manual business operations and streamline the efficiency of organization. To adopt the mentality of "set it and forget it" with your technology is a sure way to tell your clients "we are resolved to becoming outdated and inferior." At the same time, the industry has taught us that technology for technology's sake is not a sound business model either. Keeping up with trends in the technology world becomes an even more overwhelming challenge for with every new, in vogue capability, there are countless iterations already in incubation. So, how do CIO's and IT executives stay ahead of the curve to ensure systems will grow with an organization and protect valuable capital from being flushed away? Server Virtualization is a prime example of what was once looked upon skeptically as an interesting attempt to change the way IT managed cost and systems until it was proven prudent and lucrative by Fortune 500 firms across the spectrum. Now however, companies are out of license compliance, and have lost control and visibility into the enterprise.

Business is constantly changing, and this trend of change is seen more than ever in recent years with virtualization, cloud computing and IT outsourcing. These changes are difficult to effectively orchestrate but your people, your needs, your clients, and you must be able to adjust and evolve if everyone is to survive as value-players within the organization. Like any other evolution cycle, this one, too, is survival of the fittest. So are you adapting (driving business innovation) or are you strong (stabilizing the platforms for better business operation)? To begin, you need to take a step back and evaluate your current IT situation and the services IT is providing. Understanding the longevity and sustainability of the services, software, and hardware you are currently managing is imperative to current viability. Whereas adapting to changing business needs is crucial for your future viability. Where's the balance? Here's how to avoid stagnancy and keep your IT systems evolving, while keeping your company's long-term goals in mind. Model your business and IT services. By mapping out your business services to IT services and the assets that support them, you build the solid connection that is required to understand the complex relationship between technology health and business health. So how do you get the information and where do you start? More than likely, you already have 2 key areas where this information is kept. 1st) Your catalog issues listed in your help desk. Yes, you have probably already mapped your critical business services. The simple reason is users don't call to complain about the "Server03". They call to complain about the "registration system" or some other business function not working. This is a great source of information to start your business service modeling. 2nd) Your functional QA team. No QA team has time to test 100% functionality which is why they must prioritize the critical functions of the business to be tested first. Within the service, they will also have the vital business functions labeled and mapped to the interfaces and applications. Monitor your End-User Experience. End-User Experience Management is all about viewing your services through the eyes of your user. Nothing is more frustrating than when a product marketing manager insists that there are issues with an application or user-interface module and IT argues that from a functionality stand-point, everything is A-OK. End-user experience monitoring incorporates so much more than tracking click-through metrics. Understanding the intricacies of back-end systems, content delivery networks, streaming technology and other factors contributing to a positive end-user experience can have a huge impact on your bottom line. The system not only has to just work; it has to work for your end-users. The value of the technology is not only found in the functionality it provides, it also comes from its ability to be utilized over the internet, in the middle of the night, within five seconds - whatever is required. That is where the real value of the technology is seen, in its utility and warranty. Manage your Application Performance. It would be unwise and counterproductive to hire new employees, train them, and leave them to their own devices - never again checking in to see how things are going. Yet, this is often the case with new application deployments. Application implementations require upfront customization for your organization and thorough testing to ensure functionality with all current operations, but it should never be considered complete without a system in place to measure performance. If there is a problem, you need to isolate it and determine root cause in order to keep the problem from reoccurring. As changes are released and the complexity increases, you need to ensure that your end-users are not adversely affected. Implementing a system to measure application performance gives you the ability to keep your operations running at optimal levels. Infrastructure Management. Infrastructure Management (IM) has always been about managing more than hardware, software and the multitude of cables that connect it all together. While we would like to say keeping it running is easy, the reality is that infrastructures are more complex than ever. A strategy needs to be built to help manage the state of the infrastructure as it relates to the quality of service it is providing to the end user. Monitoring needs to incorporate more than just availability or faults. Performance, capacity, changes and security are all conditions of the infrastructure that will translate into a healthy or unhealthy condition for the business to operate in. Each of these attributes must be polled and brought together into a single engine to determine root-cause-analysis. Otherwise you risk over-alarming (page-floods) which can be worse than no monitoring at all because it causes the "cry wolf" syndrome. Like any observation, it should be instrumented methodically and matured (or increased) over time.