

5 ways your IT infrastructure can help address your biggest operational headaches

You're under pressure to release products faster, make their implementation easier, and improve your upgrade process. To help address these headaches, according to Deloitte, an overwhelming majority of today's businesses are shifting their IT priorities to supporting new business needs in the coming years.

Here are five ways your IT department can solve your biggest operational headaches—and help you get new products to market faster.

1

Plan ahead for IT budget changes

Whether your IT department is a staff of 2 or 20, you're likely operating on a shoestring budget already and don't have the flexibility to offload certain tasks to new staff or temporary workers. Though the current economic outlook is more positive than in previous years, IT departments often have to weather abrupt budget reductions or flat growth, notes a report by Computer Economics. When you can consolidate or simplify your IT systems, you gain greater visibility into your organization's operational needs, which can help you be more flexible under a limited—or suddenly reduced budget.

2

Balance your routine IT tasks with your strategic IT activities

Up to 80% of IT budgets can be tied up with managing routine maintenance tasks according to Forbes. Many of these IT tasks could be automated with cloud-based deployments or migrated to new systems—and evolve beyond the processes that are keeping you stuck in the past. To remain competitive, you need to consider what activities are consuming too much time and could be offloaded to free up your IT group for more strategic activities. Consider tasks like implementing backups, upgrades, and security patches. When you can automate many of these processes, your IT department can spend more time supporting facility upgrades, market expansions, and R&D initiatives.

3

Stay on top of software upgrades to allow real-time information flow

When your systems don't communicate with one another, you run the risk of making ill-informed decisions that can slow down your production processes and leave you open to security flaws. Non-integrated systems, or ones that don't even allow for integration, often require more challenging upgrades. Meaning, the specific vendor for each solution needs to upgrade and maintain updates. Because of this hassle, many organizations adopt an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it mentality" and simply avoid updates, as ZDNet has observed. There is a twofold danger in this. First, your systems should be talking to each other, sharing and collating data—not



hoarding data that other parts of your organization need. Across the board, you need to be working from one trusted set of data so you can make better decisions, faster. Second, software support is critical. When you rely on old systems that are no longer supported or being updated, it becomes easier for hackers to exploit bugs—leaving you open for attack. A modern solution will deliver easy upgrades, security, and seamless integration—so you have the right information, at the right time, all the time.

4

Use your data wisely

Inadequate IT systems prevent 33% of businesses from doing more to improve their supply chain, KPMG has found. Your business is already generating data about your timelines, trading partners, budgets, price, orders, costs, and inventories—you just need to harness this data, analyze it, and make it work for you. Big data and sophisticated analytics can help you track all of your resources—from your production capacity to your transportation and delivery operations, and everything in-between—so you have the information you need, when you need it. You'll be able to make better decisions about the total cost of quality of your manufacturing operations, stay on top of your maintenance needs to reduce time spent on unplanned equipment and tool repairs, and gain real-time insights into potential production defects.

5

Stop customizing applications to get the functionality you need

Customization is a hassle. Worse, it wastes time and money. There are so many layered configuration options available that with each new customization you're often creating new challenges for yourself instead of making your life easier. Just when you've got a tool organized how you need it to be, a mandatory upgrade will come along and break your customized workflows. If you're in the middle of a critical project, reinstalling your customizations is time you can't afford to spend. To avoid these headaches, choose systems that include industry-specific standards right out of the box. You'll get best practices and workflows suited to automotive built in, so you won't have to spend time on customizations. You'll have what you need, when you need it—without having to start fresh after each upgrade.

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