

SiliconIndia

The Changing Role of CIOs

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The role of the CIO , based on my experience has changed dramatically from that of implementing networks and the latest and greatest applications to one of being recognized as a business visionary and truly engaging with CXO's to formulate and implement business strategy. There is tremendous pressure being placed on CIO's to move away from pure maintenance of applications and infrastructure into the realm of being innovative in transforming the business eg, to become more customer centric.

This new role, in my opinion requires that CIO's should be first and foremost qualified business management experts with a good understanding of technology. Some CIO's are tasked with leading business process reengineering projects and integration projects following a merger or acquisition (that would be me !) CIO's are now part of the business solutions team and not just the technical solutions team. Consequently, the skills sets of IT teams are also changing from pure technology to more business process oriented with some technical expertise. The availability of high quality technical resources at offshore locations, particularly in India greatly assists in this transition process. IT organizations now communicate frequently with functional teams across the business and are seen as an extension of these functional teams.

Although the CIO's role is changing, IT is still viewed as a cost center and in most cases reports into the CFO. CIO's are constantly challenged by the business to deliver more features and functionality at no (or very little) additional cost. In order to strike the balance between IT spend and providing support for the changing needs of the business, we must leverage technology to "re-allocate IT maintenance spend to support innovation". At Jazz, we leveraged technologies like virtualization, cloud computing and increased use of open source platforms to reduce costs. Server virtualization, after some initial hiccups yielded the most benefit as we were able to consolidate servers at a ratio of 10:1 (10 virtual servers to 1 physical server). Our technology roadmap for 2008/2009 is largely focused on communications (video collaboration infrastructure and 802.11n), Security (network and edge devices), consolidation (SAN/NAS and server virtualization), ILM and E-discovery (data retention and achieve strategy) and Availability (remote replication and disaster recovery). These are some of the technology investments we will be making to support the ever changing needs of our business.

I believe that CIO's will be able to reposition IT organizations to be seen as a "value add" function and not just a cost center. CIO's will be included in leadership teams' discussions around the formulation and implementation of business strategy. Will the pure technologist CIO of today become the IT manager of tomorrow?

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