

Five IT Outsourcing Rules

The information technology consulting and management industry has matured considerably in the last decade. As a result, IT outsourcing is now common among small to medium sized businesses. However, it's not always easy for business owners to relinquish control of something so critical to their success and many struggle to understand the division of responsibilities between their companies and the firms they hire to manage IT. Here are a 5 IT Outsourcing Rules that will help you manage your IT infrastructure.

1. Understand that IT is primarily a business management philosophy.

Outsourcing IT is a lot more than just "My laptop or printer doesn't work." It's about what your business will look like in two years. You need to think strategically - in big-picture terms - and consider your future growth and evolving needs.

Outsourcing your IT needs is the opposite of losing control. You're empowering yourself because you'll be able to focus more on what you're really good at and have a clearer picture of your office's computing environment. It's like having a business partner, someone who is laser-focused on that part of the business, someone who will tell you straight-up about the good and the bad.

Part of what we look at is not just whether you are technically sound, but do you have the operational controls in place so people can't put their files in the wrong place? If you don't create controls that help people put things in the right place, you can lose a lot. Also, if you don't understand IT, be humble enough to ask someone who does to help you develop a strategy. Most people will recoup the cost of this investment in the first year.

2. Recognize the impact of "soft downtime."

Downtime isn't just when your server is down. It can be as subtle as the time someone spends trying to get a file. We call this "soft downtime." It's like a hidden cost and you want to prevent it before it happens.

Business owners rarely think about the amount of time their employees lose struggling with computers. For many it's as if taking five minutes to insert a row in a table is normal or taking 10 minutes to get to a folder on the network. It doesn't have to be this way. IT should be transparent if it's working correctly. All you should have to worry about is doing your job.

People get distracted by computer issues, and right away - that's downtime. Work isn't being done. These lapses typically come in small bits of time, but they add up to a huge amount of lost productivity. You can't afford to have unstable, unreliable systems that hinder your work instead of supporting it.

3. Accept that you should not be on the cutting edge.

For a while, hardware technology was really accelerating, but it's leveled off now because the power has exceeded what typical businesses need. Applications like word processors, spreadsheets, contact

managers and email are the backbone of every office, and they'll run as quickly on last year's computers as this year's.

We keep people back from the leading edge because it's typically not proven reliable. At work, computers are utilities - they're machines that are supposed to help us be more productive. We recommend to customers what we think the appropriate technologies are to cost-effectively operate their businesses. Though we can recommend more cutting-edge technologies, we often don't because it may not add any business value.

There has to be a business reason to upgrade. Just because it's new isn't good enough. Will it make you more efficient? Make you more profit? However, the flip side is obsolescence and support. If a manufacturer is dropping a product, you have to look at the worst-case scenario: will it cripple your business? So, we try to balance the two.

4. Embrace pro-activity - then hand it off.

Businesses have been slowing down due to the recession, and it's rearing its ugly head. We have clients who haven't done anything in a couple years but react - and things are breaking. It becomes a negative thing, and nobody's happy. We usually convince clients that us doing as much as possible makes the most sense. We're very efficient at what we do, and we work with large economies of scale.

You can't be a small business in this economy and not be proactive, especially with IT. All computer systems require frequent maintenance to keep them running smoothly. We handle this for you. We know when your hard drive is running low on space, so we can upgrade it for you outside of business hours.

We recommend that our customers plan for annual maintenance payments. This is so that they can get new hardware and software that's already in their budget - and they love this!

5. When it's appropriate, get into the cloud.

Cloud computing is taking your server and virtualizing it online so your employees can work from anywhere. You can get this for a fixed monthly fee that gets you an Exchange server, a Blackberry Enterprise server and more. The paradigm is going to change enormously with this, and there are some IT companies that are worried about it - but we are really excited about it.

Online backup services are just as reliable as buying a piece of hardware; you can't recover from them as quickly, but at least you can recover from them if your server crashes! Cloud computing isn't for every application. You need to be sure you can get your data if you need it, and researching online service providers is crucial because you don't want to be left out if they cease operations next year. Luckily, we have a specialized consultant in house that can help do all that for you.

The freedom that comes from being able to access your files from any location and even any computer can be a real boost to productivity. The SaaS (Software as a Service) industry is growing fast and there

are a lot of players. We can advise clients on the most reliable options for them or discuss other alternatives such as Virtual Private Networks.

For business owners, navigating the IT maze can be daunting. It is critical to have a trustworthy IT partner to help you make the best technical decisions for your company, and we appreciate all of you for choosing Inacomp. Following these 5 rules will go a long way toward making your life easier, and your business more productive.

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