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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Bridging the Gap Between Technology & Firm Strategy

Keeping up with the changing landscape of technology and practice issues is challenging.

Jim Boomer • Mar. 19, 2012



Keeping up with the changing landscape of technology and practice issues is challenging. More so if you don't have an overall firm strategy, a technology strategy and the proper governance structure to align the two.

When you bridge the gap between technology and firm strategy, you harness the power of technology as an accelerator towards improved performance, profitability and growth.

This is much easier said than done but it is worth the effort and can transform IT from a cost of doing business to a competitive advantage in your firm.

The Norm of Dysfunction

Too often, the IT department operates in a silo. They simply take direction from the partners about what technology needs to be implemented. Since IT rarely sees the firm's strategic plan (if it exists), it is difficult to identify solutions and make proactive suggestions. This is an incredible waste of talent and knowledge that could be providing valuable insight into the firm's strategic direction.

When it comes to training and conferences, IT professionals and partners are, once again, not often in alignment. Each attends their individual events and while they may hear the same topic, the messages are delivered differently – resulting in a major disconnect. Compound this with the rarity of post-conference debriefs to make sure both sides are on the same page and you end up with frustration and friction. Great ideas are brought back to the firm, but without buy-in they are not executed.

Take the cloud for example. Partners attend practice management conferences where they hear about the business drivers behind the cloud. IT conferences focus more on the tactical issues related to moving the infrastructure online. Both are addressing the same end goal of moving to the cloud but approaching the initiative from very different angles. And, most importantly, both are critical to seeing the whole picture and making an informed decision.

The Path to Alignment

Do these issues sound familiar? This is happening frequently in our profession. So what can you do to overcome these challenges? Here are five actionable steps to start your firm down the path to bridging the gap between technology and firm strategy.

1. *Develop a Firm Strategic Plan*

The strategic plan offers direction for your firm's most vital growth initiatives and should be the primary driver of your technology decisions. If you don't have one, start developing one. IT's involvement in the strategic planning process is critical to alignment. At the very least, you need to share the end result with IT – and the rest of the firm.

2. *Develop a Technology Strategic Plan*

Once you have an overall firm strategic plan, you can tackle the Technology Strategy. The overall firm strategy provides a reference point to ensure that the technology decisions and investments you are making are in line with the strategic objectives you've outlined in your firm plan. Development of the technology plan should not be the sole responsibility of IT and requires collaboration from partners and staff to ensure true alignment.

3. *Train in Tandem*

There are a number of conferences/trainings where you can recognize the most return by having both technology and business represented at the same event. This

ensures they are hearing the same message and can reconcile their different perspectives on a real-time basis. It also offers dedicated time to discuss strategy and apply the new information while it's top of mind.

4. *Peer Communities*

Keeping pace with the changing times can be difficult, especially if you don't look outside your own organization for new ideas and best practices. Joining a peer community can push you beyond the limits of your own organization and bring in fresh perspectives. At times it can be frustrating when you learn you are lagging behind, but it can also be very rewarding to learn your firm is on the right path, or even leading the pack.

5. *Technology Steering Committee*

Firms that are successful at leveraging technology as a strategic asset realize there is no such thing as an IT Project – only firm projects, led by firm leaders with the support of IT. If you simply throw projects to IT, you're setting yourself up for failure and throwing away time and money. This is where a technology steering committee with cross-functional representation can ensure projects align with the firm strategy and are assigned to the right people who can successfully execute.

Bridging the gap between technology and firm strategy is a process that takes time and effort. If you focus on progress and not perfection you will make great strides towards proper alignment. Start by following the five actionable steps I've outlined above and you'll start to recognize the power technology can have in achieving greater efficiency and accelerating your firm's results.

Jim Boomer is a shareholder and the CIO for Boomer Consulting, Inc. He is the director of the [Boomer Technology Circles™](#) and an expert on managing technology within an accounting firm. He also serves as a strategic planning and technology consultant and firm adviser in the areas of performance and risk management. In addition, Jim is leading a new program, The Producer Circle, in collaboration with CPA2BIZ and the AICPA.

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