

An IT Manager's Survival Guide in a World of SaaS

MANAGING YOUR CAREER IN A HOSTED WORLD

Introduction

The mark of an IT manager's success has changed, with emphasis now placed on Return on Investment (ROI), and IT's ability to do more with less money and fewer people.

Just as sales managers oversee an increasingly mobile workforce, IT managers are overseeing infrastructure and mission-critical applications operated by third-parties. In the past, IT managers operated intricate networks within their company's walls. Executives could physically look at each server and application. The uptick in adoption of Software as a Service (SaaS) has altered this landscape, with IT executives partnering with off-site providers who do the heavy-lifting to support and maintain these same mission-critical applications and networks.

The good news? By eliminating much of the guesswork typically associated with the on-site rollout of applications, of server purchases and storage expansion, SaaS enables you to focus your technical expertise on true business benefits and ROI.

by
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SaaS Surge

Economic pressures and SaaS' proven benefits have encouraged businesses to investigate and adopt SaaS. In fact, 37 percent would consider SaaS or business process outsourcing (BPO) because of its increased flexibility, according to a 2009 report by AMR Research. Other reasons: Faster implementation; lower initial costs; improved productivity; better alignment between IT and business lines; and increased ROI.

Late last year, 86 percent of SMB users were expected to adopt SaaS, according to a 2009 Microsoft survey. Driving factors include ease of set-up; the ability to connect to software via the Internet; virtual storage; access to files and email from anywhere; ease of maintenance and updates; and maximizing IT investment, AMR Research finds.

Some are concerned about total cost of ownership (TCO); security; unavailability of applications; integration issues; lack of customization; application performance; complicated pricing; pre-existing contracts with vendors, a Forrester Research report shows. Addressing these concerns during early contract negotiations ensures your SaaS partnership delivers on its promise of savings and productivity gains.

Rev up ROI

SaaS gives IT managers the tools to create and abide by monthly budgets. You know how much the provider will charge each month, the anticipated results and can determine in which ways and time-period the solution will pay for itself and generate revenue or cut costs. Generally, SaaS shortens the ROI timeframe, increasing the value of your investment in less time.

SaaS also helps you cope with your no-doubt small IT staff. As developers further-enhance their products, the SaaS provider implements the latest applications, reducing the onus placed on IT for upgrades and compatibility issues.

Clearly comparing the expenses associated with on-premise vs. SaaS implementations only underscores your expertise at determining the most cost-effective solutions for your company.

SaaS also increases your personal ROI. As the SaaS champion you are directly responsible for the hard dollar and hour savings you've shared with C-level executives, a process that puts you in direct contact with corporate leaders and boosts your visibility and acumen. By underscoring the business - not technology - benefits, you also emphasize your value as a leader who constantly seeks ways to use IT to improve your company's operations, productivity and bottom line. For more tips on managing your career in a world of SaaS, see the "Ten Tips for Managing Your Career."

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Care-Free Growth

Hopefully your company is growing or preparing for growth. As an IT manager you ensure the technology infrastructure is in place to support all these added users, branch offices and capabilities. In the past, that meant buying a laundry list of new servers and network bandwidth, perhaps even adding administrators or IT professionals.

Since SaaS operates in an expandable cloud computing environment, your partner will grow technology resources on an as-needed basis. Unlike an in-house implementation where you must proactively or reactively add servers, software and storage, SaaS delivers almost immediate access to the tools you need to power the bigger user-base. You pay only for what you need. You don't need more people or an expanded network: Think of the salary and benefits savings, the costs slashed from your hardware and network budget, and the savings quickly add up.

Pick a Partner

When selecting a SaaS provider find a financially-viable partner, one operating at a profit with a record of delivering the services you require. You don't want to entrust your critical data to a fly-by-night or immature, unproven partner. Make certain prospective partners operate datacenters in multiple locations to ensure around-the-clock availability.

Consider future plans: Are you considering unified communications? Should employees share data and documents? If so, consult potential SaaS partners to determine their experience and expertise in these areas. While some SaaS providers expanded their enterprise-level offerings to support small and midsize businesses, others focus exclusively on this market, and offer a better understanding of the specific opportunities and challenges facing SMBs.

Delivering a list of the top contenders listing each service provider's strengths and weaknesses showcases your research abilities, knowledge of the technology and ability to get commitments from potential partners. And it simplifies your ultimate choice in service provider. Compare each prospect's benefits and estimated ROI, a step that eliminates contenders and provides you with a measure of your business' success.

Intermedia's Advantages

In business for 15 years, Intermedia's Service Level Agreement (SLA) protects how you're working with the SaaS service provider's 99.999 percent financially backed uptime SLA. They also protect what you are working on. In addition to running regular backups, Intermedia replicates Exchange 2010 data in real time from one set of premium hardware to another. This protects the critical information your business keeps within Exchange, even in the event of hardware failure or database corruption. It also enables Intermedia to rapidly restore the full functionality of your Exchange environment should an issue occur.

And since Intermedia's SaaS solutions encompass hosted email, mobility, instant messaging, fax, collaboration tools and unified communications, you immediately remove the high costs associated with implementing, maintaining and supporting these vital - but often resource-intensive - solutions. Not yet using some of these technologies? If you do adopt them, you'll already have a partner ready and able to support and provide these money- and time-savers.

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10 Tips for Managing Your Career

- 1. Business first. Technology second.** When you're engaging the business side of the house, focus on understanding where they are advancing the business & what's in their way. How can IT help them capture the opportunity or remove the obstacles?
- 2. Understanding and executing against clear business priorities, not administrating technology.** SaaS frees up time, but where do you allocate that time? The best way to put your career on the fast track is to dialogue with business unit & C-suite executives. Understand & serve their needs. You'll be indispensable.
- 3. Measure the ROI.** Determine exactly how much a technology will save your company or how many hours it will free-up. Will an implementation allow a department to grow without upping its headcount? Will it eliminate some positions? How much will you save on hardware, software and networking alone?
- 4. Boost your visibility.** Volunteer for non-IT meetings and company committees to learn the pain-points and opportunities facing other departments. Whenever possible, read the agenda beforehand and ponder ways in which IT can help. After all, the folks in sales or marketing, in production or manufacturing, are not necessarily current on available technologies - so you should play an active role in educating and informing them of ways in which you and your team can help.

5. **Document your success.** Don't inundate your manager with the countless detail but do inform him or her of your successes, be it renegotiating a contract for less money or more services, or another department's feedback about how your team empowered and improved its operations.
6. **Compare your team to the competition.** Keep up-to-date on what's going on at your competition - and be prepared to cite examples of how you are ahead of them. This shows your team's abilities, reflecting well on your organization as a whole, and on you as the executive responsible for leading IT initiatives.
7. **Expand your expertise.** Technology - and business - continually change, so it's important to continue investing in education. Even if your company does not reimburse you for ongoing education, investing in your own training or certification reinforces your commitment to your business and yourself, and underscores your willingness to go the extra mile.
8. **Bolster your image.** Dressing for success is only part of the equation. Build a presence, whether it's by being quoted as an expert source in a respected publication or by writing a serious blog. Reporters are always seeking qualified sources and may well be open to story ideas and comments on technologies. Speaking at local business conferences or trade events also bolsters your image as an expert. Be sure to get the proper authorizations as each company's policy is different.
9. **Focus on time-management skills.** Advancing your career requires the voluntary taking-on of additional responsibilities. It's vital, however, that your regular responsibilities don't suffer. Time-management skills are critical to ensuring you have enough hours in the day to do everything you've promised.
10. **Be a true leader.** Just as you delegate some IT tasks to service providers, it's important that you learn to delegate tasks to members of your team. Be sure to thoroughly and accurately describe the task, the objectives and required steps, and keep your door open for comments and problem-resolution. Recognize good work and try to improve sub-par work, and don't fall into the all-too-easy trap of rewarding an entire group for a few employees' hard work.

Conclusion

By delivering cost-savings and productivity-enhancements, SaaS empowers IT managers to do more with less, allowing your company to continue thriving against even the toughest competitors while supporting rapid expansion and growth. Whereas you once differentiated yourself through your internal infrastructure, today you are judged more on the ROI you deliver, a proven benefit of SaaS.

About the Author

Formerly the Managing Editor, Departments, of Computer Reseller News, Alison Diana has spent more than 20 years covering the hottest trends in the tech world. She's written thousands of articles, many of which have been featured in leading tech publications such as Baseline Magazine, eWeek, IT Expert Voice and CRN. Currently a freelance reporter and tech-savant, she now most closely follows Hosted Exchange and SaaS trends and enjoys cheering on her daughter's Little League baseball team in her free time. Alison welcomes the thoughts and opinions of her readers. You can reach her here via email at alisondiana@hotmail.com.

This 'An IT Manager's Survival Guide in a world of SaaS' whitepaper was co-sponsored by Spiceworks and Intermedia — partners in helping SMB IT pros simplify "everything IT" about their jobs.



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