

Convergence Between IT and IP Departments Workshop: How to Get on with your IT Director

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Following the recent period of retrenchment in world economies, the dot-bomb, accounting scandals and increased compliance and sustainability pressures, the IT Director – once the blue eyed boy of the e-based economy – now finds himself morphing into a Chief Information Officer charged with delivering more value by bringing together Information and Technology.

In this session, we will try to examine how an Information Professional might exploit this convergence of Information and Technology.

Workshop participants included both Information Professionals and ex IT people now turned Information Professional.

Neil Infield set the scene on how he has worked very successfully with his IT counterparts in creating and rolling out his company's intranet. He put forward the following hints and tips:

- Make it easy for IT e.g. Use IT templates
- Take ownership from IT (IT worry about support and training costs)
- Find “webmaster” or publisher in each department served to be responsible for content
- Be prepared to act a go between for Techies, Developers, Content owners and Business
- Be IT aware – especially around IP related technologies. Know enough not to be fobbed off.
- Play to IP strengths which often include the “softer” side of communication and roll out
- Understand that many IT departments are focused on day to day technical management
- Work with selected members of IT departments to ensure they understand the role of IP

IT Departments – their issues and challenges. Do we understand what are their current concerns?

- Cost rules everything – trying to manage technology in a cost cutting environment
- Must have a measurable return/ ROI or will be weeded out of project list
- Priorities are maintaining current systems. Not replacing until failure
- Security locks systems down – no random development with Off the Shelf products
- Standardisation and IT governance reduces flexibility
- Single project focus by contractors/outsourcers. Only do what they are contracted.
- Lack of resource for support (e.g. of intranets)
- Web delivery not a universal solution – security/authentication issues
- Read IT Analyst Reports (e.g. Gartner, Forrester etc) to understand what drives IT Directors and desktop operational IT publications/magazines

IP Departments – proactive or reactive? How to generate better value to the business.

- Physical proximity to IT an enabler
- If organisation too big and geographically dispersed, find IT champion to work with
- IT sometimes too proactive and push through projects (e.g. inappropriate search technologies) not needed – IP proactivity helps reduce this wasted effort

- IP's have more experience of being reactive! Need to speak up more! Not normally used to "blowing own trumpet" preferring to act more subtly
- IP proactivity should focus on supporting technical projects – e.g. roll out, communication, training etc. from their understanding of end users
- Be proactive with (in order of priority) – Business; Senior Techies, Application Developers, content creators
- Understand properly the needs of the business
- Be flexible – able to cope with changing ideas and business drivers
- Publicise success – tendency for users to focus on negatives rather than improvements

Cultural Fit – not only IT with the Information Professional but both with the business. Do we have a left brain/right brain mismatch that will forever be difficult to reconcile?

- Agreed that IP and IT are different and neither wants to be like the other or do the other's job.
- Work together with IT to present a united front to the business. No divide and rule.
- Communication by collocation is ideal
- Both need to understand the business better.
- Business keeps changing its mind!

Internal Selling – building the business case. What does it take to gain approval for an IP lead project? Can a project be IP lead? What types of projects have been successful?

- Promote success through user surveys and marketing/communications exercises
- Send out usage reminders
- Use adoption techniques to promote underused systems
- IP tend to be out of comfort zone when dealing with IT professionals. Need to move out of comfort zone.

What is success – discuss and understand what metrics can be used to measure the success of a joint IP/IT project. Nothing cements this convergence like success.

Time precluded detailed discussion of this point – however there was general consensus that there is still plenty of room for improvement here.

Parting Thoughts – Some potential new directions for IPs?

- Visualisation
- Text Mining
- Compliance
- Web Services Application Integration
- Information Architectures – Knowledge/Content/Technology

One view - Do IPs really want to get involved in this? What about the resource issue? Would this stretch skillset?

Other view - This is an example of being outside the IP comfort zone but have to do it. These are cross business issues that need to be understood.