WHY AN IT STRATEGY FOR YOUR BUSINESS IS ESSENTIAL AND HOW TO BUILD ONE

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Why an IT Strategy for Your Business Is Essential and How to Build One

Whether you're just starting a business or expanding an already successful one, you might find it surprising to learn how much an IT strategy will impact and streamline your business to help achieve its goals.

Consider for a moment how system downtime, slow data management, old systems, and other issues might affect your teams' ability to do their work efficiently and cost effectively.

When your technology is working well it can help you reach new customers, communicate better with partners and clients in any time zone, more easily expand to multiple locations, and meet other business priorities without interference, downtime or other frustrating IT issues.

The answer is to develop and review on a regular basis a strong and cost efficient IT strategy that meets your company where it is now and where it is preparing to grow.

Here are the top 7 priorities in business we typically develop IT strategies for, not in any particular order.

1. Make more sales

2. Communicate more efficiently,

3. Increase the speed at which we deliver our product or services

4. Expand to new location(s)

5. Have peace of mind with strong security and uptime measures in place

6. Give our teams the ability to work remotely in a secure environment

7. Upgrade our older technology to modern systems without downtime

The best run companies understand an investment in IT is part of doing business. Why not have a plan and understand the purpose of that investment?

At Succurri, we strive to provide the best IT solutions to meet our Clients' business objectives. This ebook outlines our method for developing effective IT strategies.
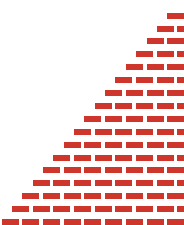
IT Business Strategy: A Quick Overview

The point of implementing a comprehensive IT strategy for your business is to understand the investment you're making to achieve predictable business outcomes. With a proactive IT strategy and planning process in place, your executive team can be certain that they have a process for thinking through things like data management, server storage, security backups, employee onboarding/exiting, and a lot more to help your business run smoothly.

Great business teams are constantly thinking about generating new revenue, putting the right people in the right roles, staying ahead of customer issues, managing cash flow - the less interruption in these areas, the smoother their business operates.

The problem is when you don't have a process for examining and creating a thorough IT strategy there is a much higher likelihood of technology issues creeping in to interrupt the flow of your business. Things like site downtimes, server problems, inconvenient software updates, and incompatible systems can all affect your business operations. These problems could interfere with a customer's impression of your brand, internal operational momentum on key projects, and the ability to communicate with partners, suppliers or customers.

Let's break down the who, what, when, and why of an IT business strategy.

Who?

Your IT strategy affects your business, your customers, your business associates, and other stakeholders. Your company's IT strategy should improve the user experience on the front-end (customer side) and on the back-end (operational side).

Think of the people who need network uptime, phone systems to work smoothly, or a key business application to work fast.

What?

POS, data servers, office computers, teleconferencing equipment, building security, and anything else your business needs to operate. While you may worry that all of this new equipment and software could be a huge dent in your budget, an effective IT strategy isn't about having the latest tech toys. Instead, it is about making sure the technology equipment and processes within your business run smoothly, are secure, and that your employees do not have any excuses not to do a good job for the company. What your business needs are the most effective solutions for the systems you use or want to incorporate with a budget that makes sense.

When?

If you don't already have or are not happy with your current IT strategy, the sooner you can find a provider who can show you examples of what should be included in an IT plan and budget, the better.

Depending on the type, size, and speed at which your business operates an IT plan and budget should be examined at least once per year. For larger small businesses, this plan and budget should be discussed once each business quarter along with other top business priorities.

Why?

Every business needs IT solutions for its daily operations. Some types of business more than others. Whether your company has digital security doors, an encrypted digital payment system, VoIP phones, or 47 cubicle computers that need regular software updates, an effective IT strategy plans for repairs, updates, upgrades, and obsolescence.

When your IT provider helps you develop a strong IT strategy, you can budget for standard equipment and software upgrades on a predictable schedule rather than suddenly needing a new server or data storage not allocated in your budget.

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The Advantages of a
Well Planned Business
IT Strategy

So what makes an IT strategy effective? And what exactly is an IT strategy?

Loosely defined, an IT strategy is the technological equipment, software, access to Internet, security measures, and employee support needs necessary to manage your business operations.

Other aspects include determining when and how to upgrade certain equipment and systems without interfering with operations and ensuring that IT solutions align with your business goals.

It also includes a clear process for employees to obtain support, service level agreements for that support, and report on all aspects of these service tickets.

When implemented effectively, a strong IT strategy is a proactive approach to improving operational efficiency that is scalable as your business grows and changes while also maintaining an uninterrupted user (employee) experience.

A Proactive Approach

Take the time to do your research and get multiple quotes. The IT service firm you hire should ask about and listen to your business needs, audit and assess your existing technology environment and performance, and suggest a plan and budget for sustaining and or improving the operation of your business – whichever your business objectives require.

Below is a summary of how to go about creating an IT Strategy.

Assessment

Developing an IT strategy begins with performing an assessment of your current IT solutions and determining if they align with your business goals. For example, if you intend to do more teleconferencing with long-distance clients in the future, can your current setup accommodate that goal?

Document your assessment and business goals to judge how aligned your business and IT solutions are.

Issues & Challenges

As part of planning an effective IT strategy, your IT solutions need regular updates, upgrades, and occasional repair or replacement. Document all the known IT challenges you feel are keeping your team from achieving the business objectives in their departments.

Inventory

Understanding what type of technology you have and that you must manage and oversee all of it is critical to making sure it's supported and serviced properly.

Equipment and software lifecycles should be predictably managed and replaced. That means you can plan ahead to achieve operational maturity from your IT solutions rather than putting out fires.

Create a list of the hardware and software used to support your company. Each piece of equipment of software should have either a renewal or replacement or some type of service schedule dates associated with it. An IT service provider will be able to go into

much greater detail on equipment - like battery life expectancy, as an example.

Upgrades/Updates Needed

Based on your inventory, current performance levels, and productivity needs, your IT service provider can determine where you need to update specific systems or upgrade to new devices capable of handling more
tasks more efficiently.

Support & SLA

Once your IT strategist reviews your current technology and develops a plan for your business, they will draft a Service Level Agreement (SLA) that outlines the services they will provide and the level of support and response time provided for your business technology systems.

Budget & Schedule

IT services often involve everything from purchasing, installing and updating your computers and software to helping resolve issues that arise with technology. IT staff need access to digital systems, physical server rooms, individual computers, security systems, and other key areas and systems across your business. Your IT budget should be based on a proactive service, upgrade, replace, and support schedule needed to maintain the performance of your systems and business.

Operational Efficiency

How many IT systems does your business need? Are your systems independent nodes? Do they all work through a centralized data hub? Or is your answer somewhere inbetween? Different industries and business models require different IT solutions to achieve operational efficiency.

For example, a large retailer like a department store would require some similar solutions to a large office building, such as an encrypted data network for sensitive information and a digital security camera system. However, it has other needs that a large office building might not, such as POS (point of sale) and price-scanning technologies, inventory management system and software, among others.

By contrast, that large office building also needs specific IT solutions not necessary at a large retailer. Offices need computers and phones for workers, receptionists, C-suite officers, and on-site security. A large office building could need a data network that can handle hundreds of users at any given time, especially during busy periods. They may also need several large teleconferencing rooms.

Your IT strategy can help you achieve operational efficiency by reducing downtime, increasing uptime, improving data speeds, maintaining secure connections, and managing how data travels on your network during peak times. This will ensure you can host zoom calls without buffering and bid in real-time on stocks and securities. It also will include when to update or upgrade your technology as well as ensure fast and safe customer transactions.
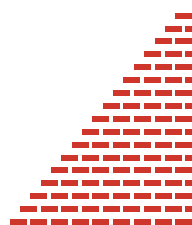
Scalable as Your Business Grows

Your IT strategy should be ready to scale up as your business expands or changes, whether you're reaching more customers, adding the functionality of upgraded software or entering a new market. As your business grows, you may need new computers, additional printers, more POS (point of sale) locations and accessories, and upgraded data solutions for the extra information your system will need to manage.

Business expansion can happen in several ways. Your IT strategy needs to accommodate:

- Expanding to multiple locations and duplicating necessary equipment and software.
- Hiring more office employees who need computers, VoIP phones, data ports, and network access.
- Increasing your customer base and needing new POS, data encryption, cloud transactions, and more to accommodate more sales.
- Expanding virtual services to new international clients and needing new teleconferencing solutions for virtual meetings.

Your IT strategy needs to target growth as it aligns with your business goals. Whether you want to make an additional 500 sales every month, open a new location, or expand into a related industry, can your current IT strategy accommodate your aspirations?

An effective IT strategy should plan for the next 1 to 3 years for predictable outcomes in IT solutions, including necessary hardware and software upgrades and life cycles and employee support needs. By incorporating your business goals into your IT strategy, you can budget for new equipment to meet your expansion goals when taking that next growth step.

Customer Satisfaction

Your IT solutions should streamline your business operations and improve functionality for all users, including employees, vendor billing services, and your front-end users, clients, and customers.

Introducing faster, safer, and more efficient technology to your business strategy can help you serve customers and the employees who work with customers better. For example, if your office currently has issues with connectivity and downtime, your customers may become frustrated trying to contact you, and develop a negative idea about your company and customer service.

How to Plan an IT Strategy for Your Business

Planning an IT strategy that supports your business strategy is essential to incorporating the predictable outcomes of IT development into your business growth plan. But what do you need to consider, and what steps should you take when developing your IT strategy?

Align your Business Goals with Your IT Strategy

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The first question to ask yourself is - what are our business objectives? Do we want to make $30 million in sales this year, reduce production costs by 10% within two years, or open three new locations in the next five years?

Having a list of key objectives for the business will provide an IT service firm like Succurri with an idea of where there might be changes coming in which the technology solutions and support may need change.

Whatever your goals are for your business, you need to find out which technologies will help you achieve them.

For example, if you want to increase sales with more people on the sales team and you provide computers to sales people which are all remote, there will be a plan for getting the best devices with a secure environment for X number of sales people in Q4 this year. Maybe that just means updating the existing machines you have for the sales team and not purchasing any new equipment. If reducing production costs is your goal, investing in upgraded automated equipment and software could reduce labor costs at your production bottleneck and enhance the flow of your work-in-process inventory through the production process. You will also need to make certain that your Internet is optimized to serve this department and their apps first, before sales.

It all depends. BUT, if you don't have someone who is aware these changes are cooming and when they might occur, you could be stuck - this kills business momentum.

Define Your KPIs

Your key performance indicators (KPIs) describe how your business is performing overall or in specific areas. How do you measure your KPIs? Are you meeting your numbers for growth according to the KPIs you outlined in your business plan?

A good KPI describes a quantifiable goal within a certain timeframe. It will also define the source and frequency that you can use to measure your progress toward the goal. For example, a KPI could describe:

- New contracts signed per timeframe.
- Sales growth over a timeframe, measured in dollars, percentage, or total number
- Revenue growth over a timeframe.

Once you know your goals and the time period you want to dedicate to achieving each one, you can develop an appropriate IT strategy to support your business performance targets.

What are potential KPIs for IT? It all depends on how you want to look at it. IT might look at things like.

- Network availability up time
- Service tickets created
- Service tickets resolved
- Customer satisfaction

Check with your IT service provider to define KPIs you think they should be tracking with you.

Determine the Scope of Your IT Strategy

After defining your business goals and determining what IT solutions you will need to incorporate into your business operations, take an inventory of your current IT equipment and software. Is it sufficient to achieve your KPIs?

Your IT solutions may include, but not be limited to:

- The number of Desktop computers
- The number of Employee laptops
- Software and other apps
- Antivirus, firewall, and online security software
- Servers

- VoIP phones and devices
- The number of Desktop computers
- The number of Employee laptops
- Data, internet service, wi-fi routers, and network cabling
- Software and other apps

As with all business decisions, you need to weigh the cost of upgrading against the risks of keeping your current IT solutions as they are.

While your equipment and software may be adequate at your current standards, will they help your business grow, and do they have the capability to handle the additional demands of expansion?

You also need to consider your competitors. Are they upgrading their systems to meet new industry standards? If you keep your business with the previous version of the software while your competitors upgrade to the latest version, you won't be competitive for much longer.

You may be able to balance your IT budget by upgrading your teleconferencing room to the latest technology, but only updating the software on older machines for your customer service and support department.

Your business might also benefit from a larger initial investment in something like converting to a new inventory software. The initial costs for training and importing existing inventory into the system could balance in the long run with lower labor costs when performing monthly, quarterly, or annual inventory audits.

Implementing an effective IT strategy can include a mix of your existing IT solutions and new equipment and software. You may not need to convert every piece of equipment immediately if it isn't in your budget. Instead, ask your IT strategist to prioritize items that can improve your operations immediately, then use your profits to invest in the next set of upgrades.

Plan for Growth and Technological Updates

Your IT provider will likely offer some different maintenance and update plan options to manage your IT solutions and ensure that your IT strategy is effective in helping your business grow. As your operations expand, whether that's to a new location or in managing higher data requirements, your IT strategy needs to plan for equipment and software upgrades to accommodate your business growth.

A new location will require new equipment to manage on-site operations. More customer transactions could require additional data management, cloud security, and more POS systems.

You may not need to implement your growth plan for a few years after developing your initial IT strategy. Define a budget for system upgrades before you need them, so you don't suddenly need to expend additional costs for new IT equipment and software as you meet your growth goals.
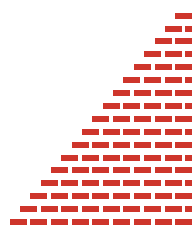
Features of Effective
Strategic Planning

While large companies or companies that operate in computer security and secure data management have in-house IT strategists and support, many other businesses outsource their IT management to a contracted provider. But how do you know a good IT provider from one who isn't as skilled or who just wants to sell you the newest and most expensive tech toys?

A good IT management professional will be honest, taking the time to explain how each IT solution they recommend will improve your business operations. They will listen to your business goals and help you determine the best technical solutions for your business problems. By the end of your consultation, a good IT provider will leave you with a roadmap of your IT strategy.

Transparency

At Succurri, we operate on a foundation of transparency. Rather than upselling the newest technologies and software, we carefully assess your business needs to determine what IT solutions will best suit your business model.

Not every IT solutions provider operates this way. Some will perform an inspection of your office and quote you upfront to install every piece of new equipment at once without any explanation of why you need it or if you need it now.

Predictable Outcomes

An effective IT strategy aims to upgrade your technology and software when you need it without interfering with regular operations. Your IT provider should be able to schedule equipment upgrades or software updates outside of busy operating hours.

An IT strategy focuses on predictable outcomes. For example, your current computers may last another two years before requiring replacement. When the time comes, your IT provider should be able to schedule a time outside of your regular business hours to swap equipment and perform updates. They will also test your new systems to ensure compatibility with your other devices.

Understanding Business Needs

IT solutions vary between industries. Healthcare professionals need HIPAA-compliant digital security systems to protect patient confidentiality. Transactional industries like banking, retail, and restaurants need secure payment systems to protect credit and debit card data. Brick-and-mortar businesses need digital security systems to manage cameras, video storage systems, and secure POS systems.

Daily operations at most businesses require computers, VoIP phones, printers, internet and data management, as well as software licensing for everything from Microsoft Office to industry-standard software like QuickBooks for accountants, Adobe Creative Cloud for media content creators, and drafting programs for architects and 3D modelers.

Your IT provider should know what IT solutions will help you develop your business to become an industry leader within your market, as well as highlight compatibility concerns with other equipment and software. For example, is the industry standard for your business a Mac or a PC, or do you need both to run different programs?

Technical Solutions for Business

Does your business face specific problems, like international teleconferencing? How do you video call a client at 3 a.m. local time from your home and guarantee a secure connection? Your IT service provider should design custom technical solutions for problems your business encounters.

Designing a Roadmap

Whether you just scheduled your initial consultation or you've been working with the same IT company for years, each meeting should end with a clear IT strategy roadmap. An IT roadmap should show where you are now, as well as where you plan to go and the path to take to get there.

Your IT strategy should outline the equipment you'll need in the future, when to upgrade it, and when to integrate new systems to accommodate business growth.

Your IT provider should be able to explain your IT strategy clearly, including which items to budget for immediately, which to budget for in the future, and how to utilize your devices and software in conjunction with your business operations.
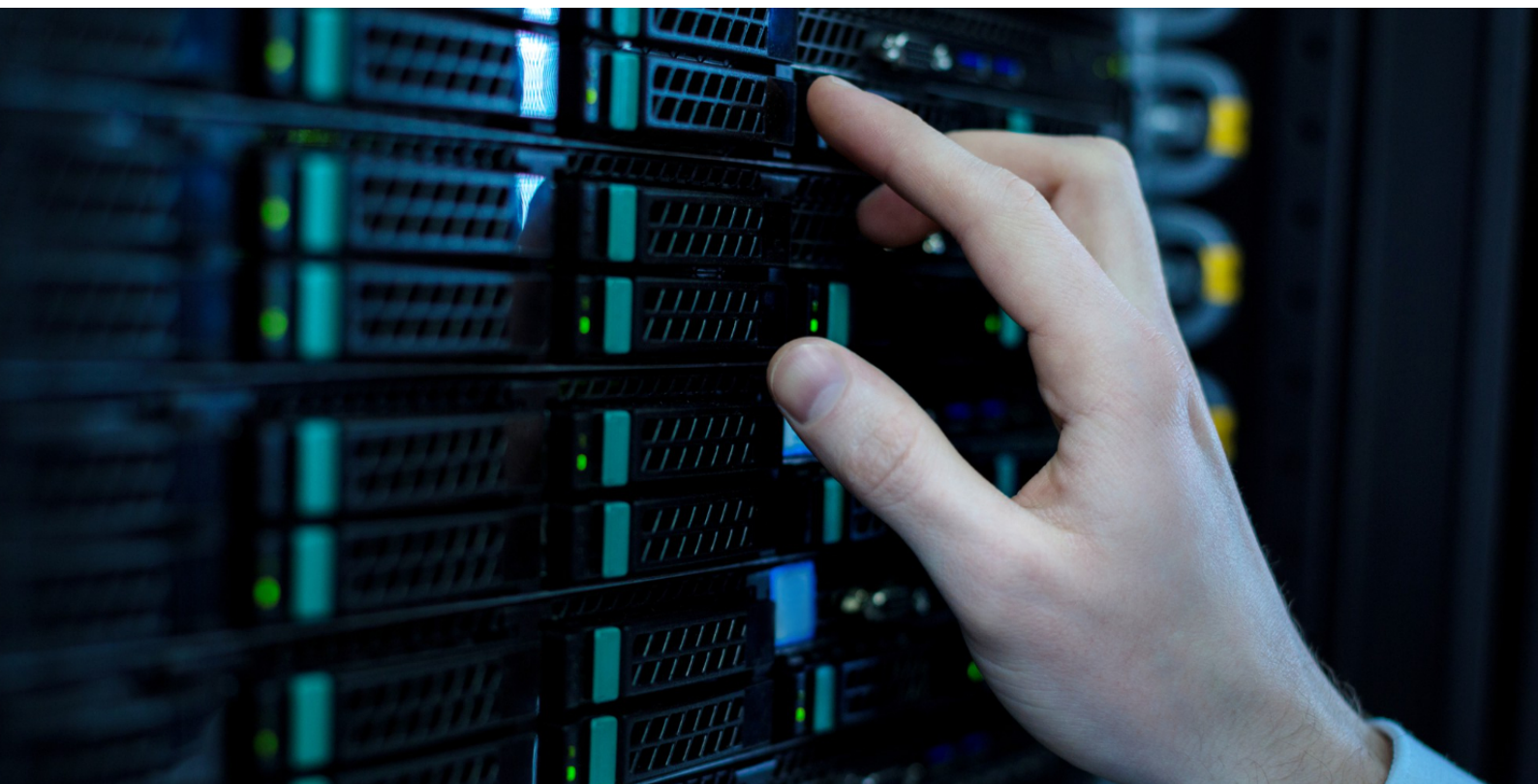
Final Thoughts from an IT Strategy Expert

Finding the best IT solutions company for your business can be daunting with so many options available on any Google search. When looking for an IT strategy expert, look for a provider who will help you:

- Align your IT strategy with your business goals.

- Improve your website and server uptime.

- Improve your client IT experience with web, phone, and teleconferencing solutions.

- Maintain upload and download response times as your business expands.

- Learn about the difference between necessary functional upgrades and novelty upgrades outside of your budget.

At Succurri, we go the extra mile to provide white glove service in IT solutions and strategy for business owners in the greater Seattle area. We have provided small and medium-sized businesses with professional IT solutions since 2008.

If you want to schedule a professional IT strategy consultation for your business in Everett, Seattle, Marysville, Arlington, or their surrounding areas, Succurri can help. Call us at 206-745-2629 or **contact us** online for more information about our IT strategy services or to get an IT assessment.