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In My Opinion

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Syrus Restaurant Information Services: Advancing Restaurant Performance and Productivity

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CIO-Viewpoint

I have been playing the role of CIO for ACH Food Companies over the last 2 years. Prior to this, the company had implemented an ERP system, which had a lot of packaged code with heavy customization on systems with limited interface. After implementing an enterprise application integration platform and having worked with SAP twice already, we are now interfacing across all functions of the business (Plan to Deploy, Procure to Pay, Logistics, Order to Cash, Finance, and Product Lifecycle Management).

The earlier CIO had transitioned many custom non-integrated systems to a more structured and integrated environment with an ERP system. This was a time of building and organizing IT structure, developing strategy around business processes and implementing the system applications to enable the processes. After the business had a chance to settle in with the ERP system, we focused on extending what is in production by implementing additional functionality to further improve processes. Collaboration and partner-

Jana Branham

ing with the business resources within each function is key to doing this role well. I focus on developing strong relationships with department heads to understand their business issues, and resolve the same through IT. I have to listen and relate in business terms. This is something I tell my IT leaders every day to follow.

Most of our projects are smaller in nature and very focused on delivering a single piece of functionality for reporting or replacement of a legacy application. The business continues to request IT to provide the overall Project Management for the next big effort. The IT department providing project management can be good and bad. IT should not lead alone or implement a system without business sponsorship and co-leadership. We try to leverage smaller boutique firms who have very specific expertise and utilize more of our own resources. Our resources work side by side with the consultant to gain the necessary knowledge and experience to maintain and provide enhancements for ongoing support after ERP implementation. However, I view it as a collaborative partnership that IT intends to participate and drive. I do not worry about a seat at the table anymore...I look for ways to contribute value that is recognized by the business.

The food and beverage industry is historically driven by small margins compared to many other industries. This typically translates into smaller budgets as a percentage of sales. This ratio has increased in the last few years driven by CIOs who can translate IT initiatives into operating efficiencies.

There is a considerable amount of collaboration occurring between IT and Marketing, with marketing driving the direction for a lot of new technology being adopted. Marketing's focus is targeted towards social and digital media as well as Big Data mining and mash-up of transaction data. IT's involvement

is necessary either because Marketing lacks the technical understanding to interface with the solution providers or agencies and to avoid creating "shadow IT".

The biggest challenge for any company in the consumer products industry is developing brand loyalty, which translates into the consumer selecting your product on the shelf. Our customers are brokers and big food retailers, so digital/social media will not be directed toward them, but to the actual consumer. Big Data gathering and mining will be used to develop innovation around products and marketing.

We have the same issues as every other IT department independent of industry. The top items on our list are security concerns, business reporting and data analytics as well as cloud solutions and services. As cloud offerings become more mature and widely adopted, IT will become more of a broker of services to the business, which is delivered by a hybrid of on premise, and cloud delivered solutions. The real value IT must focus on is understanding the business process in order to define requirements necessary to deliver solutions that get the product to market quicker or enable innovation. Sometimes we have the knowledge of all the parts within the business and we identify the gap that needs to be addressed since we cross all functions within the company.

The Golden Rules

- 1) Shadow IT should not be viewed as all bad...vendors are calling on Marketing...partner with them to understand the opportunity at hand and be involved in the decision for new technology.
- 2) Understand the nuances of negotiating cloud services...working with your legal department to understand the differences and to look out for the ownership of data, security

protections, DR, SLAs, etc.

3) Always investigate alternate delivery models...if all you do is keeping the lights on...you will find yourself out of



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business as an IT organization. The company can outsource IT commodity services, become a preferred partner to the business by providing leadership in problem identification, process enablement and yes, Project Management!

4) People are our biggest assets...do you have the right skills needed to deliver the roles of IT today? I need people who are leaders, problem solvers, can understand and break down business processes, adaptable, flexible and people who can get things done!

5) Invest in your network! I am a member of the Society for Information Management, a local chapter of a national IT organization for CIOs and Senior Leaders. I have developed connections locally and nationally, that I access regularly for business and technology questions.

The Transforming Role of the CIO

By Jana Branham, CIO, ACH Food Companies

