

A blue-toned background image featuring a hand holding a smartphone. Overlaid on the image are various white icons representing technology, business, and communication, such as a globe, a person, a cloud, a Wi-Fi symbol, a shopping cart, and a bar chart. The text "MSSPs and Strategic Thinking about Technology" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

MSSPs and Strategic Thinking about Technology

This e-guide encourages you to stop looking at the technology you use to run your business as just some reliable piece of invisible infrastructure that hums along in the background. Instead, business owners should look at technology from a strategic perspective. What can technology do to support business in the future? How can new technology help your existing business evolve and adapt to new market demands and customer expectations? For instance, AI is a new technology that may create serious disruption in many industries. Failure to think into the future could put a business at a disadvantage. Unfortunately, most small businesses face two challenges that make it difficult to incorporate new technology into their strategic plans.

1. In-house staff focus more on maintaining existing technology - For many businesses, in-house IT staff resources are limited. As a result, much of their time and attention must be focused on putting out fires and handling emergencies. Beyond that, day-to-day maintenance and support of your IT infrastructure is probably stretching them past the breaking point.
2. Leadership expertise in businesses is concentrated entirely on running the business and growing revenues. Very simply, SMB leadership's skills are in their specific industry. Management needs to be focused on the product or service and driving revenues. It needs to be focused on "core competencies." A business that gets distracted from its core competencies may damage its focus on quality and meeting customer expectations.

Because of these two challenges, businesses tend to not integrate technology into long-term strategic planning. They simply don't have the luxury of devoting resources to IT planning. There is a solution, however. An MSSP has the depth and breadth of resources that you could never hope to build and manage internally. To do so would drain management focus and be financially unsupportable.

What can an MSSP bring to a small business?

Here are six areas where an MSSP can help a small business act strategically and integrate technology into long-term growth plans.

Building a Technology Roadmap

At the heart of a technology roadmap is this question: “Can technology improve the delivery of products and services or improve qualitatively the nature of the product or service itself?” A technology roadmap works to develop a complete, concrete answer to this question. It is a long-term planning document that defines how and what technology should be incorporated into the growth of the business. Individual parts of a roadmap will address specific aspects of the company’s technology such as software development, infrastructure upgrades, digital transformation, and product innovation. A technology roadmap that includes product innovation is especially important. The roadmap may also include research and development initiatives.

Creating a Security Roadmap

A security roadmap is the result of a risk management analysis. By analyzing the vulnerabilities in your IT infrastructure, including cyber security threats, an MSSP can create a security roadmap that identifies all the actions that need to be taken to fortify your IT infrastructure as much as possible. Like a technology roadmap, it is a specific plan for ensuring that your data, network hardware and software remains safe from cybercriminals. Data is critical to your business. It is proprietary and it is also very vulnerable to theft. A data breach can be a real threat to the viability of your business. The legal and reputational consequences can take down a small business. A security roadmap can include:

- Determining what regulations govern your data (HIPAA, GDPR, FERPA, etc.)
- Developing access protocols
- Training employees about human vulnerabilities to cybercrimes, such as phishing
- Creating effective backup procedures, which are a particularly important defense against ransomware attacks

Handling Data Management

Don’t take your data for granted. The basic business model for some large IT companies is monetizing the data that they collect. While this may not be your goal, you probably collect a great deal of data about your customers, prospects, and operations. An MSSP can help you make better use of that data. Here are just three examples:

Marketing

Data tells you who is interested, when they're interested, and in what they are interested. Data can tell you where each individual prospect sits in the sales funnel, so your marketing messages reach them exactly where they are. It can also track the performance of your online marketing initiatives.

Forecasting and Sales

Customer Relationship Management applications exist because of the data that can now be collected. They monitor sales efforts, nurture leads, and work to improve customer engagement.

In-house and Operations

Data can track all manner of things in your production of goods or services, identifying where resources are being spent in each step of the process. Data can also be used in scheduling and pricing, although these tools can have human resource and customer relations implications that need to be carefully considered.

In conclusion, technology is more than just something to run your business today. It can be a source of innovation for the future of the business, pushing it in new directions. However, that means you need technology support that is focussed on strategic planning; understanding new technologies that can move the business forward. For an SMB, a Managed Service Provider can be the CIO/CTO that understands your business and helps plans for the future. In summary, most

businesses are limited in how they can make use of technology in their strategic planning. As a result, this may compromise their capacity to remain competitive in the long-term. Consider using an MSSP as a strategic partner in your long term planning.



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