



Marketing the Value of IT

BY CAROLINE MONCUR

Information Technology, whilst one of the most integral components of an organization, is also arguably the most undermarketed and therefore the most misunderstood function.

The business in most cases has a negative perception of IT's effort and productivity. IT services are believed to be high-cost and low-quality. Within any organization, there are usually a plethora of people who are very vocal about IT's inability to deliver. The interesting aspect of this negative perception is that it does not seem to matter whether IT is delivering or not: the perception will most likely still be that IT does not deserve the funds that it receives.

Without a proactive and interactive marketing strategy, this perception of IT will not change. Marketing of IT is essential to obtaining support and resources and is one critical step in transforming IT from being treated as a cost centre to being a strategic partner of the business.

Definition of IT Marketing

IT marketing has been defined by the Enterprise Computing Institute as "The art of appropriately setting expectations between customer and service provider such that both entities enjoy a mutually beneficial economic relationship". The essence of the definition is that although communication is a key part of an IT marketing strategy, it is also about quality, consistency and interaction with key business stakeholders.

For IT marketing strategies to be successful, a foundation of a consistent level of service is required. From this point on, IT marketing strategies must be focused on achieving a higher quality of service, increasing its understanding of the business requirements as well as on proactive communication campaigns. Otherwise, IT marketing activities may undermine IT's reputation and all communication will be viewed with derision.

IT Marketing Strategies

Magnolia Communications' Marketing Maturity Grid shows a distinct correlation between the level of marketing focus and activity and the role of IT within that organization. The following summarises their findings:

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SOLUTIONS FOR A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

1. Ad Hoc: Reactive communication and the primary marketing tools are status reports/briefings. IT's role tends to be as a Cost Centre.
 2. Demand Driven: Communication is demand driven & reactive and the primary marketing tools are project level scorecards. IT's role is again as a Cost Centre.
 3. Process-Based: Communication is regular and based on status updates and the primary marketing tools are newsletters & recurring planning meetings. IT tends to be a Preferred Partner of the business.
 4. Customer Proactive: Communication with the business is based on proactive interaction to address current and future performance. The main marketing tools are quarterly business reviews, newsletters and scorecards. IT is a Preferred Partner of the business.
 5. Enterprise and IT Proactive: Communication is based on proactive interaction with the entire customer community and individual customers. The primary marketing tools are Annual Report style information, comprehensive scorecards and IT information available in real time. IT tends to be a Strategic Partner of the business.
1. Identify the target audiences: IT will have multiple target audiences, from end users through to the Board of Directors. For effective communication, messages must be tailored to each audience.
 2. Identify the key messages and themes to convey: For example, a solid infrastructure produces value etc
 3. Brand IT: IT projects and services have been found to be far more interesting to business people when they have a meaningful and memorable brand name
 4. Consistent interaction and communication: Develop a strategy of regular face to face activities with the business
 5. Publish: Develop a strategy of print vehicles that will carry your messages to the business
 6. Track service levels: Understand IT's performance and communicate the good with the bad

Business people are not psychic. Without a consistent marketing campaign, IT's value and achievements will remain under the radar or be swamped by the business' focus on IT issues. Marketing and communications are an essential part of doing business; particularly in an environment where IT is largely misunderstood.

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About the Author:

Ms Caroline Moncur is Manager, Business Development at Providence Technology Group. Ms Moncur has over ten year's business development experience, primarily within the Information Technology industry. Providence Technology Group is one of the Bahamas' leading IT firms, specializing in Networking Solutions, Consulting & Advisory Services and Software Solutions.

In addition, a recent survey conducted by CIO Magazine clearly demonstrated that IT Managers who implemented comprehensive marketing strategies gained significant benefits in terms of their relationship with the business. Their study showed that these organizations achieved the best results in terms of closer alignment with the business, increased IT credibility and improved customer service and loyalty.

Getting Started

Implementing a comprehensive marketing campaign can not be achieved over night. Some of the activities that can form the foundation of a marketing strategy include: