



*With various forces combining to transform the IT landscape, how do you see the role of the IT department evolving?*

By now, we all know that cloud computing is shifting roles inside companies to an extent we've never seen before: Business people are bypassing IT and subscribing to cloud-based apps that help them connect with customers with Zendesk, fine-tune marketing campaigns with Marketo and collaborate with Box.

But while business people are embracing the flexibility that cloud computing gives them, companies' IT organizations currently find themselves caught between two opposing forces. One of those forces is IT's love of control and complexity, a mindset that chains them to jobs focused on "keeping the lights on." The other force is the transformative role of cloud computing.

Forward-thinking IT organizations have already begun transforming what they do and how they think to take advantage of cloud computing. Instead of owning the infrastructure — and spending 90 percent of their time just to "keep the lights on" — these IT organizations are assuming new responsibilities related to governance, capacity planning, security, workflow across apps, and the rise of BYOD. I believe this is the path all IT departments will eventually follow. I emphasize the word "eventually."

That's because many IT organizations still remain mired in the legacy-systems mindset. The reasons are varied. For some, it's the mistaken belief that delegating hands-on responsibility is the same as abdicating it. For others, it's the personal fulfillment they get from flipping switches, writing code and overseeing server-filled rooms. And for a few, it's the conviction that IT complexity ensures job security.

No matter what the reason, these IT organizations still operate as isolated islands— unable to take a leading role in their companies' strategic initiatives. This must change.

I believe it's imperative for SaaS providers to help IT people recognize how cloud-computing can make them strategic partners with their business colleagues. I like to call this mindset the age of IT enlightenment.

It starts with psychology: convincing IT folks that that they are not abdicating responsibility. They are delegating it. This will be easier said than done, since IT craves control -- especially when something goes wrong — as it inevitably will. The solution?

Deliver excellent SLA: Google Gmail, the world's biggest cloud-based e-mail system, has an average uptime of 99.99 percent. Amazon targets 99.95 percent uptime for AWS. I challenge any IT organization to come close to those levels of reliability. They know it. Even so, we as SaaS providers need to reassure IT that our levels of reliability are at least the match of their legacy systems. Statistics offer that reassurance.

Be secure: Security is a hot topic as evidence mounts of persistent, targeted attacks of cyber-espionage. That's why cloud-computing providers need to check off all relevant legal, security and governance requirements -- such as SOC2, ISO/IEC 27000, PCI. Certificates like these are the best way to clear away the misperception that cloud-computing isn't secure.

Show IT how cloud computing can make them heroes. The days of touting cloud computing as the way to save money or increase flexibility are behind us. Cloud computing will replace legacy systems because it can transform IT into a strategic arm of business and, in the process, help their companies increase productivity, become more competitive and find new sources of revenue.

I can't think of many instances where IT organizations have the potential to directly boost the economy. With cloud computing, they can -- which is why I believe their transition to the age of IT enlightenment is inevitable. It's too important for it not to happen.

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