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It’s easy to become a little cynical about what appear to be the latest ‘fads’. The term ‘digital transformation’ is a buzzword that has become part of the furniture, and it has come to mean many different things to different people. For some, it is the move away from manual, paper-based procedures to electronic processes. For others, it means moving data and applications into the cloud to make them more easily accessible to far-flung staff.

A clear indication of the importance of the digital transformation is the federal government’s intention to establish a Digital Transformation Office to improve productivity and service delivery and make government/public interactions easier. Those same ambitions apply equally to SMEs and larger private enterprises.

In conducting the interviews for this issue’s From the Frontline feature on digital transformation, I was struck by the impact new technologies are having on enterprise operations in terms of efficiency gains; staff and customer satisfaction; and bottom-line performance. Digital transformation is far from being a ‘fad’ - it’s a driving force in today’s ICT world.

Jonathan Nally, Editor
Small sacrifices
Coping with downsizing

Andrew Collins

Organisations are downsizing their IT departments, creating headaches for those leading the teams.
Hugh Ujhazy, a director at IDC Australia, explained the results regarding executives' priorities in 2015: “The highest of the CEO goals in 2015 was operational efficiency (19.5%), followed by a desire to increase the share of customer wallet (16.1%) and the ability to deliver company-wide cost savings and increase the level of customer engagement.

“This trend follows from what we have seen in the past as companies seek to do more with less and leverage their relationship with existing customers and channels to build market share and revenue without necessarily increasing spend,” Ujhazy said.

Interestingly, the concerns and goals of executives responding to the survey “remained pretty well aligned across company size and industry vertical”, Ujhazy said. In other words, this desire to squeeze value from every dollar was observed across the board.

The shrinking of the IT department - as well as the “outsourcing of IT functions to the line of business” - follows on from that executive desire for value, according to Ujhazy. This handing off of IT responsibilities from the IT department to the rest of the business is evident in the spending figures for different departments.

“In Australia, we are seeing that 40% of IT spending is driven by the line of business and that CIOs are increasingly partnering with COOs, CMOs and CFOs in driving the technology solutions they implement,” Ujhazy explained.

These spending figures also signal a change in the broader function of the IT department within the organisation.

“Combined with a trend to move non-core functions to either managed solutions (Office365 for office and email functions, WebEx and similar solutions for audio and video, collaboration solutions by Microsoft Lync and Cisco UCS) or completely to the cloud, [this means] that IT is less about technology delivery and more about enabling of business function,” Ujhazy said.

According to IDC’s analysis, the majority of the overall IT budget is still being allocated to governance and IT operations. But, Ujhazy said, “IT departments are universally recognising their need to act more as an innovator than as an accountant in supporting the business.”

This brings us back to the shrinking IT department.

“The net effect of all this is that IT departments are tending to be smaller across the board,” though this is most prevalent in companies with between 100 and 500 employees, Ujhazy said.

Those companies with larger IT departments are pushing their people into the market and looking towards managed services and the cloud as a way to offset skills shortages in Australia and New Zealand, Ujhazy said.

“We expect this trend to continue as demands from the business for a technology partnership with IT increase and managed...
cloud solutions enable the move from a CAPEX model for technology services to a much more OPEX focused one,” he said.

Those IT departments that have shrunk are experiencing several ramifications. IDC is seeing fewer people (especially in the mid-market) focused on maintaining network, compute and storage infrastructure, as their companies move towards the cloud and off-premise for things like email, office function and collaboration. “As a result, IT people are accelerating the move toward business outcomes as their guiding metrics,” though Ujhazy notes that this is a move that started some years ago.

“That being said, IT is not in danger of becoming a collective of management consultants anytime soon and the transition is taking time. We see it accelerating in 2015 but by no means done.”

He added that the nice thing for the IT teams is “they have a wider range of solutions to choose from, which means that their only response is no longer a CAPEX justification - they can now examine key technologies and make a determination of how business needs are best met (in source, on premise, off premise, cloud, SaaS and so forth).”

One size fits all
Keeping an IT department going after a downsizing can be tough. How’s an IT department meant to keep the lights on - and hitting all the performance metrics handed down from on high - when senior management keeps showing staff the door?

To answer that question, forget downsizing for a moment, and think more generally about the differences between large IT departments and small IT departments. At face value, it may seem that the two are very different beasts, with different expectations from the business and different problems to solve.

But that’s not really the case, at least according to analyst firm Gartner. In a recent research paper, Gartner analyst Colleen M Young argued that small IT teams actually have to do most of the same things as large IT teams, but without the resources the larger teams have access to.

Young said that there are six “pillars of capability” that every IT organisation must have in order to succeed, regardless of its size, industry or geography. There are three primary pillars (enterprise architecture, IT service management, governance) and three secondary pillars (project management, program management, investment portfolio management).

In organisations with plenty of resources to throw around, there would be a team or structure dedicated to and responsible for each of these six areas, according to Young. Each team would have specialised expertise and pursue best practices and continuous improvement within its own area.

But smaller organisations “don’t have the luxury of dedicated teams, functionally aligned resources or top-heavy ‘best practices’”, Young wrote.

“They must pursue the core, required capabilities more organically, and their people must be literate in multiple areas simultaneously. Workers must be both extremely capable and extremely versatile. They must also be comfortable collaborating in multidisciplinary teams, rather than functional or technical silos,” she wrote.

Even in that ideal scenario, with such talented and capable workers, small IT departments “will never have the bandwidth to pursue all six disciplines as extensively as more generously endowed organisations”. As such, these smaller departments must understand what constitutes a “good enough” standard in each of the six areas and be “comfortable leaving well enough alone” once that standard is reached, Young said.

How to cope
It’s not all doom and gloom, however. If your department has been downsized, but you’re still expected to meet the same needs as you did before, the analysts reckon it’s possible - but you’ll need to make some changes to how you run things.

The following is a collection of advice from two analysts - IBRS analyst Alan Hansell and Gartner’s Colleen M Young - on running a small IT team while trying to address the same problems that big teams deal with.

First up, Hansell provides 10 tips to help small businesses and agencies better manage their use of IT. He recommends that smaller IT departments:

1. Minimise the number of vendors and service providers for business systems, operating systems and services.

2. If evaluating an ERP, choose a vendor that provides ERP as a service to avoid supporting the technical environment, including release upgrades.
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3. Ensure the CIO or equivalent is a member of the SLT (senior leadership team) so they can shape the leadership's thinking about how IT can help gain a competitive edge.

4. Make no changes for functional enhancements to business systems, in order to maintain software version currency and facilitate fast resolution of operational failures.

5. Attend vendor briefings and user groups to identify how to best use the technology and business system and maximise the expected benefits.

6. Use external providers for specialist services such as network architecture, development of tenders and to acquire disaster recovery capability.

7. Give staff an incentive to develop multiple skills so there is support coverage in an emergency or major systems outage.

8. Use cloud for delivery of commodity services such as email and workplace collaboration solutions to avoid deploying scarce, but skilled, staff.

9. Adopt a zero-based budgeting approach for workforce planning, to justify why the work days that are expected are needed, and to stop marginal value projects.

10. Make IT initiatives as transparent as possible so all stakeholders are kept informed of developments - for example, when a project’s priority is changed by the SLT.

Gartner’s Young also has some advice for the smaller IT department. She recommends that small or resource-constrained teams:

**Define clear performance goals.** According to Young, running a small IT team is all about optimising what you can get out of your available resources, and that optimisation requires a clear understanding of purpose and outcomes. There must be a very clear definition of what needs to be done, the priority of each of these needs and how the success of these tasks will be measured.

For change programs and projects, success should be quantified in terms of specific goals or outcome measures. The success of services that IT offers to the business, on the other hand, should be judged in terms of measurable service-level agreements (SLAs).

"Together, the project metrics and SLAs constitute the performance management context against which IT orchestrates its resources and capabilities. Without these, resource optimisation is literally impossible," Young wrote.

**‘Projectise’ work.** Young advises that the best way for small IT teams to make full use of every resource is to “projectise as much work as possible”, and the best way to do that is to adopt a “professional services or repertoire IT model”.

A model of this nature involves “acquiring a portfolio of skills or competencies, understanding the depth and breadth of people’s individual and collective capabilities, and developing work intake processes that ensure enough is understood about the nature of demand so that the right resources with the right skills can be assigned in the right quantities to the right work streams,” Young wrote.

This approach helps ensure that available resources are optimally allocated to the established priorities.

**Avoid process reference models.** According to Young, small IT teams can’t afford process improvement for the sake of it, "which is what reference models like ITIL, COBIT and Capability Maturity Model Integrated (CMMI) tend to devolve into".

These models “lack performance context”, Young said. They assume that the specific set of processes they address are the most important and that any improvement in those processes is worthwhile.

"They implicitly advocate a management orientation of continuous process improvement. As a result, none of them are comprehensive, covering the full range of IT processes, and none of them will tell you whether you are working on the right processes, when they are ‘good enough’, or when to stop,” Young wrote.

She advises that small IT teams should not invest further in processes that support goals IT is already achieving. “If you are achieving your goals, then those processes are already good enough. If they aren’t broken, then don’t try to fix them.”

That said, if IT is not meeting its defined goals, then “understanding the processes that drive your outcomes, and which ones are broken, is crucial”. If you find that a broken process is indeed addressed in a reference model like ITIL, then Young suggests you leverage that reference model.

But until you know what’s broken, Young advises you avoid those models, "or you will almost certainly make process improvement your goal rather than a means to a defined performance outcome".
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Tablet devices boost field service efficiency

Electricity distributor and retailer Ergon Energy has launched a major field operations automation project, with the first phase seeing the rollout of 500 Panasonic Toughpad FZ-G1 rugged tablets into a wide array of varying vehicle types and configurations. The Toughpads had to meet strict selection criteria to ensure they were fit for purpose in the harsh environments that workers face on a daily basis.

A Queensland Government-owned corporation, Ergon supplies electricity to around 700,000 homes and businesses across nearly 97% of the state. For many years, it has conducted its field operations through manually intensive paper-based methods. Work was distributed through a process involving many people, which culminated in work dockets being printed out at depots around the state and then handed over to the field crews. The field crews then travelled to grid locations to fix faults and captured new information from the site on paper. Once the work was completed, paper records were returned to the depot staff to be updated in the central system. The process was time-consuming and, because it was paper-based with multiple people involved, it was easy for information to be lost or recorded incorrectly.

Jason Ledbury, program director for field force automation, Ergon Energy, said, “We as an energy provider have a responsibility of providing the most efficient services to the community. We also realised there is going to be much more competition in the retail electricity market driving more customer service work, and with our old processes it would have been difficult for us to scale up without requiring more resources. Therefore, we identified the need to revamp our processes by empowering our workforce with technology.”

Ledbury said that the new Toughpads - coupled with an extensive systems integration solution and enhanced processes - are already saving Ergon workers up to as much as 45 minutes on the job per day.

A critical factor for Ergon was that the Toughpad needed to be safely and securely mounted in a wide array of field vehicles. In collaboration with partners Data#3 and Advanced Mobile IT (AMIT), Ergon’s technology provider, SPARQ Solutions, worked closely with Ergon field crews to develop a mounting solution for each vehicle configuration that would meet strict government safety standards.

The Panasonic Toughpad FZ-G1 is made specifically for harsh environments such as those the Ergon field crews face daily. It is designed to endure high temperatures, drops and knocks, thick dust and heavy rain.

For a business, the ability to use enterprise-ready software is as important as the hardware itself. Data#3 supported Ergon by managing the software implementation and delivery with ready-to-go Windows 7 and Ergon’s own mobility solution, ABB Service Suite. Ergon has re-engineered its processes, removing multiple handling and resulting in better prioritisation and allocation of work.

Using the devices’ 3G/4G mobile connectivity module, the field crews are now able to access information that was previously only available in the office or through a library of paper manuals held in their vehicles. Additionally, access to live data, emails, intranet and internet also assists in improving the flow of information to and from the field.

“We have noticed an increased efficiency through optimised processes and are now in a position to cope with a greater volume of work. We will continue to roll out new work types using the Toughpad FZ-G1,” said Ledbury.
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The testing of applications and hardware becomes easy with a virtual lab.

Managed service providers (MSPs) or IT departments wanting to research and provide security services and solutions should seriously consider setting up their own cyberwarfare research lab that replicates their small business servers and workstations. The idea is to then ‘virtually’ infect the servers, break workstations and experiment with configurations, vulnerabilities and features. It’s a bit of an undertaking, but it can be invaluable in understanding all the complex layers of the modern network while providing the MSP or IT department the opportunity to plan and document security best practices.

With customers and security professionals demanding more integrated solutions, security features are increasingly being built into network printers, UPSes, wireless access points, switches and, of course, actual firewalls. These features are switched off by default, which has given rise to some interesting internal vulnerabilities - such as lockouts, bricks or denial of service of devices and networks.

From a practical learning perspective, the SME network looks the same no matter what sort of business it is. Every business has some sort of server/file-share set-up, with workstations and firewall/router and core switch - even if that switch is the four ports on the back of a router. Most SMEs also have wireless of some sort, possibly built into the router or firewall. Today, it would also be a pretty rare scenario where the business did not have at least one network-attached printer.

As an example of what you can find with your own cyberlab, I spent the past month assembling some typical SME hardware devices and examining their security features, and found that not a single device demanded a change from the default password. As a basic payment card industry (PCI)-compliance requirement, all of these devices fail out of the box unless you spend some time changing defaults. These features all ‘work’, but what they don’t do is work securely.

SME IT departments and MSPs are going to be successful only if they can provide secure, predictable and reliable systems for their customers. The opportunity to experiment with configurations and system changes with no risk to production networks is a huge value-add. So simply being able to understand what typical network activity looks like between a domain controller and workstations can help troubleshoot the most difficult customer support calls.

The ability to test back-up and disaster recovery plans, new or updated applications and new hardware becomes very easy with just a small investment in your own virtual lab. It is important to replicate the environment that you’re likely to encounter so you can observe the consequences of dangerous configurations, hostile infections and malicious activity. The key here is to look at the mitigations against those threats and understand how the environment might be secured.

Ian Trump is Security Lead at LogicNow, a global provider of cloud-based IT security and solutions for the managed services provider community.
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You would have to have been living under a rock to have not heard about Uber and Airbnb and the disruption they are causing the taxi and hotel industries around the world. No industry is immune from the Uber effect. Potentially disruptive technologies go way beyond online information services and include 3D printing, drones, next-generation batteries, hydrogen fuel cells, wearable devices and the Internet of Things.

Your organisation needs three things to benefit from disruption and not fall victim to it: you must know your business and be prepared to change; be agile and respond quickly, as changes are hard to predict; and employ low-drag systems which push you forward, not hold you back.

Basically, to ride the wave of disruption - which can supercharge business growth when identified and employed effectively - you need an agile system and you need to work like mad. How do you know if your system is agile? In IFS’s experience, your main run-the-business system or ERP application should meet the following seven criteria.

1. Give visibility into and integrate information across the enterprise. You can’t change or improve what you can’t see. To truly know your business, you need to consolidate all your financial and operational information into a single system.

2. Provide a ‘single source of truth’ for operations in real time. If information is not real time, it cannot drive new services or processes in real time. Capturing information at the source and communicating it immediately is vital.

3. Facilitate customer service, including new services and apps. Can you optimise your service operations with integrated enterprise service management (ESM) software with mobility support? If not, how will you empower your customers?

4. Present information tailored to people’s roles in an easy-to-use way. As more information becomes available, can you easily distil it down to what is needed for a particular job role or project and present it in a user-friendly way?

5. Support digital devices that can be used everywhere and anytime. Is your ERP system accessible and useable across all devices - from PCs to laptops, tablets, smartphones and smart watches - and easily extendable to new devices?

6. Quickly integrate new technologies relevant to your business. Integrating disruptive technologies into existing business systems presents challenges. Is your supplier continually demonstrating new solutions to overcome challenges as they arise?

7. Be easily tailored to adapt to changes in your business. Expensive customisation - when deploying systems or adapting them to business changes - are a drag on agility. To enable change, minimise customisation and use systems that are easily configured to meet new business requirements.

Ensure that your ERP system meets these seven key criteria and, like Uber, you will be well on the way to riding the wave of disruption and not being wiped out by it.
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The role of IT across Australian healthcare has evolved over the past few years, from merely enabling automation to effecting integration across the healthcare delivery value chain. Data is considered the single most important resource; therefore, healthcare providers are most interested in collating accurate and comprehensive patient information.

The Australian healthcare IT sector is expected to reach a value of $1.2 billion by the end of 2015, making it the second-largest market in the Asia-Pacific after Japan. Spending on IT, however, is not in proportion with the benefits or improvements experienced across the health system. A high degree of fragmentation is plaguing the industry. Health data and services are not seamlessly connected across regions, facilities or various levels of care, and consumers face challenges such as unwanted repeated diagnostic tests, misdiagnosis, delayed treatment, insufficient long-term care and even medical errors.

Another challenge is the large amount of wastage across healthcare providers. There are grave inefficiencies across hospital inventories, management of devices and consumables, and even staff scheduling. Even processes are reported to be inefficient, with staff spending their time on unproductive activities such as searching for devices or manually capturing patient notes.

In meeting these challenges, vendors need to think about the value that their technologies bring not just to a single client but to the healthcare system as a whole. This is where SMART IT comes in.

S - Scalable. Healthcare providers are interested in solutions that enable quick and easy expansion. Systematic deployment of IT across departments, connectivity between disparate systems and rapid expansion of provider facilities all contribute to the need for scalable solutions and are driving the market for cloud in healthcare.

M - Measures-oriented. A key objective of investment is data collection and performance benchmarking. Well-designed analytics solutions that capture vital information to affect process improvement are in demand, creating a need not just for the solutions but also consulting services.

A - Accountable. Quality of healthcare continues to be questioned in spite of a much higher level of data capture for accountability purposes. Australia needs patient-centric data-capturing mechanisms that include indicators of the care quality and customer experience.

R - Real-time. Demand for real-time data at non-conventional sites is increasing fast amongst health professionals. Mobile, smartphone and tablet access to patient data and hospital solutions is the call of the day.

T - Transformational. Expectations from IT systems have risen beyond providing efficiency to transforming the way care is delivered, particularly in remote areas where healthcare access is a challenge. New models of care delivery and payment are expected to be supported by the necessary combination of devices, sensors, software and connectivity platforms.
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Paradigm shift
How digital is transforming business

Jonathan Nally

Old business models and methods are tumbling as digital transformation changes the world.
The term ‘digital transformation’ has been coined to describe the move towards the provision of services via digital means. It’s a term that means different things to different people. For some, it means going paperless; for others it means new ways of gathering information; and for still others it means new ways of communicating.

And it’s being taken seriously by entities of all shapes and sizes. The Australian federal government is establishing a Digital Transformation Office that “will be responsible for digital service delivery across government” and “transform government services, making services available digitally from start to finish”.

In 2009, the federal Department of Human Services - which has more than a third of federal expenditure under its management - and the CSIRO formed the Human Services Delivery Research Alliance to “inform digital transformation with hard evidence and multidisciplinary research”, with the aim of improving “the customer experience and at the same time improve efficiency and service levels”. The results of a three-year study by the collaboration are available on the CSIRO Productivity Flagship website (csiro.au/en/Research/DPF).

Digital in the built environment

If there’s anyone who should have an intimate knowledge of digital transformation and where it is heading, it’s Greg Stone, leader of digital services at building and engineering firm Arup. Until recently, Stone was chief technology officer for Microsoft Australia, and he reminds us of the distinction between digitising information and digitalising it.

“A lot of people have understood the benefits of digitising something,” he said. “So you see that manifested in people taking offline forms and then digitising them so that they’re PDFs online, and people can then download them or fill in a web form. But actually not a lot changes - it’s just a more efficient way of doing what they did before.”

And then there’s digitalisation, where swathes of information from, for example, mobile devices, can be collected and saved in the cloud, and “taken up and be used in many, many different ways, other than just a replication of a form collection”, Stone said. “All of a sudden now with digital, we have an ability to create new business models and new forms of engagement that transcend devices or locations or communication types, because once it’s in digital form it can be repurposed... to further aid personalisation in a way that’s not possible with simply digitising something.”

For the built environment, which is Arup’s main focus, Stone gives the example of looking for cracks inside tunnels. “In the old days they’d send someone out who’d look at the thing they’re surveying, they’d come back and they’d have a paper-based system,” he said. “But now we have the ability to send a drone up and down the tunnel with a multisensor camera... and then we can use big data and artificial intelligence and machine learning to start understanding what the changes are in that data.

“That kind of example is emblematic of what kind of advantages you can get when you go digital in the right way,” said Stone.

Keeping in touch

A very different kind of business is Feros Care, a not-for-profit organisation that provides healthcare and monitoring services for thousands of people nationwide, using technology that helps them stay safe in their own homes for longer. Feros Care is implementing Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online and Office 365 throughout its network of villages, at-home services, allied health and wellness programs and tele-healthcare.

Previously, Feros Care was using a few different systems. “We were trying to manipulate a client management system to do a lot of customer relationship management, so there were a lot of spreadsheets,” said Glenn Payne, CIO. “We’ve moved from a very manually intensive operation to a cloud-based, access-anywhere system.

“From a collaboration standpoint especially, we’re seeing that Yammer has cut down on email traffic. I think that was quite surpris-
“All of a sudden now with digital, we have an ability to create new business models and new forms of engagement that transcend devices or locations or communication types.”

ing,” said Payne. “It has enabled us from an IT perspective to give people real-time information and updates on things that are going on in the company… and cut down on our need for so many staff meetings.

“Our whole idea was to create a remote workforce that felt that even though they are working from home, they’re part of the business,” he added. “Office 365 and all the collaboration tools have really brought that to life. It has enabled us to have a remote workforce that feels connected to the central office.

“Our CEO has a real drive for technology, she understands it, she wants it,” said Payne. “So from my point of view of being a CIO, having a CEO who understands and really embraces and wants to use technology makes it a much easier job for me.”

Going paperless
MacKenzie Strategic is a South Australian-based chartered accounting firm, which also operates a wealth management consultancy and an investment administration support business. With 30 staff working in its Adelaide hub and five others across several offices around South Australia, it is a small-to-medium firm with clients all over Australia.

As you would expect, the company needs to transfer lots of legal documents to and from its clients, and traditionally this had been done on paper. Documents would be mailed, signatures added and then mailed back. But that required quite a lot of effort, and lots of phone calls to chase documents that had not been finalised. MacKenzie Strategic had tried using Adobe document management software, but found that staff and clients didn’t really take to it. So they switched to an Australian-developed document management solution, Nitro.

With Nitro, “clients don’t need any special software - they just get an email from us that says ‘Here’s a link, we’d like you to sign or view these documents’”, said Amanda Kennan, MacKenzie Strategic’s Strategy and Development Management Consultant. “They click the link and it tells them they’re going to Nitro Cloud, and then it’s literally just follow the bouncing ball.”

“From a business perspective, we’re not having to print when we need authorisations, we’re not having to check and see where things are at, because we can see on Nitro where the documents are sitting,” said Kennan. “I can set a workflow [for different people to sight or sign the document] and it literally moves that document around so that the manager can review it, the director can sign it, it can go to the client for signature, it then goes back to our admin team for completion and for lodging, and then the client can get an email to say, ‘All good, all done.’

“I had one example two weeks ago where I had a business sale contract that came through to us, 20 pages in a PDF, and I knew the amendments that needed to be made,” said Kennan. “The lawyers were all looking at me saying, ‘I’ll get a secretary to retype it.’ And I said ‘No,’ and I literally OCRed it straight into Word, had the amendments done and it was back to me within 20 minutes and I had a contract out and ready to go. And then I ‘Nitro Clouded’ it so that the vendor could sign, and I had the signature back and I had moneys transferred literally within two-and-a-half hours. It would have taken days previously.”

“In a world that’s going ever-more paperless, it just makes paperless easier,” said Kennan. “You just don’t worry about it. So we’re not [even] keeping a mail register anymore.”

The cloud’s silver lining
Ben Hutt is CEO of The Search Party, a business that began in 2011 and developed The Marketplace, which is a way of delivering for the recruitment industry what Uber delivers for transportation. The Search Party now represents more than 15 million candidates connected to about 200 recruitment agencies in 25 countries.

Recruitment via traditional methods takes an average of 81 days, costs a lot of money and most of the time doesn’t work out. The Search Party says that its talent pool and data science techniques, plus the role of intermediary recruitment agencies, reduces the average time-to-hire to less than two weeks.

“That’s only possible because of the vision we have always had around scale and leveraging data science and the benefits of cloud to really extract genius information from raw data, and make it accurate and insightful to the time-poor hiring manager,” said Hutt.

It’s also fair to say that without the cloud, The Search Party’s business model simply wouldn’t work. “We’re a massive fan of the right tool for the right job… [for instance our] anonymisation engine uses a machine learning algorithm… and it’s doing around 80 or 90 trillion effective comparisons over a span of about 20 hours. It certainly would not be possible without cloud architecture,” said Hutt. “It’s not just a minor improvement, it’s a paradigm shift for everyone involved.”

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Choosing the right networking infrastructure means reconciling contradictory technology trends. Static architectures are ill-suited for today’s highly mobile and virtualised environments. The proliferation of data and growing number of devices requiring network support requires networking to be agile; thus, organisations will be looking to leverage network infrastructure agility to deliver rapid responses that support business growth.

Network agility enables applications and services to be added, removed or adjusted promptly. Yet organisations are faced with the inherent decision of determining what should be outsourced and what should be insourced. Although costs will be an underlying factor, the need to separate investment into parts of the infrastructure that are strategic to the business, while outsourcing the rest, will be crucial.

With Gartner projecting worldwide IT spending for 2015 to increase by 2.4% over 2014 to US$3.8 trillion, how will new
For a start, it is difficult and time-consuming to change and adapt infrastructure due to network complexity. The same can be said about the constant implementation of new technology features that require time before end-user benefits are realised.

Furthermore, network intelligence tends to be too siloed from applications, preventing organisations from benefiting from the presence of valuable and relevant data.

Challenges

The accelerating IoT wave is seeing a deluge of connected devices accessing the network, resulting in a vast influx of data, transactions and users. By 2020, the number of connected things will have surged exponentially to an estimated 40 billion. This increase in connected devices will have a huge impact on organisations’ strategies for the data centre and network infrastructure. Data can become unstructured, leaving a percentage of very insightful, high-quality data that is not stored anywhere.

Data centres will need to become the modern-day railroad - in other words, be able to bridge the movement and storage of data. With existing network complexities, further network growth and expansion may pose significant challenges for management and provisioning. Once more, organisations will encounter a recurring concern - why should data be moved to a new platform, to a point where it might be impossible to leave that platform?

The answer might be simpler than we think. The volume of data flooding a network as result of IoT will need a place to be stored, exposing the traditional network problems - many are not agile enough, much less ready to support the flow of data or the pace of the ever-changing business landscape. This situation will encourage organisations to recognise the issues with traditional networking, in the respective systems. Networking hardware is too often closed or static, limiting future scaling or enhancements of the data centre.

The network should be an asset that drives an organisation’s innovation forward, yet too often it holds other efforts back or slows them down. How can organisations address these issues between the differing trends of deploying converged infrastructure or SDN?

Closed integration

Deploying converged infrastructure removes a layer of complexity when data centre configuration is abstracted, by preassembling the components so organisations don’t have to deal with the pieces. This ensures that tighter integrations are built, along with preconfiguring of the pieces - storage, networks and computer servers - with different applications and uses in mind.

With the pieces being integrated and working collectively at optimal capacity, organisations are able to streamline the day-to-day management of their data centre. They may also stand to benefit

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from reduced costs that would otherwise be spent on single-use components that are required in managing or troubleshooting these pieces. By consolidating resources and outsourcing the network complexity, time taken to build and scale the data centres is reduced significantly.

Open disaggregation with SDN

Then there is SDN, which, in most architectures, disaggregates networking and IT intelligence into separate pieces in order to create more layers of abstraction and increase agility and levels of control and automation. SDN enables the option of separating networking intelligence from networking hardware, which cannot be achieved with traditional routers and switches that have mutually exclusive software embedded in the hardware.

Since the software will not be bound to a networking operating system or control plane, opportunities to leverage new innovations faster will arise. The most extreme incarnation of the SDN model has the potential to not only add complexity, but also to increase agility and choice, thus addressing many of the challenges listed above.

To the uninitiated, these may seem like opposing approaches: integrate and bring the pieces closer together, or disaggregate and have more moving pieces. Yet there are different advantages in the deployment of each trend.

Enterprises interested in getting systems up and running quickly may go to the most converged infrastructure available, while those interested in open and dynamic networks that can leverage innovations faster will look to SDN. At face value these are conflicting trends, yet ultimately it boils down to the different needs and approaches of an organisation, all of which seek to achieve the goal of greater business agility.
Hume Bank, which operates in north-eastern Victoria and southern NSW, has a network of 19 branches and 47 ATMs and approximately 150 staff.

The core of the bank’s customer-centred approach is the provision of fast and convenient service. With this in mind, Hume Bank sought to gain greater insight into its IT networks to help maintain a highly available platform for the business and its customers.

Following recommendation by a third-party supplier, Hume Bank chose to trial a free version of Paessler’s PRTG Network Monitor to gain insight into traffic availability on its branch network. On seeing what the solution could do and the benefits it could bring beyond simply monitoring network links, the bank reviewed the cost and scope of the solution’s features versus the competing products, and chose to fully implement the solution across its enterprise.

Paessler’s PRTG Network Monitor is a monitoring solution for LANs, WANs, servers, websites, applications, URLs and more. The product is capable of monitoring virtually any kind of device, application or service, helping IT professionals identify potential outages before they occur as well as removing system bottlenecks and maximising use of system resources.

“PRTG Network Monitor is very simple to deploy,” said Brad Mennen, systems administrator, Hume Bank. “We were even able to customise the software to suit our own business needs; for example, we customised some of the reports we receive from PRTG and developed custom executables for sensors and the issuing of alerts via SMS message.”

Hume Bank installed PRTG on a Windows Server 2008 R2 operating system within its virtual infrastructure, supported by two CPUs and 8 GB of memory. Monitoring a whole host of servers, switches, routers and applications - and even printers, ATMs and EFTPOS - all aspects of network monitoring for the bank were covered using just under 900 sensors.

“With PRTG we can even keep an eye on response times for loading web pages for the public-facing internet banking site, via both desktop and mobile, so when a problem arises it can be dealt with swiftly and efficiently to reduce any impact to our customers,” said Mennen.

Each data centre and all of the bank’s branches and ATM networks are covered by PRTG. If an ATM goes down in Albury, for instance, the bank is alerted immediately so that the problem can be resolved quickly; similarly, if there is an issue with EFTPOS links in Sydney, the bank will be alerted to take action and repercussions for its customers or the wider business can be kept to a minimum.

PRTG Network Monitor has given Hume Bank much greater insight into the availability of its systems, network and the availability of services it provides. As a result, it has helped the organisation predict and resolve issues before they become bigger problems that could potentially affect viability to internal and external customers. As a result, the bank has made significant time and financial savings through reducing IT administrative time and cost of outages.

“PRTG provides us with an always-on second set of eyes that lets us know when something in our network isn’t right. As a result of our viability of services being measured, it helps us better allocate time and resources to improving areas that may need attention,” said Mennen.
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* Feb 2015 research by Markets and Markets
Enterprises forget basic service management principles at their peril

The service delivery challenge is to change decision-making patterns, within an organisation’s broader IT framework, from what are often hierarchical to those that are much more ‘process driven’. It should be viewed as a solution to the issue, providing end-to-end management that extends beyond the ‘project’ phase and into the ongoing operational phase of the business cycle. Thus ‘service management’ is able to provide a blueprint for the implementation and subsequent support for the provision of IT services at both the ‘back end’ and increasingly ‘front of house’ as well.

This has a potential downside, though, and on occasion CEOs may conclude that service management provides the blueprint for operational IT within the organisation. In other words, it descends from its rightful place as a strategic partner to a tactical one where it, and its practitioners, are regarded as the solution to problems of a day-to-day nature, such as, “Hey, I can’t turn my screen on”.

At its best, the service management team will pivot quickly to both take advantage of new opportunities and also to head off new threats and, to use the current terminology, ‘disruptions’. These later issues may be due to the advent of emerging technologies that generate strong initial enthusiasm, along with a ‘change for change’s sake’ mentality where the best and worst of the new are jostling for attention in the same organisation.

This can also relate to losses in market share when we think of that as being not so much ‘accounts’ or business entities, but rather the people behind them to whom the service management fraternity owes a duty of care in the provision of timely solutions and sound strategic thinking. And it is entirely likely - perhaps more than likely - that these customers and key relationships will be internal.

In this scenario, service management is sometimes seen as being sandwiched between project management at one end and change management at the other, but its role and potential is significantly short-changed by this view. So while the service managers tend to be responsible for the service desk, this neither represents the entire scope of their work nor its most important component - simply its most visible role, hence that which lends itself to definition.

More important is the role of service management in the provision of each link of the chain, starting with the routine provision of problem solving at the provision-of-service end of the spectrum, right through to infrastructure and to what may be fundamentally non-IT business services. It is this last sector which is seeing dramatic growth in many organisations as they come to appreciate that intelligent people, trained in the provision of service management, are well placed to deliver solutions within the ‘portfolio’ regime. These same capable individuals are, of course, often at the forefront of change management as well.
### IT Conference Calendar

**Gartner Application Architecture, Development & Integration Summit 2015**  
20-21 July 2015 (Hilton Sydney)  
Providing insights and perspectives needed to prioritise necessities, refine strategies and make the right decisions to help balance the core IT systems of today and tomorrow.  
gartner.com/ap/aadi

**Gartner Security & Risk Management Summit 2015**  
24-25 August 2015 (Hilton Sydney)  
For business and IT professionals involved in enterprise-wide security, risk management or business continuity.  
gartner.com/ap/security

**DCD Converged Australia 2015**  
3-4 August 2015 (Australian Technology Park)  
Cutting-edge topics and high-profile speakers focusing on the dynamic growth of cloud, IT and data centres (DCs) as business drivers and the convergence of technologies that makes this possible.  
dcdconverged.com/conferences/australia

**Service Management 2015**  
20-21 August 2015 (Sofitel Sydney Wentworth)  
Bringing together today’s and tomorrow’s IT enterprise leaders.  
smconference.com.au

**Australian CIO Summit 2015**  
3-5 August 2015 (RACV Royal Pines Resort)  
Offers enterprise and government CIOs as well as IT solution providers and consultants an intimate environment for a focused discussion of key new drivers for IT innovation.  
cio.com.au/ciosummit/

**Gartner Symposium/ITxpo 2015**  
26-29 October 2015 (Gold Coast Convention & Exhibition Centre)  
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gartner.com/technology/symposium/gold-coast/

**Reimagination Thought Leaders Summit**  
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Forum that converges experts and digital disruptors from business, government, education and research sectors.  
reimagination.acs.org.au

**Comms Connect Melbourne 2015**  
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Cybercrime has evolved from simply stealing information for financial gain to ruthlessly infiltrating industries with the goals of destroying intellectual property, damaging reputation and crippling vital operating functions.

As one of the most recent and malevolent examples, the Sony Pictures Entertainment hack brought global attention to the issue of cybersecurity that will likely have a significant impact on future government policy and national responses to cyberattacks perpetrated against countries or companies.

Motivation plays a big role in who is targeted by these threats and how they are executed. Although the Sony hack has garnered significant attention, its impact pales in comparison to the implications of an attack on critical infrastructure and facilities, which has the potential to be politically, economically and physically devastating.
The breach was accomplished using a technique called spear phishing - a simple attack that utilises social engineering to provoke the user to open an email appearing to be from a trusted source but designed with embedded malware. Once hackers compromised and gained access to the system, they applied sophisticated technical knowledge to override the control systems and caused massive destruction.

“In December an unidentified group of hackers led a cyberattack on a German iron plant that caused physical damage to the machinery.”

This breach is significant because it is the second publicly confirmed case of a cyberattack causing physical damage to a system - the other being the 2010 sabotage of centrifuges used to enrich uranium gas at an Iranian facility.

It is important to emphasise that a cyberattack on physical infrastructure poses a unique threat - not only to an organisation’s network and data, but also to its physical and human capital as well as the surrounding population. These threats require distinct procedures, standards and proactive protections.

Industries need to implement a cybersecurity strategy that outlines best practices for employees, sets comprehensive protocols outlining a response to a breach and, most importantly, encourages the necessary steps to ensure active network and data security.

The Council on CyberSecurity and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), for instance, have both outlined critical security controls as well as public security measures that organisations can take to better secure...
and defend the network, data and vital business assets. To address the full array of cybersecurity threats, near-real-time solutions in the form of continuous systems monitoring and risk mitigation are required.

**Real-time awareness**

When an organisation lacks the awareness to determine who has access to its network and sensitive data, it is forced into a reactive posture where breaches are dealt with after the fact, leading to a state of perpetual damage control that diverts further resources away from threat detection and prevention. In today’s environment of advanced threats, being proactive is essential. It is inevitable that bad actors of some kind will gain access to an organisation’s critical data with enough persistence.

Strong cyberdefence relies on the strength of multiple layers of security targeting underlying software security assurance, data encryption, network defence and near-real-time monitoring to quickly identify a breach and respond before damage can be done.

Without comprehensive situational awareness of an organisation’s network, intrusion prevention and detection systems are limited to stopping only the attacks they have been programmed to identify.

Pairing near-real-time monitoring solutions that have been calibrated with the latest threat intelligence can afford IT managers a comprehensive picture of their data environment, so threats can be detected and mitigated before they cause harm.

This is why threat-indicator sharing and collaboration is such a necessary and crucial step - not only for the protection of individual organisations, but also entire industries, critical infrastructure and national security.

Cyberattacks are no longer simply practical jokes or non-lethal schemes of siphoning information for monetary gain. An attack on critical infrastructure presents a clear and present danger to human life as well as life-sustaining industries.

Breaches are an inevitable and expected occurrence in the digital age. Now we must place the priority on how we can prevent and respond to these threats together, which can mean the difference between business as usual and a national crisis.

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Service management solution saves time and money

The University of Canterbury caters to over 15,000 students and employs more than 1500 staff. It offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses in over 50 disciplines and has a number of specialist research centres.

The university had been using an IT service management (ITSM) solution to handle the management of incidents, change requests, service requests and problems. However, the software enforced lengthy workflows which could not be modified, wasting valuable time and resources to enter incidents and service requests. Reporting was also inefficient and inflexible.

During a restructure of operations, it was decided that a new solution was needed to meet the needs of the Learning Resources department, which encompasses IT as well as Audio-Visual, Facilities Management and Library Services. A single service desk was required to meet the needs of Student Services, HR and Finance.

The university implemented Axios Systems’ assyst Incident Management and Asset and Configuration Management. Combining all processes into a single solution has provided it with full visibility across its business, plus the ability to control and manage all assets and services.

Using assyst’s Reporting Wizard, along with the real-time information via dynamic dashboards, the university has gained actionable business insight. The Reporting Wizard provides report templates for accurate, fast and reliable data. Designated users also create custom reports to see the information they need, when they need it.

Due to the success initially seen when rolled out to IT, the university is now rolling out assyst to other departments and adopting the assyst Self-Service Portal for remote request logging by staff and students. Over time, the Self-Service Portal will be rolled out across the entire university for all administrative service areas, covering both staff and students.

The university is now managing more than 8300 assets within assyst, with numbers set to double over the next year.

Incident logging has become much more efficient and the time taken to log a call has drastically reduced, with staff on the service desk more at ease with the process. Both staff and students now have the ability from web or mobile to log their own incidents and have full visibility of their progress. The result has been an 8.5% incremental increase in self-logging requests on a monthly basis.

Library Services has been impressed with the uptake of the assyst Self-Service Portal, seeing an uptake of 50% within only six months. Overall, the university saw a 15% uptake on the Self-Service Portal for IT and Libraries. This reduces the pressure on the Service Desk by allowing staff and students to log and track their own requests - and feedback has been very positive.

“The implementation of the Self-Service Portal has significantly improved our engagement with our customers and has produced savings in time and effort through reduced processing of email requests,” said Andy Keiller, the university’s CIO.

Finally, assyst has enabled reporting on cost per call and number of calls per day, allowing the Service Desk to appropriately manage its resources. Reporting has also highlighted further efficiencies, such as saving time, reducing support costs and improved end-user satisfaction.

“The Axios Systems team had clearly addressed the requirements set out in our RFP documentation,” said Keiller. “Not only did they answer the question of assyst’s capability, but also commented on how we could expand the use of the same functionality in the future phases of our implementation.”
Big data, cloud, mobility and security have transformed the way we do business. These four themes have been dominating the IT landscape, ushering in a new era and bringing with it new capabilities and new expectations. We’ve seen the development of new waves of workloads; changing architectures and deployments; and new ways to consume IT from the data centre to the end-user device. Your IT department and infrastructure must have the agility and flexibility to keep up with an unpredictable and fast-moving future to ensure yours is a ‘future-ready’ enterprise.

Before you start shaking at the thought of the costs associated with becoming future-ready, stop - being future-ready isn’t a rip-out-and-replace solution. Rather, it acknowledges today’s rapidly evolving environment and enables your business to quickly adapt to new technologies now and into the future.

Businesses need to be deliberate with their IT infrastructures, building a bridge between their current IT solutions and the innovative technologies of tomorrow. Building this flexibility in now will enable businesses to continue to grow while optimising their existing IT applications and performances.

There are three relatively simple guidelines to follow as you prepare your IT for the opportunities ahead.

Make IT front of mind. The realm of where IT sits within a business has shifted.

Businesses need to understand the ‘value creator’ that IT can be and see it as the route to greater productivity, innovation and growth. IT has become a unit of the profit-making business, no longer just a supporting function, and it is increasingly important to the bottom line.

Take a holistic approach. Historically, businesses managed their IT in silos with the various elements not necessarily complementing each other. Businesses have a complex network of IT solutions, some that work together and some that don’t. But there is a better way. Integrated infrastructure is built to work from device to the data centre to the cloud, seamlessly and securely. This is imperative when you consider how cloud computing, big data, mobility and security are reshaping the world in which we do business.

Say no to lock-ins. As consumers, we have never liked being locked into contracts - witness the new plans on offer from phone carriers who have had to adapt to their customers’ wants. So why would businesses lock themselves into expensive proprietary systems? Businesses have more IT options than ever before, so if your business is already locked in, it’s okay. Vendors are devoting massive amounts of time and resources to innovations that are bridging the gap, creating enterprises of the future which are open, modular and flexible.

Using these three guidelines, the time is ripe for all businesses to look at their IT infrastructure and ask: are we future-ready?
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