Internal IT vs. Outsourcing?

By Heinan Landa

If you think you have to choose between either an internal information technology (IT) team or outsourcing your IT management, think again. It's possible to have the best of both worlds.

For any business, having the right IT team undoubtedly will accelerate the path to success. Having confidence in the scope of the team's capabilities and knowledge is key, but how can you be sure that all of your IT bases are covered? After all, your IT team undoubtedly has a strong knowledge base of your organization's technology needs, but the spectrum of technology management has multiple, ever-evolving components that can be hard to stay on top of.

In other words, no one person can handle all the elements for any given organization. There are just too many pieces to the puzzle, and with technological advances adapting and improving at a rapid pace, businesses must constantly be looking for ways to expand and strengthen their IT team's knowledge base and toolkit. One of the best ways to do this is through outsourcing.

Where Do I Start?

You don't have to make an either/or choice between an internal team and outsourced IT management. If you want to combine the benefits of both, though, how do you decide what to outsource?

First, assess and evaluate your internal IT team and compare what you have to the vast array of today's technology tools, tasks and roles. Audit what talents you have in your current team and what tools your team members are competent to work with.

This audit can also showcase your team's talents and weaknesses, and from that point onward, you can decide who, or what, to bring in from the outside. A technologically capable, specialized and computer-savvy outside team will be able to help complement, balance and enhance the skills that your internal IT team already has.

What Are the Benefits?

An outside technology company can bring to the table a broader industry perspective. An internal IT team usually has a solid understanding of technologies already in use in your organization. However, an outside team usually will have broad exposure to many different technologies.

An outside source can use this knowledge to provide consulting, planning and budgeting improvements when it comes time to set an IT direction for your organization. For example, you may be wondering what the best disaster recovery technology is for your organization. A firm that has experience with several of them might be able to point the way.

While an internal IT team's focus is usually on the day-to-day support and management of technology, outside consultants can provide project management for major technology upgrades or the implementation of new, unfamiliar technologies. They can bring in specific technology expertise that can make upgrades and implementations nearly pain-free.

An outside technology company may be able to provide specific management tool technologies, as well. Many have spent tremendous resources on developing and implementing system monitoring and management tools for their clients. These might include patch management systems, software configuration management tools, application and server monitoring, and even end-user ticketing systems.

Internal IT teams can use this specialized expertise and the associated software and hardware systems to further organizational goals and to effectively cut the difficulty, cost and time it would take to develop these management tools in-house.

It Costs More, Right?

According to the management consulting firm Accenture, outsourcing provides a cost savings of 25–30%. Additionally, some of the more important long-term business benefits include increasing efficiency, reducing risks and lowering the cost of labor and training.

Companies with internal teams that try to juggle everything themselves often find themselves paying a higher price. After all, training can be a costly investment for most companies — even more so when there is a need to hire and train staff for short-term projects.

Outsourcing can save a company money in this arena by providing a ready cadre of resources in a specific area. Outsourcing also can improve a business's productivity levels, freeing the internal team to handle the day-to-day management of the systems.

In addition, as technological advances continue to change the face of the technology industry, business investments in such technologies create more risks. An outside provider can manage these risks and employ its experience and expertise to help a company avoid making costly mistakes.

With almost all industries struggling to stay afloat in the present down economy, you need to choose the most efficient, and cost-effective, way to accomplish organizational goals — especially in the technology arena. Take the time to evaluate your internal IT team and decide what weak areas of expertise need to be strengthened. Don't reinvent the wheel — know when and how to outsource prudently so that you can ensure that your technology is working for your organization.

Heinan Landa is president of Optimal Networks (www.optimalnetworks.com), a comprehensive computer and network support services firm assisting small-and mid-sized businesses. Contact him at info@optimalnetworks.com