Association TRENDS™

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Seriously useful news & information for association leaders

Internal IT vs. outsourcing: Not an either/or choice

Outsourcing is a way to expand and strengthen an association's IT team's knowledge base and toolkit

By ZACHARY YOU, HEINAN LANDA | 12/16/2010

Because IT management for associations is complex, organizations should be constantly 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; you can combine the benefits of both. First, assess and evaluate your internal IT team and compare what you have to what you need. Audit what talents your current team offers and identify strengths and weaknesses. A technologically capable and specialized outside team will help complement and enhance the skills that your internal IT team already has in place.

How can internal and external teams work together?
A broader industry perspective. An internal IT team usually has a solid understanding of the technology you are currently using. An outside team will bring expertise in a variety of technologies across industries, such as provide consulting, planning, and budgeting improvements for your organization.

Project expertise. 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 unfamiliar technologies.

Specific, management tool technologies. Many technology companies have spent tremendous resources on developing and implementing system monitoring and management tools for their clients. Internal IT teams can use this specialized expertise and the associated software and hardware systems to further organizational goals. Different cost models. IT providers often price managed services on a per workstation basis and/or offer software as a service. This means associations can scale according to needs and better optimize cash flow.

But it costs more money, right?
Wrong. According to the management consulting firm, Accenture, outsourcing provides a cost savings of 25-30%, by reducing risk and training among other areas. Also, an outside provider can employ expertise to help an association avoid making costly mistakes.

Case in point
Zachary You, sr. IT director at the Grocery Manufacturers Association, realized that his IT team could benefit from an outside perspective in specific areas. You continues to run the GMA's IT dept. and their outsourcing provider handles the backup and disaster recovery elements. This combination saves money (no need to hire full-time or part-time staff) and provides peace of mind. While You and his team focus on day-to-day IT needs, the provider runs and maintains the backup systems, ensures the data gets offsite, restores files, virtualizes servers when necessary, and restores full server images when appropriate.

Last word
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 IT areas could be strengthened. Know when and how to outsource prudently so that you can ensure that your technology is working for your organization.

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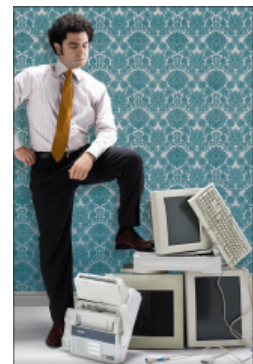
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