

# HOW TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE IT STRATEGY

THAT ACTUALLY WORKS



**micro**pro  
Business IT Experts

Many businesses lack a solid or effective IT strategy. And without realising it, these businesses are hindering their growth.

An effective IT strategy is valuable. It lines up your IT and technology capabilities with your business objectives. As such, it maximises your return on investment. Strategic IT planning ensures a business is accountable and stays on track with its IT and wider business goals.

After all, the majority of our working lives heavily relies upon IT and technology in various forms. So, having a solid strategy is essential.

## What is an IT strategy?

Put simply, an IT strategy is a detailed plan outlining the ways in which technology and IT processes should be used in order to align with your business goals.

Often, it is in the form of a written document or roadmap detailing the various things that affect a businesses' use of IT and technology.

An IT strategy can help a business or organisation invest their resources more effectively and ideally covers all areas of IT management. This could include things such as hardware or software management, cost management risk management, human resource management and vendor management.



## What's the purpose of an IT strategy?

Ultimately, the aim of an IT strategy is to guide decisions around IT and technology processes, software, hardware or infrastructure.

It's essentially a roadmap for businesses and helps them understand and get to grips with all areas of IT. Enabling them to make smart, informed business decisions to drive growth.

An IT Strategy should identify and explain **three main things**:

- Where the business is currently
- Where the business wants to be (often in line with company's mission statement)
- How a business can reach its objectives

In a nutshell, it's the who, what, where, why and how. And you'll need to identify and answer all of these in order to create an effective and robust IT strategy.

Put simply, if you don't plan, then you won't succeed. Businesses without goals or specific objectives in mind will not only lack direction but are destined to fail.

In fact, according to a strategic software company, Cascade; 67% of strategies fail due to poor execution. That's over two-thirds! And it highlights the need for an effective IT strategy that's guided by experts.

## **How to Create an Effective IT Strategy that Works**

Of course, you could start scheduling that meeting with your colleagues and attempt to come up with an IT strategy on your own. But the fact remains, a winning strategy is about more than a few brainstorming sessions.

**To plan and implement a successful IT strategy, you need specialists.**

An effective IT strategy is informed by data and requires a more scientific approach. And your in-house IT team may not have the expertise or experience to work in this way. This is exactly why hiring the services of an IT strategy specialist is often a requirement.

Because, without understanding the driving forces and data behind your decisions, your strategy risks being flat or ineffective.

Planning and implementing an effective IT strategy – one which can explain why you need to move in a particular direction or goes into detail on the resources required to deliver it – is a complex undertaking.

At MicroPro, we love data.

Data provides us with the ability to step back and view a business objectively.

These numbers help us to see where a business is, understand how it got there, assess it and decide exactly what steps a business needs to take next.

Data is at the core of all effective IT strategies. But without people who can translate it or understand what that data means, your strategy is lifeless.



Having a solid IT strategy also requires strong IT leadership and the ability to work across all departments harmoniously.

For large businesses, an IT strategy is led by a chief information officer (CIO) or chief technology officer (CTO).

Smaller businesses may not have this capacity. Therefore, they might require some help to get their IT strategy.

However, as with anything in business, there's no one size fits all method or formula for an effective IT strategy.

## **The 5 Pillars of an Effective IT Strategy**

Even though each strategy depends entirely on the precise needs of your business, your goals, processes and knowledge, there are five pillars that hold up any good strategy.

Five Pillars of an effective IT strategy

- Initial planning & outlining of goals
- Defining & analysing current strategy/business data
- Reviewing & evaluating existing IT and technology infrastructure
- Creation of a robust plan
- Defining your metrics to measure the effectiveness

Let's look at each of these stages in more detail:

### **1. Planning and Outlining of Goals**

During this stage, you'll want to detail anything specific to the business. All outlining of business goals must be relevant. As well as support current business and marketplace contexts.

Working closely with stakeholders is where you will initially agree and commit to a strategic approval process. This will ensure a consistently smooth running IT strategy from start to end.

Ensure you're aware of all roles, the reporting process, and what the communication arrangements are.

This is essential as communications breakdowns happen a lot more regularly than you might think. And they are one of the biggest reasons that many IT

strategies fail. Even the biggest and most well-known companies such as Wells Fargo or Nike fall prey to miscommunication.

Of course, this is also the stage where target dates are set. Remember to take into account any budgetary considerations and resource commitments. Next, it's time to define and analyse the current standing of the business.



## **2. Defining and Analysing the Current Business Data**

This stage will take up a considerable amount of time, but ensuring you have accurate and up-to-date information is paramount.

All business data needs to be analysed so that you know exactly where your starting standpoint is. Identify the current state of the business in terms of IT and technology.

Analyse the challenges currently facing the business. This is your chance to find the core challenges facing the business. And they will inform your rationale throughout the entire IT strategy, as you work to overcome them.

Ensure you collate data from all areas of the business. Map out the current IT or technology landscape from as many perspectives as you can. You might invite department heads from each area of the business to talk to you about their existing IT infrastructure and to outline how their team uses IT.

## **3. Reviewing and Evaluating Existing IT Infrastructure**

Now you have spoken with all the departments and gathered some data, it's time to review and evaluate your findings.

Map out the current state of affairs against the future aims and objectives outlined in the initial planning stage. Then evaluate how well the existing infrastructure matches up.

As you begin to develop a roadmap and start linking dependencies you'll start to see a plan forming.

You can learn a great deal about a company when you start to evaluate its data and current infrastructure or processes. IT strategists have the expertise to review and evaluate large amounts of data in a way that employees or company managers often can't.



Sometimes what you discover might be unpleasant for a business to hear. Especially as many business owners are often proud of their decisionmaking capabilities, having gotten to where they are now as a result of them. So when a previously unforeseen data issue crops up, sometimes it can cause grievances. But this is why it's worth investing in a specialist IT strategist. As a third party, they can review a business objectively and they are equipped to deal with these issues.

When data is analysed and evaluated properly, it can be the driving force that accelerates an IT strategy.

#### **4. Creating a Robust Plan**

This stage is perhaps the most important. An IT strategist needs to use the data they have gathered and translated it into actions.

It requires a detailed understanding of current processes and positions. This includes taking into consideration all the complexities involved, including the resources and workforce needed to undertake the plan.

Ensure your strategic program plan includes a financial element, as this is often the main concern for decision-makers in a business. Remember to review these in line with market factors such as the current financial climate.

Translate all your data into actionable steps and ensure all parties involved are up-to-date. Transparency is incredibly important throughout the entire process.

You'll need to create any accompanying reports, documents, roadmaps and presentations. Everything up to this point will have been driven by data, so all actions outlined in the plan will need to be too.

#### **Communication is key**

- A good IT strategy will involve collaborative input, so ensure you regularly review your plans and make any amends or adjustments.
- Present your plan to key stakeholders in the business and answer any queries they may have. This is where the specialist expertise and knowledge of an experienced IT strategist will come into play.
- It's important that your client understands the basics of your plan and feels at ease. Any unanswerable question will plant doubts and lead to a breakdown in trust or communication.

- But once you've explained your plan, and everything has been agreed on and approved, it's time to implement it.

## 5. Defining Your Metrics to Measure Effectiveness

Before you can begin implementing your plan, there is one last step. In order to measure the success of your IT strategy down the line, you'll need to define the metrics you'll use to do so.


Whether operational metrics or delivery metrics, work out the identifying factors that will help you assess the success of your IT strategy.

Ultimately, all steps throughout the entire process need to guide the organisation you're working with. Skipping a step or failing to develop a plan with strong aims will undoubtedly render your strategy ineffective.

### Don't forget to account for flexibility

Your IT strategy and all its parts should remain as flexible as it can. This means it will be more effective at adapting due to unforeseen changes in the business, such as a shift in priorities or budgetary constraints.

For example, you only need to look to 2020 to see that unforeseen circumstances such as a global pandemic can affect entire businesses. In this instance, the existing strategies that were flexible enough to account for new market conditions were the ones that likely succeeded.



However, it's not just about being flexible enough. It's about having contingencies in place and measuring risk. A good IT strategy should be able to adjust accordingly to whatever comes up. Effective strategies can leap over hurdles such as new technology advances or sudden, unforeseen employee absences with ease.

## Reasons Strategic IT Planning Can Fail

As well as a lack of flexibility, an IT Strategy can fail for multiple reasons. Every business wants to see actionable results, the sooner the better. But sometimes the right kind of plan for your business is rooted in long-term gain and requires patience.

Then there are businesses that want a plan for the sake of having one because they think they need one. Or they make things more complex than they need to be.

Of course, this isn't always the case. Each company and business is different. For instance, a smaller firm may not require a full strategic plan. They may not have the budget or resources behind them. Instead, they may simply need some analysis or data to help get them started.

**However, some companies have unrealistic goals and may bite off more than they can chew.**

On the other side of the scale, companies may only be partially committed to a plan. This can lead to a breakdown in communication or cause friction.

### **A matter of cost?**

Naturally, financial factors can also come into play. Whether it's due to inaccuracies in financial estimates, a refusal to invest for the long-term or an inability to account for marketplace reality. Cost factors are usually commonplace.

However, by investing in the correct leadership and guidance for your IT strategy, organisations can actually save money in the long run.

All of these factors share one main similarity. And it's perhaps the most important and often overlooked reason an IT strategy can fail. That is, it all comes down to not having the right expertise involved.

At the end of the day, a solid strategy requires companies to hire experts to analyse and explain the data or environment.

### **Start Taking Effective IT Strategy Seriously**

Overall, any IT strategic activities you undertake must be providing a benefit to businesses. Consider IT strategy like adding another string to your bow. It's a powerful weapon that can be wielded by your business and your inhouse IT team.

All good strategies seek support and aid decision making for a business, an IT strategy should be no different. Your business likely has a strategy for growth, an account management strategy, a marketing strategy and so on... so why shouldn't it also invest in IT or technology strategy too?

IT strategy equips businesses with the expertise and direction necessary for success. To ensure they are investing in achievable, technological ventures, infrastructure and processes. Instead of wasting time, energy and resources on things that don't support or aid the future growth of the business.



## **Do you need an expert team to help deliver an effective IT strategy that works for your business?**

If you need a specialist team to help you and your business with your IT strategy, we can help.

Consider IT strategy in the same way you think about IT support. Depending on the company size or needs, IT support can be fully managed and outsourced. So too can IT strategy.

One organisation may require all of its IT processes to be managed by an IT business specialist. And a smaller business may want to outsource one or two elements of their IT or tech while running the majority of things inhouse.

Whatever approach you take will depend on the role technology plays within your business. The right approach may also alter or change over time too. As business priorities, visions and markets change.

Start seeing the results you deserve and get in touch now.

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