

Keeping it in-house

The value an in-house IT team can bring to your organization

In today's modern-day business environment, the technology solutions your company invests in are managed either internally or externally.

Smart Business sat down with Bill Reichman, vice president of information systems for AIT Worldwide Logistics, to find out why he prefers the former over the latter.

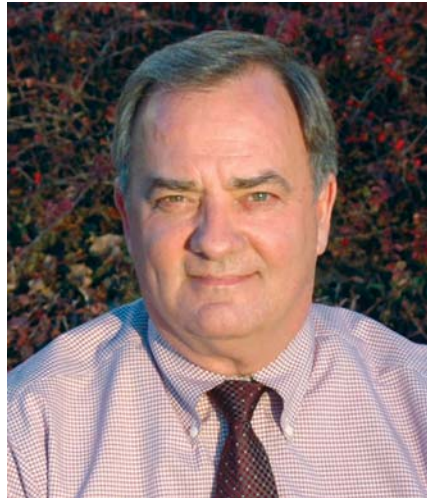
Do companies today place enough emphasis on technology?

That depends on the company's outlook on the importance and value of technology. If your company regards technology as something you absolutely have to have in order to be in business, then you are likely viewing your IT solutions as more of a customer expectation or business requirement rather than a competitive point of differentiation for your business. Essentially, you are more inclined or conditioned to be interested in cost justification or short-term benefits rather than the value of the long-term investment in technologies.

Alternatively, if your company takes a proactive stance in truly putting technology at the forefront of your business, then you are opting to use that technology to drive your business. In order to maximize on your technology resources, it's far more beneficial to have an in-house IT team as opposed to outsourcing one.

What are the main advantages and disadvantages to having an in-house IT team?

Quite simply, having an in-house IT team cultivates enhanced control over technologies — both implementing and sustaining it. If your company were dependent on an outsourced IT company, then you are at the mercy of its schedule. To your company's detriment, you are subject to much longer turnaround times according to its priorities and timelines. With an in-house team, you can direct and devote your resources anytime and anywhere you choose based on your own set of terms and priorities. The control is in your hands — you can measure the output as well as dictate the deadlines.



Bill Reichman
Vice president of information systems
AIT Worldwide Logistics

There is, however, a risk factor associated with having an in-house team: While an imperative investment, educating and training employees on emerging and updated technologies is a costly one. You could potentially spend thousands of dollars training an employee only to have him or her walk out the door.

But when recognizing the importance of maintaining and managing the control over various technologies under one roof, it's critical to have an in-house team and worth that risk in the long run.

How can an in-house IT team make technology a competitive point of differentiation for your business?

When you put yourself in the position where you view technology as one of your company's strongest competitive points of differentiation, then you must be able to adapt and react quickly in order to accommodate the massive changes, project requests and demands of your customers in today's ever-changing information climate — an in-house team makes this possible.

BILL REICHMAN is vice president of information systems for AIT Worldwide Logistics. Spanning numerous nationwide locations and an ever-increasing network of international partnerships, the global transportation and logistics provider delivers tailored solutions for a wide variety of vertical markets and industries. Reach him at www.aitworldwide.com or (800) 669-4AIT.

With an in-house team, you are also less likely to undermine and/or overlook the capabilities and advantages in terms of how technologies can be used to improve job efficiencies, workflow, business processes and overall employee productivity.

Furthermore, having an in-house team facilitates a stronger link between your company's business group and technology group. Under this management structure, meetings of strategic business importance often always include a representative from the IT team. By reinforcing your company's commitment to technology, you are also underpinning the collective goals and visions of your organization.

The technology is not a marginalized sector of your business; rather, it becomes a product of your company's offerings. For instance, at AIT, we're proud to say that we're not just in the freight-forwarding business, but we're also in the IT business.

How does an in-house team contribute to employee retention?

A thriving corporate culture and positive work environment makes it possible to invest in training and educating your employees because you as an employer enjoy a certain level of confidence that they won't leave the company the first chance they get. Similarly, that particular employee truly feels like he or she is an asset to the team and is empowered to come to work every day, roll up his or her sleeves and contribute to the overall success of the company.

Essentially, it's mutually beneficial in that it facilitates and fosters positive employer-employee relationships and places increased emphasis on the human element of the IT business. At the end of the day, it's always going to be about the people running the technologies and not vice versa. <<