

Three Technology Trends Your Company Can't Ignore

The more anticipatory you can be in regard to technology, the more creatively you can use it to gain competitive advantage

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Technology is evolving - fast. For that reason, it's imperative that your company focuses not just on the changes that are happening today, but also on the technological trends that are emerging and shaping the future of your organization and your industry. Why? **Because the more anticipatory you can be in regard to technology, the more creatively you can use it to gain competitive advantage.**

1. Processing Power on Demand

The increased bandwidth that our mobile devices now receive enables us to connect to cloud-based technologies easier and faster than ever before. And one thing we know about bandwidth is that it will continue to increase.

Because of this, we'll soon be able to take advantage of another trend that I call processing power on demand – or virtualized processing power.

We have already virtualized so many things. We have virtualized storage where we can store our data on a cloud-based network. Many companies choose this option for data safety and ease of backup, as well as for the ability to access the data via any device. We have virtualized our desktops so that we can see our desktop on anyone else's machine, just the way it's supposed to look.

It only makes sense, then, that processing power will be virtualized, too. In other words, a mobile device only has a certain amount of processing power. But if you can tap into additional processing power via cloud-based technology, you can turn your mobile device into a super computer where you can do advanced simulations and crunch different data streams together to get real-time analytics. Now your handheld device is as powerful and advanced as your desktop. Imagine the increase in productivity if each of your company's employees had the capability to do complex work that required advanced processing power while they were on the road, armed with nothing more than their mobile device. What would that shift do to your company's bottom line?

2. Creative Application of Technology

For both of these trends and others to fully emerge, business leaders have to consider what their people would do with the technology. It's no longer enough to just deploy technology; you also have to consider how your people can creatively apply the technology in order to gain competitive advantage.

Therefore, you need to go to your internal customers (all the people using the technology in the enterprise) and ask what they want technologically. Give them what they ask for, but realize that they will under-ask because they don't know what's technically possible. So while you want to listen to what people in the organization are asking for and give it to them, realize that what they're not asking for is the bigger and better capabilities – the things they don't even know are possible.

The key is to give people the ability to do what they currently can't do, but would want to do, if they only knew they could. After all, people really didn't ask for an iPhone or a BlackBerry. The hidden need was the ability to access their email and Internet without being tied to their desktop or laptop

This is about putting existing technologies together and using them in a creative way. For example, there are literally thousands of features in Microsoft Word that you can select. Most people are using only seven to 10 features. And your competitors are using the same features, which means you're not getting any true competitive advantage. So you need to ask: What features would be great for our sales group (or HR, or accounting department, or logistics people, etc.) to use – features that are so buried in the software that no one knows they exist? Most IT departments won't ask those questions because they're too busy making sure everything is connected, working well and safe. And if they're not asking, who is? Who in your organization is looking at the tools you already have and asking if they are being underused? Chances are the answer is "no one." As such, it's safe to say that all your tools are underutilized.

Therefore, you need to implement a communication vehicle that engages the different groups you serve in the enterprise – such as sales, logistics, purchasing, accounting, HR, etc. – and **you need to engage them in helping them understand the power of the tools they have access to.** One suggestion is to automatically show them a "feature of the day" and how it can make their life easier. This is about giving them information in short, fun, engaging ways rather than a hundred-page document detailing all the features (which no one will read anyway). Some software programs have such features where you get a tip per day. Perhaps you can customize that idea and apply it internally so that the different groups get information tailored specifically to them and their needs.

3. Just-in-Time Training

Thanks to cloud-based technology, we're on the brink of a revolution in just-in-time training. This will **enable people to use their laptops, cell phones and tablet computers as a tool to receive training precisely when they need it.** In the current training model used by many organizations, people receive training for a variety of things before they actually need the expertise, thus taking the people away from their jobs and costing the company a lot of money. With just-in-time training, companies can keep people in the field without specific training. Then, when the person needs a certain skill set to complete a job or do a task, he or she can receive the training for it in real time via cloud-based technology.

For example, suppose your company specializes in selling and repairing commercial HVAC units. There are a number of different units your repair staff needs to know how to fix. But rather than taking your people out of work and putting them in a multiday training course, you keep them in the field without the specific training. When they have to repair a unit they are not familiar with, they can receive the training on how to fix it in real time via their mobile device as they are servicing the unit.

Now, let's take this trend a step further. Suppose the commercial HVAC repairperson is on site, servicing something he's never worked on before. He uses the just-in-time training module via his tablet computer. But he's still confused about a certain aspect of the repair. All he has to do is touch the "help" icon on his screen and it immediately connects him to a master trainer live on screen. But instead of just telling the master trainer what the problem is, the repairperson can put on a headband that has a camera on the front, much like the headbands with a light on the front that people use for camping or car repair. By wearing this digital, high-resolution camera that interfaces with the mobile device, the repairperson can show the master trainer exactly what the issue is. Now that master trainer can see what the repairperson sees and can tell him exactly what to do. The master trainer can lead the repairperson through the repair as if he were standing right there with the repairperson. Talk about a dramatic savings and increase in efficiency.

Create Your Company's Future

Many business leaders will say they are too busy to address any of these trends. But if you don't address them, who will? Ultimately, whoever drives these trends within an organization will be perceived as a significant contributor to the enterprise – someone worth keeping, and someone with high value in the marketplace. When that someone is you, you can drive results to the bottom line and be a key contributor to the organization's success.