How the CIO Can Drive Success for the Connected Enterprise

IT doesn't just drive the modern business, it is the business. As well as power mission critical business processes and support employee productivity, the servers, networks, clouds and applications at the heart of the 21st century organization also enable the digital services that are so vital to business growth and customer engagement. Sitting at the apex of the IT tree, the Chief Information Officer (CIO) is therefore a key figure, with the power to make or break the connected enterprise. But expectations of IT have never been greater; technology teams are stretched and sometimes CIOs are not given the ear of the board, making the dream of the connected enterprise a fantasy more than a reality.

To empower the modern, customer-centric, digitally enabled enterprise, CIOs need to prove that IT is an essential value driver. Doing so will require them to refocus efforts on IT operations, which sit at the heart of the organization. By driving automation and preventing outages across legacy and modern digital systems, unified IT operations management and IT monitoring can help CIOs plot a more strategic path to drive business success for the connected enterprise.

> " CIOs are focused on building out and operating new digital platforms & new digital operating models reshaping the competitive landscape. "

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Reshaping the role of CIO

The CIO has always had a somewhat complicated relationship with the rest of the business. Unlike more established C-level roles in charge of finance, marketing, and operations, it has evolved significantly over recent years as opportunities around digital transformation have emerged. Where once the CIO focused largely on IT infrastructure and services, increasingly today it's about "building out and operating the new digital platforms and new digital operating models that are reshaping the competitive landscape," according to research firm Everest Group.

As a result, the CIO role has become more strategic, and important to business growth and customer engagement. In 2018, Gartner reported that 84% of CIOs at digital-centric enterprises had expanded their role to focus mainly on innovation and transformation. By 2020, the analyst claims, all IT roles "will require an intermediate level of proficiency in business acumen."

As such, the CIO is absolutely central to the connected enterprise: a model characterized by innovation, customer-centricity, operational efficiency and agility, and an empowered workforce. However, despite the growing importance of the CIO, those in the hot seat can sometimes find themselves battling against more established C-suite execs; they may spend much of their time in reactive mode, supporting requests from elsewhere in the business, rather than leading from the front strategically. This can in turn reduce their value and leadership credentials, in a vicious cycle.

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Performance anxieties

Perhaps even more importantly, IT performance can also undermine CIO efforts to drive digital leadership and growth. Modern enterprises are a complex blend of heterogeneous systems: legacy mainframe and database technologies might sit alongside mobile applications, cloud-based platforms and even Internet of Things (IoT) projects. Siloed data and IT teams create gaps in awareness that allow problems to escalate quickly to outages. The fact that many parts of IT operations today may be handled by multiple providers adds even more complexity to the mix.

Combine these challenges with the ever-present risks introduced by human error, and the business-criticality of many customer-facing IT services, and you have a recipe for disaster. A report from the Uptime Institute claims the number of publicly reported outages jumped 37% from 2017 to 2018 in the US, while another calculates that around a third of these cost more than $250,000, with many exceeding $1 million.

CIOs therefore need more effective ways to manage IT complexity, mitigate the risks posed by legacy platforms, reduce outages and enable more strategic use of their teams.

How IT operations management can help

When used effectively, IT monitoring and IT operations management can reduce downtime, enhancing customer and employee satisfaction and brand value while minimizing the potential impact of outages on the bottom line. However, in too many organizations it isn't just one tool — it is several.

This tool sprawl has reached epic proportions. In fact, one report from 451 Research claims that a quarter of companies use between 15 and 31 tools to gain visibility into applications, infrastructure and cloud environments, demonstrating how organizations are turning to multiple technologies to do the same job. Such products may have been bought with the best intentions in mind, but ultimately only serve to perpetuate existing IT siloes and poor decision making, as well as legacy, reactive approaches to managing IT performance. Many may be set-up to measure the wrong metrics — availability rather than performance and UX — which will do no good in helping the CIO become more strategic.

Consolidating power

By consolidating onto a single, unified IT operations management platform, CIOs can start to break down IT siloes and add value. By monitoring proactively for issues via a single pane of glass and tackling any problems before they've had a chance to evolve into full-blown IT outages with clarity, they can demonstrate to the board the value IT brings to the business. IT monitoring and operations management will also help them to get their message across by providing the right metrics — both in terms of preventing IT outages and in providing visibility into the systems and services adding most value, such as uptime.

Just as importantly, by automating the monitoring and remediation of IT operations issues, CIOs can free up highly skilled team members from firefighting outages to focus on more strategic, high value tasks. These employees are likely to be more motivated to engage with these workplace opportunities, thus improving productivity and staff retention at a time of critical industry-wide IT skills shortages.

By shining a light on IT monitoring and operations, CIOs and their teams benefit from the kind of insight that can support more strategic planning. If a particular piece of the network, a storage solution or cloud server is consistently failing, for example, it may need to be replaced or upgraded in the short term, and substituted in the longer term by an alternative that adds more value to the business. IT monitoring and operations management both accelerates and informs this process.

The CIO role may have been around for over a decade, but in many organizations it's still treated as something of a novelty and individuals have to work hard to overcome boardroom misconceptions. With more effective IT monitoring and IT operations management they have a golden opportunity to demonstrate just how much strategic value the role can bring, in driving innovation, growth and a customer-centric business model built on digital agility.

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