

IT ZONE

By Alexander J. Hanna

Is Your Business Serious About Information Technology?

There are hardly any areas untouched by Information Technology (IT), it's everywhere. However, in The Bahamas, only a few businesses are taking advantage of IT. Just having computers does not mean that you are enhancing your business. There are several ways to determine how serious a business is about the use of IT to enhance their business. This article discusses some of these reasons why businesses in The Bahamas are not serious about IT. Please note that most of this writing, if not all, refers to "mid to big size" businesses in The Bahamas.

Executive Management Team

I strongly believe that if a business does not have an IT executive on their Executive Management Team, then they are not serious about IT. And I don't mean a manager, but a Vice President of IT/Chief Technology Officer (CTO) or equivalent. Many businesses do not have an IT executive on their executive management team, but rather they have the IT division reporting to the Financial or Operations head. I know most of you are probably fuming after reading this because the hat probably fits. You may have the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) or the Chief Operation Officer (COO) who is responsible for the IT division. This CFO/COO reports directly to the President/CEO of the business. In my experience this is a big mistake for several reasons. Businesses must employ an IT executive, who would report directly to the President of the business. This is the primary indicator to check whether a business is serious about IT.

Invariably, with the CFO/COO responsible for IT, it never gets its prominent place and is only seen as part of the fixture in the business and not a business tool as it should be. A CFO is more inclined towards financial issues. The CFO will think about IT only when it serves his purpose, and even then, I question their competence in the ever-changing IT industry. However, with a Vice President of IT on the executive team, his sole purpose is to develop a plan as to how IT could be applied to the business to meet the business objectives. With a VP of IT, it then has its own budget and in some cases the various business units must work along with the VP of IT to formulate their own business unit IT budgets. Additionally, the VP of IT reports directly to the President which now gives IT its voice. IT is not easy as some people think. A CFO can never keep up with IT because of the focus and experience required in this dynamic industry. If you don't believe me, check out some of the businesses here and talk to their President/CEO on their experiences.

Budget

Next on my list is a company's IT budget. It would help understand better if you refer to my position in previous paragraphs regarding an IT person on the executive team. This is the person who is responsible for formulating IT budgets. Without a good VP of IT, a business will always be shooting in the dark when trying to prepare their IT budget. Additionally, it is important to note that a good IT strategy will dictate a proper IT budget.

Training

Then there is training of IT personnel, which is more often than not, taken for granted. I see this all the time. Not only is IT always changing, you require IT personnel with experience. If the company does not allocate budget for IT training of staffs, it means the company is not serious about its business. Put simple, IT personnel require constant training. My advice to businesses is to train, train and when you are tired, then train some more.

Often I hear complaints from IT professionals that their employer wants them to support solutions, but that they have not provided the means for training. Not only do I hear these complaints, I see it myself. Inexperienced personnel trying to support or implement complicated solutions is only a recipe for failure. What amazes me the most is how much is expected from these persons without the proper training and experience. Like I always say, "this is not your home PC".

IT Business Plan

Then there is the IT business plan. Do you notice a trend here? This goes back to having a VP of IT on your executive team. There is no way you can have a proper IT plan for your business without a VP of IT on your executive team. Only at this level one can understand what the business requirements are in order to formulate an IT strategy for the business. As you can see, this is not a job for the CFO to put an IT business plan and strategy together.

Government Ministries

Although Government Ministries are of a different business structure, it is important to note that an IT executive is still extremely important. Many readers would be wondering what I am talking about? As you are aware, Government Ministries do not have an executive management team (as such), but they have Permanent Secretaries. While most of them have a computer department, the manager of this department is not at the executive/senior level. Then it should come as no surprise as to why technology is not maximized within Government Ministries. Even though the Government has an Information Technology division under the Ministry of Finance, I would humbly suggest that it is extremely difficult if not impossible for this division under Finance to properly service all of the ministries.

If the government wants to efficiently deliver services to the public, then the government must first install an executive/senior IT officer with the autonomy to plan and execute a strategic IT plan within each ministry. Without this, we can only expect more of the same regarding service delivery. Yes, you will have a solution or two every once in a while, but you will not be able to fully take advantage of the technology available in order to provide efficient government services.

Conclusion

I trust that you now have a better appreciation as to why a VP of IT is required if you are serious about IT in your business. However, it is important to hire a competent person for this position. Far too often, businesses tend to put someone in this role who has no formal IT training, but who has simply been with the company for a long time. This is a big mistake. This sort of person just does not have what it takes to fulfill this role in this era of technology. I find that this is quite the norm in The Bahamas. This will explain why many businesses in The Bahamas IT' strategy (if you can call it that) are so disjointed.



A business must ensure that they hire an experienced VP of IT who believes in fostering career growth for IT personnel. Don't hire a VP of IT who wants to do the work themselves and is afraid of sharing knowledge with his IT staff. This type of person will only hold back the growth of your business.

There is a lot more that I can write on this matter, but as you know, time and space is always limited.

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