



Three Reasons to Move from Transactional to Strategic with Your IT Partner



Nathan Austin brings 20 years of IT business management experience to his current position as Vice President

of Business Development. After co-founding **Mytech Partners** in 2000, he has focused on helping clients achieve 4x more value and productivity from their IT investments through implementing a proven IT strategy that is aligned with client goals. Mytech serves the small and medium business community as a Managed Services, Security and Consulting Provider and strives to “Make IT Easy” for the respective clients they serve. Additionally, he is the author of the upcoming book: *“Capitalism & Community: a partnership for a better tomorrow”*.

By **Nathan Austin**

Technology is about more than the equipment you own – especially in a highly-regulated field like medicine. In these days of high-speed Internet and sophisticated threats, your organization needs more than a transactional mindset, where you simply buy computers yourself and only seek an IT vendor when something breaks. The transactional, reactionary approach leaves you open to both malicious and accidental disasters, but a more strategic relationship can mitigate these risks.

As an owner of a managed services and consulting firm for over 20 years, I’ve learned a few lessons about the difference between a transactional relationship vs. a strategic one when it comes to an IT partner – and why the strategic approach offers far more security, productivity and peace of mind.

Finding the Right Fit

The success of any relationship is based on quality communication, a shared belief system and being there through good & tough times — and the relationship you build with your IT partner is no different. Every managed services provider (MSP) operates a little differently based on how they have chosen to structure their business and core competencies. There really isn’t a “best” IT partner out there: it’s more important that you find the best **fit** for your organization.



As you weigh your IT options, identify what you need and watch for whether or not an IT organization can address those needs. The medical field requires a high degree of education and specialization, and the same is true for (most) IT organizations. You and your IT partner each have respective areas of expertise, so working together requires practicing both confidence AND humility. Be willing to do your part – and find an IT Partner that is willing to do theirs – so you can make informed technology investments to achieve your short- and long-term organizational goals.

There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all IT partner. Just like in medicine, the technology industry offers thousands of solutions, and no organization can be an expert in all of them. Each MSP needs to narrow their focus for product selection, tool set, training, professional development and more. This means that each potential IT partner will have slightly different ways to solve a problem, each of which may or may not be a good fit. The solution is not necessarily right or wrong, just one way or another, and your organization may need to show flexibility in your preferences: Dell vs. Lenovo computers and Cisco vs. HP switches are two common examples. Aligning with your IT partner's solution set helps them deploy their greatest competency and corresponding ability – and that means better service for you.

Your organization must be able to hold your IT partner accountable to results, and taking their recommendations will set you both up for success. However, it's important to consider all of their recommendations, so you can be certain they've done everything they can. When you follow the advice of your IT partner, you are in a much better position to hold them accountable when something breaks or goes wrong — because with technology, something always does. If your IT partner owns the problem and the solution, that's an IT partner worth keeping.

Owning Risk

The ownership of risk is an executive-level responsibility. This may seem obvious, but many organizations neglect to include an executive-level decision maker in IT discussions — thereby exposing the organization to significant liability. Often, this happens because the executive doesn't feel comfortable in an IT conversation: they aren't tech experts, and the acronyms are all unfamiliar. Conversely, the IT personnel are often inexperienced with business-based conversations. You must bridge this gap between the business and IT sides if you want to get the most out of your tech decisions. The right IT partner won't leave you to fend for yourself; they'll help you navigate these critical conversations.

Your owner of organizational risk is the only one with the information and tools available to make an informed decision, especially when HIPAA compliance is involved. The most expensive solution might not address the top priority, and the least expensive option is very rarely the best choice — because when security is concerned, should it really go to the lowest bidder? Your tech-focused team members are experienced in their field, but they often don't know the organization's highest-level needs and risks. Even though technology plays a considerable role in security, finding the right solution at the right price that effectively mitigates your organization's risk is not truly an IT decision.

Getting all the necessary information to the right decision maker is no small task, but it's absolutely critical if you want to mitigate high-level security risks. Of course, executives often have limited time available, so optimizing those meetings is important as well. Not everyone needs to participate in EVERY technology conversation, and that's where an effective strategic IT plan comes into play.

Plan for the Future

Long-term planning may seem cumbersome, but the risk it mitigates is well worth your time! Technology is not perfect, and you'll still experience outages even with the best

safeguards in place, but the differences are still astonishing. When you build and execute an effective strategic IT roadmap, you will experience fewer outages, and return to operations faster when they do occur. If your organization is tired of unexpected downtime and costs, you are ready to engage an IT Partner who can help you with a long-term strategic IT roadmap.

Building a plan with regular check-ins will help both you and your IT partner. It empowers your IT partner to provide a budget and execute your plan whenever you aren't in the room, minimizing the day-to-day burden on your executives' time. And because some transitions (cloud solutions, for example) take multiple years due to equipment lifecycles, building a long-term plan allows for smooth transitions while maximizing the return on your existing investment. This strategic IT roadmap will also help you navigate conversations about performance, connectivity, security, and disaster recovery.

A strategic IT roadmap has numerous benefits, but the main one is ensuring alignment. When everyone involved knows your needs and goals, you can be confident that your priorities are aligned with and help you achieve your organizational goals of increased growth, security, team member satisfaction and bottom line performance.

Invest in Your Success

Finding the right IT partner, getting the right people in the room to manage risk and building a strategic IT roadmap are the top three steps we recommend to transform your IT relationship from transactional to strategic. Not every MSP will be able to deliver proactive, strategic guidance to your organization — and it's important to note that an MSP that has matured to that operational level will require a larger investment of time and money.

The benefit, however, is far more significant: less operational downtime, faster recovery, improved scalability, greater budget visibility and dramatically reduced organizational risk. ■

