IT in the
New Normal

How To Adjust Your IT Strategy Midstream and Come Out Ahead

COVID-19 Advice from Leapfrog Services, Inc.

IT in the New Normal

No one expected to be reevaluating the role IT plays in their organization partway through this year. Technology is now front and center following the COVID-19 outbreak. Teleworking requirements, customer needs and preferences, service delivery and speeds, performance benchmarks, and more have changed for many organizations.

To thrive for the rest of 2020 and in the coming years, embrace the changes. Focus on improving your IT environment's ability to be nimble and ubiquitious – with an emphasis on revenue generation, cutting waste, and transforming digitally. By integrating more efficient solutions, tools, and processes, you can both streamline your IT operations and take advantage of new opportunities.

How To Adjust Your IT Strategy Midstream and Come Out Ahead.

In this paper, you will gain insight on how to:

Adjusting your IT strategy post-COVID-19 does not mean pausing or standing still. It means making proactive changes to move forward quickly and prosper.

Shore up your ability to be productive and secure

IT Strategy: Integrate online collaboration platforms and security protocols so "working remotely" becomes synonymous with "working."

Your team needs to be able to do their work from wherever they're located and do it securely. Jumping headfirst into teleworking during the beginning phases of COVID-19 probably revealed where your online collaboration processes needed improvement. Now that you've probably worked out most of the kinks in your current processes, evaluate if there could be a more efficient and productive overall approach. You may have decided to keep part of your workforce working remotely on a permanent basis and there's a chance your entire workforce will need to work remotely again.

Security gaps don't reveal themselves in the same way as collaboration problems. You need to look for them proactively. Security protocols may have been an afterthought in the rush to get everyone working but now is the time to rethink. Expect people to make mistakes and take shortcuts, so build in security processes that reduce the likelihood of both.

1. Fine-tune your collaboration processes
- Choose communication and collaboration platforms that can integrate fully with your current IT environment so users can access corporate resources while collaborating.
- Automate archives of collaborative sessions (including video conferences), communications, and chats.
- Listen to feedback from employees — many want more (and more regular) communications to feel connected with coworkers and collaborative approaches that feel more inclusive or less hierarchical.

2. Review and refine your remote access processes
- Aim for your remote-working processes to mirror your processes at the office.
- Ensure users have seamless access to the corporate resources they need.
- Evaluate current user permissions, login efficiency, and VPN capacity to see if they are in line with your requirements.
- See Ensuring Employees Can Access What They Need.

3. Implement improved security for remote access and be vigilant with backups
- Secure remote access by using single sign-on (SSO) together with multi-factor authentication (MFA).
- Protect sensitive data and documents with strict permissions or added layers of security.
- Ensure your team can monitor your IT environment effectively — it's more complex when more employees are connecting remotely and more bad actors are taking advantage of the situation.
- Back up on a rigorous schedule and require employees to back up home computers if they're used for company business.

To become ransomware-ready:
- Keep backups offline and isolated from your networks. Ransomware will encrypt backups along with your primary files.
- Continue to require security awareness training, even during unusual times. Most breaches originate from email.
- Patch and update all computers, and choose antivirus software that includes zero-day threat detection.
- See Is Your Organization Ransomware-Ready?

Align your IT budget with revenue generation

IT Strategy: Spend IT dollars strategically by cutting inefficiencies and using the strengths of IT staff and partners for your competitive advantage.

Your revenue-generating opportunities may have changed since COVID-19. Staying healthy has become a key priority in the new normal, which can impact the way your business operates internally and how your customers want to interact with you. Amid the changes are opportunities to use IT in new and better ways — from the infrastructure and solutions you use to run your business to innovations that can put you ahead of the curve.

When cutting waste from your IT budget, look to reallocating IT funds strategically between managing your environment and leveraging innovation to win new business. This is an ideal time to streamline, systematize, and invent.

1. Evaluate your current IT environment, activities, and new priorities
- Have your IT team identify anything in your current environment that might fail soon and deal with it immediately.
- Determine which IT activities are strategic (revenue generating) and non-strategic (IT management).
- Gather leadership to identify, clarify, and prioritize your post-COVID-19 revenue opportunities for the next one to three years.

2. Update your IT budget based on updated revenue opportunities
- Include your internal and outsourced IT teams in this process so they can provide input and help define what's possible.
- Look for ways to redirect dollars toward IT spending that will generate business value.
- Determine if your organization can take advantage of efficiencies offered by automation, machine learning, and artificial intelligence (AI) to help eliminate repetitive tasks.

3. Configure IT roles based on team knowledge and skill sets
- Assign your internal team strategic IT activities, such as developing touchless customer interactions and internal workflow monitoring.
- Assign your outsourced IT team non-strategic activities, such as cloud migration, disaster recovery (DR), backups, and infrastructure management.
- Use vendors to complete tactical assignments.
- Consider engaging consultants and freelancers if they can simplify rather than complicate IT activities.

4. Update your IT roadmap now and again in six months
- Update your written plan to reflect your current opportunities, roles, and budget priorities.
- Include an IT business transformation category that covers digital transformation and any business initiatives that involve IT.
- Consider including plans for potential disruptions, such as another wave of the pandemic.
- Revisit your roadmap more frequently during this dynamic business climate.

When cutting costs, consider:
- Postponing non-essential new IT projects and operations, such as tasks aimed at improving IT at the margins
- Combining multiple current IT initiatives that may be siloed across the company
- Reserving cash by moving from CapEx to OpEx when possible

Fast-track your digital transformation agenda

IT Strategy: Strive to achieve digital excellence quickly — business is happening online now, so the faster you move, the more competitive you'll be.

While the vast majority of businesses had planned to transform digitally in the near future, those timelines have shrunk dramatically. The massive digital leap forward spurred by COVID-19 will not retreat — organizations that transform the fastest will be able to better serve customers sooner and gain market share. Keep in mind you can move some computing back on premises later if circumstances change.

To move fast, it's best to bring in experts to help plan and execute your digital agenda. They have experience with cloud migration and integration and can fast track your agenda. They are also invaluable advisers for transforming proprietary systems.

1. Review opportunities to decouple from on-premises solutions and infrastructure
- Collaborate with your IT team to inventory your current applications, data, and workloads.
- Look to apply tools built for a distributed workforce to as much of your IT environment as possible. If you're already using these tools, refine them and fill any gaps.
- Evaluate available technologies to determine which ones can interface with your existing environment.
- Lean heavily on standardization and automation, including possibly moving to a virtual desktop interface (VDI) to simplify your IT delivery and management model.

2. Create a cloud migration plan that follows a logical order
(cloud migration checklist)
- Start with corporate resources you can digitize now – in particular, the resources your employees need for their daily work. File storage, customer relationship management (CRM), and payroll processing are examples.
- Next, move workloads that migrate relatively easily and are handled more efficiently in the cloud, such as email, backups, DR, and phone.
- From there, move onto the apps and processes that take more preparation — on-premises legacy line-of-business (LOB) apps or enterprise resource planning (ERP) processes, for example.

3. Find ways to automate for improved efficiency and user experience
- Identify and reduce or eliminate manual activities to reduce the likelihood of workflow disruptions.
- Move performance metrics from those requiring an employee's physical presence to those that track through defined goals.
- Collect and analyze customer interaction data so you can continually improve your tactics.

Make it easier to do business with you:
- Digitize as many customer interactions as possible, including implementing digital transaction platforms for customers to review, sign, and pay online.
- Develop or improve your customer web portal and mobile apps, including integrating self-help platforms and chat for support.
- Make it possible for customers to interact with you at any time of day.

Ensure everything aligns and works together

IT Strategy: Optimize your IT environment so it's fully integrated, bug-free, and supports your growth and business continuity.

Adjust to the post-COVID-19 environment quickly but also smartly. Plan from the start to use technologies that will all work together in a seamless IT environment. Include how you will continually monitor and manage your environment and build in security at every level.

To ensure alignment, engage with your IT management team from the beginning. They can guide you toward solutions and operating models to meet your business goals and help you make decisions about balancing productivity, cost, and risk as you continue to build revenue. They will also help steer you away from complexities related to having too many vendors or bolt-on solutions that make your environment more difficult to manage. Your goal is to optimize your operations for the remote, new-normal world.

Here are some industry-specific recommendations for midstream technology changes you can integrate to better serve customers and enable business growth:

1. Healthcare industry
Focus on implementing or refining your telemedicine processes. Organizations that integrate telemedicine solutions effectively have already benefited and will continue to benefit for them — they're efficient for both practitioners and patients. Make sure the solutions you choose are scalable, auditable, and secure. You can transition between telemedicine and in-person services as needed.

2. Real estate companies
Look at adding devices and tools for touchless interactions and managing all of your properties from a central location. Installing sensors and monitors for surveillance (including audits of maintenance and sanitation activities), updating property access control, automating parking payments, and allowing payments from mobile apps.

3. Financial services companies.
Look at integrating data analytics, secure cloud platforms, chatbots, artificial intelligence (and machine learning), or blockchain into your systems. Your choices will depend on where your organization is in the process of digital transformation — be as bold as possible while ensuring any new integrated solutions and tools must control for fraud and meet compliance standards.

> **Better IT is good for business**
> This is an opportunity to increase performance and value. Strategic, business-driven IT environments are standardized across locations, meet your required service levels, and align specific IT costs to their strategic value.

A blueprint for coming out ahead

Responding quickly and strategically to the changes brought on by COVID-19 will set you up for success.

In this business environment, your IT is your springboard. Transform your IT environment into one that's nimble and ubiquitious so all of your stakeholders can securely access what they need from wherever they are. By shoring up your ability to be productive and secure, aligning your IT budget with revenue generation, fast tracking your digital transformation, and ensuring everything works together, you can successfully adjust midstream and thrive in the new normal.

There will be new challenges – and opportunities– in the future as well. Your technology will be ready to meet them.

Leapfrog Services is a managed IT service provider that's been helping organizations meet their business goals since 1998. As our clients' IT partner, we design and operate outsourced solutions that adhere to the highest standards and deliver consistent, secure levels of service. We believe that organizations do best when they leverage the IT expertise and capacity they need from a partner who's committed to integrity, service, and people.

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