

“Almost-enterprise” Applications: CIO Threat or Opportunity?

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Almost-enterprise applications are tempting, especially to business managers who can leapfrog IT roadblocks with the swipe of a credit card. Should CIOs stop them now? Or should they lead the way?

The cloud revolution is spawning a new generation of productivity, collaboration and mobile/social connectivity applications that some managers see as quick-and-easy solutions to some of their biggest problems. But many CIOs recognize that these types of applications may solve a short-term business problem only to create a long-term IT headache. Should CIOs clamp down before it's too late? Or should they welcome these almost-enterprise apps into the fold?

Here's the debate:

Point

Clamp down now.

Park critical customer and company data in a cloud? No way. Everything stays within the company firewall – that's the policy.

And guess who'll be left with the mess.

Those start-ups promise the world, but where are they when our user has a problem? We're on the hook to provide support even when the application is outside our shop. Internet speed and cloud scale only make matters worse.

Been there. Done that.

Weren't you around during the 90s? Desktop apps sprouted everywhere. Soon managers were complaining that they wanted them integrated into our systems. There's no end to their demands.

This is a disaster waiting to happen.

Dozens of vendors. Hundreds of contracts. Thousands of helpline calls. Why buy multiple applications when one would do the job with less complexity, lower cost and better service contracts?

Counter-Point

Lead the way.

It's going to happen *regardless* of the policy. CIOs can help mitigate security problems by providing standards and services that support a hybrid environment where IT assets are housed inside – and outside – company walls.

It may be messy, but there are benefits, too.

You can sidestep some problems by helping business managers select applications from reliable vendors. Plus, it will get them off your back to provide in-house solutions.

Think managers are demanding? Listen to their customers.

Customers expect a constant stream of new products and services that are available anytime, anywhere. These applications offer smart solutions that can be up and running within days or weeks.

That's why managers need you to join them, not fight them.

Get involved now so you'll be in a better position to save the company money and headaches by negotiating better contracts, pricing and service.

This isn't what I signed up for.

My job is to steward the company's most critical information and help the business be more efficient.

Maybe it's time for a new job description.

That job isn't going away. But this is a good opportunity to expand your role from steward to strategist.

Our Take



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Like it or not, the role of the CIO is expanding from data steward to solution strategist.

CIOs have the opportunity to guide the business to adopt a risk-intelligent approach to new technologies. The core business activities continue to need the standardized, integrated and reliable solutions that are typically provided by traditional, on-premise enterprise applications. But around the edge of the core business, managers who want to improve productivity, collaboration and information accessibility have often been left to their own devices. It's no wonder they are attracted to cloud and almost-enterprise solutions. Fortunately, these less critical but competitively important "edge" activities can be effective candidates for innovation and experimentation.

Forward-thinking CIOs are using the emergence of new technologies to expand their role from corporate steward to strategic leader. Here are some ways to step up your game:

- **Look in the mirror.** Do the business managers see you as a collaborator who helps them solve their biggest problems? Or as a roadblock to getting the job done? Talk to the business leaders to understand their concerns. Then do the research to present them with viable solutions that will work for the entire enterprise.
- **Reposition IT's core capabilities.** For many organizations, IT is evolving into a hybrid world where technology assets are housed in multiple locations – within the organization and with external providers. Become a strategic guide through this hybrid world by repositioning IT as the go-to provider of enterprise-critical solutions for integration, information management and security.
- **Step up as a leader.** Become the go-to person for innovative technology solutions. Help leadership see fresh possibilities for using technology to help create a positive disruption in your industry. Gain their confidence as someone who is risk-smart and technologically progressive.

Many CIOs we meet say they would like to play a larger strategic role in shaping their company's future. The emergence of almost-enterprise applications may present that opportunity..

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- The potential benefits of almost-enterprise solutions outweigh the risks.
- The potential risks of almost-enterprise solutions outweigh the benefits.