

The Spring 2013 Technology Executive Forum Series

Hosted by MDI Group



Alignment between IT and the Business

April 17 :: Dallas
Crescent Hotel – Downtown

April 18 :: Phoenix
Capital Grille – Biltmore

April 24 :: Atlanta
McKendrick's – Perimeter

April 25 :: Greenville
Hilton Greenville

MDI Group recently hosted its Spring 2013 Technology Executive Forum Series with events that took place April 17 – 25, 2013 in four of the markets in which it operates: Atlanta, Dallas, Greenville and Phoenix. The discussion topic was “Cross Functional Teams – Alignment between IT and the Business,” and technology executives representing 40 organizations shared their perspective and insight on this critical topic in today’s IT industry.

MDI Group’s executive forums are invitation-only networking events, and no vendor or sponsor representatives are allowed to attend. The focus is to provide an environment that is conducive to sharing ideas and best practices for what’s next in technology. The following summarizes the discussion among attendees from all four forum events.

Discussion Topics and Summary

Is your IT organization aligned with the business?

Many IT executives agree that the initial response to the question of alignment can vary depending on the type of business being evaluated. For service companies, there is usually a bigger gap between IT and the business. For product companies, IT and the business are typically more closely aligned. The rapid evolution of technology is inspiring savvy business leaders to shift their valuation of IT departments from cost centers to strategic mechanisms of growth and profitability, which requires



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alignment between cross-functional teams. Most technology leaders recognize that alignment is about relationships—with meetings and effective communication between IT and the business.

What are some of the challenges that prevent alignment? Some say that IT has a PR problem when it comes to it's perceived by the business. Why? Most IT groups are viewed simply as a service desk and are often treated as efficient order takers. Another challenge that can stand in the way of alignment is the fact that the business may not always see the big picture when evaluating their needs. IT often has the big picture in view, but convincing the business to look outside its own needs can be difficult. Finally, if IT doesn't understand the business it supports, alignment won't happen.

How do you facilitate alignment?

If IT is going to be seen as a strategic partner and “earn a seat at the table” with strategic business decision makers, it must clearly define and develop its value proposition within the organization. One of the foundational elements to consider is the fact that the issue is not just about technology—it is about the business with technology as an enabler. At the core of the IT industry, the information is really about the business, and the technology is what supports the information for business purposes.

IT must help the business understand how leveraging technology can support and deliver critical business results, making technology a competitive edge for the business. Whether it's mobile apps to facilitate customer interactions or sophisticated software programs to streamline operational processes, innovative technologies—and the people who create technology solutions—are now the best competitive advantages a growing company can develop. IT must listen to the business' needs and be proactive with innovation and translating technology to meet its needs while balancing the impact to the bottom line.

Most attendees agree that alignment relies heavily on communication. In order to have cross-functional teams with effective communication, there needs to be a common language between IT and the business. IT executives recognize the significance of finding a way to normalize the language that everyone uses. In fact, some even hire BAs to act as a liaison and help facilitate communication between IT and the business. IT professionals must be able to sell the value of IT to the business using business language.

Speaking the business' language and understanding what the business is trying to accomplish go hand in hand. IT must understand the business and its perspective to address questions like: What are the business' pain points, and what is the root cause? Armed with that knowledge, IT will be able to identify and develop the right solutions. In order to gain an understanding of the business, several technology executives agree that IT should be exposed to the sales process, seeing the end product and sales transactions, which would help them see the impact of their work.

Once IT understands the business process, it can more effectively partner with the business to be involved with strategic planning and governance discussions. This will change the relationship between

IT and the business, positioning IT as more of an ally. IT leaders agree that it is very important for IT to be viewed as part of the operational functions of the business for alignment to occur.

Overall, IT and the business must think in broader terms when it comes to successes—a win isn't just for IT or the business exclusively—a win benefits the entire organization.

ABOUT MDI GROUP

MDI Group helps IT organizations tackle “what’s next” in terms of emerging technology projects and challenging business objectives by providing a full range of information technology staffing services and contingent workforce solutions that supplement in-house resources. Services range from contract and contract-to-hire placements to project teams and end-to-end processes that maximize the engagement and management of contract labor. Since 1988, MDI Group has successfully placed more than 10,000 technology consultants with mid-sized to Fortune 500 organizations across the country. MDI Group has offices in Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, Dallas, Fort Worth, Greenville and Phoenix.

The Executive Forum Series consists of invitation-only roundtable events hosted in metropolitan markets throughout the United States for IT executives and thought leaders. For more information, visit www.mdigroup.com.

Special thanks to the distinguished leaders from MDI Group’s client organizations that agreed to participate in the Spring 2013 Forum:

Aerexchange	Medtronic
AFL	Metro PCS
American Airlines	Nautilus Insurance Group
American Equipment Company	PBMS Group/Genius Avenue Inc.
D&W Finepack	Pegasus Solutions
Dignity Health	Reinvention/Aeigis Media
Easton Bell Sports	Rent-A-Center
EDMC	Republic Services
Eldorado	Rhino Internet Solutions
Empire Southwest	Sealed Air
Excentus	SITA
Farr Systems	Source Direct
Fluor	SunTrust Bank
Georgia-Pacific LLC	Symantec
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