How managed services is driving digital transformation

Content

How managed services is driving digital transformation

'Digital transformation'. It is one of the most high-profile business buzz phrases of the moment, and rightly so. Transformation, after all, is what keeps businesses competitive in a fast-moving world. No organisation can afford to be left behind as the world around it evolves.

However, it is also a hugely broad and complex concept, and one that can therefore be complex and costly to implement and optimise. There is no singular approach to digital transformation, no uniform technology shopping list that you can put together to get started.

Nevertheless, some guiding principles do stand up in almost all digital transformation contexts – and one of them is that IT managed services are a powerful, if not essential, driver of such projects.

In this insight guide, we'll explore why – and how – IT managed services could help your organisation achieve lasting digital transformation.

What do we mean by digital transformation?

There are multiple different definitions of digital transformation, so let's try to keep things simple. At its core, digital transformation involves replacing manual processes with digital ones, generally via software applications and possibly the deployment of specialist hardware as well.

In turn, this digital technology enables a range of benefits, including:

- The reallocation of human resource away from repetitive or routine tasks, so staff can dedicate more time and energy to long-term strategy and creativity.

- The consolidation and unification of disparate business processes and departments, so that they can share information more easily.
- The automation of processes that are cumbersome, repetitive or even impossible to carry out manually, streamlining operations and driving cost savings.

- The analysis and harnessing of vast quantities of business data, generating tangible insights on anything from streamlining a process to enhancing a product's design.

From 'keeping the lights on' to active innovation

To appreciate why IT managed services can play such a fundamental role in driving and maintaining digital transformation, it is important to understand a fundamental shift in the role of enterprise IT which is enabled by the processes above.

Once upon a time, enterprise IT was more like a business support function than anything else. That isn't to say that it wasn't important – it was fundamental to business operations. However, the core function of both the technology itself and the staff managing it was to maintain the status quo. To keep normal operations running smoothly. To keep the lights on.

In an era of digital transformation, all that has changed. Now, IT is not merely the enabler of business operations – it is the enabler of business innovation. Through digital transformation programmes, organisations can capture previously untapped data and turn it into tangible insights and action. They can develop new products and services. They can create new models of collaboration and creativity between employees, and with external parties.

All of this sounds hugely positive – and it is – but it also means that the burden on the IT department has dramatically grown.

Where IT managed services come in is in reducing that burden, and therefore in enabling digital transformation to take place without interfering with your business operations. There are several key benefits to consider.

Benefit 1
Manage complexity

As outlined above, digital transformation shifts IT from having a fairly narrow remit of 'keeping the lights on' to a far more complicated and multifaceted set of responsibilities, including uncovering new opportunities for improvement, analysing data and deriving insights from it, introducing new technologies such as artificial intelligence and augmented reality, driving business innovation and creativity.

Ultimately, this means that the typical business exploring digital transformation is engaging with a number of different technology vendors and partners, and the responsibility for managing all of those relationships – and the information they generate – has landed on the shoulders of the existing in-house IT function.

The right IT managed services provider, will be a specialist in integrating and managing all of these diverse mobbing parts, freeing up the in-house team to reap the benefits and focus on more strategic activities.

Benefit 2
Achieve cost-effective infrastructure

The costs involved in digital transformation projects vary enormously according to the scope of the project in question. Sometimes it is simply a case of purchasing new licenses for software to be deployed via the cloud; sometimes it involves multi-faceted investment in specialist devices, hardware and software. If data is to be effectively harnessed then some kind of analytics platform is probably in order too, possibly with artificial intelligence elements.

Then there is middleware to consider, so as to properly integrated multiple different moving parts and achieve truly comprehensive digital transformation. The costs for doing all this can quickly stack up.

Managed services providers, however, can advise on how organisations can best embark on digital transformation without making unnecessary upfront investments – whether in terms of money, or simply the time taken to research all of the different options.

Benefit 3
Optimise the user experience

Managed services providers act as a buffer between problems and faults which occur across your organisation's infrastructure, and your end users, whether those users are internal or external to your organisation. Imagine a customer using a newly-created video chat service which keeps breaking up because of a poor network connection. Or a group of colleagues attempting to run a collaborative virtual meeting who find that one of the participants is unable to log in.

Identifying, isolating and remediating the fault as rapidly as possible is essential to deliver optimal user experience and a genuine return on investment for the digital transformation project in the first place – but in an advanced communications system, this may be easier said than done. A managed services provider with the right specialist tools, skills and experience can proactively monitor all aspects of a digital transformation technology suite and ensure that everything is performing at the best levels at all time.

Benefit 4
Looking to the cloud

Cloud infrastructures, whether public, private or a hybrid mixture of the two, are among the biggest drivers of digital transformation. By enabling organisations to deploy new applications and process large volumes of data in the most scalable, agile and flexible way, they allow even small businesses to take advantage of sophisticated productivity and collaboration tools and harness the power of business intelligence.

Managed services providers can enable organisations to take advantage of these benefits in a sustainable way, by providing a single point of management and contact for looking after the vast array of new applications and platforms which may be delivered via the cloud. It doesn't matter how small your organisation is or how specialist the sector it operates in – the right managed services provider will be able to deliver the streamlining and simplicity you need.

Choosing a managed services provide

So, having established that a managed services provider could be central to your organisation maximising the potential of digital transformation, how do you go about choosing the best partner?

Here are some key elements to bear in mind.

- Diverse skills and experience: Digital transformation is, as we have established, a multifaceted concept. Technological innovations such as the IoT, big data, augmented reality and artificial intelligence are all part of the picture, and require diverse skillsets and experience. Even if you do not intend to deploy the very latest trends immediately, it is worth trying to future-proof your approach when choosing a managed services provider. Choosing a company with a narrow band of skills or experience can mean that you have to look elsewhere when you are interested in exploring new technologies.

- Security and compliance: Knowledge and understanding of the data security and regulatory compliance challenges your organisation will face as it embraces digital transformation is non-negotiable. The cyber threat and compliance landscapes are more complex and fast-moving now than ever before, and as digital transformation projects typically increase the amount of data your organisation needs to process, as well as potentially shifting its location to the cloud, it is important to take a proactive approach to protecting that data. A good managed services provider will help you to accelerate your digital transformation whilst simultaneously carefully managing your risk profile.

- **Accountability and measurement:** Like any third party, your IT managed services provider should be able to set clear targets and SLAs, keep tight track of its performance and tie that performance to your business aims and objectives. Whilst a purely reactive managed services provider – one which responds to incidents and problems as they occur – can be a cost-effective option, it is almost always a better investment in the long term to seek a partner that can identify priorities and potential roadblocks in the future, and help you work around them.

- **Partnership:** The best managed services providers are more than suppliers – they are business partners. Remember that digital transformation has shifted enterprise IT from operational support to driver of business innovation. With that in mind, your managed services provider should be utterly aligned to your business goals and objectives, and able to take a long-term, strategic approach to supporting and enabling your vision.

Next steps?

Interested in understanding how we can help you increase uptime, whilst lowering operating costs? Find out with a free cloud migration assessment.

Take advantage of a 15% discount if you sign up for a multi-year service agreement.

GET IN TOUCH

APH
Glencroft House
Vale Road
Heaton Mersey
Stockport
SK4 3QR

t: +44 (0)161 442 2603
e: hello@aph.solutions
www.aph.solutions