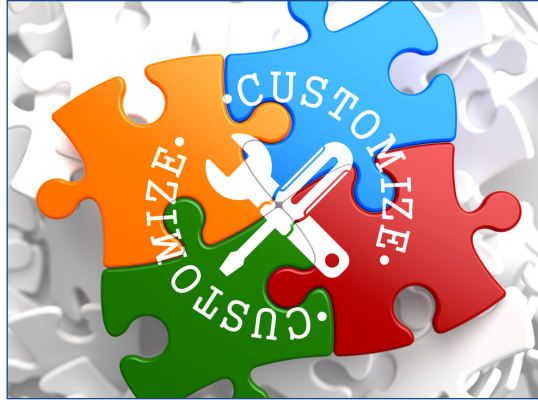


# IT Operations Evolution:

## IT Priorities Shift Toward Customized Solutions



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How is IT evolving, and how are businesses adapting to the fast pace at which the world is moving? This white paper highlights trends uncovered by a recent IDG Research survey that explores which technologies are top of mind for businesses today, how these organizations are increasingly turning to strategic IT partners to create the custom technology solutions that meet their business demands, and what they look for when choosing partners to help fulfill their IT vision.

### Top-of-Mind Tech

**Backup:** In a world of increasing complexity, ensuring availability of critical information is a top priority, so it's no surprise that backup and recovery is rated the top technology project area by 42% of the IT directors, CIOs, and CTOs who responded to the survey. In our 24/7 world the data that powers business websites and e-commerce must always be accessible.

**Mobility:** Further, the impact of mobility and the proliferation of application technology that drives many businesses to take a mobile-first approach to app development is reflected by the 40% of respondents who put application and mobile app development as top priorities for the coming year.

**Security:** With reports of data leaks and privacy violations making the news almost daily, security continues to be top of mind as well, with 36% of respondents reporting that it is their top focus for this year. Many organizations struggle with the ever-changing threat landscape and seek guidance for developing the most effective network

security strategies.

**Cloud:** This September brought the end of support (EOS) for Windows Server 2003 (WS2003), and many businesses are looking at server migration strategies that include cloud and virtualization, with 34% and 28%, respectively, naming these as top tech projects.

**Big Data:** Rounding out the list of top tech focus areas is big data analytics. Thirty percent of respondents say the insights gained from advanced analytics platforms will factor into their plans for the coming year. This will only increase in the future as businesses of all kinds begin to analyze new data streams including social media sentiment, connected equipment, industry and trade trends, and clickstreams from their own websites to better understand what matters to customers and other users in an ever-more-connected world.

### Beyond COTS – Customized Solutions and Strategic Partners

Increasing IT complexity impacts not only the technology areas of interest, but the way technology solutions are crafted. In particular, businesses are finding that commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) software and hardware do not have the features or flexibility needed to support business functions, as they are often unable to integrate new features being demanded by users, new data sources, and the rapidly changing profile of mobile devices and users. Nearly 40% of respondents say they currently have a challenge that COTS software just can't solve.

IT has evolved over the past few decades from an essentially "all custom" approach where businesses often wrote their own bookkeeping and payroll software on proprietary mainframes to a mostly COTS approach, where canned applications with some customizing here and there running on commodity hardware often ruled the IT shop. Now, the consumerization of IT has placed pressure on businesses to deliver consumer-grade apps for business functions. For that reason, application development is the top tech-

nology area where respondents seek a strategic IT partner to help craft custom solutions.

But it's not only software that's customizable today. Thanks to advances in virtualization and converged architecture that enable "software-defined" servers, storage, and networking, customization can now take three forms: software customization, hardware customization, or a combination of both depending on what is most efficient for the function at hand.

For many of the same reasons, the cloud is becoming a larger part of every business's IT portfolio. Whether workloads are migrating to the cloud or augmenting existing IT resources, getting all the moving pieces of public cloud and private/hybrid cloud to work together is important for many respondents—26% and 22%, respectively—perhaps in part driven by WS2003 EOS.

As business processes become more mobile, supporting secure anywhere access becomes ever-more important. With many users now using two, three, or more devices to access corporate data, the need for secure access becomes critical. The increasing complexity of VPN and firewall support for a vanishing network perimeter is evident by the nearly 25% of respondents seeking help with the overwhelming task of securing their networks and their users.

Another area where strategic IT partners are being asked to help is backup and recovery. Today's almost ubiquitous network bandwidth has enabled cloud-based backup and recovery solutions that offer off-site, replicated copies of virtually any data the business wishes to secure. However, tuning backup and recovery systems to take advantage of de-duplication and compression technologies often requires help from experienced partners.

In addition, respondents cite some very specific—and probably familiar—reasons they're turning to strategic IT partners. Some notable mentions are:

- A municipal utility forced to abide by custom, unique rules established by the city that increased users' desk load three times, increased paperwork, and created the need for meetings to resolve problems due to COTS not meeting their needs
- Solving security, privacy, and flexibility challenges while integrating with current systems

- Extending the useful life of legacy analytics applications while replacement strategy is planned

Supporting the transformation to application-centric business processes, many IT professionals cite a lack of industry-specific applications and solutions as a key driver to seek outside help. A common thread is the ability to share requirements with a partner in plain language, and have it implemented in a technology solution with little additional work on the respondents' part.

### What Makes a Good Partner?

The survey asked respondents to indicate the most important aspects they look for when choosing strategic IT partners. The number one response—with 96% rating it as critical or very important—is reliability and trustworthiness.

Along with an untarnished reputation, businesses seek partners who understand and value the client relationship, evidenced by the second top-rated criteria for partner selection: customer service, cited by 84% of respondents as critical or very important. Businesses want partners that act as an extension of their own IT department, and with a growing number of entrants into the market, strategic IT partners must work to keep the customers they have, or risk losing them in big numbers. Custom solutions go hand in hand with customer service—it's all about meeting client needs.

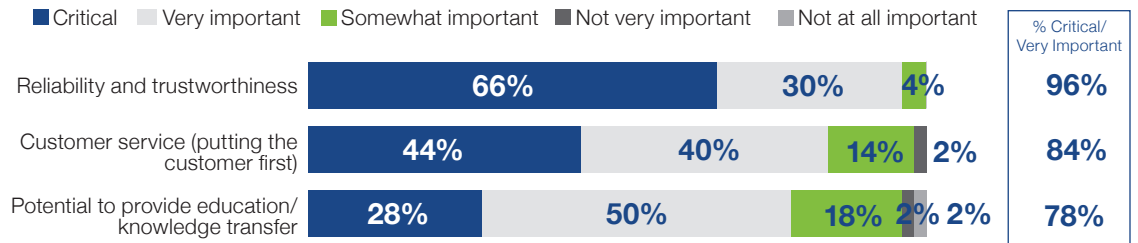
Most businesses are keen to learn from the partnership and hope to acquire the skills to be more independent in the future, shown by the 78% of respondents who indicate that the potential to provide education or knowledge transfer is also important when selecting a strategic IT partner.

Education and knowledge sharing are also linked to creative problem solving, which 76% of respondents consider an important attribute. When custom solutions are commonplace and new challenges are coming from every quarter, a fresh perspective and an adaptable approach to problem solving can go a long way.

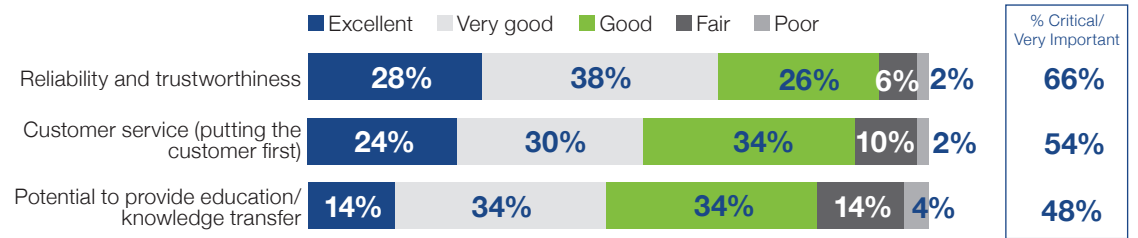
### Importance vs. Performance: Where the Gaps Are

Surprisingly, the relationship between how important partner attributes are rated compared with how well the business believes current IT providers perform in those areas is sadly lacking,

### Important criteria when choosing strategic IT partners



### Performance rating of current IT providers on important criteria



Source: IDG Research, October 2015

and the more important the attribute is to the business, the worse current providers are at rising to the occasion.

For three of the top four attributes—reliability and trustworthiness, potential to provide education, and creative problem solving ability—the percentage of respondents rating partners as excellent or very good is consistently 30% lower than the number ranking those attributes as very important or critical. For the fourth—customer service—the gap is 40%. Whereas 96% rate customer service as a critical or very important factor, a mere 46% rate the service they currently receive from IT partners as excellent or very good.

What does this mean? In large part today, organizations that utilize IT partners are settling for what they have, rather than seeking the most qualified, creative, and customer-focused IT partner. Many companies appear to be unwilling or unable to change partners even though having better skilled partners could make the difference between profit and loss.

Inertia is a powerful force—and companies must look beyond “just good enough” when evaluating future IT plans, goals, and partners. The current state of affairs is a bit grim: Although seven out of 10 organizations would find it highly valuable to have an IT partner that could reliably create or invent IT solutions to solve their complex IT chal-

lenges, only 30% have a current IT partner that they feel is highly capable of meeting that need.

### Conclusion

It is clear that IT continues to become more complex, driven by industry megatrends like big data, mobility, the cloud, and security challenges. It is this increasing complexity and the need for specialized solutions that can be accessed by Web, mobile, and desktop that drives many organizations to seek expert partners to ensure they keep a competitive edge.

WEI is a strategic value-added IT partner that is continually looking for the most innovative ways to address the unique IT challenges of every organization it serves—from global corporations to midsize companies. The company invests time, energy, and technology know-how into building long-term customer relationships. The way WEI sees it, every engagement is an opportunity to measurably improve business outcomes by delivering leading-edge technology solutions that other IT vendors simply can't or aren't willing to offer. ■

When you would like to discover how your business can leverage WEI's expertise to solve your pressing IT challenges, speed time to value, and improve employee productivity, visit [www.WEI.com](http://www.WEI.com).