Beginning of new year great time to create your company's IT strategy

With the advent of a new year, many companies are faced with a familiar challenge: What projects will we act on and why? It is important, especially for 2013, for companies to focus on IT refreshes and initiatives.

Reasons for focusing on IT in 2013 range broadly. According to a recent article by Gartner, over 150 new form factors (types of computers) will be released in 2013, due to the expected deployments of Windows 8. Also, the cloud trend continues, and many companies are embracing pieces of cloud computing, if not large-scale deployments of cloud technologies.

One may wonder how to assess all the options and devise/develop a realistic plan. It's simpler than one might think. Always start with the organization's business goals. Some IT departments believe that the goals should drive the organization, but others believe the organization should drive the IT department. In any instance, it's important to

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ensure that IT and Business are "in sync" and that everyone agrees on the major goals for 2013.

Here are some examples of steps you can take to determine the year's forthcoming IT needs:

• Clearly define business goals, and ensure that your IT initiatives will support them. For example, if you have a strong push from the business to enable remote access to files, your IT department might consider upgrading its VPN capabilities or invest in cloud synchronization.

• Take a look at all of your year-to-year licensing and support agreements. Which ones are coming due? Do you need to renew all of them? Are some of them set to "auto-renew"? If so, check

carefully: auto-renewals typically require 30 to 60 days advance notice to cancel them.

• Run expense reports from last year related to IT. Where was the most spending? If it was in hardware repair for workstations, then you may need to replace a portion of your workstation fleet this year.

Once you have defined what you want to accomplish, then it is important to set some targets for achieving those objectives. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, but a simple format to follow is to break down the year in to quarters, and then back-fill that structure with your initiatives, depending upon the timing of the business' needs.

After your targets are set, meet again with your IT or business leaders and ensure that these objectives and timelines are acceptable. And remember — be flexible. Very few businesses and IT departments are free of moving targets. It is important to time things properly,

and to meet target dates, but it is also very important to be as flexible as possible, so that if a target moves you can re-adjust your plan accordingly, with as little pain as possible.

As the year progresses, revisit your strategic plan. A good rule of thumb is to revisit it quarterly, and ensure that you are still on track. This also gives one the opportunity to report back on the past quarter's accomplishments, which will help reinforce your department's effectiveness.

Following a few simple steps can help get the IT department in a more proactive mode for the remainder of the year, and allow for those involved to have a single point of reference so that everyone stays on track.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Calendar

Jan. 18: The 2013 Small Business Council Program Launch Luncheon takes place at the Memphis Marriott East, 5795 Poplar Ave. Registration begins at 11 a.m. The speaker is Martin Regalia, senior vice president of Economic and Tax Policy and chief economist for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Jan. 22: Memphis Rotary Club hosts its regular meeting at the University Club at noon. This week's guest speaker is Dwan Gilliom, director of Public Works for the city of Memphis.

Jan. 23: Talk Shoppe holds its regular meeting at the Better Business Bureau office, 3693 Tyndale, at 9 a.m. This week's guest is Dave Bensman of Bensman Computer Repair.

Jan. 23: Associated General Contractors of West Tennessee will conduct an OSHA 10-Hour Construction Safety & Health Course from 6:45 a.m.-12:15 p.m. at the AGC training facility in the Clark Tower at 5100 Poplar Ave. The cost is $95 for members and $125 for non-members. Contact Nick Nanney at (901) 481-0126 or agctnsafetymphs@comcast.net for more information.

Jan. 25: The University of Memphis

Journalism Department will host a "Watchdog Workshop" from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. in Meeman Hall. The event continues on the following day. The cost for the first day's session is $25 for students and $55 for professionals.

Jan. 29: Memphis Rotary Club hosts its regular meeting at the university Club at noon. This week's guest speaker is Ryan Dalton of Operation Broken Silence.

Jan. 29: West Memphis Chamber of Commerce presents "Ask the Experts" from 5-6:30 p.m. at Southland Park Gaming and Racing Starting Gate Event Center. Tickets are $15.

Jan. 30: Big Fish Creative hosts Health Care Social Media Meet Up at its offices in Minglewood Hall from 8-9 a.m. For more information, vist www.gobigfishgo.com.

Jan. 30: U.S. Learning Inc. and the Don Hutson Organization hosts the Prosperity Series Memphis Seminar at the Botanic Gardens. For more information, visit www.ProsperitySeriesMemphis.info.

Jan. 31: Autism Society of the Mid-South presents a support group meeting on estate planning titled, "What will happen to your special needs

children when you are no longer here?" with guest speaker Mark Loftis, financial adviser with New England Securities Strategic Financial Partners from 6:30-7:30 p.m. ar Baptist Rehab Germantown, 2120 Exeter Road.

Feb. 5: Memphis Rotary Club hosts its regular meeting at the University Club at noon. This week's guest speaker is Troy Keeping, president of Southland Park Gaming and Racing.

Feb. 12: Methodist South Hospital, 1300 Wesley Drive, hosts attorney Alan Crone speaking on the topic "Estate Planning & Wills" from 5:30-6:30 p.m. Visit www.whitehavenkiwanis.org or email whitehavenkiwanis@gmail.com for more information.

Feb. 12: Memphis Rotary Club hosts its regular meeting at the University Club at noon. This week's guest speaker is Memphis Mayor A C Wharton.

Feb. 19: Memphis Rotary Club hosts its regular meeting at the University Club at noon. This week's guest speaker is Ronald Gray, medical director of the Tennessee Medical Foundation.

Feb. 22: The Metropolitan Memphis Hotel & Lodging Association and Pinkowski & Co. will host the 14th annual Lodging Industry Update from

7:30-10:30 a.m. at the Hilton Memphis Hotel. Among the presenters will be Jeff Higley, editorial director of HotelNewsNow.com, citing information from Smith Travel Research. The cost is $25 for members and $35 for guests. For reservations, call (901) 752-9902 or email Memphishla@earthlink.net.

Feb. 26: Memphis Rotary Club hosts its regular meeting at the University Club at noon. This week's guest speaker is John Fowlkes, U.S. District Court judge.

March 16: Memphis Area Minority Contractors Association and City of Memphis Renaissance Business Center hosts the Residential/Small Commercial Contractor License Exam Prep at 555 Beale St. from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Seating is limited. Contact Stephanie Alexander at (901) 526-9300 for reservations.

Submit announcements for our Upcoming Events calendar, at least two weeks prior to publication date, via e-mail to memphisnewsdesk@bizjournals.com or send to: Memphis News Desk, 80 Monroe Ave., Suite 600, Memphis, TN 38103. Submission does not guarantee publication.