

# IT teams 'critical to business'

THE increasingly important role of the IT department in the workplace has been flagged up in a new survey.

A study of 750 SMEs in the UK by office technology specialist Altodigital has revealed that IT is behind only the sales team in importance for growing the business and providing a competitive edge. A fifth of all those surveyed called their IT department a 'life saver'.

Jason Connolly, pictured below, director at local firm Next Generation IT, said the dynamics of the IT support team within an organisation had changed in recent years.

'There has always been a love-hate relationship between businesses and their "geeky" IT departments,' he said. 'In the past IT staff were treated with a fair degree of suspicion and contempt by the business teams. IT staff in return would come across as aloof and unhelpful. But recently that dynamic has changed with leaner, customer-focused IT support teams, often much more integrated into a business's operations.'

He said that IT teams had evolved to be leaner, service-focused, reactive and very much part of the business rather than pursuing inwardly-focused technical agendas.

'In the current, more-competitive business environment, IT teams need to earn their keep by enabling the business to work as efficiently as possible, incorporating technologies to drive the business forward. But more than this, IT needs to provide value by enabling businesses to gain competitive advantage utilising technology to improve customer service and responsiveness, high levels of security, more accurate decision-making from analytics and reporting, plus finding innovative ways to connect and communicate with potential and current clients, including personalised web portals and custom-built apps.'

The make-up of IT teams has changed too, with many firms carrying a small, business-focused IT team and partnering with third party providers to buy in additional technical expertise, or entirely outsourcing IT to concentrate on their core business.

'Good IT is so critical to business success in the current environment and having the right IT team composed of passionate, hard-working and knowledgeable staff is crucial,' said Mr Connolly. 'Technology moves so quickly it is a challenge for businesses to keep up. Key to this is the humble IT team, composed of the best staff from inside and outside the organisation all working together to drive the business forward.'

The Altodigital research also revealed that the five key qualities of an IT manager are seen as efficiency, broad knowledge base, commitment, approachability and patience.

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Next Generation IT's Jason Connolly

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