



Trends in Information Technology Usage for Religious Institutes

Most Catholic organizations aren't run like Starbucks, McDonald's or IBM, but all businesses, including Catholic 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, have a few things in common. Each has various audiences with their own demands and expectations that must be satisfied, and each business needs to be as efficient and effective as possible to fulfill its mission and vision. Today, all of these businesses also rely on information technology (IT) to help achieve these goals.

It's important to think of IT as a strategic objective to help your organization achieve its overall goals, not just an expense you need to manage. IT should help you provide excellent customer service; deliver business value by bringing in more revenue than expense; help you know and manage risks and improve business processes. IT should enable your organization to complete business and technology projects, helping to meet the organization's goals.

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What is Your Current State of IT Usage?

Every organization has different IT challenges. Maybe you're thinking about aged hardware or software that might need to be updated or replaced. You may have disparate, disconnected systems that don't talk to each other. Do you have expensive maintenance contracts, or inefficient and ineffective processes? There is always something on people's IT to do list.

There are also enabling technologies such as applications, cloud, mobile, social and security technologies. In the past, organizations didn't want to spend money on these technologies, but they are now commonplace. It's not important for every organization to hit every item that comes along the IT spectrum, but to think of IT as evolution as opposed to revolution, and pursue a continuous improvement philosophy.

IT as the Fifth Utility

Up until recently, electricity, gas, telephone and water were the utilities you "turned on" when you moved into a new building or home. IT is becoming — and many would argue already is — our fifth utility. There is a jack near your desk or on your wall you plug your computer into - who really cares what's behind where you plug in, you just know you want to plug in and get service.

We want to be able to plug in and take advantage of industry trends for the benefit of our stakeholders, but what are the industry trends that are driving digital transformation?

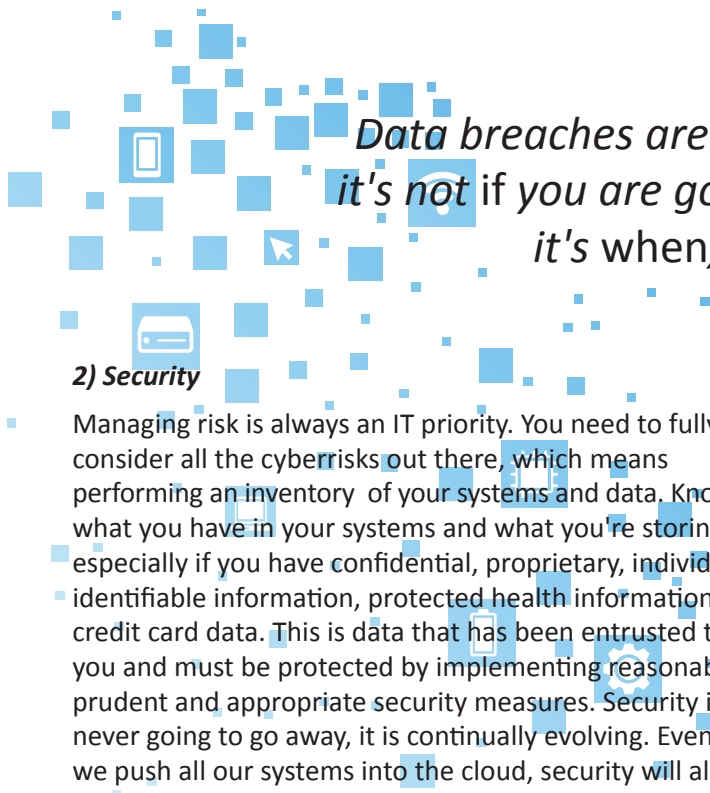
There are things that have reached a tipping point where they are readily available to businesses: Mobile smartphones; Internet of Things; Adaptive Security; Social Networking; Artificial Intelligence; Big Data; Cloud Processing; Workflow Automation. An organization can now affordably apply these trends to achieve benefits. You may have been thinking about a few or all of these trends as they apply to your organization.

The Big Three IT Trends for Catholic Organizations

1) Cloud Computing and Processing

Think of cloud processing as something not on your premises. Cloud computing has the capability to turn uneven capital expenditures, every three or five year cycle, into an operating expense where you don't have to own any assets. Think of it as a subscription, a predictable expense you pay monthly based on usage, like water or electricity. If you use 10 gallons of water, you pay for 10 gallons of water, if you use 10 CPU cycles, you pay for that amount. When you move equipment off your premises and take advantage of someone else's data center, you're gaining economies of scale, which will help you become more nimble and agile to meet the needs, demands and expectations of your stakeholders. You should consider not only moving IT operations offsite; but, if your software development is a security burden, you should shift as much of that as you can to others as well. This does not mean you should get rid of your IT department; there will always be something you consider to be the "core" when you think of operations and security that you will want to keep on your premises. Keep your core solid and keep the door open to receive other services from outside providers — it's all about turning fixed expenses into variable expenses where possible.

Keep in mind when you are considering the move to cloud processing, to calculate the cost of dated equipment and processes. Review agreements against current market place rates. Review all of your current agreements with your IT-related utilities: wired and wireless phone service, internet access cable TV and maintenance agreements for your older equipment and phone systems. If you have been with a provider for a long period of time—longer than 24 months—you may be paying a "loyalty" penalty to some extent. Calculate your costs and once you know what they are, you can make comparisons. ►►



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2) Security

Managing risk is always an IT priority. You need to fully consider all the cyber risks out there, which means performing an inventory of your systems and data. Know what you have in your systems and what you're storing, especially if you have confidential, proprietary, individually identifiable information, protected health information or credit card data. This is data that has been entrusted to you and must be protected by implementing reasonable, prudent and appropriate security measures. Security is never going to go away, it is continually evolving. Even if we push all our systems into the cloud, security will always be the top priority. With cloud processing, instead of managing the infrastructure in our offices, we manage the vendors who manage the infrastructure for us. Trust, but verify cloud providers to make sure they are reputable. Once you choose a provider, you will need to trust them to a large degree, but you have to continually verify they are doing what you need and protecting your systems and information.

Data breaches are inevitable. Unfortunately, it's not *if* you are going to have a data breach, it's *when*, so be prepared. Review your insurance policies to determine what kind of cyber liability coverage you have should a data breach occur. If and when a data breach does hit, it has to be investigated and may require forensics, credit monitoring, remediation and legal defense. All those expenses add up, so if your current commercial general liability (CGL) policy doesn't cover these things to the extent you need, a separate cyber liability policy may be in order.

When it comes to security, it begins with people, process and technology. If you haven't done so already, start a security awareness program to educate your employees and continually inform them about cybersecurity risks. Provide them with the tools they need to recognize the risks and how to stay away from them. Teach your employees, members and stakeholders everyone is a target.

Think about replacing any aged hardware and software you may have. Anything older than five years probably cannot be fully patched and updated, and you may be better off just pitching it and starting over. Things are changing fast and the bad guys know what old equipment can and can't do and they will look to exploit vulnerabilities. Patch all of your systems regularly and consider private cloud hosting where you can find a vendor who can do all this for you, so you don't have to perform regular upgrades.

3) Social Networking

Social networking has the ability to improve the services we provide to our stakeholders. First, it is a massive instant communication medium, even more so than email. With email, you send it and it sits in the recipient's inbox. Social media generally pops up immediately on the recipient's social media feeds. There are over 200 different social media outlets, but when you think about getting started with social media, focus on LinkedIn and Facebook. At Christian Brothers Services, we look at LinkedIn as being best at connecting to the decision-makers at organizations, and we use Facebook to connect with the individual participants in our health and retirement plans - we want to get important information to those people as well, but they aren't going to connect to us on a professional level.

Envision Your Future State

Think about how you can turn IT in your organization into a strategic asset instead of purely an expense. IT is changing rapidly; you can no longer just put in IT systems and change them every three to five years - you need to put them on a shorter evolution cycle. Adopt a continuous improvement philosophy to take advantage of benefits that come with IT. Add a new feature on a regular basis, that way, you won't need to add a hundred new features every three years. ☀

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