

# THE KEY TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

ALIGNING TOP-LEVEL DECISION-MAKING AND IT IS A MUST



**XLerate Efficiently and Safely.  
Expect More from Aligned IT.**



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## INTRODUCTION

There was a time when a business' focus was obvious. A shipping business focused on shipping. A retail business focused on selling products. A publishing business focused on publishing. These things seemed far removed from the fairly basic technology they needed to run their business at a successful level. Get some phones and some desk-top computers and add the right software and you're done. The IT department provided a service, making sure a company's tech ran smoothly, but nothing beyond that was necessary. Well, not anymore.

These days the success of a business relies more and more on their adoption of technology. With the advent of cloud and mobile technology and the Internet of Things (IoT) changing the way in which businesses engage with the consumer, IT plays a much bigger role in a business' success. Every single business out there, small or large, is in the IT game, no matter what their primary business focus is. This means the alignment between a business' IT leadership and business leadership needs to be strong.

## WHAT IT-BUSINESS ALIGNMENT MEANS

The alignment of IT and business goals means the ability to strengthen the growth of your business and empower your people to run with that growth, improving customer relations and making business processes more efficient. To accomplish this, businesses need IT strategies that are in line with business objectives and this requires business leaders to look at IT as more than just a support department and an expense.



### Aligned IT Department

Business / Technology Steering		
Department Alignment		
Infrastructure	Business Systems	Security
Helpdesk	Line of Business	Security Operations Center
Projects	HR	Projects
Tools	Sales	Tools
	Marketing	Compliance Planning
	Finance	Compliance Analysts

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Since every single aspect of business and personal life is now connected to a device, a business simply cannot survive in today's world without adequate IT to help them establish a cloud and mobile presence. As [inc.com](http://inc.com) reports, consumers want businesses to look and feel like the apps they use on a daily basis and employees need apps that support mobility.

Not only that, but the [millennial generation](#) is the largest generation in the workforce today and they have expectations in terms of technology. These are the people who grew up with technology. They are tech-savvy and tech-driven and they expect technology to be accommodated in the workplace. An incredible [93% of millennials](#) say that a business having up-to-date technology is a major factor in choosing a place to work. And [42% of millennials](#) say they would quit their job if technology in their place of work was not adequate. This can have a significant effect on a company's ability to grow and thrive when you consider that [Gallup](#) estimates that millennial turnover costs the U.S. economy \$30.5 billion per year.

## BENEFITS TO IT-BUSINESS ALIGNMENT

When IT-business alignment is achieved, the business can experience a host of benefits in today's technological world. These benefits affect all aspects of a business, from the front line to the back end. Benefits include:

- 80% reduction in IT issues, allowing staff to be 7-10% more efficient in their work.
- Certainty that the technology used by a business is actually what the business needs. This helps a business avoid overpaying for technology for the sake of having the technology.
- Increased agility in the marketplace, making it possible for a business to change direction as needed to stay ahead of the competition.
- Technological transformations that are strategic and aligned with business objectives.
- An improved customer experience, which is critical in today's world. Today, consumers want a connection with the companies they do business with. They want value, good and personalized customer service, consistency, and the opportunity to interact with real people.
- Better collaboration as the departmental silos come down, which creates a company-wide team atmosphere.
- More effective marketing, which comes when technology is fully on board with business objectives.
- Faster time-to-market with products, which cuts down on lost revenues and improves market position, sales, and customer satisfaction.



Having said this, obtaining an IT-business alignment is a struggle for many businesses. There are obstacles that stand in the way, obstacles that can mean the difference between forward thinking and momentum and getting left behind.

## OBSTACLES TO IT-BUSINESS ALIGNMENT

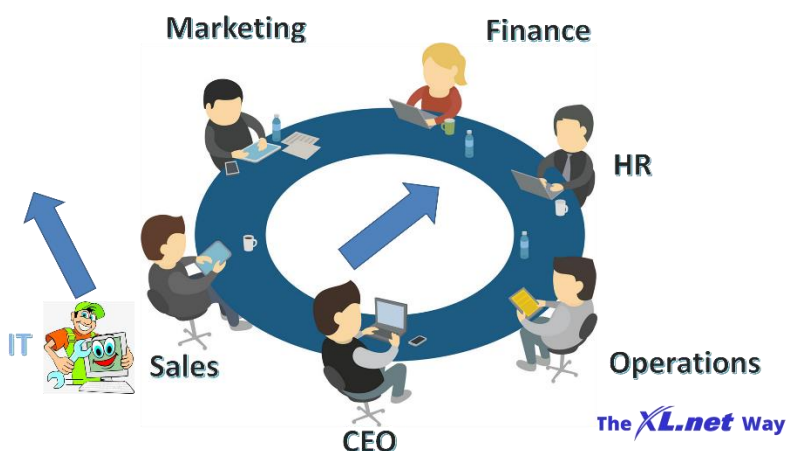
There are a number of obstacles to aligning IT and business and ensuring they are on the same page. These obstacles have their roots in the pre-IT and early-IT days, when IT was nothing more than a department that ensured a business' computers and software ran properly. Now, IT has a much more important role to play, but this is often overlooked for the following reasons.



**Lack of the business' understanding of technology:** It is common for businesses today to not have a good grasp on what IT is capable of and what it can do for them. There are many opportunities that exist with today's technology and these opportunities keep appearing, changing, and growing at a phenomenal rate. Without IT backing business on a strategic level, businesses won't be able to use today's technology effectively enough to stay ahead of their competition.

**Lack of IT's understanding of business:** The key thing for IT to understand is not what a business is trying to do or how to do it, but *why* the business wants to do it. The what and how will follow from the why, and approaching IT with business processes in mind will allow IT to drive business growth and generate revenues.

**Not including IT in strategic planning:** Who is generally at the table when strategic planning takes place? The CEO, the CFO, the COO, HR, and Sales and Marketing. However, IT is generally left out.



The problem is that as business objectives and strategies change, technology has to change with it. If IT is not aware of these changes and the direction the business is headed in, they

cannot plan accordingly. This makes IT more of a liability than an asset at a time when they should be the business' greatest asset.

As an example, consider the business objective of increasing customer engagement and improving the customer experience. In today's technological environment, a company needs to be using social media and have a mobile presence. Sales and Marketing might know that competitors are taking the lead with customer engagement and create goals to increase their own. IT might know that chatbots are the leading edge, that competitors have been using chatbots and machine learning to up their customer service game. If they were at the table, they could present that option and help the company come up with a solid tech strategy. If they aren't at the table, the company might go in a technologically wrong direction.

**Unwillingness to budget adequately:** It is not uncommon for businesses to fail to adequately budget for their technology needs. This is in part due to excluding IT from strategic planning. It's also often due to the fact that C-level executives do not have a firm grasp on the value of the technology and they are reluctant to invest in new technology when they have already invested so much in their old technology.

**Lack of human buy-in:** For technology to be as effective as possible, people have to use it. This can be a real challenge when it means changing how things are done. Push-back from employees who don't accept change in processes and procedures can be a huge challenge.

With these obstacles in mind, it is important for every business that is aligning IT with business objectives to come up with a strategy that will streamline this process and make it not only viable, but successful.

## STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE IT-BUSINESS ALIGNMENT

Aligning IT and business goals is not out of reach. Every company is capable of ensuring this alignment takes place, as long as they embrace the new and highly critical role technology has in business today. Unfortunately, we have a long way to go to achieve this, considering a mere [11% of IT leaders](#) feel as though IT is truly part of the business. With that in mind, here are some strategies you can implement to bring IT into alignment with your business operations and goals.



**Include IT in business discussions:** The absolute first thing you need to do to ensure an IT-business alignment is bring everyone to the table. That means that the head of IT should sit in on all business strategy meetings, with no exceptions. This person will have valuable input on how technology can help the business improve operations and achieve the goals that have been set out.

**Set a common goal/definition for IT-business alignment:** IT might have a very different idea of what an alignment means compared to what leadership on the business side thinks alignment is. It's critical for successful alignment that the two groups come together to determine what that IT-business alignment looks like in their company.

**Attend IT strategy meetings:** Senior management and C-level executives must develop an understanding of what technology can do for the business. This means that high-level executive should sit in on quarterly IT meetings to gain a thorough understanding of the company's current technological capabilities and where they can be used to support the business objectives of the organization.

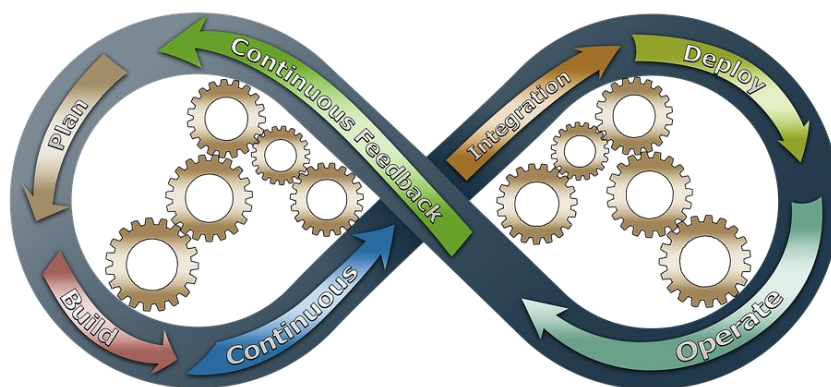
**Get employee buy-in:** Every single employee has to be on board with the adoption and use of new technology. This means there has to be an effective change management process to support top-down acceptance and a thorough training plan needs to be implemented to ensure that employees know how to use new tech in every aspect of their day-to-day work.

**Cross the silos:** Bring the IT leader into the leadership team. These people should be important advisors and IT brokers, rather than simply making sure the company's tech is installed and running smoothly. At the same time, make it possible for business leaders and upper management to have a say in the direction IT is taking, particularly when it comes to the inhouse development or use of third-party apps.



## HOW IT-BUSINESS ALIGNMENT WORKS

Companies like XL.net offer services to fully align business objectives with technology. XL works to XRate small- to medium-sized businesses (SMBs) with 15 to 250 employees to achieve this



alignment through their Technology Alignment Plan, which helps SMBs:

- Increase sales
- Stay ahead of the competition in the war for talent
- Reduce labor costs
- Create an exit plan
- And more...

XL's approach to creating a Technology Alignment Plan has them working closely with their clients to learn about the business and construct a best-fit plan. The strategy consists of the following steps:

- Onsite visit to conduct one-on-one interviews with people on the leadership team
- Analysis of the interview results to create a Technology Alignment Plan
- Onsite visit, which includes a 1-hour meeting to deliver and discuss the individualized Technology Alignment Plan

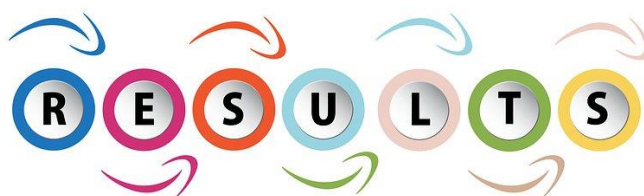
## Technology Alignment Plan – Labor % of Product Reduction

1-YEAR PLAN		QUARTERLY PLAN		ISSUES LIST
<b>Future Date:</b> 12/31/2018 <b>Critical Success Metric:</b> Labor %/Product = 22% <b>Balance Metric:</b> Average Daily Sales > \$65K <b>Measurables:</b> 0.85 Reactive/Employee, Security Level 2, 80% Engagement		<b>Future Date:</b> 9/30/2018 <b>Critical Success Metric:</b> Labor %/Product = 23% <b>Balance Metric:</b> Average Daily Sales > \$62K <b>Measurables:</b> 0.95 Reactive/Employee, Security Level 1, 70% Engagement		1. Information Security Policy including ITAR Section
Goals for the Year		PROJECTS		2. Marketing Automation of Leads Database
1.	Agreed CRM Roadmap	1.	Technology Alignment Assessment	3. Onsite Desktop Support
2.	10%+ Reduction in Technology Issues	2.	Security Level Assessment	4. License Management
3.	10%+ Improvement in Engagement	3.	Engagement Assessment	5. Desktop Refresh Policy
4.	Security Level 2	4.	CRM Requirements Documentation	6. CRM – how jobs move through pipeline
		5.	Access Control with J Drive Data	7. New workstation process
				8. Paging System Issues every 2 months
				9. Internet/Phones go out ever 4 months
				10. Training on communicating with international clients
				11. Manual email archiving
				12. Training on how to use tools (ACT, JobBoss, etc.)
				13. Phone router single point of failure
				14. Battery backup for servers

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Each business is provided with a Technology Alignment Plan based on their individual needs, objectives, and technology situation. To learn more or to get started creating your Technology Alignment Plan, visit [XL.net](http://XL.net).



## CONCLUSION

With today's technological advancements coming at us at an ever-increasing rate, businesses can no longer push IT into the background and treat it as a strictly service-based department. Instead, it is time businesses took a step back to look at the big picture. Just as technology has infiltrated our personal lives, so it is infiltrating every aspect of how a business operates. This requires businesses to bring IT to the forefront and make IT part of the business development process.

Naturally, as with any major business change, it will take time to get all your IT-business ducks in a row. This is a process that can take months as you examine and change your processes and procedures to ensure that IT and technology is given the space and information it needs to take your business to the next level.