Don't get lost in the legacy - digital transformation is a business imperative

By Amritesh Anand

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While digital transformation may seem like an overwhelming exercise for enterprises with a large investment in legacy infrastructure, the reality is that it has become imperative. The longer businesses delay, the further behind they will fall when it comes to their ability to innovate and be agile in the face of change. Defining the goals for transformation, having a plan, and executing this strategy effectively are the keys to simplifying the journey and unlocking the benefits of digital trends.

Amritesh Anand, associate VP at In2IT Technologies | image supplied

The trouble with legacy

While large enterprises in particular have invested significantly into legacy infrastructure, and the task of changing and updating this may seem more trouble than it is worth, the further into the fourth industrial revolution we move the further behind these businesses will fall.

Legacy systems require modernisation, because they will eventually become obsolete as they are no longer supported, and the skills required to use the systems fade out. The cost of maintaining legacy systems will eventually become unsustainable. This then makes them vulnerable to security threats because older systems are not patched and updated. On top of security and other challenges, digital is becoming increasingly important not only for competitive advantage but for basic survival.

Despite the issues and high risks associated with outdated infrastructure and applications, many organisations still lack legacy-modernisation initiatives. Many of these enterprises will only plan for re-engineering current solutions in case of an emergency. This leaves them further and further behind and will eventually make them unable to deliver services. To bridge the gap between the current offerings and rising customer expectations, organisations need to rethink their business model

and goals and plan towards making them digitally ready.

Effective planning is key

When looking to embark on a digital transformation journey, planning is critical, in terms of what to migrate, when to migrate, who to involve in this migration, and so on. Poor planning can lead to potentially disastrous outcomes and even complete downtime. Modernising legacy systems and software will require time, patience, and a lot of planning. It will need management, commitment, and the understanding that these processes often take years to fully realise.

The lack of skill can be a stumbling block for many organisations, and budget constraints can also be a concern. It is also important to bear in mind that both old and new systems need to be secured throughout the journey, as any vulnerability or weakness can affect systems and cause ongoing problems.

Getting the plan and strategy right from the onset and tracking time, cost, and return on investment is vital. It is also important to align business goals with the digital transformation strategy, as this will need to guide the implementation of new processes. Understanding business and customer needs, as well as the pain points that need to be addressed, is key in aligning the transformation process with core business goals.

A checklist for transformation

A high-level checklist for the journey towards digital transformation can be summed up as follows:

- Assess the current legacy environment
- Define target and timelines
- Document for future system growth and requirements
- Create a separate support and retirement schedule for legacy systems with the understanding that it is not possible to do a flash cutover
- Budget and plan for training and system updates
- Budget and plan for new security requirements to match your new digital infrastructure and applications

Transform or fall behind

Starting the journey sooner rather than later is imperative as the more businesses delay, the more they will be left behind. Digital transformation presents unique opportunities for organisations to innovate and grow, and forces critical thinking, enabling enterprises to potentially reimagine aspects that are core to the business. This requires a massive shift in both mindset and behaviour.

Digital transformation is a collective realignment of core processes, tools, and experiences. The right IT partner with applicable experience can help to smooth the path and simplify this journey by understanding what to do, cost planning, time planning, zero downtime migration, and more. For many businesses, the transformation journey can be overwhelming,

but the right partner will ensure you have the assistance of professionals who have walked the journey before and can provide you with a framework and foundation for finding success, with a track record to back this up.

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