Maintenance Perspectives
Ways to get more from your hardware agreements

Stop Wasting Available IT Talent

Favor productivity-enhancing innovation and delegate the maintenance tasks

April 26, 2011

Keep an eye out for typos.
Details are at the bottom of this newsletter's content.

Savings is good, productivity is better

In the process of tightening belts and cutting costs in the tepid economic conditions most businesses currently face, it's been all too easy to assign multiple hats and tasks to people rather than bringing in additional employees - especially when it comes to maintenance tasks in the data center. The reality is that budgets may simply not be there, and even if they are, uncertainty may legitimately prevent your team from doing any new hiring. It's not hard for a white paper to tell you to innovate rather than focus on maintenance, or for Mark McDonald of Gartner to tout productivity over cost-cutting as the key goal of forward thinking CIOs (in the video below, among other places).

But by now we already understand that no one succeeds in growing a business by focusing *only* on maintenance tasks and cutting costs. For most businesses the emphasis is on not losing ground, and once the here and now is relatively safe, we take a little time every day or every week to focus on doing things better, on systems and process improvements and innovative approaches. Innovation has hard costs in hardware, software, and time, so the tricky part is how to manage to innovate and focus on productivity, as a priority rather than an afterthought, without sending upfront costs through the roof. But we already get that a 'catch as catch can' approach isn't necessarily going to get us to the front of our marketplace.

A simple answer you may not have thought of

The solutions you may wish to avoid because of costs and because they require more courage than you can spare at the moment, are to hire more IT personnel, or to pay even higher maintenance fees to OEMs for elite-level support so that they can bear more of the maintenance load themselves. Both of these options cost money; neither is a guaranteed fix.

But if you can pay less, and leave maintenance issues to a third party maintainer that ends up saving you money - 20% off of what you're currently

paying, on average - suddenly some new options and advantages open up. Few businesses even think about freeing up time and budget by changing their hardware and software maintenance agreements, because obviously the OEMs making the hardware and publishing the software don't go around promoting their competition, and their customer base is something of a captive audience.

This is unfortunate, because a significant amount of employee time and company money are wasted on hardware and software maintenance tasks that can be delegated or automated by a third party, and that would cost the IT budget $20K or $30K less on an average $100k maintenance contract. It also makes sense from a competitive point of view: If your competition has lower bottom line costs and more productivity resources than you do, they're using these advantages to increase their own market share. And if you're one of only a few in your marketplace enjoying the advantages of third party support, then you will be leveraging them against competitors to your benefit.

Many third party solutions exist for both software and hardware support, and for large installations especially it's critical to partner with a trusted advisor rather than a small-time provider that can't begin to measure up to OEM service levels. The great news is that you can choose from global-scale maintenance providers that are actually better trained and better equipped to handle unique situations because maintenance is their entire business. OEMs on the other hand naturally focus on product sales and profits and seek to cut costs and corners on product support service offerings.

Web searches, white papers, and online IT communities like toolbox.com are good places to begin discussions with peers regarding maintenance options. The first step is simply to build a bid list for comparison to current providers for your next maintenance renewal. The risk is much lower than the risks involved in hiring new people who maybe won't work out or that you maybe can't afford, or the risk of paying even more to OEMs who have a business case to their shareholders to deliver the least possible service for the highest possible price.

By contrast, your maintenance contracts are great places to leverage more innovation and development opportunity for your internal IT, while saving rather than spending to solve the problem. With a comprehensive Request For Proposal and a well-rounded bid list of potential providers, you can base the decision on the hard facts and numbers contained in the proposals you receive, rather than intangible hopes and fears. In turn this makes it much easier to follow the advice of experts like Mark McDonald and dozens of other analysts encouraging innovation as the surest way to stay ahead in your market space.

Free Maintenance Consultation

TERiX Independent hardware maintenance lets you use your team's talents on innovations that grow business and revenues. And it almost always costs thousands less than the OEM charges for the same level of service. Talk with a TERiX sales consultant and let us know some basic information about your business and your datacenter locations, and we can get in touch quickly with relevant information so you can compare vendors and capabilities. Click through to find out more!

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