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Five Ways to Promote Your IT Department and Gain User Support

From newsletters to user surveys, making your IT department more visible to end users offers big rewards

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Many of the services provided by IT departments are taken for granted by the user community. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Like the power company an IT department is doing a good job when service is being provided so consistently it can be taken for granted. However unlike a power company, the IT department is also engaged in projects to improve the company's profitability and competitive edge. These value added activities are what differentiate an IT department as more than a commodity to be provided at the lowest possible cost.

Unfortunately these value-added activities frequently go unnoticed. To be viewed as more than just a utility, it is necessary to promote your IT department. If you are a little squeamish about "blowing your own horn," just remember that your company advertises the benefits of its products or services, so why shouldn't you? Here are five ways to promote your IT department:

Internal Newsletter

I know, you're thinking: Will any one actually read it? You will be surprised just as I was when I terminated publication of such a newsletter only to be inundated with requests for its return.

Keep it short and focus on the projects that will directly affect the user community. Stress the benefits to the user community and make sure you praise the participants, particularly those from the user community. Everyone likes to see their name in print, especially when it is in a positive light. You can also add information about existing services that may be underutilized. Think of this as your version of the ubiquitous "quick tips." Focus on things non-power users might not know exist but could use, like

using your Outlook directory as a mailing list. Keep the frequency of your publication low, once a quarter, so that you have something substantial to report.

Internal Web Site

If your company does not have an intranet site, then let the IT department's Web page be the beginning of it. If it does, the intranet site is the perfect place to promote your department's activities, and I am not talking about the IT picnic. Like the newsletter, focus on major projects and their benefits to the user community. Make the Web site an integral part of your development life cycle. Use the Web site to post projects' justifications, status reports, and schedules. You can use the newsletter to generate traffic to your Web site by linking newsletter articles to Web pages with expanded content.

Think of the IT department Web site the same way any company would, include bios of the IT staff with pictures. Archive your user tips and include a contact section with information on how to get help and whom to contact for additional information.

User Survey

Nothing is scarier than asking your user community what they think about your department's services. While people are more than willing to vent scorn, they rarely heap praise. Surveys do not have to be a negative experience, and the fact that you are asking the user community for their opinion will help promote a positive view of the department.

Survey the user community about something you know is flawed. This both shows that you are in agreement with them and that you value their opinion. Ask the user community what they like about a system and what they think can be improved. Keep the questions focused on system functionality and provide multiple-choice answers. For example: "Rate your satisfaction with the order entry system from one to five (with five being completely satisfied)." Then use follow-up questions to identify specific problems, such as "Rate the ability to add a customer to the system." Finally let the users express themselves with the ability to provide additional information. For example: "If you could change just one function of the order entry system what would it be?" Don't forget to do follow-up surveys after implementing changes to confirm your success. Successive surveys on the same subject can reveal trends in user acceptance.

External Publications

Everyone receives a variety of professional publications, including your users. Imagine their surprise to find an article on their IT department in one of them. Trade publications are always looking for material to publish. Read the publication's editorial policy. You can usually find it on their Web site. Make sure your project fits in with the type of subjects the publication has covered in the past. Your new CRM system may be of interest to a sales and marketing focused publication but probably not of much interest to one focused on manufacturing techniques. Contact the appropriate editor and propose your story. You

may be asked to submit the article your self or the publication may assign a writer to it. If your company has a public relations department be sure to talk with them before proceeding. [Editor's note: guidelines for the Enterprise Systems family of newsletters is posted at http://esj.com/about_us/es.asp?EditorialsID=11.]

Presentations and Speaking Engagements

Just as professional publications are always looking for material to publish, professional organizations are always looking for speakers. Ask around to see what organizations people in the user community belong to. Again, do your research on the organization. How-to and success-story presentations are always welcome. Don't forget company events, announcing the start or completion of a major project at a companywide meeting sets a tone of importance for your project and organization. Afraid of speaking in public? Join your local Toastmasters; they can help you gain experience and confidence in public speaking.

Finally remember the Zen saying, "If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?" and promote your department.

Vincent J. Ferravanti (www.ferravanti.com) is an Information Technology Executive with global experience, aligning IT departments to creating competitive advantages. You can contact Vincent J. Ferravanti about **Five Ways to Promote Your IT Department and Gain User Support** at vincent@ferravanti.com

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