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360°IT – Time to find another job?

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Okay - it's official. IT is now a commodity, and as such all of us who work in implementing, managing or advising on IT are out of a job. Time to re-skill as manicurists, hairdressers or MPs; get on our bikes and go and do something useful for a change.

Maybe a little over the top, but we do have to look at IT differently today, compared to how we did a few years ago. In the 1980s and through to the early 1990s, IT was the Wild West frontier: it was exciting, it was all done by the seat of the pants and if it all went deliciously pear-shaped, it only impacted two people and a dog and the business hardly even noticed. Now, we're scared to touch anything in case Joe in Accounts suddenly finds that pressing Ctrl/Alt/F7/P no longer makes a cup of skimmed latte.

IT has matured in the same way as many other industries. Look at cars; in the 1920s all the way through to the 1960s, the majority of drivers went around with a pretty comprehensive tool kit in the boot. If anything went wrong, the average driver knew where to hit the carburettor or how to use certain bits of ladies' underwear to replace a broken cam belt, or where to apply a liberal squirt of WD40 in order to get things moving again. Now, how many drivers have never opened the bonnet of their car themselves? It's a mysterious place in there - touch anything and the car may never be the same again.

It's the same with IT: when I started in computing, I wielded a soldering iron, pulled code off EEPROMs, changed it and pushed it back in again. I knew how to apply code overlays to change how something worked. And I was just a user, not an IT person. Now when I talk to IT professionals and ask them how they see their job progressing, it comes down to ensuring they don't have to "lift the bonnet" and get their fingers dirty - if they do, it's a sign to start dusting off the old CV.

IT users have reached the point where they expect IT to work and the IT professional is rapidly becoming like the car showroom salesman: try to make sure everything is well glossed-up and the answer is "yes" as often as possible - then, when the user has gone away, breathe a sigh of relief.

Yet, like a car, things will still go wrong. Like a modern car, this may not be easily fixable by the average person - or even a reasonably well-qualified one. It may be fixable by replacing part of the IT platform wholesale, or it may need some in-depth expertise. Unfortunately, this will tend to be either direct from the vendor (although even they seem to struggle these days) or from some external service company. More and more of the in-depth skills now reside predominantly in these service companies. However, while the majority are strong in technical skills, most aren't so hot when it comes to understanding the business areas of the customers they are trying to help. And this is where IT people employed directly by organisations should now be looking to boost their own skills.

The grunt work of maintaining IT systems within an organisation will not be appreciated by the organisation itself - it's commodity with a cost, not a differentiator providing benefit. Such support will move outside of the organisation at some stage. The new IT is there to translate between the business requirements and the technical capabilities - to turn IT budgets into business investments.

Or, to continue the car analogy, you're going to be the chauffeur. Businesses don't want to do it themselves, but they need someone to do it for them. They'll go elsewhere for the grease monkeys, but they want to employ a smart, trusted presence to take them from where they are to where they need to go.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

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