Building an IT Roadmap

Planning for technology initiatives aid in successful and timely implementation of IT projects
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Guide: How to develop a 18-36 month IT roadmap

In the 1700's, Benjamin Franklin had already figured it out: "If you fail to plan, you’re planning to fail."

The perception of technology used to be that it was simply an expense, often times an unexpected cost when something went wrong.

A recent shift is allowing organizations to leverage technology in a way that drives efficiency and growth.

Planning for these central initiatives will aid in successful and timely implementation of these projects.

Why is it important to have a roadmap?

Financial services firms that create, budget and follow their IT roadmap experience benefits at every level of the organization. Here are a few:

- Alignment with overall business goals. Technology shouldn’t be viewed as an expense, but rather a tool that can be leveraged to set the organization apart. The roadmap will factor in the firm's overall goals and prioritize projects that support those goals.
- Experience fewer unexpected expenses. The roadmap identifies both short and long-term IT needs. With this proactive planning, firms are less likely to have surprises in their IT environment.
- Anticipate how technologies will affect each other, the budget and the workload. This kind of planning fosters greater cooperation, teamwork and buy-in among the team.

What is an IT roadmap?

An IT roadmap is a document or set of documents that sets the strategy and plan for technology within the organization. Addressing both short and long-term plans, the roadmap typically charts the technology solutions for the next 18-36 months.

Your firm’s roadmap should be three things:

1. An assessment of your current environment, identifying gaps and mitigating risks
2. A high-level strategic document, thoughtfully laying out the next 18-36 months
3. A tactical technology plan with associated budgets and timelines

Your firm’s IT roadmap defines how technology contributes to the larger organizational goals. Your firm should refer back to the plan often and use it as a guiding document for prioritizing projects and workload. Like all strategic plans, the IT roadmap should be reviewed and updated annually.
Who benefits from a roadmap?

Proactive planning can help any organization. An IT roadmap is imperative for financial services firms that are planning for growth.

Many times in firms, IT initiatives come as a response to an immediate need or risk. When a fire starts, a firm determines their options, chooses a fix that can be implemented immediately and the directive is handed down, leaving the IT department feeling rushed, pressured and stressed. An IT roadmap helps relieve these feelings. The roadmap serves as a proactive, tactical plan for IT teams or service providers.

Roadmaps are beneficial for more than just the IT department. This tool also serves as a communication and planning guide for organizational leadership. Presenting a proactive, written strategy helps IT departments gain buy in from their leadership team, adding to the likelihood of budget approval for upcoming projects.

What should an IT Roadmap cover?

When creating your IT roadmap, here are some areas that should be included:

- **Assessment**
  Knowing where you’re going begins with knowing where you are. Your IT roadmap should include an assessment of the firm’s current people, processes and technologies.

- **Budget**
  Each initiative, new technology, existing infrastructure change and staff requirement should have an associated budget or cost.

- **Strategic Initiatives**
  Identify major firm initiatives for the next 18-36 months and how they might be affected by IT. Also identify future plans directly related to technology.

- **Timeline**
  Your roadmap should include a timeline that aligns with your priorities, budget and staff capacity.
What should an IT roadmap cover?

ASSESSMENT

- **People**
  Assess your current IT team. Identify their specialties and what roles they’re currently filling. Are you asking a networking specialist to also manage server and storage infrastructure? If employees aren’t serving in their specialty, your firm is likely missing out on efficiencies and optimization that comes from staff specialization. Interestingly, having specialized team members can actually save your firm money. These team members are more efficient with their time and make less mistakes with technology because of their expertise, resulting in time and budget savings.

Many firms hire a support person to manage workstations and user issues. As time goes on and the firm grows, this support person is expected to also manage security and servers. Responsibilities keep getting added to this individual’s plate, but proper training and experience is often overlooked.

Identify what gaps exist in the current staffing structure. Determine short and long-term plans to fill these gaps. Can your firm afford to hire for the specialties that it needs, or would it make more sense to work with a service provider to fill these gaps?

**TIP**

If considering working with a service provider to fill gaps at your firm, ensure the provider you select meets key standards including specialty in the financial services industry, fast access to IT support personnel, reliability you can depend on and flexibility to adapt to the fast-moving financial landscape.

In your roadmap, outline the skills or positions your firm needs and then identify when they will be hired or outsourced to meet the need. This will allow you to prepare and budget for the addition of new staff or service providers as the firm grows.
What should an IT Roadmap cover?

ASSESSMENT

• Process
  Processes exist throughout your firm already. The front desk has a process for onboarding new clients. Staff has processes for communication and services. Service delivery has processes for consistent reporting. All of these processes have the goal to enhance customer service.

Processes within the IT department lead to efficiency, optimization and standardization. Having these processes identified and tested allow users to seamlessly provide quality care.

When assessing your department's processes, here are a few specifics to consider:

  Disaster recovery
  Disaster recovery is often identified as one of the most important processes in the IT department. Ensure your disaster recovery process is up-to-date, comprehensive and functional.

  Data Breach
  Ideally, implementing security best practices like firewalls, complex passwords, intrusion detection systems and the like, will protect your firm from having to execute a breach process. Have an Incident Response in place.

  The breach process should be identified nonetheless. Having the process in place will prepare your firm in the event a breach occurs. How would the firm respond? Identify roles within the firm and ensure each person knows their responsibilities.

  New hire/termination
  Identify the IT department’s responsibilities when the firm hires a new team member or terminates an existing user. For new hires, consider user roles, security authorization and security training. For employee terminations, determine a checklist including terminating access to the network, what passwords may need to be changed, proximity cards that need to be deactivated, etc.

  Compliance Training
  All employees within the organization should be trained on compliance regulations specific to your industry. What is your firm’s training process? How often do you train employees? How is completion of the training documented?
What should an IT Roadmap cover?

ASSESSMENT

- **Current Technology**
  Taking an assessment of your current IT environment will help you identify gaps and plan for replacements and upgrades.
  - Compute resources
    - Workstations – Are all workstations joined to the domain? Are there any workstations running on outdated Operating Systems, like XP? When do warranties expire?
  - Servers – Inventory your active servers, their Operating System, age and warranty. Are servers appropriately load-balanced? What is the function of each server; what applications is it running? Is there an appropriate workload on each server or are resources being run too thin? How old is each server, and when will it need to be replaced?
  - Storage Area Networks (SANs) – Identify how the capacity of the SAN, how old it is, when the warranty expires and what maintenance it may require. Are you using tiered storage; should you be?
  - Network
    - Firewalls
    - Routers
    - Switches
    - Wireless Access Points
    - Telecom Agreements
  - Data management
    - The demands of an increase in data combined with retention policies lead to constant growth in overall size. Storage will continue to be a concern in the coming years and should be included in your firm’s IT roadmap. How are you handling that storage growth? Are you utilizing tiered storage; could you be? Are you storing data offsite? What are your retention policies? Have you tested your backup process?
  - Security
    - Maintaining a safe, secure environment is vital to your firm’s success. It is an important practice to complete a risk assessment. Are there outstanding vulnerabilities from that assessment that need to be addressed?
      - Workstation and server OS updates and patches
      - Anti-virus – What anti-virus do you have in place? When does it expire?
      - Software restriction policy – Is this server-based policy employed? Should it be?
      - BYOD – How is the firm handling the security risks of users using their own devices?

**TIP**

Netgain recommends implementing a hardware refresh strategy that looks to retire PCs after three years of service. PCs have a longer lifespan when using cloud services because no data is left on the local machine.
What should an IT Roadmap cover?

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

• **Strategic Firm Goals**
  Don’t forget to incorporate your firm’s overall growth plans into your IT roadmap. Adding offices, staff or acquiring another firm will significantly affect the IT needs and plans of your company.

• **Future Technology Plans**
  Based on an assessment of your current technology, develop a plan for addressing gaps. This will help to better position your firm for the future and mitigate risk and vulnerability.

Consider what new technologies your firm may want or need to implement in the next 18-36 months. Some of these initiatives might include:

º Single Sign-On
º Email Encryption
º Cloud services
º Managed services
º Web Content Filtering

Each of these initiatives should include an estimated budget and timeframe.

BUDGET

Each item in your roadmap should have an associated cost, even if it’s just an estimated amount, it’ll help your organization plan for large expenses.

When budgeting, consider how these purchases will affect the firm’s balance sheet. Would operating expenses be better for the firm than capital expenses? How can large purchases be financed over time? What time of year is best for these purchases?
What should an IT Roadmap cover?

TIMELINE

Incorporating a timeline is vital in building consensus and understanding in your firm. Your IT department will appreciate being able to see what projects are coming, what the expectations are as far as completion and what human resources will be dedicated.

Likewise, the leadership team is more likely to approve new technologies and expenses that are planned for and aligned to the organization’s goals.
Special Breakout - Currently in a hosted environment?

You’re not off the hook; you still need an IT roadmap. Your hosting provider handles many important aspects of the roadmap, so pulling together a roadmap should be much easier. Here are a few things to discuss with your hosting provider when building your IT roadmap.

- **Upgrades (software and/or technology)**
  Software and technology upgrades are the most common change in an IT environment. Discuss your software landscape with your hosting provider. If you’re anticipating major upgrades to your core applications that affects storage, bandwidth consumption, user access or server requirements, it’s important for your hosting provider to be involved early in the process.

Likewise, if you’re planning technology upgrades within your firm, such as workstations or ancillary devices like fax machines or printers, discuss this with your service provider. They'll be able to advice how this might affect your user experience.

- **Disaster recovery**
  Review your hosting provider's disaster recovery policies. Identify the gaps and what responsibilities your firm holds. Also discuss what backups are in place and if the backup schedule adequately protects your firm from data loss.

- **Firm growth**
  Incorporating your hosting provider into your firm's growth plan will help them. Keep your service provider abreast of anticipated changes. These major changes may include opening a new location, acquiring another firm or implementing a new firm management software. Knowing these upcoming changes will help the hosting provider position your IT infrastructure for the anticipated growth.

- **Performance**
  Ask your hosting provider for a performance report. How is your firm's performance compared to the SLA? Do your users or providers have concerns or complaints about performance? What’s causing this? Is it a bandwidth issue? Under-provisioned resources? What can be done in the short-term to alleviate these pains? What’s the long-term plan?

- **Best practices**
  Use your hosting provider’s experience with other firms to your advantage. Ask what technologies firms of similar size or specialty are using to help their firm be more effective. Having this intel might help your firm decide on a specific technology, or conversely, may save your company from making a poor technology decision.

- **New technologies**
  Talk with your hosting provider about new technologies on the market. Tiered storage or single sign-on are just a few new technologies your hosting provider might have industry insight on.
A Roadmap in Action

After creating an IT roadmap for the first time in 2016, leaders at one of our firms adjusted their IT plans to accommodate desired firm growth. The roadmap allowed them to see a more holistic view of their IT needs and costs. Because of this, the firm was able to identify gaps, saving both time and money.

The leadership team requested Netgain create the IT roadmap. The roadmap was then shared with the partners to help make decisions.

The roadmap helped the firm plan for the required and recommended updates and upgrades in the next 18-24 months. Several areas identified in the roadmap have already been implemented, a few including:

- Upgrading Windows XP workstations
- Completion of anti-virus installation
- Decommissioning of old server systems

Had the firm continued down the path they were on without the IT roadmap, they likely would have missed updates, spent unnecessary money and hindered their ability to grow quickly and methodically.

Taking Action

Albert Einstein said “If I had an hour to solve a problem, I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions.”

Spend time taking a current assessment of where you’re at, identifying where you want to go and then determining how you’re going to get there. The days of technology being a reactive cost-center are over. Strategic, proactive decisions can be made when proper planning is done.

Having a proactive roadmap will bring a greater peace of mind for your IT and leadership teams.

If you’re having trouble with your IT roadmap, we’d love to help. Our team of IT experts has worked with firms of all sizes and specialties to create roadmaps that position the organization for success. For more information on our services, please visit Netgain.
About Netgain

There are several companies that can host applications, or deliver Desktop-as-a-Service (DaaS) or IT-as-a-Service (ITaaS), but what makes us unique is The Netgain Standard. It’s a set of eight features that truly differentiate us from anyone in the market. This is what our clients have come to expect over the past 17+ years. It’s why they remain our clients and—with an incredibly high frequency—recommend us to their peers in the market.

The Netgain Standard is included with every solution. Every time.

- **Performance and Availability**
  Keep my IT up and available, day and night, with redundancy safeguards and a **99.95% uptime guarantee**.

- **Awesome User Experience**
  Give my users an exceptional support experience at every touchpoint so they come away elated and relieved.

- **Client Care Team**
  Give me a 24/7/365 dedicated client care team that knows me, my business and my specialty applications.

- **Cost Predictability**
  Show me simple and straightforward per-user pricing that allows me to pay-as-we-go and pay-as-we-grow.

- **Cybersecurity**
  Safeguard my sensitive data from tomorrow’s threats with DoD-grade, ultra-secure protection.

- **Top-Tier Talent**
  Provide me access to a deep bench of IT professionals, who know my business, to call upon when needed.

- **Complete Compliance**
  Give me HIPAA and SSAE 18 certification so I know we will be meet—and exceed—compliance standards.

- **Flexibility to Scale**
  Let me pay only for the IT that I need today, and allow my IT to easily scale as my company grows.

Contact Us

**Corporate Headquarters**
720 West Saint Germain Street  |  St. Cloud, MN 56301  |  877.797.4700  |  320.251.5030 Fax

**Chicago Operations**
350 South Northwest Hwy
Suite 200
Park Ridge, IL 60068

**San Diego Operations**
7535 Metropolitan Drive
San Diego, CA 92108