

FIRST FIVE IT ROLES IN NEW ORGANIZATIONS



Small organizations oftentimes partner with consulting firms or large name vendors to provide their technology solutions. However, it eventually becomes important to bring expertise in-house so that technology solutions can be implemented to maintain efficiencies as the organization grows. For non-technical entrepreneurs, deciding where to start can be a challenge. This article provides some suggestions as to which roles make the most sense for organizations just getting started.

1. IT Manager

Perhaps the most important first role in modern organizations is the IT Manager. This role is often the most overlooked role in smaller organizations. The IT Manager role is just as important as sales, accounting and HR. Similar to building a house, if you do not invest in a stable technology foundation, then future business endeavors can be impeded by technology rather than enhanced.

As your organization grows, the requirements of this position will likely change. Initially the IT Manager has to be a jack-of-all-trades and have a very broad understanding of technologies that can drive the bottom line. Later on, the IT Manager will have to transition much of the technical work to team members so that s/he can continue to strategize and drive results.

Three key functions of the small organization IT Manager:

- Technology broker

- Efficiency evangelist
- Technology support specialist

Technology broker

Small organizations don't need complex enterprise systems yet. They need to be agile and have the ability to leverage technology solutions as opportunities arise. The technology broker function of the IT Manager ensures that the right contracts are in place, with service providers and vendors. That way when the need for a new solution arises the IT Manager can respond quickly and help the organization deliver the desired outcome.

Efficiency evangelist

Small organizations do not have large technology (or other) budgets. Bad staff hires in a new organization can drag it down quickly. Therefore, IT Managers must be constantly evangelizing efficiencies through technology solutions. Implementing technologies that allow leadership to work from the field and collaborate on new opportunities regardless of physical location are vital. Technology solutions that allow for partial hire and outsourcing of functions are also crucial. For example, a cloud based financial system allows the business to contract with an accounting firm for financial work. Anywhere access to files allow for the salesperson / owner to open and print contracts anywhere they may be. Electronic signature systems and the ability to accept mobile payments can speed the onboarding process and help maintain a positive cash flow. Perhaps most importantly the evangelist must drive rapid adoption of new technology to ensure that the organization is leveraging it to its fullest potential.

Technology support specialist

In new organizations, the IT Manager must oftentimes provide technical support. Although most IT Managers shy away from this, in new orgs it is very manageable. Having technical support available when needed without having to worry about on-site fees and travel time can make the difference in closing a deal and having to wait until tomorrow and miss the opportunity

As the organization grows...

When the organization begins to grow the role of the IT Manager will continually change and additional functions will be needed. The technology broker role will quickly grow to include vendor management. Having the right relationships with vendors can drive down technology costs. Furthermore, with a great vendor relationship you can get access to better pricing, and new technology as it is developed.

Before long, information security and risk management will also weigh heavily on the mind of the IT Manager. As the inventory of intellectual property in the organization grows, the IT Manager must ensure that data is protected, backed up, and meets any regulatory requirements that may exist. If the cloud services contract is the first one signed by the IT Manager, an information security provider contract should be the second.

Functions of the IT growing organization IT Manager

- Technology broker

- Implement cloud based solutions
- O365 / G-Suite
- Storage
- Vendor relationship manager
 - Contracts in place
 - Purchasing gear
 - Negotiate and solidify outsourced support agreements
- Efficiency evangelist
 - Identify opportunities in the organization where technology can be implemented to solve challenges
 - Ensure that technology solutions are being utilized to their full potential
 - Work with organizations to promote simplicity and automation in processes
- Technology support specialist
 - Roll out new systems as needed
 - Ensure proper patching / update mechanisms are in place
 - Provide first tier troubleshooting for knowledge workers
- Security and risk management specialist
 - Ensure technology implemented does not expose organization to undue risk
 - Actively pursue security services and negotiate services from providers
 - Understand basic legal considerations for IT security and discover what regulations are applicable

What to look for in candidates

- Personal commitment to professional development
- Open minded
- Customer oriented
- Service oriented
- Strong technical background but looking to move into management
- Results oriented

2. Support Technician

The second role hired by most organizations is a Support Technician. This role is vital to assisting the IT Manager in ensuring the organization's technology is operating as intended, and is available to answer problems from the staff. Some organizations will choose to outsource this role to a local service provider. Each organization is unique and you may quickly find that outsourcing basic technical support negatively affects the productivity of the organization. In small technology firms, this isn't a problem as most staff can handle their own technical support. However, in industries where the main product is not technology and where there are high volume sales, on-site technical support can be well worth the investment.

Key functions of the Support Technician

- Answer basic questions about the organization's technology
- Configure and deliver desktops, laptops and mobile devices
- Ensure organizational software is installed on computers

- Ensure organizational computers have the correct security configuration
- Keep inventory of technology assets and software licenses.

What to look for in candidates

- Ability to communicate complex solutions without condescension
- Strong understanding of client technologies
- A tinkerer, that is excited about technology and what it can do
- A strong personal commitment to professional development
- A more extroverted personality, someone who is comfortable working with others
- Service focused

3. Systems Administrator

Before long organizations will reach a point where the needs of the business become complex and therefore the systems supporting the organization get larger and more complex. When this happens it is time to bring in a Systems Administrator. In the past, Systems Administrators focused on network management, server installation, and server application management and installation. They oftentimes spent a lot of time managing the storage capacity and security of the organization.

In more modern organizations, they are looking to the cloud to relieve some of the technical burden placed on Systems Administrators. The new sysadmin must be familiar with the multitude of cloud solutions available. They also must be able to understand how cloud solutions can be leveraged to the benefit of the organization.

Many would argue that the Systems Administrator role is going away. However in most circumstances the Systems Administrator today, must understand cloud technologies and be able to combine that knowledge with an in-depth understanding of the organizational needs in order to deliver technology solutions in partnership with the IT Manager.

Functions of the Systems Administrator

- Evaluate, recommend and implement infrastructure systems (cloud and on-premise)
- Ensure availability of systems
- Integrate disparate systems (cloud and on-premise)
- Ensure that protection of data is occurring
- Test backup and disaster recovery plans and policies
- Implement monitoring and log management systems to ensure systems performance.

What to look for in candidates

- Technically proficient individual with a basic understanding of the industry you are in
- Strong organizational skills
- Self-starter
- Introversion is more acceptable in this role
- Deep technical skills
- 3-5 years' experience supporting systems in similar scenarios

4. Social Media Specialist

While this isn't necessarily an IT role, sometimes this type of work gets included in the responsibilities of the IT department. The Social Media Specialist is responsible for the organization's social media presence as well as the public facing website. Oftentimes IT departments early on will find themselves having trouble building a quality website and integrating social media tools into the organization. The Social Media Specialist can help the organization understand what the IT department means when they ask for "content". The Social Media Specialist is the vital bridge that can help translate organizational value into content that will drive customers / constituents to have an interest in the organization. Additionally, the Social Media Specialist can respond to inquiries on social media and ensure that the social brand of the organization meets its needs.

Functions of Social Media Specialist

- Create and manage dynamic, relevant content for the organization's public website.
- Maintain the social media presence of the organization
- Respond to public comments and queries posted on social media
- Help marketing and communications leverage social media to promote the organization's products and services

What to look for in candidates

- Outgoing personality
- Journalist or writing background
- Basic understanding of search engine optimization
- Experience using social media management tools
- Very strong communication skills
- Ability to communicate effectively at all levels in an organization

5. It's up to you...

At this point, your organization is likely growing and doing well. In order for the IT organization to continue to support the overall needs, it will likely be time to hire a specialized role. However, most of the time this will depend on your industry. Here are some things to consider when determining the next IT hire:

- What area of your organization is lagging? Is there a technology role that could help them move forward?
- Are you constantly making programming changes to your public web presences? If so it may be time to hire an in-house web developer.
- What technology consultants are you spending the most money with? Is it time to bring one of those roles in house?
- How much time and expense are you spending on IT security? Are there tasks that an internal security specialist could perform?
- Are there any regulations that require you handle / protect data in a certain way? If so, it may be time to hire an IT specialist for that area.