



The Communique - The Newsletter for Data Center Managers August 2005

Featured Articles

Five Nautical Lessons - Thirty-Eight Captains Of Technology – Three Days At Sea

By John Bostick

I recently met with thirty-eight CIOs and CTOs in a series of one-on-one interviews aboard a ship in the Atlantic. The half-hour interview format enabled me to see patterns that may not have emerged if they had occurred during the course of a normal business week. CIO after CTO kept alluding to three basic themes: the need to do more with less; the alarming growth of data volumes; and the strategic management imperative to align technology closer to the business—a perfect storm.

How does a captain of technology avoid being trapped by these converging fronts and provide safe passage for everyone involved? As an avid history buff and “reasonably experienced” sailor, I had a chance to reflect on my conversations and distill five lessons about seamanship and the sea. The following are the five nautical lessons I learned as they apply to information technology:

Row Less – Steer More: Business leaders are demanding that IT staffs focus their energy more on strategic initiatives to move technology forward and accelerate business growth. This demand requires that IT captains and crews look for new and innovative ways to monitor and manage their infrastructure. The emerging IT strategy and course for career advancement is through the use of powerful ideas from internal sources and external vendors that provide direction to overcome the weight of infrastructure and the force of inertia.

Can’t Sail Directly Into The Wind: The headwind for IT departments is this: do more with less. We could do more with more, is a place where you just can’t go in the current conditions. To arrive at the destination of aligning technology closer to the business, only a nimble captain with an agile crew and technically savvy vendors can tack and reach across this headwind to make strategic progress. A captain with more cargo and a smaller crew has to sail smarter.

The Bigger the Ship – The Less You Use It: Larger data volumes, complex infrastructure and fragmenting legacy systems no longer mean bigger budgets, more clout, or economies of scale. Often it means increased management time and maintenance, less flexibility, and a delayed ability to respond to the market conditions. Only captains and crews who effectively manage and retrofit their systems with advanced automated processes and knowledge-based service providers can deliver agile performance.

Columbus Was Wrong and Tom Friedman Is Right—The World Is Flat:

The convergence of hardware, software, telecommunications networks, and the global language and infrastructure of business now mean the playing field is level.

Captains that value creativity and welcome ideas will be able to shorten the space between the technology, the business, and the customer—the only competitive advantage.

Whistle To Summon The Wind: Perhaps it is better explained by quantum mechanics, but many sailors believe that whistling summons the wind. So the quantum truth may be this: There is not an IT problem that exists that does not have a fresh creative solution that currently lies just beyond the horizon. Infrastructure management of data and business intelligence resources appears to be the new fresh breeze to help IT captains and crews navigate the perfect storm of “do more with less,” growing fragmented data volumes, and management initiatives for change.

Why do so many sayings about sailing and the sea apply to our business of information technology? One: History enables us a romanticized view, and two: Sailing ships and the sea were the first platform for globalization and trade. The issues we deal with on a daily basis are not too dissimilar from the issues captains and their crews also dealt with: changing course, shifting conditions, complex infrastructure, new markets and customs, rapidly evolving technology, and let’s not forget piracy!

At the end of the day, the goal of the captain and crew of a ship or a technology department is to keep all that is important safe and running above the water line. One of the strategies to avoid the emerging perfect storm is through infrastructure management. Monitoring and managing your data infrastructure as a managed service is like having an accurate weather forecast; it enables you to keep your focus beyond the horizon, on fresh ideas like business intelligence, data warehousing and refitting your technology to better serve the business. It’s like rerigging the sail plan to better capture and transform the wind. As a sailor and captain of entrepreneurial technology, it’s a great feeling: speed and strategy execution above the waterline.

John Bostick is CEO of dbaDirect, a pioneer and leader in the field of data infrastructure as a managed service. Mr. Bostick credits his liberal arts education for his success and entrepreneurial insights in the information technology field. www.dbadirect.com