

LibraryCrunch

Bringing You A "Library 2.0" Perspective, by Michael Casey

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Including Your IT Department: High Dividends, Excellent Results

Wednesday's [SirsiDynix talk](#) got me thinking about how the IT department is integrated into the overall library planning structure, and what changes may be necessary in order to improve that relationship between IT and non-IT departments. The importance of this integration and this relationship cannot be overstated.

Planners and designers have a tendency to think parochially. New projects often include past perceptions of technology – for example, a new office may be designed to include a fax machine, a copier, and a printer, when one multi-function machine would more efficiently and more effectively fill all three roles. This isn't exactly the planner's or the designer's fault. More than likely, this is caused by the failure to properly integrate IT into planning and decision making.

We long ago realized that the materials department needs to be involved in any new plans that involve shelving or new materials. Planning for building a new wing onto a library would include the materials department from the beginning. But what about planning for a new ILS system or new automated check-out equipment? Is the IT department going to be involved? And when you decide you're going to reach out to teens, are you going to invite IT to the planning table?

In both instances, your IT department will be supplying and maintaining the technology to carry-out each service – whether it's the network infrastructure to support that new ILS system or the bandwidth and computer horsepower to stream videos, push live web feeds, and support multiplayer games for those teens. Either way, your IT department is critical to the success of the service. But all too often we don't include IT. When we plan for a new service without getting IT on board, the consequences are not good – unsuccessful service offerings, disappointed customers, angry IT staff, and frustrated administrations are often the result.

Very little of what libraries do (or what any organization actually does) are completely devoid of technological components. And this is not limited to system-wide planning. When the materials department decides to purchase a new database, IT must be involved. Will that new database deliver information via large PDF files? If so, do your computers have the muscle to handle those documents? Will the new database offer streaming video or image downloads? If so, do those same computers have the ability to save to something larger than a floppy, and can your network give the database the bandwidth it will need? These are not little questions. The ultimate success of that new offering requires a computer infrastructure that meets specific minimums, and only your IT department can see to it that you have those capabilities in place when your new service debuts.

Another result of planning and designing services without consulting IT is that it will create bad feelings between IT and the rest of the planning team. Being asked to come in after the fact – after equipment has been purchased or new construction has been started – and fix what's gone wrong will never make for good relations between departments.

We need to begin including IT in every planning session, and we need to solicit their input on all new service offerings. You'll be pleased with the improved final product, and IT will be very happy that they were involved from the beginning. The worth of having buy-in must never be underestimated.

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