

The legacy infrastructure conundrum: what business leaders should know

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Legacy infrastructure presents businesses with tough questions to answer. There is the motivation to establish IT architecture that can stand the test of time, efficiently deliver on existing operational and client requirements, and accommodate overall business growth well into the future. But technology evolves in real-time, and businesses feel pressured to deploy and offer cutting-edge solutions to help them keep up with the competition and the trends of the day.



Source: <https://unsplash.com/>

This conundrum is felt on a local level too. South Africa is home to many companies that use mainframe or server infrastructure for essential business operations.

Legacy infrastructure, which includes both software and hardware, runs the risk of becoming limited or inflexible with time.

The end result is a system that proves too vital to be tampered with or outright removed without crippling every other system, thus preventing further digital transformation within the business.

It's imperative that leaders understand not only the impact of these systems, but also the ways in which they can establish new precedence and embrace new solutions so they are not held back by them.

What is legacy infrastructure?

An effective IT strategy is one that considers legacy, current, and emerging technologies to create a comprehensive and capable portfolio.

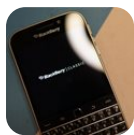
The name of this game is value extraction – as in effectively using the available tech to best meet a company's needs.

Legacy systems are defined as those that, while based on outdated technologies, are critical for daily operations, with infrastructure ranging from physical servers to digital applications.

But over time, the long-term impact of outdated technologies begins to be felt.

Slow, inefficient, and unsustainable hardware limits a business's ability to expand, take on new clients and secure and contain company data.

Software that goes unpatched can bring about compatibility and security threats, risking not only the information it processes but also those daily operations that, if compromised, can bring an entire enterprise to a complete halt.



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The gap between legacy and emerging technologies also continues to widen, exacerbated by the growing market in frontier technologies.

Encompassing trends such as big data, artificial intelligence, and blockchain, the global market size of frontier tech is expected to reach \$3.2tn by 2025, with Internet of Things (IoT) accounting for nearly a third of that value.

A market of that size breeds rapid technological development, which overall shrinks a system's viable lifecycle within a business and opens the door to redundancies.

Workplace mindset and skills

Legacy systems can become the bane of a company's IT staff, eating up their time, energy, and budget, leaving little to no space for other responsibilities or initiatives.

With each patch or configuration change, a system becomes more complex, beholden to the knowledge of its overseer. Institutional memory is at the mercy of time and turnovers.

And as technology grows older, the education and training needed to maintain it becomes scarcer, which in turn drives up the possibility of disruptions, thanks to undetected problems.

The right skills are key to overcoming this obstacle. While South Africa may have thousands of hard-to-fill positions available in our ICT sector, with the majority being software developer and computer network technician roles, one cannot overlook the importance of upskilling existing staff and administrators to maintain these systems, while also equipping them for dealing with new ones.

Assuming a collaborative and forward-looking mindset is also critical. Being able to visualise a business's requirements, and the capabilities of its staff is vital to knowing what systems have the greatest longevity in terms of application and lifecycle.



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A specific workplace mindset must be treated like any other business investment as there are returns to be made.

From on-site to the cloud

Probably the most prominent development to come out of moving away from legacy systems is the transition from on-site IT solutions to remote cloud-based ones (where remote solutions are applicable and best suited, of course).

Cloud technology represents one of the biggest shifts in how businesses handle their IT operations, bypassing the necessity of legacy infrastructure in favour of a more malleable, adaptable, and streamlined service offering.

Moving to the cloud is not a new trend. According to the Cloud Africa 2018 research project, 90% of surveyed companies in South Africa said they had increased spending on cloud computing in 2017, while 83% said they would increase their budgets in 2018.

Companies also reported a high positive impact on brand perception and customer experience, which indicates that there are non-direct benefits of adopting cloud-based solutions.

Flexible ICT infrastructure requires fast and reliable connectivity to accommodate varying business processes and their ever-changing requirements related to their data, clients, and more.

Lacking the expertise to introduce this kind of infrastructure, one can turn to industry partners who can provide them with necessary facilities and knowledge.

Trusting both your IT partner and your own systems negates the concerns of legacy infrastructure, clearing the way for a business's digital transformation.

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