

## **Jim's Profit Accelerator 37: Is Your IT Capability as Ugly as You Fear?**

For many firms, a close look at real IT capability isn't pretty. Complexity means layers and invisibility, even for the best of us. We can't watch it all, or even keep up with much of it. The back side of powerful priorities is what's undone, left dangling hopefully. If you're like most of us, your IT operation is one of those frogs, slowly boiling to death as you rush to capitalize on the best stretch of growth potential in the past 25 years.

Having an IT system can be like marriage to an alcoholic: no matter what you do, it isn't enough, and gradually you just accept how things are. That works about as well in business as in a marriage.

Facts that you already know:

- Twitter, Facebook, and mobile technology were glimmers six years ago; now they're basis.
- Digital is changing everything from the practice of medicine to the experience of watching a sport or a movie.
- You're deep into it already. (You have a smartphone and a tablet computer, don't you?)

Facts that you're avoiding:

- IT (information technology; your computer systems) is as essential to your success as fuel to a racecar.
- IT maintenance avoids disaster, but it doesn't enable growth.
- IT upgrading is as critical to growth as upgrading capital equipment and people.

A company where I worked struggled to keep its production machines running because of fuzzy IT maintenance responsibilities. (Some software was the responsibility of production equipment makers; other software was the responsibility of the company IT network administrator). When those responsibilities were cleared up, we saw the need to upgrade the scheduling process, because down machines didn't hide root causes. The upgrade process revealed simple scheduling changes that dramatically improved production output. (Little-known fact: Many IT "upgrades" involve improving processes upstream and downstream of computerized processes. Simplified: change what people do, and see your capacity rise.)

Facts that you can do something about:

- You can't possibly personally stay current in IT, and neither can your minimum-sized "IT Team."
- IT systems degrade; they don't just "keep on rollin'."

- The odds are that your business is not only vulnerable to expensive IT blackouts, but your growth will stumble without upgraded systems.

**SPEED BUMP:** Since you're not up to date technically on IT, get someone who is. You wouldn't do cardiac surgery on yourself.

**DO BUSINESS FASTER™:** Invest in IT to increase capacity or throughput, but never count on a headcount reduction to justify an IT investment. It seldom happens.

Here's a quick framework to accelerate your growth with minimum IT investment. After you find an expert that you trust, ask him or her to organize around these pillars:

1. **Maintenance:** Actions, upgrades, and supervision to keep today's business going.
2. **Growth Now:** What is the highest value action with payback in less than 12 months?
3. **Two-Year Plan:** What are the elements that will modestly support the growth that we expect in the next 24 months?



**DO BUSINESS FASTER:** Even a minimal IT upgrade usually forces upgrades in some related business processes. The payback, after the whining, is frequently a boost in throughput.

**ACCELERATOR:** Who will drive your IT upgrade, starting this week?

Call me.

For more information, visit [www.grewco.com](http://www.grewco.com).

Jim Grew is an expert in CEO-level strategy and executive leadership whose clients refer to him as the Business Defogger and Accelerator. Jim helps leaders swiftly discover the hidden opportunities within their businesses and exploit them for dramatic results. Nearly three decades of success as a COO and CEO coupled with his experience running nine thriving businesses provide the foundation for his consulting work as president of the Grew Company. He presents regularly to industry groups, mentors business leaders, and shares insights on his blog, BizBursts.com: <http://bizbursts.com/>. He holds BA and MBA degrees from Stanford University.

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