



Dataquest  
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CIO Role

COVER STORY

# Transformed

The onus is on the wannabe CIOs to get ready by skilling themselves with what matters today in businesses

**T**he language has changed from computing to customer, from bytes to business, from Pentium to profits. The transformation of the classical CIO is complete. Those who look will see!

Imagine making an online booking for a domestic flight for a Monday morning. One will notice that the difference in fare between the lowest price option and

the highest could be as high as 100%, depending on the time of the day of flight and the airline. Fare structures are changing in real-time, owing to information systems being used by different airlines that are rapidly computing the sale of tickets, and based on the analysis of demand and supply and consumer preferences, altering the fare prices in tandem.

Think of another scenario. Say for getting trained in Microsoft's .Net technology, one will be searching online for a suitable program and a training organization. It

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is quite likely that 11.5 mn results will be displayed in less than 0.21 secs. But more importantly, another half a dozen or more ads will be served on the right half of the page. Ads of not anything but specifically for the course searched for. One will have the same experience whether one Googled for a hair product or an iPhone. Clearly, the result of an intelligent back-end information management system that has enabled creation of an advertising real-estate on the cyber space—something that did not exist before and something that would not have been possible if the CIO hadn't participated in the business side of this application.

In both these examples, while consumers technology is offering a choice to organizations, it is offering a chance to maximize profitability by balancing demand, supply, and a razor sharp relevance.

With technology playing such a strategic role in businesses, the chief information officer has stepped out of these cabins and become part of mainstream business, with an eventual spot in the boardrooms.

For the CIO, it's no longer about deciding which hardware and software to purchase, but rather about business priorities. Today's techies are sharing the platform with business managers and talking about business applications that help organizations catalyze their growth, process, and profits agenda.

In their new avatar, CIOs are playing a role that can be viewed in the following 4 pieces:

■ **Enabling Products and Services:** They are helping organizations to harness the power of Information Technology (IT) to introduce innovations and improve their products and services. They are enabling technology that gives rise to products that would have otherwise been not possible more so in services.

■ **Transforming Customer Experience:** They are enabling organizations

to transform the customer experience. Whether it is online, or offline products and services, they are making available information and decision making algorithms to customers and customer-facing executives. They are acquainting them with the painpoints and recurring queries and issues of customers, so that they can help in problem resolution and create customer delight with speed and agility. Remember that 'the faster you serve, the more you sell'.

■ **Business GPS:** CIOs are the providers of dashboards that navigate through the vital statistics, major business parameters of organizations in an increasingly complex world. They do this by capturing, analyzing and extracting zillions of data points, through well-defined analytics. Can one imagine a Vodafone or Airtel today, deciding on promotional and pricing strategies, without having deep, meaningful insights on consumer behavior and preferences?

■ **Strategic Investments:** CIOs no longer have to focus on investing in hardware boxes. Rather, their new agenda is to invest in technologies that can address business priorities, not just for now but on an ongoing basis. And with increasing options on how one actually buy 'availability' rather than 'boxes', the CIOs' jobs just became more complex and their role and the CFO's role just got blurred. Now throw in 'cloud options' and 'SaaS' (Software as a Service), it will be realized that the CIO's job is soon becoming unrecognizable from the same of yester-year

While the role has become complex, CIOs have become center-stage and business-critical. They are very much part of a 'Business Strategy' of an organization—at least the ones that want to win.

The onus now is on the wannabe CIOs to get ready by skilling themselves with what matters today in businesses, over and above all the mumbo jumbo on technology. They have no choice but learn anyway. ■

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