

Technology and the way a company uses it to drive business outcomes has become a focal point for executive scrutiny and prioritization. According to a 2018 Gartner survey of 460 CEO and senior business executives, IT-related initiatives are a high priority for executives—ranking third in top business priorities amongst survey respondents, behind growth and structural development—and while discussing their top IT priorities, CEOs overwhelmingly called out digital transformation.

What Keeps an IT Executive Up at Night?

The role of the IT executive, such as the Chief Information Officer (CIO), is evolving. According to Gartner's 2018 CIO Survey, "As digitalization and innovation put more emphasis on the information rather than the technology in 'IT', the CIO's role is transforming from delivery executive to business executive – from controlling costs and re-engineering processes to driving revenue and exploiting data." In today's world, even the most seasoned, competent, and motivated IT executives can find themselves overstretched: Driving business strategy with other line-of-business owners while still managing, maintaining, and evolving the IT footprint to meet the day-to-day needs of the business.

In addition to their traditional responsibilities, such as IT vendor research and sourcing, today's IT executive must:

- Help the organization maintain an effective security and compliance posture within an increasingly interconnected (and vulnerable) digital landscape
- Understand how emerging technologies—such as AI / ML, voice recognition, and the Internet of Things (IoT)—are changing the way consumers interact and conduct transactions
- Prioritize agile development methods and lead a DevOps transformation within the company
- Hire and retain top technical talent and train existing employees on new technologies
- Conclusively demonstrate the business benefits and outcomes of a particular technology decision
- Coordinate and engage with other line of business owners whose areas of focus are increasingly impacted by IT decisions—such as marketing and sales
- Understand and help lead the culture change an organization must undergo when implementing a digital transformation agenda

Are you suddenly feeling like the room's temperature has risen and aren't sure why your palms are sweaty? Your ever-expanding list of priorities needn't be overwhelming; in fact, the evolving nature of your role offers you a unique opportunity.

As an IT executive, you're positioned to positively impact your team and your business by focusing your time on priorities—like those listed—that most demand your unique expertise and skills. But to dedicate the time you need, it's important to draw the line at where you feel your time is best spent and remove some of the undifferentiated heavy lifting from your plate, such as IT vendor sourcing, negotiations, and procurement.

IT brokers exist to make your life easier by becoming your dedicated expert and advocate in the IT services space.

Your Secret Weapon: The IT Broker

Imagine you're a professional athlete: You've got innumerable skills differentiating you in your sport, and your days fly by as you juggle workouts, practices, engagements, and your personal life. And yet, you still need to ensure you're being fairly compensated and recognized. You can hammer a baseball 450 feet, but contract negotiations are, simply put, not one of your core competencies. That's what an agent is for: To provide you with specific expertise and support as you traverse the complex world of sponsorships, endorsements, appearances, and contracts. An agent liberates you by saving you time, making you money, and making your life easier so that you can focus your efforts on what differentiates you—your skills.

As an IT executive, you're the consummate technology professional and expert in your company—and you deserve to focus your time on what you do best: Using data and technology to help drive new business opportunities and evolving your team to meet the changing needs of the business. Though critical to your success and the success of the company, your time is not best spent navigating the IT services provider market, negotiating contract terms with different providers, and keeping pace with pricing trends. In fact, because it's not a core competency, you may end up negotiating sub-par contract terms for an IT service, leaving you stuck.

How can an IT broker make your life easier?

IT brokers live and breathe the IT services market. The market is evolving at a breakneck pace, particularly with the growth of cloud-based providers and solutions; it's a broker's job to stay up-to-date on industry trends, pricing, providers, and services—so that you don't have to. And because IT brokers are paid a small residual commission from the service providers they engage with, you don't pay anything for an IT broker's services.

A good broker's domain and industry expertise is broad and deep: StrataCore, for example, has experts with decades of IT services experience that can help you identify the right connectivity options and providers for your company's needs; evaluate if moving to a private data center makes the most sense for your company—and if so, help you understand the unique differences between each Tier I, II, III, and IV data center; analyze which cloud services may best help you scale, and walk you through specific security service and solution options to gain a better security posture, such as DDoS mitigation, alert management, and security information and event management (SIEM) providers. StrataCore is continuously developing its expertise in evolving areas, such as Procurement as a Service to help you take advantage of backend procurement services and Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS), to help you provide a better customer experience through cloud-based solutions.

The mission of a top-notch IT broker is to:

- **Give you your time back.** By engaging with a broker, you remove the burden you must traditionally bear sourcing IT providers, negotiating contracts, and staying fully up-to-date on service provider trends. Seamlessly taking these tasks off of your plate is a fundamental goal of a broker.
- **Advocate on your behalf.** An IT broker thinks of themselves as an extension of your team: If you win, they win. Their goal is not only to save you time but to make sure your best interests are being represented when discussing contract terms, pricing, and options with providers. Armed with in-depth knowledge about competitor pricing and industry trends, a broker won't back down until they know you're getting the optimum outcome. And should issues arise long after contracts have been signed and an IT solution has been deployed, a broker will be there to continue to advocate fiercely on your behalf.
- **Strategize with you to understand what you need, in both the short- and long-term.** IT brokers start by diving deep with you and additional key stakeholders on your team to understand what your company needs and will offer individualized guidance for your unique infrastructure and growth plans.
- **Introduce you to an extensive network of IT service providers.** It's an IT broker's job to maintain strong relationships with IT service providers across industries, and continuously cultivate new relationships with providers they find may drive value for their clients. StrataCore, for example, works with over 400 service providers globally and makes it easy for clients to become familiar with the different offerings within the space they're focused.
- **Vet the IT services market for you to identify solutions fitting your needs.** Instead of you having to spend time evaluating 16 different service providers who may or may not meet your needs, an IT broker will conduct a thorough analysis of available providers, present you with side-to-side comparisons, and will help you narrow down the list of viable solutions.
- **Gain unmatched expertise through years of focused market analysis.** Tracking providers, services, technologies, and trends are at the heart of what IT brokers do. The goal is for you to benefit from the tribal knowledge gained by the broker through many years of experience and the expertise a broker acquires every day through new learning, interactions, and vendor comparison exercises. Wayson Vannatta, CIO at WatchGuard, explained that StrataCore's expertise is crucial to his procurement of new IT services: "When it comes to getting IT services, the first partner I call is StrataCore. I count on them to know the heartbeat of the market and the best options for our business needs."
- **Cherish long-term relationships.** IT brokers play the long game: They know your business and IT needs will change over time, and they seek to help you succeed through ongoing renewal discussions, contract reviews, re-negotiations, strategy sessions, and continuous knowledge sharing of shifting market trends.
- **Stay unbiased in provider recommendations.** The primary value an IT broker offers is objective feedback, suggestions, and information about the different providers with whom you may decide to engage. Brokers won't shy away from giving you pros and cons for each provider

and have no incentive to recommend one provider over another. StrataCore, for instance, turns complex IT service provider proposals into easy to digest side-by-side comparisons. The company also shares with its clients a vendor selection matrix, a weighted ranking based on an objective analysis of a client's needs to help provide clarity on which provider may be best suited to meet specific business needs.

- **Save you money.** Brokers keep a strong pulse on the IT services market, closely tracking pricing trends and changes on a day-to-day basis. By working with many providers they're able to monitor pricing benchmarks closely and forecast future pricing trends, maximizing their ability to help you save a substantial amount on your IT services bill compared to what you may be able to negotiate on your own. For example, with the implementation of a comprehensive unified communications as a service (UCaaS) solution, StrataCore helped World Vision save 40 percent on overall voice-related costs or \$800,000 over the initial term of the contract.

Working with an effective IT broker will leave you with more time on your hands, more money to devote to other initiatives, better negotiated IT service contract terms, and an improved IT footprint. An IT broker should bring you peace of mind—but it's essential first to properly vet a broker to ensure they're the right fit for you.

Not All Brokers Are Created Equal: What Should You Look for in an IT Broker?

What you look for in an IT broker is akin to what you look for in long-term business partners and employees: Intelligence, expertise, loyalty, and proven success. When beginning to engage with an IT broker, start with the following questions:

What's your specific philosophy?

Why is an IT broker in the business of providing these specific services to clients like you? What do they believe is inherently different about the IT broker model?

StrataCore's founder and CEO, Aaron Loehr, established the company after spending years working for an IT service provider and witnessing similar clients pay widely different amounts per month for the same services. The different contract terms and costs were a consequence of varying

levels of insight, time, and negotiating prowess on the part of the client, and Loehr felt that clients deserved better. "I believed there was a superior way for companies to source and procure IT services," says Loehr. "I started StrataCore to help companies gain equal footing, better pricing, and better contract terms by providing an alternative to going it alone: Providing an advocate whose only job is to help a client drive the best outcomes they can for their IT service needs." Learning why a broker believes in the IT services broker model can provide you with deep insight into the company's methods, standards, and overall enthusiasm.

How much experience does your team have? Can you quantify that experience for me in years and contracts brokered? Can you detail the IT services in which your team has the most experience sourcing and negotiating?

The more time an IT broker's team has had in the industry, the more knowledge they've acquired and experience they've gained that can be put to good use on your behalf. For example, StrataCore's team has brokered over 1,000 contracts for clients. It's vital to learn upfront how much experience a broker will be bringing to your projects.

Contract negotiations can be complicated, particularly if you're working with multiple providers. Can you tell me about your approach to problem-solving? How have you taken a tough situation and turned it into success for a client?

One of a broker's main differentiators is their proven ability to shield you from complicated negotiations and problem-solve on your behalf throughout the IT sourcing and procurement process. Ask a broker to give you 3–5 examples of situations where they've helped a client: Re-negotiate unfavorable contract terms; identify areas of massive cost savings and taken the lead on re-negotiating pricing with an existing provider; successfully redline a large provider's contract while working through resistance on the provider's side; and/or taken a complex and time-sensitive client request and driven the project forward on schedule.

How do you get paid?

As previously mentioned, IT brokers **should never be paid by you**. Ask a broker upfront: Do I have to pay anything directly to your company to work with you? Are you getting an upfront commission from providers or internal SPIFFs based on particular types of services brokered? There

should be complete transparency for how a broker is paid, and client-centric brokers will not be paid directly by clients and will disavow incentives that may lead to subjective IT service provider recommendations. Instead, a client-centric broker, such as StrataCore, earns a small residual payment from carriers for the life of a client's service.

Can you demonstrate proven success in the areas that matter most to my company?

If you're, for instance, concerned with sourcing and procuring cybersecurity services, then it's imperative that an IT broker has a strong network of viable providers whom they can vet for you that have expertise in the subject matter and potential solutions. Ask a broker to walk you through how they'd approach addressing your specific needs, and request examples of other work they've done that directly relates to your objectives and particular asks.

How do you differentiate yourself from other IT brokers? What have you accomplished?

Ask a broker if they've been formally recognized by any of their clients or providers for the work they've done, and to provide you with company-wide achievements that may distinguish them from other brokers. For instance, StrataCore's team has won dozens of awards from providers around the globe and has toured over 350 data centers worldwide.

Who are your other clients? Can you provide me with high-quality public references I can contact to gain more information about working with you as an IT broker?

Hearing a testimonial straight from an existing client is the best way for you to gain an objective perspective of a broker's capabilities. First, check out a broker's website to see if they have any existing testimonials or case studies you can download.

Here are a few examples of testimonials from StrataCore's website:

"StrataCore took the time to fully understand our requirements and objectives before going to market. They worked as our advocate throughout the entire process and found a solution that can grow with our business as well as save us money."

– Andrew Turner
Director of IT at Medical Consultants Network (MCN)

"What I enjoy most about StrataCore is their full end-to-end service. We met, gave StrataCore our requirements, and they engaged the appropriate vendors."

– Carey Fujii
former IT Director at Tableau

"I've worked with other IT services brokers over the years, and none of them match the level of service and technical competence as StrataCore – that's why I keep coming back to StrataCore."

– Paul Farrall
Vice President and Chief Information Security Officer at Skytap

As you begin to engage more closely with a broker, ask for 3–5 client references that fit your use case and objectives, and reach out to learn more about the best ways to utilize the services of an IT broker.

What do you value in the relationships you build with clients?

After meeting with a broker and doing some additional research, ask yourself: Is this company one I can see myself working with long-term? Do we seem to click? It's crucial you feel comfortable with an IT broker, as they'll become a trusted advisor to you and advocate working on your behalf. Ask a broker how they approach relationship building and what they prioritize in the client relationships they've established. Dig for specific examples of strong client relationships they've built that have gotten stronger over time. And remember: it's okay to go with your gut. If you don't feel you can work with the broker long-term, then walk away.

Don't Go It Alone—Take Advantage of an IT Broker's Core Competencies to Better Focus on Your Own

Turn the IT executive's dilemma on its head and embrace the evolving role you play in your company's success and growth. By bringing in a trusted partner like StrataCore to advocate on your behalf, you can focus your efforts on what differentiates you and drives your company's success, innovation, and growth—and you can let go of the mundane, complex, and often frustrating task of sourcing IT vendors, negotiating IT service contracts, and keeping pace with ever-changing pricing trends.

Liberate yourself by engaging with an IT broker and see where your newfound time and freedom can take you.

Are you ready to maximize your time while gaining advocacy, expertise, and new insight into the complex world of IT services? [Reach out to StrataCore today](#) to engage with an expert and learn more about the benefits of engaging with an industry-leading IT broker.



See why executives use
StrataCore to source IT services

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About StrataCore

StrataCore provides digital network, unified communications, contact center, cyber-security, and commercial data center consulting and brokerage services to enterprises that need to secure services across the globe. Our strategic relationships with all major service providers offer us insight into the latest technology trends and opportunities to ensure that your company receives the best services at the best price. Our goal is to become your long-term partner and advocate.

StrataCore's proven success demonstrates the company's commitment to excellence and client success:

Zayo – Top Agent, NW (2016 & 2017)

INAP – Top Partner, NW (2016 & 2017)

RingCentral – RingExcellence Award (2016)

Unitas Global – Top Agent, PNW (2016 & 2017)

Coresite – Top Revenue Producer (2015 & 2016)

Equinix – Top Revenue Agent, NW (2016 & 2017)

Masergy – Top Performing Sales Partner NW (2016 & 2017)

DRT/Telx – Gold Partner and Top Agent NW Region (2016 & 2017)

CyrusOne – Top Billing Master Agent (2016 & 2017)

Chine Mobile – Top Producing Partner (2017)

Anexio – Partner of the Year (2017)

QTS – Top Partner, PNW (2017)

Telstra – Top Deal (2017)

"2018 CEO Survey: CIOs Should Guide Business Leaders Toward Deep-Discipline Digital Business"—By Gartner, accessed via <https://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/3873663>

Mastering the New Business Executive Job of the CIO: Insights from the 2018 CIO Agenda—By Gartner, accessed via https://www.gartner.com/imagesrv/cio-trends/pdf/cio_agenda_2018.pdf

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