



# Every Company Leader's Essential Guide to Business Meets Technology

2025 Edition



There was a time not so long ago when only big companies had a CIO. As technology has become an essential part of every company's business framework, experienced technology leadership is a must for every leadership team.

## What's Changed

Several significant business and technology changes came together to reshape the way companies, employees, clients, and customers work.

Imagine not so long ago when everyone worked inside the company's physical space. These walls created a tightly controlled barrier between internal activities and the outside world. Network access was relatively easy to manage, limiting who was allowed inside.

As bandwidth expanded to become more accessible and affordable, the internet brought those secure network boundaries down. People were no longer physically tethered to a desk in an office or cubicle within four secure walls.

Networks expanded beyond the physical walls, relying on sophisticated access rules to replace walls.

Suddenly "we're in the cloud" granted easy access to anything anytime from anywhere. With this seemingly endless access came the inevitable security risks and data breaches.

Several significant shifts came together to fundamentally change the business technology landscape.

- Increased bandwidth
- More accessible internet connectivity
- Migration from on-premises to in the cloud application and data storage
- Work from anywhere
- Ease of anytime anywhere access
- Increased risk exposure



All of these changes have placed a burden on companies to understand and quickly adopt very different technology frameworks. To continually anticipate and strategically plan for ongoing changes requires technology expertise companies do not have on staff. Even experienced technology folks without new cybersecurity expertise will find themselves unable to respond.

## The Solution

**The good news is there are CIO leaders available for even the smallest companies.** These business technology leaders deliver the right services, expertise, and dedication to meet your company's unique needs.

Savvy company leaders make strategic decisions only after careful consideration and objective analysis . When they reach that pivotal decision to add a technology leader to their team, they often feel as if they're staring down a bottomless black hole.

The questions many company leaders face are the same regardless of company size, time in business, and industry. Do any of these sound familiar to you?

- “How do I find the right technology team member for us?”
- “Do we really need someone to guide our technology future?”
- “We've come this far without a technology leader. Are we sure we can't keep doing what we've always done?”
- “Isn't this going to be more expensive than we can justify?”
- “How will I know if this is the right person for us?”



The list goes on. Every one of these questions is what any strategic-minded company leader should ask.

This guide will help you answer those questions and more.

Grammar Note: For grammatical purists everywhere, we have to say this. We know that a CIO is a single person. Until recently “he” or “she” would have been the commonly-used pronoun. In the spirit of the new identify pronouns, we will refer to the CIO as “they” even if “they” is plural.

Let’s start with a clear description of what a CIO actually is.

## What Is a CIO?

The company’s **chief information officer** is the connector between business strategy and the technology that brings vision to reality.

The CIO is a member of your company’s executive leadership team, reporting directly to you, the CEO or business owner.

The CIO is the practical strategist who ensures you have the right technology to deliver the right products and services to the right clients at the right time.





# What Does a CIO Do?

A CIO puts technology to work to solve business problems and discover unexpected opportunities.

- **Speaks business and technology in plain English**

Technology is confusing, continually changing, and touches every corner of your company. Because the CIO has broad experience in both business and technology, they are able to translate baffling technology words and concepts into digestible information bites everyone will understand – and appreciate.

- **Manages the IT infrastructure for the entire organization**

Your CIO manages the IT infrastructure of the entire organization. They combine executive strategy with the essential technologies to continually ensure a focused growth path.

- **Builds consensus-across the organization**

Communicating with empathy, listening to the needs of the people doing the work every day, and understanding your customers' needs create a cohesive organization.

An effective CIO will successfully break down silos in your company. Silos are especially common in established organizations with a culture of departmental independence. Technology often overlaps, leading to redundancy, unnecessary spending, and unmanageable, at risk data.



- **Understands and effectively communicates with external vendors and solution providers**

Every vendor and offering comes with its own vocabulary. Too often these are intentionally confusing. The goal of a vendor is to sell their product or service. That isn't to suggest that every solution provider is unethical and insensitive to your company's needs. Sometimes it's just hard to know the difference.

There can be a disconnect between the right technology and right now. An experienced CIO speaks the vendor's language. They build a mutually beneficial relationship through respect and a shared purpose.

- **Listens to and builds trusted customer and client relationships**

An experienced CIO has a business-first technology mindset. They frame technology in the context of the value it contributes to meeting customer and client needs.

Because the CIO builds consensus inside the company, they are able to tap into customer insights across the organization. All too often information is buried within a department. When combined with information from other departments, fresh insights and opportunities are uncovered. The CIO is skilled at looking at data objectively and connecting dots in unexpected ways.

- **Brings the new cybersecurity perspective every company must have**

Every CIO must include cybersecurity knowledge in their skillset. As we mentioned in the introduction, the security landscape has changed significantly in the past few years. Every company, regardless of size, must adopt a security mindset.

Cybersecurity can feel overwhelming, tedious, and is all too often dismissed with "it won't happen to us". Responsible company leaders cannot afford to put their company, employees, customers, and clients at needless risk.



- **Helps everyone in the company understand and adopt a positive security awareness mindset**

Implementing and getting support for security awareness training and education can be challenging. When your company has a leader at the top explaining why it matters to each person, the likelihood of acceptance increases greatly. The obstacles begin to fade away.

Cybersecurity awareness and ongoing education are as much a staple of every company as a reliable internet connection.

- **CIOs are curious learners**

They are eager to encourage and lead active learning throughout the organization. This knowledge-sharing skill is one of their most valuable and often underestimated leadership qualities.

Shared learning creates common ground where everyone within the company can contribute equally.

Translating business and technology “whys” and “hows” into practical concepts builds a strong company of valuable knowledge workers. Employees who are continually challenged and recognized for their contributions are more likely to remain with the company longer.

- **Prioritizes the stream of great ideas**

Energetic companies have no shortage of big ideas. Where they often struggle is what to do with all of these ideas.



Think of your CIO as the idea librarian. They leap at the chance to gather, document, organize, prioritize, and lead the implementation of strategically-responsible new products and services.

Your CIO will consider your existing technology investments, long-term strategy, and the resources needed to move an idea ahead. This objective assessment allows your company to pursue more of the right opportunities. An experienced CIO will also provide the reassurance that sometimes not doing is the right decision.

- **Observes, listens, and asks questions**

Companies are continually looking to deliver more of the right products and services to the right customers and clients. Success is supported by effective and efficient people, processes and plans.

Your CIO continually observes and asks questions throughout the organization to measure the effectiveness of the technologies in use. They remain objective without any personal or solution-specific biases.



## What is the Difference Between a CIO and a CTO?

These roles are often used interchangeably, but they are different.

The CIO is internally-focused. While they have deep technical experience like a CTO, they are responsible for the value the technology infrastructure delivers to the company and its customers.

The CTO is externally-focus. They are concerned with how technology works, and the products and services delivered.

In a structured organization, the CTO reports to the CIO.





Depending on the size and needs of the company, it is perfectly acceptable to combine these roles.

## What to Look for When Hiring Your CIO

We talked about many key leadership qualities your CIO will bring to the company in What Does a CIO Do. As you read through these, it quickly became clear that technology skills are only one component of an experienced CIO's toolkit. In fact, the technology aspect of the role is often the easiest for them to deliver.

If you're asking yourself, "What should I look for in my CIO?", these skills and experience are a reliable benchmark.

- At least 10 years of hands on business and technology experience with proven results at the executive leadership level
- A bachelor's degree in information technology, computer science, or business-related field
- Companies sometimes rely on the CFO to fill the CIO role. CFOs do not have the technical knowledge or broad business technology expertise to make appropriate strategic decisions. Their decisions are financially-driven and as a result, are more strategically limited than a CIO.
- Hands-on experience with proven results in a technology role such as software development, database design, data management, data analysis, network architecture, network management, or cybersecurity
- Continuously following cybersecurity trends and news. This area is changing at such a rapid pace that continued learning is a non-negotiable skill.



- Committed to ongoing technology and business-related learning with recent examples
- Ability to write clearly in non-technical words to explain and share knowledge across the organization
- Ability to present technical concepts in business language to C-team, board members, strategic partners, and employees
- Commitment to teaching and explaining in understandable words the relationship between business and technology
- Ability to listen and ask questions with empathy
- Ability to prioritize initiatives based on company priorities and long-term goals
- Ability to integrate technology and strategies
- Ability to efficiently identify, evaluate, recommend, and implement appropriate technologies
- Eagerness to contribute to the overall company strategic vision and growth plans without technical bias

## What is a Fractional CIO?

**A fractional CIO is sometimes referred to as a part-time CIO.** They provide all of the same skills, experience, and strategic leadership that a full-time CIO does in fewer regular hours.

The fractional approach is an attractive solution for companies that want technology leadership but either cannot afford or do not need a full-time C-level member. This is an ideal solution for small and mid-sized (SMB) companies.

Consider just a few of the many immediate benefits.



- Gain valuable expertise within your budget
- Add knowledge, skills, and experience your company is currently lacking
- Build a trusted relationship with an objective business technology partner
- Increase credibility with customers, clients, partners, and employees because of greater executive depth
- Increase competitive advantage by uncovering untapped opportunities
- Invest in technology that is closely aligned with your current and future business goals
- Eliminate redundancies and waste in technology purchases with experienced guidance
- Adopt an appropriate company-wide cybersecurity mindset
- Implement data and privacy safeguards
- Develop a company culture of learning and collaboration that encourages employee retention

## How is a CIO Different Than Your Outsourced MSP?

Many SMBs rely on an outsourced managed services provider (MSP) for their day-to-day IT support. This vendor can be a valuable resource for your company, but it is important to understand exactly what they provide to your company.

MSPs might offer CIO services as a way to earn your business. In our experience, the majority of MSPs do not have the broad executive CIO skills and experience outlined in this eBook. If your MSP has offered CIO services to you, use this eBook as a benchmark to measure the actual skills and services provided.



This matrix identifies four technology roles in a typical organization. Obviously, there are many other IT folks within a company including those dedicated to your website, software, apps, database management, and so much more. These IT team members also report to the CIO.

For our purposes here, we'll just focus on the essential technology roles you're probably familiar with.

✓ = you have this role now

Responsibility	✓	Internal IT	✓	MSP	✓	Network Security	✓	CIO
Day-to-Day User Support								
“It doesn’t work”		•						
“How do I...”		•						
Help desk level 1		•		•				
Help desk advanced						•		
SOC help desk						•		
User Management								
IT-related onboarding steps		•				•		•
IT-related offboarding steps		•				•		•
Add and remove network users		•						
Active Directory maintenance		•				•		
Group Policy management						•		
Hardware Management and Support								
Define, implement, manage user-owned devices						•		•
Define, implement, manage company-owned devices						•		•



Responsibility	✓	Internal IT	✓	MSP	✓	Network Security	✓	CIO
Define, implement, manage remote work policies						•		•
Define, implement, manage equipment acquisition policies						•		•
Research, recommend equipment		•				•		•
Setup new desktops, laptops, printers		•						
Setup new internal servers		•		(1)				
Configure for Windows updates		•						
Configure based on company policies		•						
Monitor for company policy compliance						•		•
Support company-approved user-owned devices		•						
Troubleshoot, repair desktops, laptops, printers, servers		•		(1)				
Maintain firewall firmware updates		•						
Install routers, switches		•		•				
Monitor disk usage alerts		•						
<b>Software/Application Management and Support</b>								
Participate in software/application review, approval		•				•		•
Define, implement, manage software acquisition policies								•
Review, approve vendor solutions		•				•		•
Setup new user email account		•						
Setup new user hosted applications account (ex. Office 365, G-Suite)		•						



Responsibility	✓	Internal IT	✓	MSP	✓	Network Security	✓	CIO
User support for approved applications, software		•						
Monitor for non-approved software installs, downloads						•		•
Support internal development team		•				•		•
Monitor third-party application updates, vulnerabilities						•		•
<b>Backup Management</b>								
Review, approve vendor solutions		•				•		•
Define company backup, recovery, retention policies								•
Configure internal network backups		•		•				
Monitor daily backup activity		•		•		•		•
Resolve backup issues		•		•				
Configure hosted application backups		•						
Monitor hosted application backup activity		•						
Resolve hosted application backup issues		•						
<b>Security Management</b>								
Define, oversee company security policies, processes, procedures with C-suite		•				•		•
Understand cyber insurance terms, condition, exclusions		•				•		•
Regularly communicate, educate company security policies to all employees						•		•
Conduct network discoveries						•		•
Conduct vulnerability assessments						•		•



Responsibility	✓	Internal IT	✓	MSP	✓	Network Security	✓	CIO
Conduct penetration testing						•		•
Conduct compliance assessments						•		•
Conduct Security Awareness Training						•		•
Security policy management						•		•
Access control management						•		•
WAN security configuration/ management						•		•
Advanced firewall configuration/ management						•		•
Network traffic monitoring						•		•
Password policy configuration						•		•
Risk management						•		•
Risk analysis calculations						•		•
<b>Data Management and Governance</b>								
Define, implement, monitor data security policies and procedures						•		•
Create, maintain company data mapping						•		•
Define data access roles, rights		•				•		•
Implement data access roles, rights						•		
Monitor data access activity						•		•
Perform regular PII/PCI scans						•		•
Monitor data collection, storage, disposal						•		•
<b>Asset Management</b>								
Create hardware inventory		•				•		•
Create software inventory		•				•		•



Responsibility	✓	Internal IT	✓	MSP	✓	Network Security	✓	CIO
Maintain hardware inventory		•				•		
Maintain software inventory		•				•		
Manage equipment disposal according to company policy		•				•		
Risk Management Policies and Procedures								
Create company security policies		•				•		•
Get legal approval for company security policies								•
Monitor security policy compliance						•		•
Deliver regular compliance reports to C-team						•		•

## When Should You Hire a CIO?

Building a company supported by a reliable, scalable technology framework is the mark of responsible leadership. That means forming an experienced business technology team member relationship **as soon as you begin planning your company.**

The right CIO will provide the guidance and specific skills your company needs at each phase of your growth.





# Are You Ready to Add a CIO to Your Team?

It's one thing to know what you should do. Taking the next step forward isn't quite as easy. Even with the information we've shared with you in this eBook, we know getting started can feel overwhelming.

We can help you decide if this is the right time for you to consider a CIO for your company.

**1**

We'll start with a conversation to answer your questions

**2**

Then we'll share a short discovery questionnaire for you to complete

**3**

Next we'll have a follow-up complimentary (of course) conversation and outline where we recommend you begin

Let's start the conversation!

