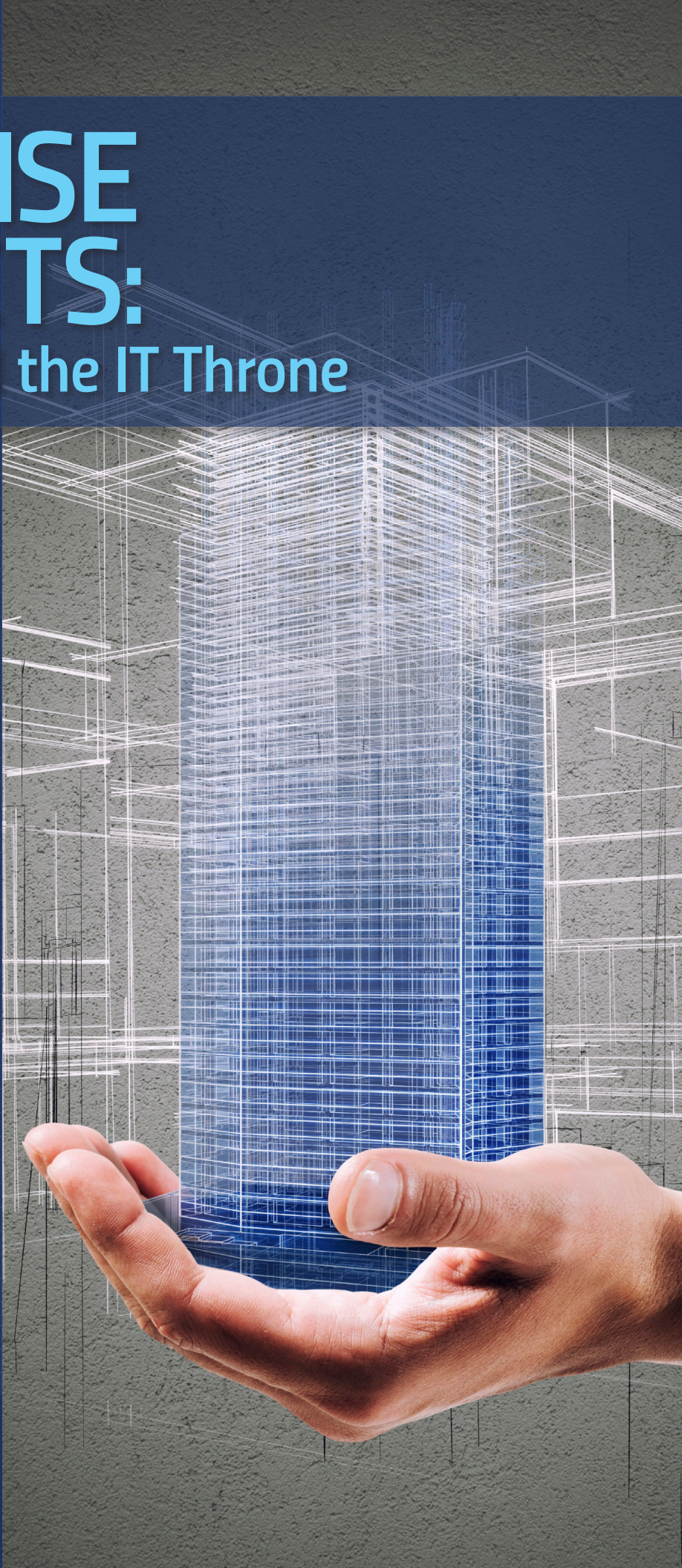# ENTERPRISE ARCHITECTS:
The Power Behind the IT Throne

It's easy to see who holds the purse strings when it comes to IT purchases. But whose advice does that person heed when making purchases? A Network World survey suggests that Enterprise Architects should be on your list of people to talk to.

Information technology is so central to our jobs and workplace that it's easy to forget that, a mere three decades ago, only the largest, wealthiest companies even had an information technology function.

A mere two decades ago, IT was mostly about managing employee desktop computers, networked file servers and maybe one or two database and application servers. In short: it was a support role in which folks that understood and were good with technology helped their colleagues on the business side.

Today, of course, the story is very different. Technology — a company's understanding, adoption and application of it — is central to its current survival and future success. IT is intimately entwined with daily work and with business operations. But that doesn't mean that the information technology and business sides of the house are, themselves, entwined. Indeed: cultural and organizational gaps often keep these two critical and interdependent groups separate from each other — at great cost to the business.

Enter the Architect. As the title suggests, it is a role that is about designing and building things. Specifically, better and stronger connections between the business and information technology functions within an organization. The "architect" has many modifiers: Enterprise Architect, Infrastructure Architect, and Solution Architect. But the idea is always the same, translating business needs into information technology strategies that help businesses succeed when executed properly.

But who is the Architect? A recent Network World survey of more than 270 professionals wearing the "architect" mantle finds that they occupy a powerful and important position within technology-dependent organizations. The power behind the IT throne, architects are more important than ever before: acting as liaisons between technology-focused engineers focused on discrete technical problems and business leaders who take the long view: focusing on strategy and execution.

THE ARCHITECT: IT EYE ON THE BUSINESS GUY

The most vexing and persistent question about the "architect" role within organizations is about its focus. To put it simply, is the architect a tech person who interfaces with business, or a businessperson who talks to IT? The answer, according to our survey, is that the role is much more the former than the latter.

Asked whom they consider their closest peers within their organization, 59% identified IT Management, compared with just 39% who identified the CIO as their closest peer. Within enterprises (1,000 or more employees) the percentage of respondents who cite close ties to IT management is even higher (71%), compared to SMB organizations (less than 1,000 employees) (38%). The explanation for the close identification with IT is pretty clear as well: many individuals occupying the architect role have emerged from development and IT departments.

"Most of the Architects I've come across have done development in the past," one self-described Enterprise Architect noted in an interview. "You need to start out with the very basics, doing the development, then working your way into design and analysis, on up into architecture."

TOP JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

Converting business strategies into IT strategies	**82%**
Providing solution architects or engineers with roadmaps or specifications	**73%**
Assisting infrastructure in mapping their future strategy to align with the rest of IT	**72%**

The need for some grounding in information technology is clear when the architects we surveyed talked about their primary responsibilities, many of which centered on helping to manage and deliver technology solutions.

> **Most of the architects I've come across have done development in the past. You need to start out with the very basics, doing the development, then working your way into design and analysis, on up into architecture."**
>
> ENTERPRISE ARCHITECT, TECHNOLOGY

Eighty two percent of survey respondents identified converting business strategies into IT strategies as their primary job responsibility. A slightly smaller share said their primary responsibility was providing product roadmaps and specifications to engineers (73%), and helping align the company's "infrastructure strategy" with its information technology (72%). Other common responsibilities were specifying vendors and technology solutions for purchase (60%) and ensuring that solutions are built according to agreed upon specifications and product roadmaps (54%).

LOST (AND FOUND) IN TRANSLATION

Despite the technical nature of the architect's job, his/her ability to communicate with a non-technical, business audience within their organization is paramount.

Using an analogy to statecraft, architects are like diplomats within a technology-dependent organization, moving between different groups and fostering conversation, information exchange and (hopefully) agreement. Forty-three percent of architects strongly agreed with the notion that their role was to be an IT Liaison within their organization, while 47% strongly agreed with the notion that cultivating strong relationships with senior business stakeholders was a core component of their job.

As with statecraft, it helps if these employees are 'bilingual' — able to communicate in terms that both IT and non-IT stakeholders understand. Fifty-eight percent of the professionals we surveyed said it was critical to have such a skill, and another 30% said it was very important to their job.

CRITICAL/VERY IMPORTANT SKILLS

The need to be bilingual and communicate in terms that both IT and non-IT stakeholders understand	**88%**
Mapping capabilities to business needs	**88%**
Architecting solutions	**86%**
Keeping up with the pace of technology change	**86%**
Educating yourself about various siloed business problems across the organization	**85%**

That emphasis on communication, collaboration and strategic thinking showed up, again, when we asked respondents to list characteristics that they thought were the most important to succeed in the Enterprise Architect role. As it turns out, technology expertise was not the most important quality chosen. Rather, strategic thinking expertise topped the list, with 67% identifying it as a must have quality.

Next on the list? Business savvy, which 56% thought was a "must have" characteristic. Technology expertise was the third most important quality; with 51% describing it as a must have trait. Technical know-how is important, but it takes a back seat to understanding of the business needs of the organization, at least for the architect role.

TOP MUST-HAVE CHARACTERISTICS

|	
Strategic thinking expertise	**67%**
Business savvy	**56%**
Technology expertise	**51%**
Innovative	**41%**
Collaborative	**38%**

As one of our architects put it in a phone interview: "If you don't understand the business…then, yeah, you can be a plumber and change a pipe, but you really can't contribute to the overall growth and sustainability of the business because in all likelihood what you're going to do is short-sighted."

THE ART OF THE (INTERNAL) SALE

Translation, interpretation and even persuasion figure prominently in architects' descriptions of their responsibilities within their company. For example, three quarters of surveyed architects said their job requires them to "meet regularly" with IT infrastructure subject matter experts to review strategy. On the business side, architects said they collaborate most strongly with line of business managers (42%), business strategists (33%) and product managers (33%). It falls to the architect to distill the information gathered in those meetings, transforming it into actionable information for senior management and other decision-makers.

The same is true when it comes meeting with technology vendors – an activity that our respondents said they engage in for close to 4 hours in a given week with vendors they are currently not doing business with.

In their responses, self-described enterprise architects shared that they frequently join with engineers and IT management leaders in meetings with current solution providers as well as prospective vendors. But it often falls to the architect to make the case for continued or new investment to upper management. A majority – 69% —said that they were involved in recommending or selecting vendors for tech purchase and 42% said that they were involved in selling that technology internally (that is: outside of the IT team).

RESPONDENTS SAID THEY SPEND NEARLY

4 HOURS PER WEEK

MEETING WITH VENDORS THEY ARE CURRENTLY NOT DOING BUSINESS WITH

69% ARE INVOLVED IN RECOMMENDING OR SELECTING VENDORS FOR TECH PURCHASE

42% ARE INVOLVED IN SELLING THE TECHNOLOGY INTERNALLY
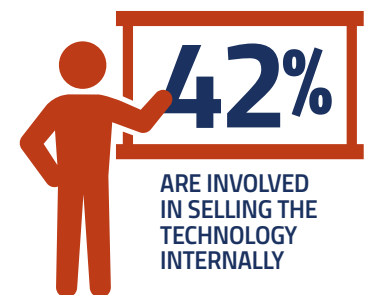
In fact, most of the architects we surveyed saw such evangelism as a core part of their role within their organization. An impressive majority (87%) agreed that they could beneficially change the way the organization views IT, and almost half of those we asked strongly agreed with that idea. Another indicator is that 85% said they had been the source of ideas that have directly impacted their company's business model or go to market strategy.

EA ISN'T EASY

It's no surprise that straddling the IT and business functions presents architects with a myriad of challenges. Among them include developing and then implementing complex technology roadmaps that might span many different

business units and functions. Promoting change and progress within complex organizations means changing established practice, after all. And changing the way any group works is bound to invite stress.

More than 7 in 10 enterprise architects agreed that a technology architecture roadmap was a core deliverable that they owed to their organization. Given that, it's no surprise that integration challenges loomed as the most pressing in their job.

Among the top-ranked challenges, merging multiple departments and objectives into one technology roadmap ranked the highest with 62% of the enterprise architects identifying this as extremely or very challenging. Being the point person for those new standards and practices was also a source of stress. The professionals we surveyed said that rolling out new business standards across multiple projects within their organization was a key challenge (62% said extremely or very challenging.) Sixty percent said that about the job of making or proposing business process changes.

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF ENTERPRISE ARCHITECTS

Given the importance of the architect to the business, employers need to better understand the 'care and feeding' of these critical employees. What kinds of support will make them happier and more successful? What kinds of inputs will lead to better decisions and outcomes?

One key element in nurturing enterprise architects is providing them with access to information – online and face-to-face – that they need to understand the business and the technical and strategic challenges they face.

This might sound obvious, but education and learning stood out as a central, if time consuming, aspect of the enterprise architect role. On average, architects spend around 9 hours a week educating themselves about problems and business needs within their organization. Among new (<3 years tenure) and younger employees (18-34 years old) in the enterprise architect role, time spent coming up to speed on business needs and problems within their organization was even greater. On average, new architects spend an average

of 10 hours per week on this task, and younger architects spend 13 hours per week.

One challenge architects reported was difficulty in finding information relevant to their job and industry. Just 26% said their need for information and community resources about their role were being met to a great extent. Twenty-nine percent said that to a great extent they were able to find information relevant to their industry. Just one in five said they agreed to a great extent that they had the opportunity to connect with peers in a similar role to the one they occupied.

Instead, the architects we surveyed pointed to common – but not specialized – sources of information about both strategy and technical matters: search engines, analyst firms, and of course, information provided by technology vendors through web sites, white papers, in-person discussions and more. Social media sites including LinkedIn (66%), YouTube (yes, YouTube -38%) and Facebook (29%), were listed among the community sources most often visited by architects in a given week. While that's great, the reliance on more tailored information sources – specifically professional groups specific to enterprise architects and peers within- and outside of the architect's company ranked much lower.

COMMON SOURCES OF INFORMATION

SEARCH ENGINES ANALYST FIRMS WEB SITES

WHITE PAPERS IN-PERSON DISCUSSIONS SOCIAL MEDIA

Asked about the challenges they faced, one Infrastructure Architect respondent said they were similar to the problems that everyone faced – limited resources in terms of people and money and trying to get everyone to come together to decide what to focus on first.

That's a problem. Half of those surveyed said that keeping up with the pace of technology change, in itself, was a challenge. Forty-three percent said they were very or extremely challenged in educating themselves about various, siloed business problems within their organization. An identical percentage said they were very or extremely challenged by the lack of available information from subject matter experts within the organization concerning infrastructure strategy and upgrades.

> **I think the problem we have is probably a similar problem to most everyone is limited resources in terms of people and money and trying to get everyone to come together to decide what to focus on first."**
> ENTERPRISE ARCHITECT, ENERGY

CREATING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR THE ENTERPRISE ARCHITECT

What does this all mean? The results of our survey and our in-depth interviews with enterprise architects suggest that these professionals recognize the growing importance of their role and skillset in the workplace. As companies become more reliant on technology, enterprise architects occupy a critical role of facilitating conversations between business and technical leaders, synthesizing technical capabilities and strategic goals and forging a path forward.

At the same time, enterprise architects face pressure within their jobs. Limited human and capital resources limit their range. A lack of useful and available information within their firm and from external sources limit their ability to properly educate themselves about the challenges facing their company, blunting their ability to effect change.

Organizations that want to set their enterprise architects up for success need to create a strong foundation upon which enterprise architects can build: identifying and facilitating access to subject matter experts within their organization rather than leaving it to the architect to identify, locate and connect with these critical liaisons.

Beyond that, employers can facilitate the work of architects by connecting them with resources internally and externally that help them to understand the specific business context in which they work, as well as the larger strategic choices before them and external forces shaping their industry and profession. Online resources like LinkedIn are great, but fostering personal contacts via industry and professional groups as well as conferences may also pay dividends.

ABOUT OUR SURVEY

For its study, Network World commissioned a 20-question online survey of 271 information technology professionals involved in converting business strategies into IT strategies, assisting infrastructure in mapping their future strategies to align with the rest of IT, or providing solution architects/engineers with roadmaps or specifications.

Respondents represented a broad range of industries including technology (29%), government and education (14%), financial services (13%) and telecommunications (10%). They came mostly (63%) from companies with more than 1,000 employees. Thirty-six percent of respondents were from companies with less than 1,000 employees.

EXAMINING THE MARKETPLACE

We think research is invaluable in helping to connect marketers with customers and prospects. Our research portfolio explores our audiences' perspectives and challenges around specific technologies, examines the changing roles within the IT purchase process, and arms IT marketers with the information they need to identify opportunities. **To review the presentation of full results from any of these studies, contact your IDG Enterprise sales executive or Sue Yanovitch, VP, Marketing for IDG Enterprise at syanovitch@idgenterprise.com.**

BUYING PROCESS

Each year we take a deep dive into the enterprise IT purchase process to learn more about who is involved and who influences decision-making, what sources purchasers rely on to keep up to date with technology—and throughout the purchase process—and how they feel about the vendors they're working with.

- **Role & Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker**

  The annual IDG Enterprise Role & Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker survey is conducted to gain insight into the evolving role and influence of IT decision-makers in today's corporations. The research examines the involvement of IT decision-makers during each stage of the IT purchase process and the primary influences and information sources they rely on throughout the purchase process.

- **Customer Engagement**

  The IDG Enterprise Customer Engagement survey looks at the role content consumption plays in the purchase process for major technology products and services, and provides insights to IT marketers to map their engagement touch-points to customers information needs. The survey looks at how a wide variety of content types are used throughout the individual stages of the IT purchase process and how that content is consumed, discussed and shared.

TECHNOLOGY INSIGHTS

Each year we explore the technologies that are top of mind among our audiences to understand the business challenges, drivers, and adoption within the enterprise. Each research study is designed to help IT marketers understand what their customers are focused on and where the market is moving.

- **Role & Priority Studies**

  CIO Magazine Tech Poll: Economic Outlook
  CIO Magazine Tech Poll: Tech Priorities
  CIO/CMO Partnership
  Computerworld Forecast Study
  Cyber Security Watch Survey
  Global Information Security Survey
  State of the CIO
  State of the CSO
  State of the Network

- **Technology Specific Studies:**

  Big Data & Analytics: Insights into Initiatives & Strategies Driving Data Investments
  Cloud Computing: Key Trends and Future Effects
  Consumerization of IT in the Enterprise
  The Mobile First Enterprise
  Unified Communications & Collaboration

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