IT Procurement Strategies in the Age of Hybrid and Remote Users

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ABSTRACT: IT departments are challenged with sorting through a myriad of solutions that include hardware, software, and services to find the most appropriate combination that meets the needs of hybrid and remote users without compromising security and user experience. This, coupled with increasing costs, supply chain disruptions, and the need to attract and retain talent, means organizations have a lot on their plate. Fortunately, a large ecosystem exists to help customers navigate through these challenges.

Overview

As the world enters its third year post-pandemic, the time is coming when IT departments will have to make a choice to reinvest in the technology and practices that they've used to keep their organizations afloat for the past few years or go in different directions. While many organizations have found that initiatives that support a remote or hybrid user base are effective, others struggle with finding the right balance between the users' desire to connect from anywhere and the institutional desire to have users return in-person.

As IT considers doubling down on the hybrid workspace, they often find themselves having to repay the technical debt incurred over the past two years, where corners were cut in the name of operational continuity. This often includes things like:

- **Endpoint devices** – Some organizations allowed users to use whatever device they could find, even if it was old and past support.

- **Supply chain-related disruptions** – There are many examples of the effects of supply chain disruption—for example, sending underperforming endpoints to users because their preferred device wasn't available (affecting end-user experience), or spending more money on over-specced devices that do too much.

- **Product services bloat** – Many organizations found themselves adding technology to support use cases or challenges as they arose, leading to an unsustainable number of disparate systems and workflows that are difficult to integrate and that take time away from IT resources that are already constrained.

- **Security** – Affected by all of the above, security is often sacrificed in the name of operational continuity.

Addressing these challenges is as important as ever, since the upcoming refresh (whether it's in 2023 or 2024) represents a commitment to organizations' overall IT strategies for the next three to four years. Considerations made today about things

like procurement, supply chain disruptions, deployment and integration, support, and end-user experience will help ensure future success, security, and productivity wherever organization's users are on the hybrid spectrum.

Analysis

There are many different ways for organizations to evaluate their current strategy, so it's useful to break down the challenges into three main topics:

- Reducing supply chain challenges and simplifying procurement

- Improving security and management

- Improving overall end-user productivity and satisfaction

Successfully managing each topic requires a balance of personnel, bandwidth, skillset, and cost, which can become overwhelming. For this reason, many customers turn to third-party providers for assistance in areas where they lack bandwidth or expertise. In fact, a recent research report from TechTarget's Enterprise Strategy Group shows that 57% of organizations leverage third parties to help align stakeholders and develop their end-user computing (EUC) strategy (see Figure 1).[1]

Figure 1. Most Common Reasons for Using Third-party EUC Services

For which of the following reasons has your organization engaged third-party services for EUC projects? (Percent of respondents, N=375, multiple responses accepted)

We use consultants to help align stakeholders and develop EUC strategy	57%
It saves us time	57%
It saves us money	51%
We do not have enough in-house staff and skills	39%

Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

Reducing Supply Chain Challenges and Simplifying Procurement

Fifty-seven percent of organizations indicated that they engage third parties for EUC projects to free up time. This can manifest in many ways, from procurement and dealing with supply chain disruptions to deployment, integration, and support.

Consider all the ways that procurement alone can impact the demand on IT staff's time. When first deploying a new technology, an organization must learn the baseline requirements and sort through a list of vendors that could include

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[1] Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Complete Survey Results, *End-user Computing Trends*, February 2022.

hardware, networking, public cloud, security, and endpoint devices, just to name a few. Determining the correct path requires education and time, and that's before dealing with the dreaded "golden screw" problem.

"Golden screw" problems occur when something that seems like a plentiful commodity is suddenly scarce and hinders a project. Consider a car that's 99.9% manufactured, except for one screw that secures the headlight, which is stuck on a ship or at a port. This one screw—insignificant to the bottom-line price of the car—instantly becomes the "golden screw." Without it, the car can't ship, the production line stops, and the company can't recognize any revenue.
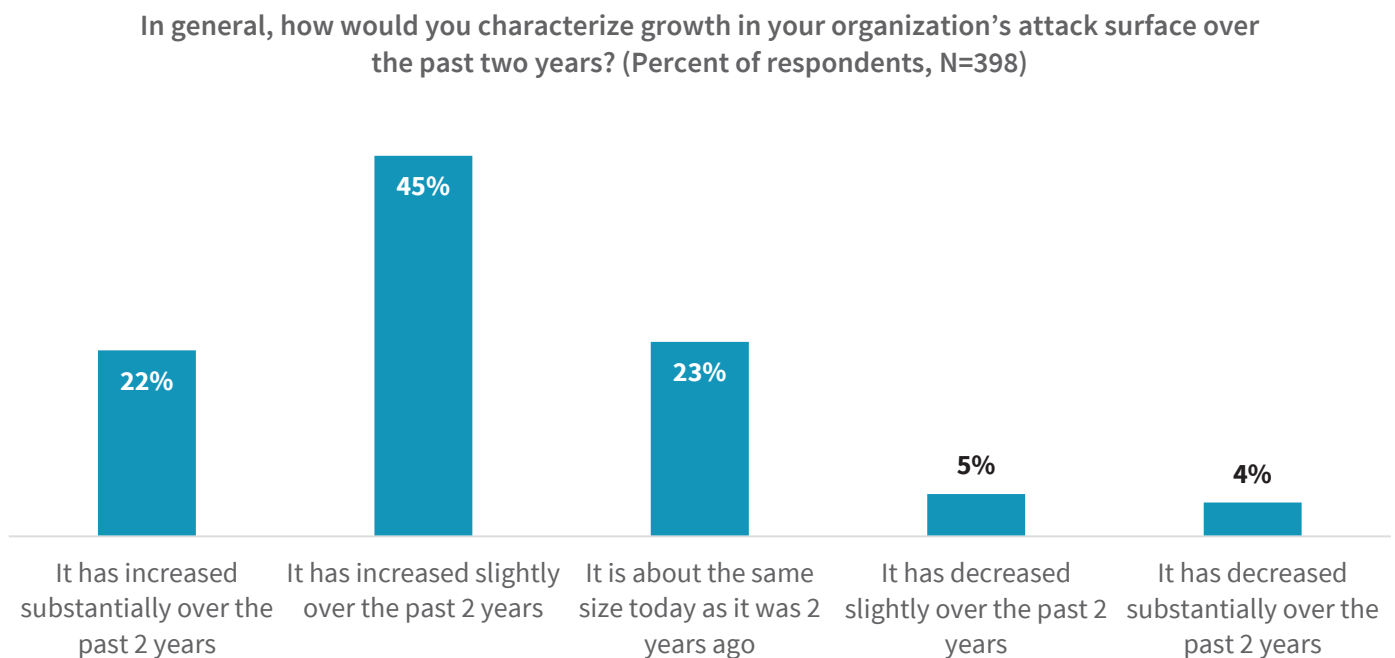
Golden screw problems don't have to pertain to a machine or a factory. They can affect any project, including those pertaining to organizations' IT strategies. Some issues can lead to protracted delays or even outages, like if an organization's preferred server or endpoint isn't available. It even extends to peripherals, like webcams and headsets, which are more important than ever.

This is where relying on partners can be tremendously helpful because supply chain management is core to their business. They can help organizations avoid these golden screw problems by suggesting compatible alternatives that deliver the same functionality without being limited to one SKU or a preferred OEM. This approach can help limit the impact of disruptions and ensure operational continuity.

Improve Security and Management

As the number of users outside corporate walls has increased, so too have the demands on security and management resources. In fact, 67% of organizations reported an increased attack surface over the last two years, compared to just 9% that said their attack surface was shrinking (see Figure 2). This additional exposure is due in large part to the decentralization of the user base, along with the need to support various endpoints, networks, and access methods (remote desktop, VPN, etc.).[2]

Figure 2. Increasing Attack Surfaces

In general, how would you characterize growth in your organization's attack surface over the past two years? (Percent of respondents, N=398)

It has increased substantially over the past 2 years	It has increased slightly over the past 2 years	It is about the same size today as it was 2 years ago	It has decreased slightly over the past 2 years	It has decreased substantially over the past 2 years
22%	45%	23%	5%	4%

Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

[2] Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, *Security Hygiene and Posture Management*, January 2022.

A hybrid solution requires a flexible approach that focuses on the end-user experience without sacrificing security or increasing management. This requires intentional design of the overall solution, including modern components like zero-trust security, along with things like device deployment, software upgrades, app management, and OS patching.

As IT departments build out hybrid or remote workspace solutions, they can leverage their partner's extensive knowledge of the complete stack—hardware, software, and services—to ensure that their goals are met without having to learn the nuances of all the new tech. Partners can provide recommendations, and IT can rest assured, knowing that the partner's expertise has already pre-validated those recommendations for their use case.

Similarly, partners are aware of the impact that management can have on IT operations and can advise organizations on the best approaches to simplify the management of all the moving parts that support remote workspaces. Many partners offer technical support and deployment services as well. By consolidating around a trusted partner and platform, IT can reduce the management demands on their organization while securely supporting remote or hybrid users.

Improve Overall User Productivity and Satisfaction

Long-term success in hybrid or remote environments is determined by end-user happiness and, more importantly, productivity, across a wide variety of user personas. While it's easy to deliver a locked down, inflexible experience to users, this has the effect of stifling productivity. A graphics designer needs a different environment than a task worker, sales rep, or warehouse manager. Each user type has a unique set of needs and providing them with the devices and experience they need will help them reach their goals. Because of this, organizations typically prioritize employee experience, both in terms of collaboration and expectations around device choice, application preferences, and security (see Figure 3).[3]

To do this effectively, IT needs to understand the different user personas and factor the way users want to work into the overall design of the remote solution. This includes baseline requirements, like which apps a user needs, but it also includes things like peripherals (cameras, printers, headsets, etc.), endpoint devices, and even where users actually work. Giving users the optimal technology bundle that aligns with their form, fit, and function is an important component in end-user satisfaction, productivity, and retention, while also increasing a company's ability to attract and onboard new employees.

Because of their wide range of customers and experience, partners are uniquely qualified to help organizations manage this scenario. While every organization is unique, organizations should look for partners that can help adapt bundled solutions to fit their user personas.

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[3] Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Complete Survey Results, *End-user Computing Trends*, February 2022.

Figure 3. End-user Computing Environment Priorities

What are your organization's biggest priorities when it comes to its EUC environment?
(Percent of respondents, N=378, multiple responses accepted)

Improving the IT organization's operational efficiency — 42%

Improving employee experience with communication and collaboration solutions — 32%

Detecting security incidences, vulnerabilities, and areas of risk — 32%

Supporting desktop users in multiple geographic regions (i.e., nationally, globally, etc.) — 27%

Reducing total cost of ownership for end-user computing experience — 27%

Managing user expectations of secure access, devices choice, and application preferences — 27%

Supporting remote and hybrid work scenarios — 26%

Consolidating endpoint security tools — 26%

Improved connectivity (e.g., WiFi, 5G, etc.) — 26%

Investing in technology/solutions to attract better and more diverse talent — 26%

Workplace learning and skill development — 26%

Accelerating toward a cloud operating model (i.e., pay-per-use) — 26%

Optimizing for employee productivity — 26%

Capturing and aggregating actionable employee insights, intelligence, and analytics — 24%

Consolidating endpoint management tools — 22%

Delivering help desk and support services — 20%

Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

The Bigger Truth

Whether their environments are remote, hybrid, or even fully on premises, organizations are challenged with procuring and deploying solutions that meet the needs of their unique users, all while dealing with constraints such as limited IT resources, lack of experience, and supply chain disruptions. Because of this, understanding the different user personas in your organization and what they need to collaborate and maintain productivity, in addition to what your organization needs to attract and retain talent, can be a daunting task.

Working with a trusted partner to acquire, deploy, and maintain prequalified solutions that are purpose-built for your environment can help you address these challenges, while also ensuring security and minimizing interruptions due to the need to maintain disparate platforms, train IT staff, deal with disruptions, and navigate supply chain issues.

As you evaluate potential partners, consider their ability to tailor solutions to your organization's—and your users'—specific needs. Do they understand the importance of the user experience and persona? How can they help with onboarding and assessing user engagement? Do they have a plan to help in the event of a supply chain disruption?

A partner with the answers to these questions will surely be able to help you as you commit to your hybrid or remote workspace strategy for 2023 and beyond.

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