

# It is only a time of change if you make it one.



Don MacVittie, 2011-28-06

In the years I've known Jonathan Feldman, he's repeatedly come up with ideas that are profound in the "Huh. That's obvious now, wonder why I didn't think of it in those terms" sense of really profound. His most recent blog fits into that category, a blog where he urges IT managers not only to try out up-and-coming vendors and technology, but to try them out against the will of their staff, and in mission critical situations. The blog, for your reference, can be found at [InformationWeek](#).

All that he says is obvious, after the fact. And he's right, there is change coming, and we just do not have any way of knowing how much or how fast that change will occur. Cloud is a thing, but is it a thing that will take over datacenters in a year? Ten? Ever? Anyone who claims to have an answer for that is ignoring the size and variety of the IT industry. There are as many different IT shops as there are businesses, and while some things – like email – are a no-brainer to help the business today, when they came about, most businesses weren't interested. Only by proving worth over time did they become the backbone of business that they are today. And that's how some – but not all – of the current technology buzzwords will grow to be game-changers too.

Even in the midst of a recession (yes, I know, it's supposedly over, but the real-dollar impacts are still with us across most of the globe), companies like [F5](#) are growing (note: I am not at all privy to F5 forward-looking data, so that statement is based upon the past few quarters and in no way predicts any kind of future), and new high-tech companies pop out of stealth mode at what seems to me to be an astounding rate. All indicative of healthy growth in technology, but many traditionally strong companies are struggling to meet the guidance they provided, let alone the numbers expected of them by analysts. That means they're selling less, or having to charge less for what they are selling.

Which proves Jonathan's point, in a very direct manner. Certainly some of the big names that have struggled in the recent past will recover, some will change directions and reinvent themselves, and some will wane while other vendors grow up to take their place. That is the nature of business, but as an IT customer, these cycles matter. Jonathan's advice is *extremely* sound in an age of flux, not only to get experience with new vendors and technologies, but to keep your staff from growing stale. Once you have a complex system like PeopleSoft or one of the facets of Tivoli in place, you are not exactly out beating the bushes to find more work, staff tends to grow increasingly specialized in that particular product. This is good for the short term, but might be bad for both the business *and* the employee in the longer term. After all, no business relationship lasts forever – or very few do anyway. Keeping an eye on what else is available helps you understand the state of the market vis-a-vis your chosen vendor's offering and helps your staff stay fresh with more than just your chosen vendor's offerings.

Does it take time and money? Yes, and there is an argument to save both in the current environment, I get that, and Jonathan, heading up a city IT department, no doubt does also. But in the long run, knowing the capabilities of products that you have in-house for a small project, or products that you don't have in-house but compete with your primary vendor could save you a ton of money and time also. In fact, if knowing the capabilities of products that compete with your largest vendor's offerings is part of the culture, it is almost guaranteed to save you time and money in the long run. And for most enterprises, single-vendor is not an option, for pricing and competition reasons most IT shops keep two vendors for mission-critical apps, even if one is definitely the primary and the other is to force the primary to sweeten deals. That means though that you have the second vendor in-house already, and don't need to spend money, only time to make sure you know all of the ins-and-outs of the products.

And after years of knowing and working with him, I'll suggest up-front that you just follow Jonathan's writings. He's got the eye of a CIO, the budget of a municipality, and the mind of Einstein. All wrapped up with an affable communications style. While I reserve the right to do more such in the future, Jonathan is the only person in the Tech Press I have outright plugged for, because he's that good.

And of course, while you're expanding your vendor knowledge, call your F5 sales rep, find out what's new with [ARX](#), [LTM](#), [WOM](#), [WAM](#), [APM](#), [ASM](#), [GTM](#), etc etc etc... You might be surprised.

Finally, even if you don't ever benefit as an organization directly from this knowledge, good IT staffers draw conclusions and ideas from the things around them... Meaning new knowledge about alternate toolsets and products may well spur ideas for alternate implementation techniques with your core vendors' products. While the impact of that statement is very difficult to quantify, if you've been in an IT shop with a bunch of bright people, you know it is truth, you'll get benefits you aren't even aware of.

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