The Owner's Guide to Lean IT

How the Smartest Teams are Making Their IT Predictable

Swift
SYSTEMS INC.
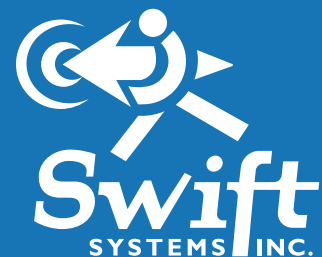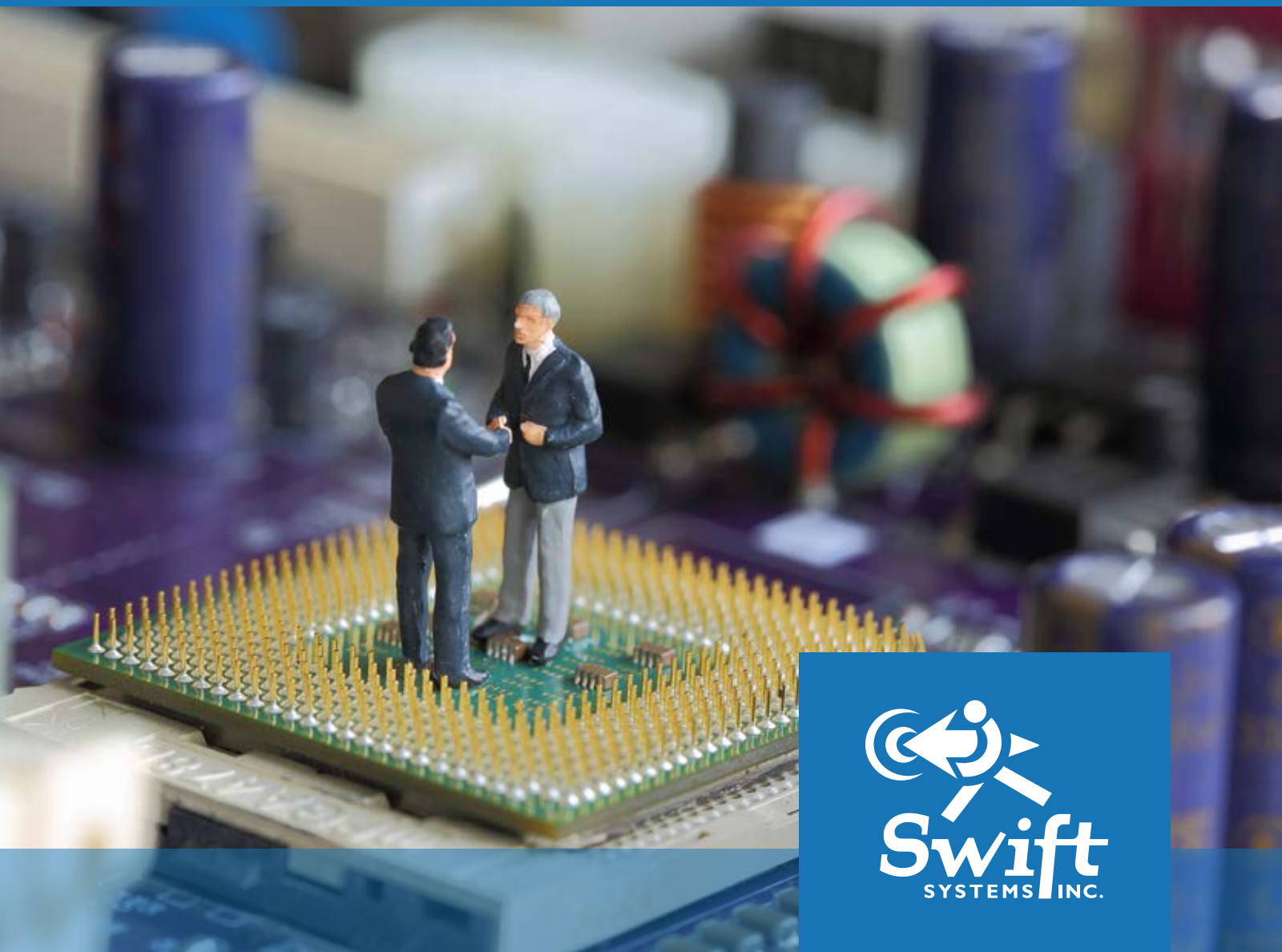
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If you're a business owner, you know this to be true: business success doesn't happen by accident. In fact, the opposite is true. Success takes careful, considered effort.

It means cutting costs, optimizing efficiency, and planning strategically for growth. Because the reality is that, while there are a lot of businesses striving for success, there are only a few businesses that achieve it; more than half of new businesses fail within five years.

> There's no magic bullet for success. But there is an intelligent approach to operations that increases the odds. And toward that end, dependable IT plays a crucial part.

IT systems are foundational to modern businesses. Too often, that foundation is unsteady. Unpredictable outages, insecure networks, and unreliable performance from mission-critical systems can jeopardize your entire business.

There's a better way, and the businesses that choose
it are well-positioned for long-term, steady success.

Are you ready to join them?

Over the course of this eBook, we'll show you how. We'll look at:

1 **The Old IT Model**
We'll identify the traditional gaps between businesses and IT providers that have hindered business growth for too long.

2 **The New IT Model**
We'll examine the shift toward alignment, including how IT should work and what components increase system predictability.

3 **The Swift IT Model**
We'll showcase the benefits of having a true and proven recipe for IT success, outlining how it benefits businesses and leads to growth.

Along the way, we'll showcase real-life case studies and surprising statistics to give you the full picture on lean, dependable IT.

The Old IT Model

The term "information technology" was first coined in 1958 via the Harvard Business Review. Naturally, the concept of "IT support" wasn't far behind.

In the early days, the role of IT support was relegated to specialists who understood the technical specs of early computers – which at first were huge mainframes taking up entire rooms. It wasn't until the introduction of personal computers that the more commonly-understood idea of technical support began to develop: the technician called in to assist individual users wrangle technology into cooperation.

The Break-and-Fix Paradigm

As technology became increasingly ubiquitous in the workplace, ensuring that systems kept running smoothly took on increased importance, and the IT support industry was born.

Here's a quick approximation of how it happened:

1 Businesses began implementing information technology in the workplace.

2 Workplaces began to depend on that technology to function.

3 Technology malfunctioned.

4 Someone had to fix it.

5 IT providers met business' demand to fix broken tech.

It all makes sense. But it created a paradigm that, in the long-term, misaligned the interests of businesses with the interests of IT providers.

Paying to fix broken systems creates an incentive for systems that break.

Now, that's not to say that IT providers working under a break-fix model would sabotage a system intentionally – almost nobody would, and there are certainly break-and-fix companies and technicians who perform their jobs admirably and well. But the reality is that the incentives of this model are simply not aligned with the needs of the client.

Because outsourced, hourly help, paid based on how long something takes to fix, is never motivated to design that systems don't break. The incentive is to fix the problem. The incentive is not to enact a plan to ensure that future problems don't occur.

74% of Customer Support Managers say that their company procedures prevent their employees from providing satisfactory service. – via [The New York Times](#)
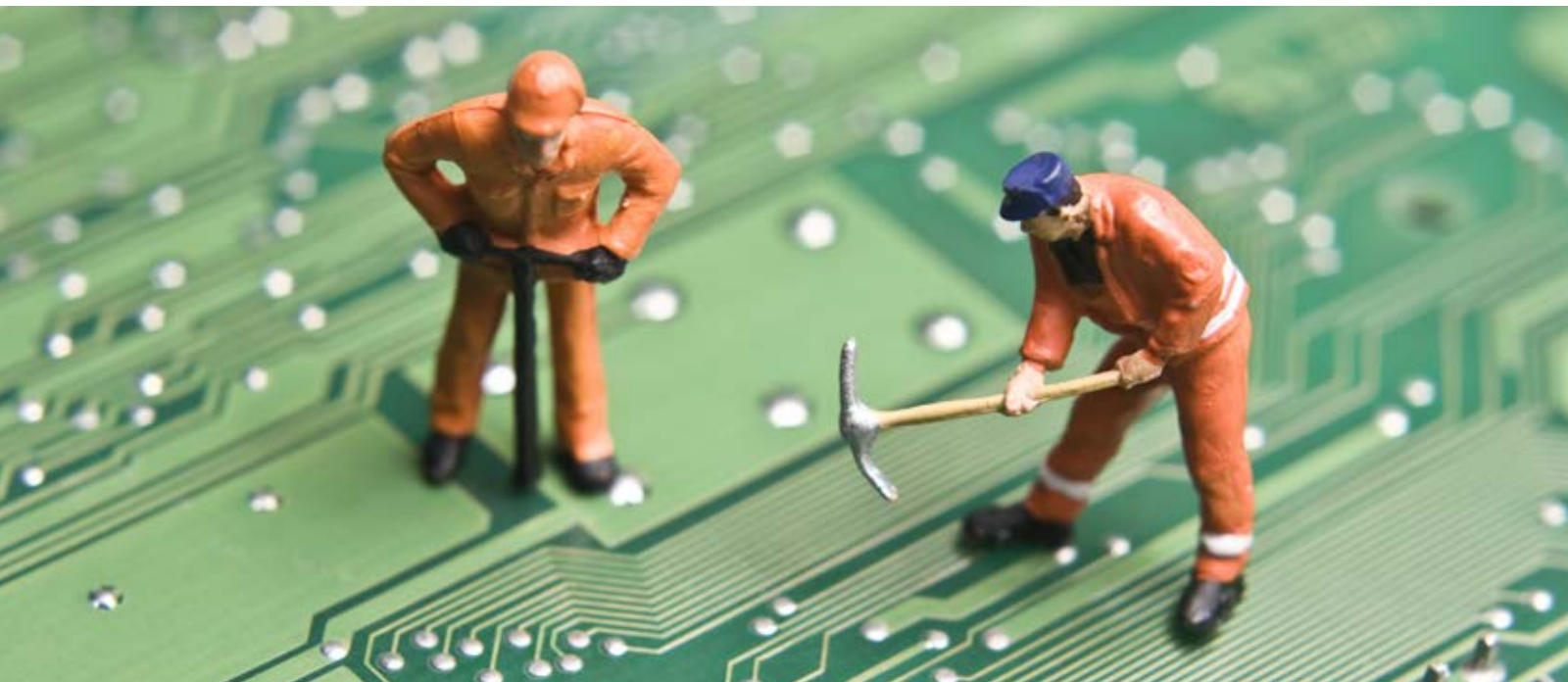
The results for businesses are unpredictable outages, insecure networks, and fluctuating costs. Technology may run smoothly for one month, but inevitably, there will be months where systems come to a screeching halt.

The Internal IP Paradigm

To bypass the problems inherent to outsourced, break-and-fix IT support, many businesses turn toward a different solution: they hire somebody to manage IT internally.

That makes sense on one level – the interests of an internal employee are aligned with those of the company. For both parties, the incentive is for systems to work as well as possible. But, while internal IT solutions don't have an incentive problem, they often have a capability problem.

Put simply, one person can't meet the IT needs of an entire organization.

There are too many issues, for one thing – from users who need assistance with email, all the way to servers that need to be optimized for security and performance. And there are issues that require advanced specialization. Just as you wouldn't expect your primary care physician to be able to proficiently treat a specialized disease, you can't expect a general IT employee to be an expert in ransomware protection.

You can hire specialists, of course. But doing so is expensive, and it can distract from the internal focus of actually running the business.

Ransomware is costing businesses more than $75 billion per year. via Datto

The old models grew naturally enough. But the bottom line is that the old models of IT no longer offer the best solutions.

The New IT Model

Fortunately for business owners, there is a new model of IT support that's designed to facilitate business growth: managed IT services.

It's a model that's becoming increasingly common, although it's not yet common vernacular. So, what are managed IT services?

Managed IT services are customized IT services provided at a fixed monthly price as opposed to services provided at an hourly rate.

It's a subtle shift, but it aligns incentives in a way that's crucial to business success.

By working under a monthly payment model, IT providers are incentivized to keep systems up and to fix them as quickly as possible. Efficiency and effectiveness are the motivation, in the same way that they would be for an internal employee – but managed IT services aren't limited by capability, either.

Here are the biggest benefits:

Managed IT services are more cost-efficient.

Managed IT services offer a higher level of service at a price that's far more affordable than what it would take to hire a full-time employee. Additionally, managed IT services often have a higher return on investment than cheaper solutions, because systems are less likely to go down, resulting in less high-cost downtime.

Hourly IT can be cheap – until something breaks, and it's suddenly incredibly expensive. With managed IT services, downtime is reduced, and costs are the same each month.

Managed IT services allow access to experts.

Managed IT services also give organizations access to specialized, IT experts across all fields. This is in direct contrast to what's available via internal hires. Again, this is the problem with internal hires: you can hire a specialist for a specific need, or you can hire a generalist to help out with broad needs.

There are problems with each approach. Hire a specialist, and they'll be useful for addressing one area of IT concern but not others. Hire a generalist, and they'll be out of their depth when special expertise is needed.

Assembling the ideal IT solution is a bit like putting together a good basketball team. The best ones have talent at each position – point guard, center, shooting guard, etc. Sure, you can hire someone who's good at everything – LeBron James – but that's more expensive than most can afford, and even then, they'll probably need a team around them to truly succeed.

Managed IT providers have done the work of assembling a top team, with experts in each area that's critical to your organization. When you need expertise, you have easy access to the experts – but you're not stuck paying a full salary.

Managed IT services shift the focus from fixing to enhancing your systems.

Traditional IT services work under the break-fix model, which means that the focus is always on getting things back online. And for internal IT teams working at a breakneck pace, there's barely time to implement necessary patches, much less plan for the future of organization IT systems.

Managed IT services, however, give organizations the capability to move past the focus on quick fixes. With a dedicated team at your disposal, you'll be able to work on system enhancements, not just necessary maintenance.

And it's all for the same monthly cost.

The takeaway is clear: managed IT services simply provide the best value.

But how can you choose the best managed services provider?

The Swift IT Model

There are many managed service providers – so how do you, as a business owner, choose the provider most likely to help you toward business growth?

The analogy we like to use may surprise you: crafting dependable IT systems is a lot like being a chef.

If you're looking for IT that will help your business reach its full potential, you're looking for a provider with a proven recipe - and the ability to tailor it to you.

Chefs work with an end goal in mind: a finished dish, delivered to taste and high-dining standards. There's a clear recipe toward getting there – a list of ingredients and a set of instructions on how each one should be prepared and added. It's this set of guidelines that ensures repeatable quality.

And yet, in addition to simply having a recipe, being a chef requires the skill and expertise acquired over dedicated years of training to make subtle refinements that tailor the final creation to a customer's unique palate.

Anyone can follow a recipe. It takes a chef to create one. The same principles are true when it comes to implementing IT systems.

There's a Proven Methodology to Dependable IT

First, make no mistake about it: there is a proven methodology to dependable IT. In culinary terms, there's a recipe to follow.

The principle is fairly straightforward: if you know what you want the outcome to be, you can start to know what you'll need to put in to achieve it. Do you want a cake? You'll need eggs, flour, milk, butter, and sugar. Do you want a secure network? You'll need a combination of solid hardware and secure software.

The best IT providers know the ingredients that will contribute to a great solution.

At Swift, over our years implementing and protecting dependable networks and systems, we've found that there are a set of standards and tools that, if enacted, provide the best chance of system dependability. This recipe is, by its nature, complex, but it's also intensely documented and easily repeatable. Generally, it includes components such as:

- The Sophos Security Suite
- Secure routers
- Secure switches
- Server-level security
- Application security

We often utilize these platforms and tools, and more, depending on need.

Each piece, of course, is implemented with the end goal of security in mind. After all, if you want your network to be secure, then it makes sense to follow a recipe known to produce that outcome.

The Best IT Recipes Take Business Needs into Account

Of course, having a recipe to follow is important, but the best IT recipes aren't static, one-size-fits-all lists. Instead, they're dynamic solutions shaped by business needs.

Let's continue the culinary analogy. A good chef wouldn't, for instance, include peanut oil in a dish when serving it to a patron with a peanut allergy – even if the recipe traditionally called for peanut oil.

A good chef would, on the other hand, tailor the level of spiciness in a dish to take a patron's preference into account – even if the traditional recipe called for a certain amount of hot pepper.

A good chef knows that a patron's unique needs trump an obligation to follow a recipe to the letter.

When modifications are necessary, the recipe isn't thrown out, obviously – it's a critical guide to preparing the dish. But neither is it followed blindly or prioritized over the desires of the patron.

The same principle holds true for IT solutions. While the best IT providers have a set of guidelines that are known to result in success, they also understand that the process of following an IT recipe is in service of a business' needs – not the other way around.

That's why, at Swift, while we have a carefully tested recipe that we know brings proven IT results, we're also open to working with existing systems and hardware in accordance with business needs.

We believe that having a good recipe is critically important. But we also believe business priorities should guide IT implementation, every time.

You Need a Recipe,
But You Also Need a Chef

Do you know why many IT solutions aren't dependable? It's because many IT providers only follow a recipe; they aren't concerned with being a chef.

Cheap IT solutions entail setting up a list of hardware and software components – and that's as true of managed service providers as it is of break-and-fix solutions.

Often, to make it easier for lower-level techs, it's the same package every time, repeated for different clients again and again. It's cost effective, and it makes training techs easier, too. In culinary terms, it's a McDonald's cheeseburger.

But the reality is that the same package of IT solutions doesn't work for every situation. And, to be honest, many cheap IT providers don't have the expertise to select the right ingredients – so the resulting solution is more like an imitation of a McDonald's cheeseburger than the real thing.

Just like choosing to eat at McDonald's every day will come back to hurt your health in the long term, choosing cheap IT means exposing your business to issues that, over time, have the potential to cripple your productivity.

If you want more than fast food IT, you need a provider who can do more than just follow an IT recipe. You need a chef who can tailor solutions to your unique business needs.

You need a trusted IT partner to provide solutions you can count on.

Still questioning whether a cookie-cutter recipe (and cheap IT) might suffice? Here's a straight-from-the-trenches look at how having a trusted provider benefits business.

Case Study: Wright Manufacturing
A Cookie-Cutter Recipe Wouldn't Cut It

Wright Manufacturing is an innovative leader in lawn maintenance technology, dedicated to manufacturing the safest, most durable, and highest quality lawn equipment in the world.

They're known for revolutionizing the lean model in their industry. In fact, the company's plant in Frederick, MD, with 77,000 square feet under roof, leverages the latest techniques in efficient "just-in-time" production and the highest quality control – but to do so effectively, it requires the continuous operation of mission-critical IT systems.

That's where Swift came in.

The Problem

Wright Manufacturing had outgrown their aging network systems. Consequently, daily challenges shifted the IT department's time away from critical customer facing operations initiatives that supported Wright's revenue streams.

Wright needed to create a "private cloud" platform that would allow their systems to run at optimum performance levels and still keep them flexible, agile, and streamlined. Additionally, Wright desired to consolidate several public cloud systems into this single system to further reduce operational costs and increase service and performance levels for those systems.

The Solution

Obviously, a cookie-cutter solution wouldn't do for Wright. So, Swift Systems' engineers collaborated with Wright to ascertain all of the various system and application requirements. Together, they designed a plan to migrate critical systems to a modernized and enhanced platform.

Swift coordinated with Wright's IT lead to install and configure the new environment, then supported Wright's internal transition to ensure that the data access paths were seamlessly connected to internal and external customer data, trimming unnecessary IT processes and hardware expenses while securely integrating the new virtual systems.

The Results

- Reduced operational costs.
- An increase in system performance and scalability.
- Bandwidth for Wright to focus on more strategic automation opportunities.

You Deserve IT You Can Count On.

You've worked hard to grow your business. So, don't leave its systems (and ultimately, its success) to chance. Choose an IT provider that's designed to support your mission-critical systems with proven recipes and the proven ability to tailor solutions to your business.

Are you ready to make your IT predictable and position your business for growth? **It's time to stop worrying about your IT. Let's talk.**

Get in touch with us for a free consultation with one of our technical experts. We'll review your current systems, assess your needs, and identify the coverage options to best meet them.

Contact us **online**, or at **240.479.9922**
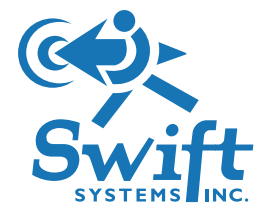
Stop worrying about your IT. **Switch to Swift.**