

# Embracing Convergence Culture?

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By Paul Cronin

If your healthcare organization has been held hostage in the past by information applications (such as video cameras, access controls, environmental systems, wireless medical devices, signage, etc.) each requiring their own separate network, convergence on to one robust network can be your ticket to freedom. A convergence culture allows your business to consolidate disparate networks, making it more efficient while saving you money.

The convergence movement isn't new - in fact, it's been going on for a couple of years. While the economy slowed its development, now many business executives are ready and willing to integrate transformational applications and devices all on to one IP centric network.

So, what do you need to know to bring the benefits of convergence to your healthcare organization?

Interestingly, healthcare is one of the areas where we're seeing the most convergence. This is due in part because of all the physical needs of hospitals and healthcare organizations. On any typical day, you have staff, medical personnel, security guards, and other employees whose individual nursing systems all carry their own costs and maintenance. The multiple moving parts make convergence culture

especially appealing, as convergence culture allows hospitals to merge all those individual nursing systems onto one consolidated network and the savings are worthwhile.

There are some common convergence hang-ups. IT managers, for instance, might be wary. Many tend to focus on what they know, and worry about taking responsibility for the network and the knowledge needed in this new converged environment. In addition, IT is not known for its savvy engagement with other business units and adjacent application owners.

Convergence in healthcare especially demands that IT personnel understand the organization itself, which requires IT to engage with other stakeholders, like facilities, security, HR, marketing and others to understand their needs and be able to deliver on them. For some of these stakeholders, convergence equates with consolidation, which translates to a loss of responsibility or power, much like the transition that happen in the past with voice systems.

As the network encompasses more of these technologies, the need for it to be always on and the risk of a single point of failure with a more catastrophic effect grows. However, the value of minimizing parallel networks, consolidating resources,



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creating new standards by which all business and information applications will adhere to with one owner outweigh the hurdles to get there.

## Presenting the Convergence Case

CIOs must make a strong case to expand their budgets and seat at the strategic table. As a CIO, what points should you emphasize when presenting your case for convergence?

**1. Cost Savings:** Naturally, finding ways to save money is important to your organization, and this particular point will be appealing to your CFO. Convergence allows your organization to group typical hospital functions and clinical applications on the same network.

**2. Serviceability:** That one network is easier to maintain and service. In addition, your IT staff will have the

ability to create a more robust and redundant network in original ways. Most data network companies have invested in strategies with certain amount of built-in redundancy (so that there's alternative ways for the network to perform). Separate networks can't offer you as many alternatives.

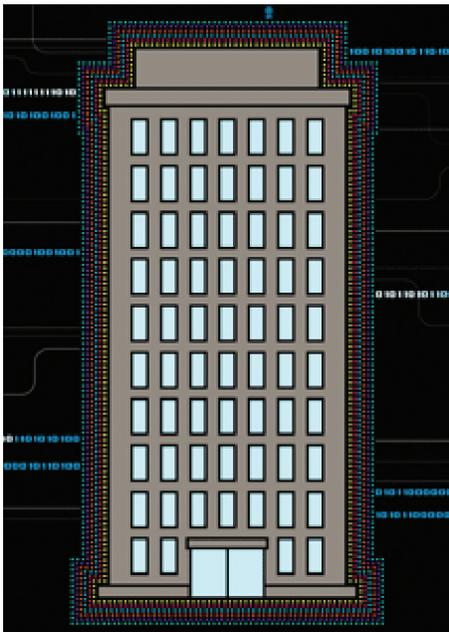
**3. The Big Picture:** A single network offers higher security as well as providing a more cohesive business architecture. This can make a huge impact on the daily functions of your IT staff and, most importantly, your end users.

Convergence makes a strong business case for itself. Once you can show the business value and the savings that can be recognized through a more centralized approach the initial investment to get there will get the attention of the CFO - and increase the budget of the CIO. However, there needs to be a plan that shows how the transformation is going to take place, that all stakeholders concerns will be addressed, and that the risk associated in having one network will be mitigated. CIOs need to be willing to invest time to understand these new information applications that were never part of their domain. Most importantly IT needs to align itself with a networking partner (below referred to as a trusted advisor) that embraces convergence and has surrounded itself with a stable of partners that can help them to provide a consistent "always on" experience through the lifecycle of this new converged environment.

Once you've made the case for convergence, the responsibility of preparing your organization and mitigating risk falls to you. Your best bet for a smooth convergence transition is to plan, plan, plan ahead.

## Finding a Trusted IT Advisor

One of your first priorities is to find a trusted IT advisor to work with. You'll want someone who knows what they're doing and who can competently guide you through the convergence process. I've seen catastrophes where people just started plugging into a data network that wasn't prepared to handle it,



and a couple of extra wifi users managed to bring the whole network down. Ideally, your advisor should have experience in converging healthcare systems, as the needs of your organization are quite different from those of a retail business (for instance, your organization might require 6+ devices connected wirelessly in each private room).

Furthermore, the presence of a seasoned advisor will reassure your current IT managers who are focused on protecting everything that the organization has built so far. To that end, you'll want someone who communicates well and perceives IT as a fused, integral part of your organization, rather than an offshoot

or cost center. Your organization could not run without technology, and learning how your organization works should not frighten off your advisor - nor should conversations about how to address all your stakeholder concerns. In addition, make sure that your advisor plays well with others and has established relationships with other reliable IT vendors; technology has become so complex that any vendor who claims to do it all should be considered suspect.

Hopefully, your IT advisor will work with you to minimize risk as much as possible. Play it safe and pick a window of time when any necessary downtime will be the least disruptive. A lot of applications are sensitive, so make sure that they're never really "down" but rather have backups running parallel while you transition to one IP centric network

Obviously, finding your IT advisor will require time and research on your part. Taking the time to select the right advisor, however, will save you complications (and likely money) in the long run.

Transitioning to a convergence culture can save your organization money, provide a more cohesive business architecture, and ultimately make life a lot easier for your end users. Additionally, if you handle the transition smoothly, you'll increase your individual business value as well as earn your IT staff a larger seat at the strategic table.