The 2021 CIO Agenda:

Seize This Opportunity for Digital Business Acceleration
The world’s most influential CIO survey

Each year, Gartner conducts the world’s most influential CIO survey to track how CIOs and other senior IT leaders around the globe are balancing their strategic business, technical and management priorities.

With these findings we generate the annual Gartner CIO Agenda Report, which presents survey results and case studies, plus expert analysis and insight — enabling CIOs to compare priorities and actions with global peers, and glimpse what the future may hold.

This year’s survey by the numbers:

- **1,877** CIOs across 74 countries
- **$4.7 trillion** in revenue/public-sector budgets
- **$85 billion** in IT spending
- **14th** year of conducting the Gartner CIO Survey
The CIO’s relationship with the business is stronger than ever

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **66%** increased strength of CIO-CEO relationship
- **70%** CIOs assuming leadership of high-impact initiatives
- **80%** CIOs educating CEO and other senior stakeholders on the value of IT

Are you ready to leverage this influence? Don’t let your advantage fade.
CIOs have the opportunity to play a leading role in digital business acceleration

During the COVID-19 lockdown, many CIOs helped save their enterprises. They now have the attention of the CEO in a way they hadn’t before. The enterprise’s path to the future runs through IT, and boards and CEOs know it. These stronger relationships give CIOs leverage they’ll need for their next big challenge — digital business acceleration.

CIOs have been trying for years to convince senior business leaders to modernize and take full advantage of technology. Now, many roadblocks have been removed, and the majority of boards are prioritizing these initiatives.

69% of boards report accelerating digital business initiatives in response to COVID-19.

This guide compiles four key activities from the 2021 Gartner CIO Agenda Report that distinguish top organizations from typical and trailing counterparts when it comes to digital business acceleration and long-term agility to help you:

• Compare your views of the future with more than 1,800 peers
• Learn from top-performing organizations
• Refine your strategy for 2021 and beyond
Redirect resources
Direct more investment and people toward new business priorities

Top-performing enterprises know that disruption isn’t the exception to the rule, it is the rule. As they plan their postpandemic strategies, focus remains on the things necessary to shift modes when future disruptions occur. This year has reinforced that funding innovation pays dividends. Thus, boards of directors are ready to put real resources behind digital acceleration.

2% average increase is expected in IT budgets globally in 2021.

Spending will increase across the board for most IT organizations in 2021. But top performers got a jump on it in 2020, and will, therefore, increase their lead over competitors. Organizations that have already increased their funding of digital innovation are 2.7 times more likely to be top performers than trailing performers.

Shifts in Funding Due to COVID-19
Percentage of Respondents Reporting an Increase

Expected Change in 2021
Percentage of Respondents Expecting an Increase

How should CIOs respond?
• Reevaluate recent business cases to optimize investments
• Reallocate funding to digital innovation

Related resources
• CIO Roadmap for Strategic Cost Optimization
• Rethink the IT Strategic Plan
Remodel operations
Revamp business operations to increase efficiency and supply chain resilience

COVID-19 demonstrated the fragility of supply chains. Many enterprises suffered severe disruptions during the initial lockdown, which are still slowly being resolved.

The big change came in supply chain delivery speed to the organization. More than half of CIOs reported a decrease in delivery speeds for basic IT equipment such as PCs and servers, compared with only 21% who reported a speed increase. CIOs expect the situation to reverse in 2021, with 51% foreseeing an increase in speed versus only 7% foreseeing a decrease.

51% of CIOs reported a decline in speed of supply, and 18% reported a decline in supplier reliability as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Top performers have already begun spending money and effort to increase supply chain resilience by duplicating key suppliers and bringing more business processes, sales and delivery in-house. These activities reduce risk, but require significant shifts within the enterprise.

How should CIOs respond?
- Look for ways to use digital technology to increase supply chain resilience
- Use crowdsourcing to expand the horizons of supply chain decision makers

Related resources
- Driving Digital Business Transformation for Industry Leadership
- Guide to Aligning Digital Business and the Digital Supply Chain
Win differently
Go where customers are

Many changes made in response to COVID-19 will continue to accelerate because they make business sense. For example, customers and citizens shifted their activity online during the lockdown, increasing demand for new digital products and services, as well as self-service use. This shift will increase in 2021.

76% of CIOs report increased demand for new digital products or services during the pandemic, and 83% expect this demand to increase further in 2021.

Top performers have gone all-in, developing the capabilities to use digital to create deeper relationships with customers, and it’s paying off. Organizations that have increased their use of digital channels to reach customers or citizens are 3.5 times more likely to be top performers than trailing performers.
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Response to Digitalizing Customers
Percentage of Respondents Reporting an Increase

- Use of Digital Channels to Reach Customers/Citizens: 87% (Top), 83% (Typical), 79% (Trailing)
- Rate of New Product/New Service Introduction: 73% (Top), 70% (Typical), 60% (Trailing)
- Degree of Customer Engagement (In Contrast to a Transactional Relationship): 66% (Top), 59% (Typical), 57% (Trailing)
- Support/Service Opening Hours: 40% (Top), 36% (Typical), 30% (Trailing)
- Sales Opening Hours: 29% (Top), 28% (Typical), 28% (Trailing)

Expected Increase in 2021
Percentage of Respondents Expecting an Increase

- Use of Digital Channels to Reach Customers/Citizens: 93% (Top), 81% (Typical), 61% (Trailing)
- Rate of New Product/New Service Introduction: 70% (Top), 52% (Typical), 39% (Trailing)
- Degree of Customer Engagement (In Contrast to a Transactional Relationship): 61% (Top), 45% (Typical), 30% (Trailing)
- Support/Service Opening Hours: 36% (Top), 28% (Typical), 16% (Trailing)
- Sales Opening Hours: 24% (Top), 18% (Typical), 12% (Trailing)

How should CIOs respond?

- Invest in customer-facing technologies
- Play a role in environmental and social sustainability

Related resources

- 2020-2022 Emerging Technologies for Enterprises
- Benchmarking/IT Score

Source: 2021 Gartner CIO Agenda Survey

n = ~298 (Top), ~1,348 (Typical), ~186 (Trailing). Numbers may not add to totals shown because of rounding.
Refocus IT leadership
Center on digital business acceleration

The COVID-19 response may look like a classic IT project on the surface, but a profound shift has occurred. Many CIOs used this crisis as an opportunity to increase IT tools and applications and modernize the legacy application and infrastructure portfolio. Some were able to do things that are normally difficult, such as conducting training, increasing the IT workforce and changing the IT reporting lines to roll up to a more senior executive.

70% of CIOs deepened their knowledge of specific business processes to advise the business.

The impact of these moves is clear: The better CIOs perform for the business, the more the business asks of them. The majority say the business is making higher-value, more strategic requests, and expect trends like these to continue in 2021.
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How should CIOs respond?
- Harness gains in culture within the IT organization to sustain momentum

Related resources
- The IT Roadmap for Digital Business Transformation
- Future-Proof the IT Workforce

### Changes in IT Due to COVID-19

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Top</th>
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<th>Trailing</th>
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<td>Strategic Rather Than Tactical Focus of IT Investment</td>
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### Changes in IT Expected in 2021

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n = ~302 (Top), ~1,364 (Typical), ~199 (Trailing). Numbers may not add to totals shown because of rounding.

Source: 2021 Gartner CIO Survey
Want to learn more?
To get additional information about the 2021 CIO Agenda, including regional and industry-specific insights, visit: gartner.com/cioagenda

Download additional resources
- CIO Roadmap for Strategic Cost Optimization
- Rethink the IT Strategic Plan
- Driving Digital Business Transformation for Industry Leadership
- Guide to Aligning Digital Business and the Digital Supply Chain
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