



Develop CIO skills beyond technology

In a 2002 survey, *CIO* magazine asked 500 CIOs to name the major challenges they face. Of the following top-five responses, not one was about technology:

- lack of key staff/skill sets/retention (40%)
- inadequate budget and prioritization of budget (37%)
- lack of time for strategic thinking/planning (31%)
- volatile market conditions (22%)
- ineffective communications with end users (18%)

When asked what skills they require most, respondents to the *CIO* magazine study cited communicating, understanding of business processes and operations, and strategic thinking and planning.

The responses are not surprising, considering the list of general CIO responsibilities, which includes planning business technology, developing applications and IT infrastructure and architecture, evaluating enabling technologies, and interacting with internal and external clients to ensure continuous customer satisfaction.

Griffin is quick to identify what he believes is significant. "The absolute No. 1 nontechnical skill is the ability to speak the language of business," he says.

Consequently, CIOs need to develop a broad skill set beyond technology. Among other skills, they need strong business orientation and a proven ability to bring the benefits of IT to solve business issues. They also need keen organizational skills; management ability to centralize IT resources and applications and coordinate business-unit resources and initiatives; and the ability to conceptualize, launch, and deliver multiple IT projects on time and within budget.

"In short, the major task of the CIO today is to simplify and unify processes across functional boundaries, and often across the entire enterprise," says Lena L. West, founder and CEO of technology consulting firm [xynoMedia Development](#). "This requires an unprecedented level of collaboration with the line managers and business units who own those processes."

West explains that given the vagaries of uncertain economic times, CIOs would also do well to acquire a number of "soft" skills, including the following:

- **Business Communication:** CIOs must be able to relay complex technical ideas in a nontechnical manner to business leaders.
- **Quick Action and Change:** The technology industry moves very quickly; slow movers almost always pay the price.
- **Harmonious and Fair Temperaments:** Technology has played a large role in the diversification of the modern workforce, but with increased diversity comes increased discord.
- **Global Outlook:** With the advent of the Internet, nearly any company can be global, which brings more competition, different cultures and customs, and multiple technology standards.