

# The Tech-Savvy President

Presidential leadership for higher education today.

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**T**HE ACCELERATING PACE OF technology presents a good news/bad news scenario for institutional CEOs. On the one hand, new technology offers many more possibilities for attracting, retaining, and serving students, providing significant support for marketing, institutional research, and networking. On the other, though, it requires substantial start-up expenses, raises constituent demands for improved access and convenience in the delivery of educational services, and carries the risk that systems may quickly become outdated.

In our experience, technology in higher education is best understood and managed not as a one-time expense but as an ongoing investment for the vitality and growth of the institution. These investments need to be fueled by presidential leadership and leveraged to reap future rewards. Therefore, we recommend the following.

## Be Strategic

Presidential leadership is essential to effective use of technology that serves not merely as a standalone goal, but as part of a broader, strategic institutional objective.

As our colleague Laurence W. Mazzeno, former president of Alvernia University in Pennsylvania, notes, "One of the key reasons presidents need to think of 'investing' in technology rather than 'spending' on technology is that we are conditioned in our society to think differently about expenditures and investments. It may be a cliché to say that we spend in the present but invest for the future — but that cliché has merit." When we are investing, as Dr. Mazzeno continues, we tend to make purchases that support strategic institutional growth.

## Think Long-Term

Campus leaders must understand the implications and value associated with recurring technology costs. Students and prospective students demand the latest generation of computer-assisted, computer-based systems, 24/7. Institutions that don't keep up may never have these would-be matriculants on their radar screens; many simply won't bother to inquire. Skeptical faculty who express reservations about high start-up costs may be converted when convinced that those whose teaching and research are aligned with institutional objectives will be supported appropriately.

Finally, developing a long-term investment strategy will enable you to make appropriate decisions to purchase and upgrade information technology as a means of enhancing the educational enterprise.


## Use Social Media as Part of Your Marketing Mix

Increasingly, colleges and universities are embracing vehicles such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. More than 60 percent of college students report visiting these sites daily, and all have a high return on investment and nominal or no production or distribution costs for marketing compared with more traditional media. All are "musts" when used strategically to reinforce your institutional brand and message across multiple platforms.

Facebook fan pages have become the new Internet home pages of a decade ago, but they should not be approached as just another "to do" to check off your list. Before overinvesting, we caution, go back to the basics of research, analysis, and evaluation that you would apply to traditional media: Who is your target audience? Where is it? When and how is it using social media? And finally, how will social media advance your institutional mission?

## Build In People Costs

Campus CEOs who have committed to viewing technology as an integral part of a plan often point to one of the primary pitfalls of technology implementation — the failure to anticipate and build in "people" costs. In fact, training and investing in technology support personnel correlates positively not only to improved productivity campus wide, but also to job satisfaction and to the core business of student learning.

Technology must always serve the ultimate user — the institution — not exist for its own sake. "Randomly spreading technology around campus," Dr. Michael K. Townsley, noted author, consultant, and former president of the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology, emphasizes, "will neither automatically yield operational efficiency, nor will it enhance strategic value." 

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