

What's In a Title? CIO



Information Technology (IT) has always played an important role in the gaming and hospitality industry to track customer's purchasing preferences and trends. IT played a very important

role to help see us through the apparent total collapse of computers worldwide during Y2K, which now seems like a lifetime ago. In the casino realm, a new era in IT is on our doorsteps in the form of mobile apps, and IGaming - that allows customers to play for free, but when legalized in the US, will let the patrons gamble from home.

To get some insight into the IT department, we asked an industry leader for his comments. Robert Phillips has served as Executive Director of IT / CIO for Mount Airy Casino Resort since April 2009. Prior to this he was the Assistant Vice President of IT for Tropicana Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City, as well as 14 years with Caesars Atlantic City. Robert has his Bachelor's degree in Information Systems and has more than 25 years of IT experience in the gaming industry.

G&L: Tell us about your property.

RP: Mount Airy Casino Resort, an AAA Four Diamond property, boasts the ultimate gaming experience against the backdrop of Pennsylvania's picturesque Pocono Mountains. Luxury hotel rooms and suites serve every resting need, while guests discover a variety of signature restaurant options including the impressive buffet, traditional diner, trendy noodle bar, and fine dining establishments including Red's Steakhouse and Le Sorelle Cucina. This all-encompassing, full service resort destination is for outdoor, and gaming, enthusiasts alike. We feature an award-winning lakefront 18-hole golf course; a 16,000 square foot spa, salon and exercise facility; headline entertainment at Gypsies Nightclub and bar; banquet and conference center; and our casino houses around 2,000 slot machines and 72 table games. We are



Robert Phillips, Executive Director of IT / CIO, Mount Airy Casino Resort

located less than 90 minutes from Philadelphia, New York City, and northern New Jersey.

G&L: Tell us about your department's organizational chart.

RP: The IT Department is segregated into two areas: a technical staff that maintains the network infrastructure, servers, storage, and desktop hardware/software requirements. Within this there is a Technical Service Manager who oversees the Network Administrators, Technicians, and Helpdesk staff. Then there is an operational staff that handles day-to-day issues. They are managed by an IT Manager who maintains daily system and application operations that oversees business analysts who work closely with the end-users, as a liaison between their IT needs and the applications that they utilize. The IT Manager also oversees the activity of the

Security Administrator that maintains user and application security, and enforces IT security policies. These managers report to the CIO who facilitates and prioritizes the needs of the department based on the companies objectives.

G&L: Describe a typical day in your work schedule.

RP: (Ha ha) There is no typical day in the life of a CIO, as each day the main focus changes. But the goal of the day is to define and insure the implementation of timely, cost effective solutions that meet the goals of the business. My day usually involves user and staff meetings, conference calls with vendors, and endless hours of online research. In between is the need to respond to user and staff issues, returning phone calls, reading and responding to emails, reviewing and approving invoices, while constantly maintaining budget and expenses. It is a never-ending job that starts at sunrise and typically ends at sunset, and then hours after that to mindfully compute and digest those daily activities. And then, like in the movie Groundhog Day, to do it all over again. The funny part is that all this goes unseen. Many of the workings that go into these solutions are rarely noticed, but the rare mistakes are always noticed!

G&L: What are some of your top departmental challenges?

RP: Although there are many issues, the main challenges are staying current with technology and implementing short and long-term solutions with an emphasis on efficiency, budget, flexibility, and stability. The challenge is maintaining these budgets and managing capital spending - it is often necessary to revamp business processes, and reengineer designs to reduce the cost of emerging technologies to satisfy business requirements. It is extremely hard to justify the cost of technology, since most of the technologies necessary for business solutions are invisible to the end-users. There is no benefit to investing in tech-



An Evening View of the Mount Airy Casino Resort in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains

nology just for technology's sake. In today's market, it is crucial that you spend every dollar wisely and bring the most cost-effective decision to the table. Before we do anything else, that's the first challenge we have to tackle.

G&L: Tell us about your department's interaction with other departments.

RP: Technology is involved in every facet of the gaming business. IT collaborates with department leaders to ensure participation of IT strategies to streamline business processes. We work with different departments to facilitate IT activities and help them understand the current IT trends, and future vision of best practices, as it relates to the demands of the business. The interaction and needs for a majority of the departments is very cookie cutter with similar applications, and solutions, that are standard in the gaming industry. Being aware of what other IT Directors are doing in the field is extremely useful in helping these departments find solutions to their needs. IT is highly driven by the

needs of the marketing department as it searches for competitive advantages to bring in the customer. Marketing always seems to challenge the systems' capabilities, and IT must scramble to help bring their innovations to life. It is important to work closely with each department to implement their solution without embedding IT into the process. The success of the project can be measured by the removal of IT resources, and the ability for the department to manage the solution independently.

G&L: Where do you see the future of IT going?

RP: Mobility is definitely the trend for the future. Everyday new and more powerful handheld devices and smartphone applications are being introduced. These devices offer instant communication to the information you need now. Mobile apps are being developed to utilize these devices in every possible way. Businesses need to capitalize on this segment to increase productivity from their

employees, which will allow them to service the customers better. An effective mobility solution lets you interact more closely with customers to quickly access your business resources and offerings, via their mobile devices as this will lead to increased customer interaction and satisfaction. In order to stay competitive, businesses today must address the customer's demand for mobility. And with online gaming on the horizon it is essential to develop a suitable mobile solution.

The ever-changing world of IT can be confusing, but always exciting. I'd like to thank Robert for his insightful comments, and as always we enjoy hearing from you with any questions or remarks.

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