



HYPETO REALITY

UNVEILING TECH TRUTHS



Reality

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HOW TO PRIORITISE REAL INNOVATION

In today's fast-paced technology landscape, it's easy for CTOs to get swept up in the excitement of new trends and buzzwords. Whether it's AI, blockchain, quantum computing, or Big Data, the tech world is constantly buzzing with promises of revolutionising industries and solving all business problems. But not all technological innovations are created equal, and as a CTO, it's crucial to distinguish between real, valuable innovations and overhyped distractions.

In this article, we'll explore how CTOs can cut through the noise, assess technology's true value, and ensure their organisations invest in innovations that deliver measurable business results. Avoiding buzzword-driven adoption and instead focusing on real-world problems and solutions

THE FLOOD OF BUZZWORDS AND TRENDS

Technology trends come and go at an overwhelming pace and for CTOs, it's tempting to jump on every new bandwagon, especially when those trends are aggressively marketed as the next "must-have" innovations. However, simply adopting a new technology because it's trending can lead to wasted resources, internal friction, and ultimately, little or no return on investment.

Consider the widespread excitement around blockchain in recent years. While blockchain technology certainly holds significant potential for supply chain management, security, and decentralisation, many companies rushed to adopt it without fully understanding how or why it was relevant to their specific needs. As a result, numerous projects failed to deliver meaningful outcomes because they were driven by hype rather than a real business case.

WHAT CTOs SHOULD CONSIDER:

- **Be Skeptical of Trends:** Before diving into any new technology, ask critical questions: Does this solve a real business problem? Will it improve efficiency or offer a competitive edge? Avoid adopting technology just because it's trending. Ask the business Why - Why do they think they need the technology.
- **Take a Wait-and-See Approach:** If a new technology doesn't have a clear, immediate application for your organisation, don't be afraid to take a measured approach. Sometimes, waiting until a technology matures or proves its value in the market can save your organisation from unnecessary risks.
- **Don't be Afraid to Experiment:** Sometimes it is difficult to see the value or opportunity for new technology, so look at how to experiment to understand the potential.
- **The Business does not know best:** Hype technology can be brought in by the business because of aggressive sales tactics, make sure you have a robust governance model in place to capture and stop these.

FILTERING THE BUZZWORDS: A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION

To prioritise real innovation, CTOs need a structured approach to evaluating new technologies. Rather than being dazzled by promises of transformation, focus on how well a new technology aligns with your business objectives and its potential for delivering measurable value. Here's a simple starter framework you can use to evaluate emerging technologies:

- **Relevance to Core Business Problems:** Start by asking how the technology addresses a core business problem. If it doesn't directly contribute to solving a real challenge faced by your organisation, it may not be worth the investment. Technologies should be evaluated based on their ability to create new opportunities or solve existing pain points.
- **Feasibility of Implementation:** Even if a technology looks promising on paper, it's important to consider whether it's feasible to implement. Does your organisation have the necessary infrastructure, skills, and resources to deploy and maintain the technology effectively? Some technologies may require costly upgrades or specialised expertise that your team doesn't currently have. Understand how it will impact wider aspects such as Business Continuity Plans.

- **Scalability and Longevity:** Scalability is a crucial factor when evaluating technology. Can this innovation grow with your company? Will it be adaptable as your organisation evolves? Additionally, consider the technology's longevity is it something that's likely to last, or is it a passing fad? Prioritise innovations that can scale and remain relevant in the long term. But don't forget it's not just about technology, understand the requirements for processes and people over the longer term.
- **Data and Analytics:** Rely on data-driven insights to evaluate the potential impact of a technology. Look for use cases, case studies, and performance metrics from companies that have already implemented the technology. If the technology has consistently delivered measurable results, it's a good sign that it could add value to your business.

WHAT CTOs SHOULD CONSIDER:

- **Establish a Vetting Process:** Create a standardised framework for evaluating new technologies. This will help your team avoid getting distracted by hype and ensure that every new technology is assessed for its real-world value.
- **Demand Evidence:** Always look for case studies or proven success in your industry before making a large-scale investment in new technology. If no clear data supports its value, it may be best to wait.
- **Inform the Business:** Make sure that your business teams understand the process and are aware that they are not allowed to bring in and/or negotiate on technology.

REAL INNOVATION VS. DISTRACTION

One of the biggest challenges for CTOs is distinguishing between innovations that are genuinely transformative and those that are mere distractions. The rise of AI and machine learning, for instance, has created countless opportunities across industries, however, many businesses mistakenly implement AI solutions without clear objectives, leading to underwhelming results.

Real innovation isn't about adopting the most cutting-edge technology it's about solving problems and creating value. Streaming media organisations have successfully deployed and applied AI technology using machine learning algorithms to recommend content based on user preferences. This doesn't introduce complex new features but enhances user experience and retention, addressing a key business goal.

In contrast, some companies have adopted AI simply for the sake of it, without understanding how it fits into their broader strategy. The result? A costly, underutilised tool that fails to deliver tangible outcomes. The lesson here is that innovation should always be tied to clear, achievable goals.

WHAT CTOs SHOULD CONSIDER:

- **Focus on Business Value:** Innovation should be driven by real business needs. Ensure that every new technology you adopt has a direct impact on key metrics like customer satisfaction, revenue growth, or operational efficiency.
- **Avoid Over-engineering:** Sometimes the simplest solution is the best one. Don't overcomplicate your systems or processes with unnecessary technologies when a straightforward fix could deliver better results.
- **Exploit What you Have:** Examine the technology already available in the business and experiment with what it can do.

THE ROLE OF DATA AND RESEARCH IN PRIORITISING INNOVATION

Data-driven decision-making is one of the most effective ways for CTOs to cut through the hype, by relying on data and research, you can assess which technologies will have the greatest impact on your organisation. This not only prevents costly mistakes but also ensures that you're investing in solutions that will yield long-term benefits.

Start by analysing industry trends and benchmarking your company's technology investments against competitors. Look for technologies that have delivered measurable success in companies with similar challenges. Moreover, be proactive about conducting internal research to test new technologies on a small scale before committing to a full-scale implementation - look at Proof of Technology, Proof of Concept and Proof of Value models - does the technology work in my environment? Will it address the business need? Will it deliver the benefits?.

For example, if you're considering adopting blockchain to improve supply chain transparency, begin by implementing it in a specific area of your supply chain. Measure its effectiveness over time before rolling it out to the entire organisation. By collecting data and learning from this pilot program, you can make informed decisions about whether to expand the use of the technology.

WHAT CTOs SHOULD CONSIDER:

- **Test in Small Batches:** Rather than making large-scale investments upfront, start by running pilot programs to test the effectiveness of new technologies. Use the results to inform broader decisions.
- **Make Data-Driven Decisions:** Use performance metrics and data analytics to guide your technology strategy. Rely on measurable outcomes rather than assumptions or trends.
- **Proof of Technology / Concept / Value:** Put in place models which allow you to explore all aspects of technology before committing extensive resources.
- **Consider the Wider Picture:** Bringing new technology into a business can have multiple consequences so make sure you understand the entire impact scope and plan for all aspects of change.

MANAGING EXECUTIVE EXPECTATIONS

One of the hardest aspects of cutting through technology hype is managing the expectations of executives and stakeholders. Often, executives are excited about the latest trends and expect quick results from new technologies. We've all experienced the conversations after executives have been to a tech conference, they come back with loads of ideas that will radically transform the business. Or they get tagged by a sales person and next thing there's a project to test some new technology that is not needed.

It's the CTO's job to set realistic expectations about what technology can achieve and how long it will take to deliver results, but more importantly it's about being the person the executives ask first.

It's important to educate stakeholders on the realities of technology adoption, ensuring they understand that innovation is a process not a one-time fix. CTOs need to communicate the benefits and challenges of new technologies, helping executives focus on long-term value rather than immediate payoffs. Which can be a very difficult conversation.

WHAT CTOs SHOULD CONSIDER:

- **Set Clear Expectations:** When proposing a new technology, outline the potential risks, challenges, and timelines involved. Be transparent about what can realistically be achieved and when stakeholders can expect to see results.

- **Educate Executives:** Help non-technical stakeholders understand the complexity of technology adoption. Use clear examples and data to explain why certain innovations are worth the investment, while others may be overhyped.
- **Show don't Tell:** Run regular innovation forum events for the executive team, show them what technology can do. Approach key partners and ask them to host one of your executive days so they get a chance to discuss their technology in a controlled setting.

CONCLUSION: PRIORITISE REAL INNOVATION OVER HYPE

As CTOs, it's easy to get caught up in the excitement of new technologies, but real innovation is about solving meaningful problems, not chasing trends. By applying a structured approach to evaluating new technologies and relying on data-driven decision-making, you can ensure that your organisation invests in solutions that create measurable value.

Remember, not all that glitters is gold. The latest buzzword might not be the right fit for your company, but by focusing on real-world applications and avoiding distractions, you can prioritise the innovations that will make a lasting impact. By filtering out the hype and focusing on solutions that align with your company's needs, you'll drive more successful outcomes and lead your organisation toward sustainable growth.

Neil Catton is an experienced strategist and recognised thought leader on the ethical and structural implications of emerging technologies. Through his *Next Evolution* series, Neil explores how legacy institutions must adapt to remain relevant in an era shaped by AI, spatial computing, quantum systems, and digital transformation.

He is a trusted voice on responsible innovation, with a distinctive narrative style that blends systems thinking, moral foresight, and practical governance insight. Neil's work spans public service redesign, cyber resilience, digital ethics, and ambient technology — always grounded in purpose, people, and long-term value.

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