

Sanity check: What's the difference between CIO and CTO?

By Jason Hiner in Tech Sanity Check, June 22, 2008, 3:46 PM PST // @jasonhiner

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When you start talking about IT leadership roles and IT career tracks, the question that almost always comes up is "What's the difference between the CIO and CTO positions?"

Here's a quick breakdown of the distinguishing characteristics of those two roles.

Chief Information Officer

- Serves as the company's top technology infrastructure manager
- Runs the organization's internal IT operations
- Works to streamline business processes with technology
- Focuses on internal customers (users and business units)
- Collaborates and manages vendors that supply infrastructure solutions
- Aligns the company's IT infrastructure with business priorities
- Develops strategies to increase the company's bottom line (profitability)
- Has to be a skilled and organized manager to be successful

Chief Technology Officer

- Serves as the company's top technology architect
- Runs the organization's engineering group
- Uses technology to enhance the company's product offerings
- Focuses on external customers (buyers)
- Collaborates and manages vendors that supply solutions to enhance the company's product(s)
- Aligns the company's product architecture with business priorities
- Develops strategies to increase the company's top line (revenue)
- Has to be a creative and innovative technologist to be successful

Further reading

- [Defining the complementary job roles of the CTO and CIO](http://www.techrepublic.com/article/5100-10878_11-5034729.html) (http://www.techrepublic.com/article/5100-10878_11-5034729.html) (TechRepublic)
- [FAQ on CIOs and CTOs](http://www.infoworld.com/articles/op/xml/01/07/09/010709opconnection.html) (<http://www.infoworld.com/articles/op/xml/01/07/09/010709opconnection.html>) (InfoWorld)
- [Whatever Happened to the CTO Role?](http://www.cio.com/article/31246/Whatever_Happened_to_the_CTO_Role_) (http://www.cio.com/article/31246/Whatever_Happened_to_the_CTO_Role_)(CIO Magazine)
- [CIO vs. CTO](http://www.windley.com/archives/2002/12/cio_vs_cto.shtml) (http://www.windley.com/archives/2002/12/cio_vs_cto.shtml) (Phil Windley's Technometria)

Does this list of characteristics ring true? What would you change? Take our [CIO/CTO poll](#)

(<http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/hiner/?p=750>) and [join the discussion](#) (<http://www.techrepublic.com/5208-6230-0.html?forumID=102&threadID=267141>).



About Jason Hiner

Jason Hiner is the Global Editor in Chief of TechRepublic and Global Long Form Editor of ZDNet. He is an award-winning journalist who writes about the people, products, and ideas that are revolutionizing the ways we live and work in the 21st century.

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