



*Charity*Finance

Voluntary Sector IT Survey 2007

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Foreword

It is again a pleasure to support, for the fourth year running, the annual *Charity Finance Voluntary Sector IT Survey*. The results continue to provide an opportunity to take a step back, benchmark against peers and see how the IT picture is developing across the sector.

IT, much more than the other functions under the remit of senior management in the voluntary sector, changes rapidly. The technologies that were expected to revolutionise the way charities operate four years ago may well now be obsolete or have been replaced by the next big thing. However, what doesn't change is the vital importance of getting IT right at a strategic level. It's not about implementing new systems for technology's sake but about really using IT to make a difference to what your charity is trying to achieve. We at ServiceTec believe in providing the most valuable tools to determine IT strategy and practice, and in convincing trustees and funders that appropriate IT investment is necessary for good governance and risk mitigation.

We want the survey to continue to be as useful as possible to those charged with IT decision making within charities, whoever they are. One factor which will always be important, regardless of prevailing fads, is how a charity organises itself to make the most of IT within its often considerable financial constraints. Only half of respondents said their chief executive is closely involved in IT decision making, while the number of chief executives who are sometimes involved has fallen from 34 to 30 per cent last year.

More encouraging, however, is the statistic that 34 per cent of organisations have IT representation on the board, up significantly from 16 per cent in 2006. Additionally, while the perceived barriers charities cite to them implementing world class IT systems remain budget and staff skill levels, the problem of inadequate support from the senior management team appears to be on the decline, with just 8 per cent rating it as significant, compared to 12 per cent in 2006 and 35 per cent in 2005. A couple of pointers, perhaps, to indicate that while there is a long way to go, IT is being taken more seriously at a strategic level. It will be interesting to see if this is backed up financially as we move forward.



Bryan Mills *Chairman*
ServiceTec

SERVICETEC

Voluntary sector IT survey 2007

The *Charity Finance Voluntary Sector IT Survey 2007* includes responses from 285 organisations, a third of whom have income of £1 million or less (small charities), while 15 per cent have income between £1 million and £3 million. At the other end of the scale 10 per cent have income over £10 million (large charities).

In terms of staff size, 29 per cent have 10 or fewer staff, while 12 per cent have more than 250. The quotes interspersed throughout the following pages represent a selection of the comments received from charities in their survey responses.

Mobile technology

Last year's survey included predictions of future trends in charity IT (a process repeated this year on page 15), and a common theme was communications technology, in particular the availability of remote working. This year's responses reflect advances in these areas. Over two thirds of organisations report that at least some of their staff can access their network remotely, up from 56 per cent in 2006, while of

those an average of 44 per cent of the organisation's staff are able to do so, up from 41 per cent. Meanwhile, two new questions this year reveal that only 10 per cent of organisations do not offer a laptop to any of their employees, with 4 per cent providing them for all staff, and approaching half the respondents offer PDAs to some or all of their staff.

This pattern is likely to continue, according to Ian Ryder, managing director of IT service provider appiChar. 'Broadband is impacting on working practices, allowing people to work flexibly, especially in the not-for-profit sector where employers don't have the budgets to keep recruiting, so need to be even more accommodating and innovative about the way they work. Also, as of 6 April, the right to request flexible working has been extended to carers of adults, in addition to parents, and their partners, of children aged under six, or under 18 if the child is disabled. This will have an effect on the way in which people want to work even more.'

Jon Jorgensen, managing director of Asyst Solutions, echoes this view.

'Mobile working is going to be a key area of growth, which will increase as home broadband keeps improving and expanding. The cost of home working considerably reduces the overhead to a charity and can remove the necessity of a large centralised office. Information on the go is common within commercial business and as more charities start to adopt commercial practices to improve their own processes, this will inevitably increase.'

He continues: 'Technology has also become much more mobile with the ability to access a charity's core systems remotely and on the move. Communications will be paramount to this success and charities should be aware that considerable investment will need to be made to ensure the workforce can remain productive while working remotely.'

Vista

One of the real headline grabbing developments of the past 12 months has been the release of Microsoft Windows Vista. However, 91 per cent of respondents say they do not intend to upgrade to Vista over the next year,

Fig. 1: Typical charity by size of IT budget

SIZE OF IT BUDGET	NO. IN SAMPLE	OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT?	DEDICATED IT DEPARTMENT?	TYPICAL NO. OF STAFF IN IT DEPARTMENT	NO. OF COMPUTERS	TYPICAL AGE OF COMPUTERS	AVERAGE INCOME (£)
<£5,000	82	CEO	No	1.0	0-10	2-3 yrs	800,305
£5-£15,000	55	CEO	No	1.3	11-25	2-3 yrs	2,217,031
£15-£50,000	45	FD	Yes	1.3	26-50	2-3 yrs	3,842,562
£50-£100,000	16	FD	Yes	1.7	51-100	1-3 yrs	5,826,550
£100-£250,000	16	FD/Operations director	Yes	3.4	101-250	2-3 yrs	10,289,362
£250-£500,000	5	FD	Yes	4.8	51-100	1-3 yrs	14,820,000
£500,000-£1 million	8	FD	Yes	9.0	501-1000	2-3 yrs	33,000,000
>£1 million	7	IT director	Yes	25.3	501-1000	2-3 yrs	75,383,714

'As IT now affects almost every part of the business and more and more key business decisions, we face an increasing challenge to get the IT department involved at the right time in decisions, especially project gateway ones.'

of whom 32 per cent say it will cause disruption to business, and 29 per cent cite price as a key factor in their decision. Of the other reasons given, a lack of beneficial functionality and a desire to wait until it has been proven to be reliable were common. Just 3 per cent of respondents currently use Vista, with a 69 per cent majority using XP, and 74 per cent of respondents believe their current operating system meets their needs, with 25 per cent saying it does 'mostly'.

There is certainly a good deal of cynicism towards the world's largest IT company; one respondent said: 'Too many changes too frequently from Microsoft, we'll wait and see if it actually works this time', while another stated: 'we will wait till near end of its life when it might work properly.' John Bird, managing director of ESiT, agrees. 'Most organisations do not want to be the guinea pig for Microsoft. There are significant cost implications – not just

Vista, but upgrade of PCs and training, and Vista offers very little functionality that brings a commercial benefit. What is important is selecting software that will work with Vista and a supplier who is well ahead of the game in that respect because even if you don't want to think about it now, make sure your supplier is, as moving to Vista is inevitable.'

With nearly half of respondents stating the average age of their computers to be two to three years old, and 18 per cent saying older than that, the advent of Vista is going to cause a significant problem. Bird says investment in IT needs to be a continual process. 'Without it, organisations will find that, in a few years time, when new technology forces an upgrade to computers they will be hit by an enormous bill. Vista will be a major driving force in this respect. Two to three year-old computers will struggle to run Vista.

Charities, like all commercial organisations, need to wake up to the fact that without an IT strategy and a plan to invest in IT on a continuous basis, they may drown.'

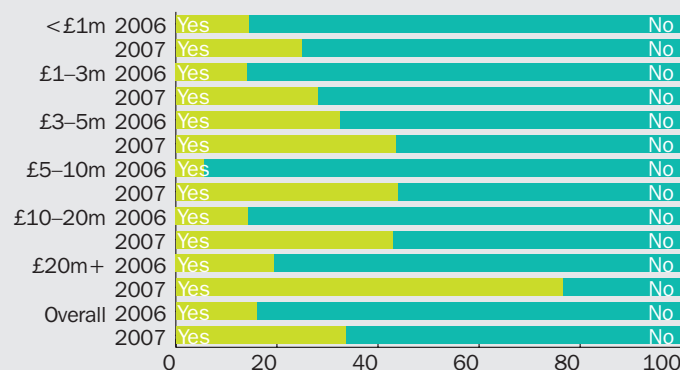
Jorgensen adds: 'Generally charities do not need huge desktop machines as the work they carry out does not require massive processing. The concern will be that if they move to more mobile working then they will need better processing power or a Citrix environment to protect their investment. This comes at a cost. Also, with products becoming much more resource hungry – Vista requires at least 1GB of RAM – these machines will need to be replaced. Charities should look to enter refresh contracts on hardware. For a fixed monthly cost the charity can update its hardware every two years, providing peace of mind.'

Governance

One factor which will always be important regardless of prevailing trends is decision-making and how a charity organises itself to make the most of IT within its financial constraints. Only half of respondents said their chief executive is closely involved in IT decision making, a similar figure to last year, while the number of chief executives who are 'sometimes' involved has fallen from 34 to 30 per cent. Bird believes that if the chief executive is not directly involved in the decision making process, then it is of paramount importance that the organisation has a clear strategy for how IT contributes to the success or failure of the business.

'Systems should be placed into one of four categories; key operational,

Fig. 2: Does your board have IT representation?
(% respondents by income band)



strategic, futures or high potential and utility or general purpose. The organisation will need to decide which category an IT system falls into and then have clear guidelines as to how a selection should be made for this category. For example, a system that is key to the operation of the organisation, such as a CRM and fundraising system, will need much more care in selection than buying utility software such as a word processor.'

'It is not just IT which is important, it's also developing staff and processes to take advantage of these tools, for internal synergy and competitive advantage.'

Perhaps a more important statistic then is that 34 per cent of organisations have IT representation on the board (see figure 2), up significantly from 16 per cent in 2006. In 38 per cent of cases this is in the form of the finance director. Piers McLeish, marketing director at Armstrong Consultants, says this is indicative of wider changes in business as a whole: 'It's encouraging to see the approach to IT as a key enabler in the charity sector continuing to mature. However, while MD involvement in IT decisions is not critical in our experience, board-level representation of an IT decision-maker is key in ensuring that the most is made of the opportunities presented by technology. This has been an influential trend in commercial organisations over the last five years.'

Figure 4 shows that 12 per cent of charities have a dedicated IT director with overall responsibility, up from

Fig. 3: Does your strategic plan include references to IT? (% of respondents by income band)

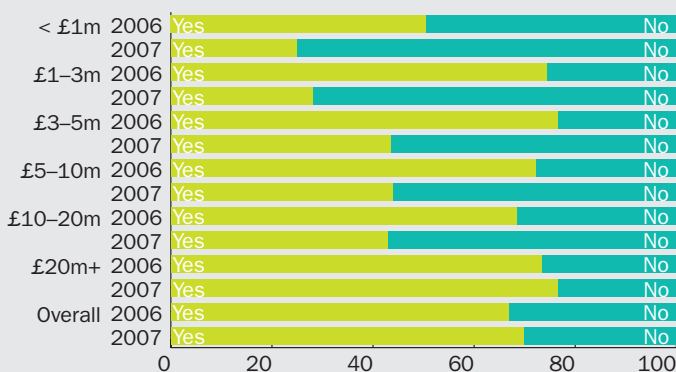
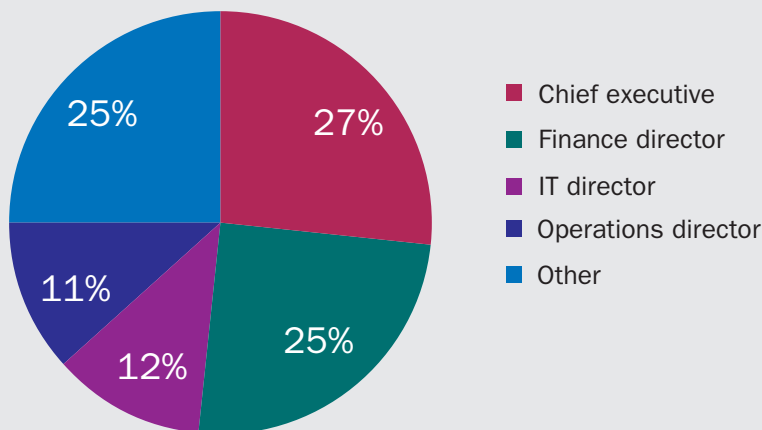


Fig. 4: Who has overall responsibility for IT in your organisation? (% respondents)



8 per cent in 2006. Jonathan Air, founder and managing director of CharitySoftware, welcomes this news. 'Without a confident understanding of IT there is a temptation to go with the perceived market leader and not take a critical look at the range of options available. As strategic IT decisions have a significant impact on organisations, it is critical that someone around the boardroom table has current IT expertise.'

Jorgensen believes collaboration is the key. 'Systems such as finance are more process driven these days. To implement a successful solution you need to map out the business processes and have a clear understanding as to how the relevant software will deal with these. The FD and chief executive should have an input into the decisions made to ensure a business process driven solution is chosen and to avoid a purely

Fig. 5: What do you spend your annual IT budget on?

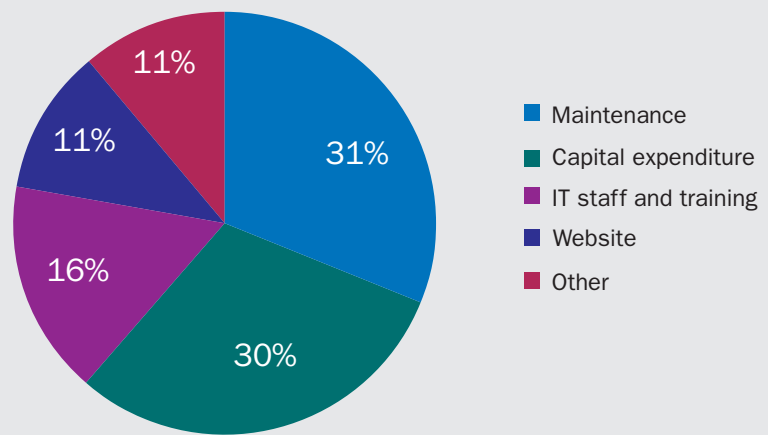


Fig. 6: How much do intend spending on new IT projects in the next 12 months? (% respondents by income band)

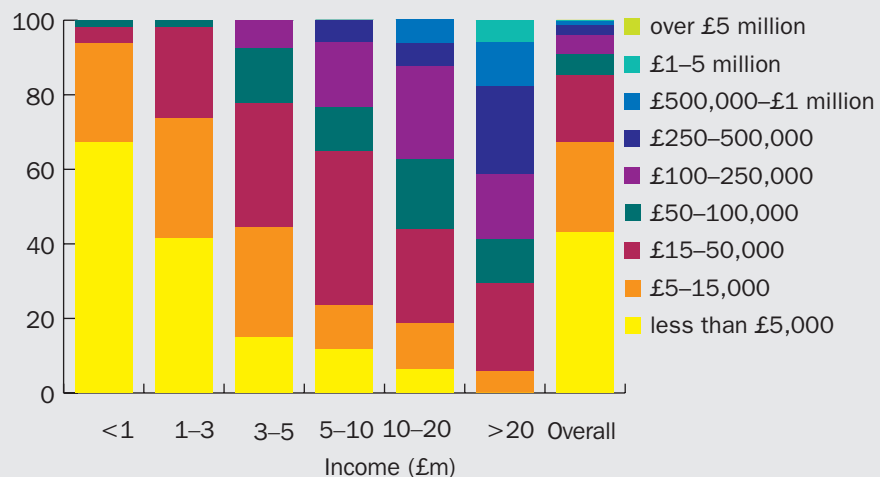
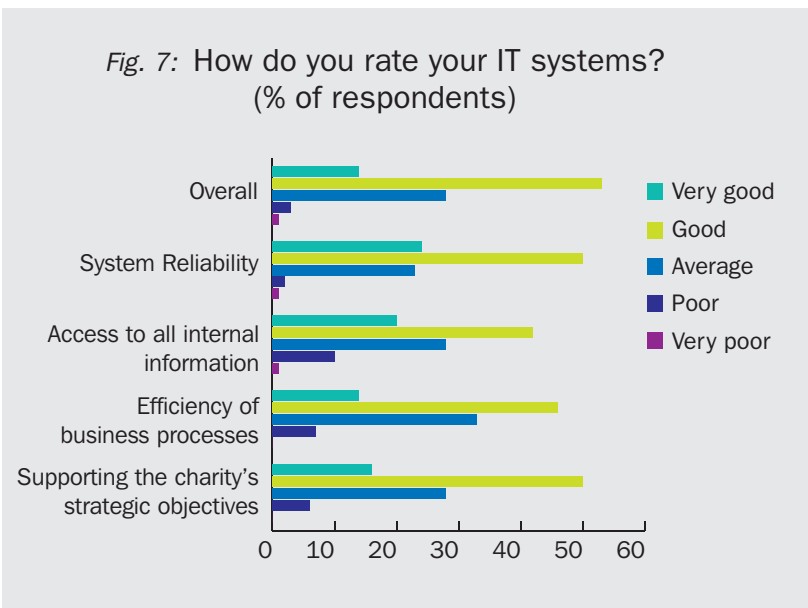


Fig. 7: How do you rate your IT systems?
(% of respondents)



technology driven implementation. By employing a collaborative approach, you are more likely to obtain a system that fits the exact needs of the charity. In terms of infrastructure, such as hardware and networking, it is quite right that the IT director should be responsible for this, but process mapping is still critical so the FD and chief executive should make sure the IT is aligned with the organisation's current and future processes.'

Some 43 per cent of respondents stated they have a dedicated IT department, a figure which rises to 89 per cent among large charities and stands at 24 per cent for small charities. The average full time equivalent number of staff members is 4.3.

Budgets

Just over a third of organisations have a budget of less than £5,000, while nearly a quarter have between £5,000 and £15,000. Eight per cent have a

budget of more than £250,000. Figure 5 shows where this money is going; capital expenditure has continued to fall, standing at an average of 30 per cent having been at 37 per cent in the 2005 survey and 34 per cent in 2006. Spending on maintenance has fallen year on year since 2004 when it stood at 35 per cent, and now rests on 31 per cent. While website expenditure has grown marginally to 11 per cent, the areas of spending appear to be diversifying, with an average of 11 per cent going on 'other' tasks, up from just 6 per cent last year.

'The majority of staff are part-time and do not see the need to improve their skill. We are also part of the NHS who are very conservative and reluctant to use up to date systems. High cost of training is a limiting factor.'

Nearly a third of respondents state that their budget will increase over the next year, while just 12 per cent say it will be less. Some 43 per cent of respondents anticipate spending less than £5,000 on new IT projects in the next 12 months (see figure 6), 24 per cent between £5,000 and £15,000, and 18 per cent between £15,000 and £50,000. However, less important than how much an organisation spends is how well it spends it. Luke Mellard, business development manager at Intelligent Solutions Consultancy, recommends taking a longer term approach to spending. 'Organisations would often be better spending five years' budget at once on a complete system that will deliver a real return on investment over the five years, than continuing to make do each year and never quite getting the right system. I fully appreciate budget constraints, and the fact that organisations would prefer to spend their money on the services they offer, but organisations need to be shown value and think value rather than cost, because over a medium to longer term, greater benefit will be derived. The fact that a third of organisations have increased their budget shows they are willing to invest, which is a good sign. The 11 per cent that are reducing their budget may have done what I just mentioned, so this may not be bad.'

'We are in a Catch 22 situation. We know that more modern systems and training would save resources in the longer term but we don't have the resources now to set the wheels in motion to bring about those savings in the future.'

John Tate of CITRA adds: 'It's encouraging to see the reliability ratings of IT systems is increasing. One of the benefits charities should get from this is a reduction in cost of support of systems. With 31 per cent of total budget allocated to maintenance, supporting the infrastructure is a significant cost and perhaps charities should look to increase this year on year. It is somewhat surprising to see that the number of charities looking to reduce IT expenditure is only 11 per cent. Maybe this means they plan to develop their systems and get real benefit, or maybe it means IT costs haven't been given sufficient scrutiny.'

'Our resourcing is keeping up in a market where applications are becoming very sophisticated but there are inadequate resources for purchase, training, and gaining competencies.'

Steve Garnett, chairman and co-president, EMEA at salesforce.com,

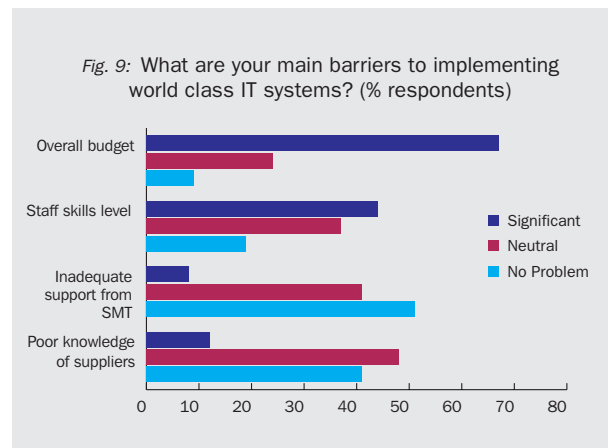
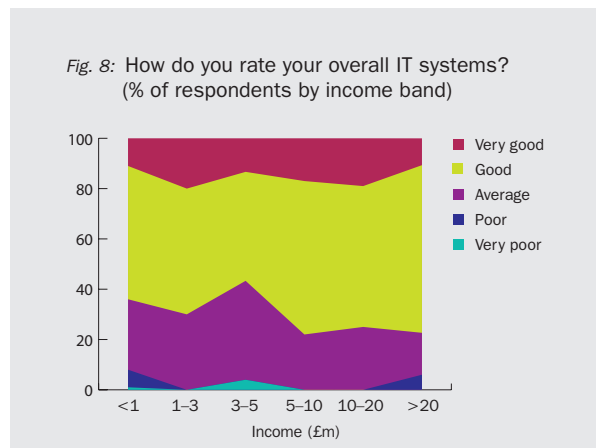
believes hosted solutions will help to ease budget constraints. 'It's no surprise to see cost preventing charities from having the right IT. Unscrupulous technology vendors continue to fleece charities by trapping them in the relentless software dependency nightmare. The never-ending cycle of upgrades, maintenance and training keeps the vendors' bottom line looking rosy, while the charities suffer a continual outrageous financial drain. And all too often charities find themselves locked in to software that isn't up to the job. They've paid through the nose for the software itself, shelled out for consultants and usually waited a year for software that is too complex, unwieldy and inflexible to use. Charities shouldn't have to worry about data security, software reliability or IT training yet the typical software vendor takes the money and runs, leaving the charity to it. Via the on-demand model, this is all taken care of for them so valuable budget isn't swallowed up by IT and they can focus on what they do best.'

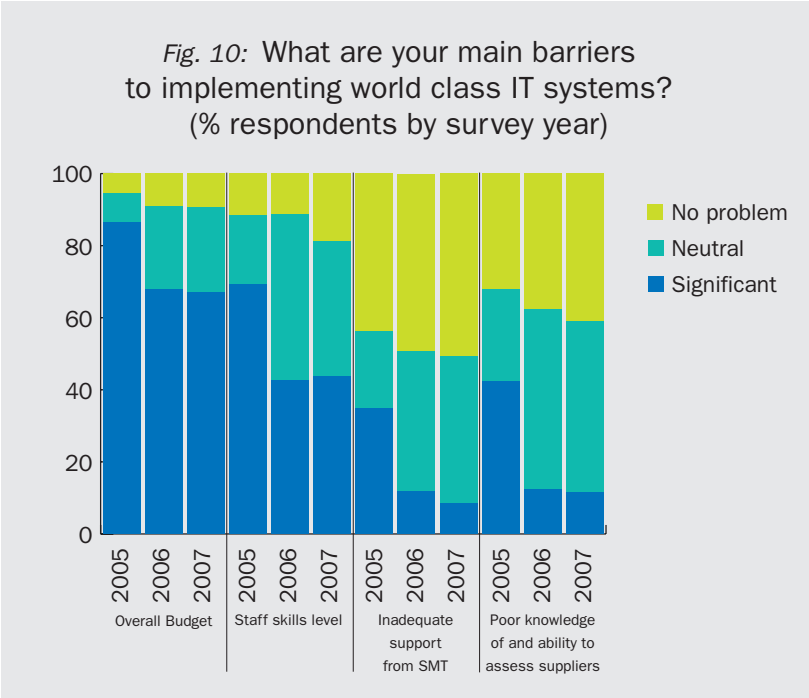
IT systems

This year we asked respondents to rate their IT systems as either very good, good, average, poor or very poor on a range of issues (see figure 7). The category for which most respondents answered either 'good' or 'very good' was systems reliability with 74 per cent, while 11 per cent felt their access to all internal information was either poor or very poor.

'The main problem is assessing the quality of IT support – sales talk sounds great, but actual service is often poor – and obtaining support at a reasonable price. Also, there is a lack of skills in-house to make decisions when presented with different options by IT companies.'

There is a consensus that reliability is improving as software, operating systems and relational databases are becoming increasingly mature. Says Jorgensen: 'It's not only systems that have improved, but also the





architecture in terms of networks, PC stability and operating systems. All of these have contributed to better system stability. Most suppliers have many years of Windows experience and have been able to iron out the early stability issues they encountered with adopting a new environment.'

Meanwhile, the barriers to implementing world class IT systems (see figures 9 & 10) have remained broadly stable, with overall budget cited as significant in 67 per cent of cases, staff skill level in 44 per cent, and poor knowledge of suppliers on 12 per cent. The only change is that the problem of inadequate support from the senior management team appears to be on the decline, with just 8 per cent citing it as significant, compared to 12 per cent in 2006 and 35 per cent in 2005.

Bird believes budget should never be a barrier to world class systems. 'Many people have a far better IT system than they realise, they just don't work it hard enough. If the system is right and does what it is meant to do, it will prove invaluable to the organisation and repay the investment many times over. The only barriers should be an inability to find the system that does what you need it to do. Staff skill levels will always be an issue but can be overcome through training, staff development and selecting systems that are easy to use.'

'Being very small we are reliant on part time staff to maintain our ICT; it's all about the budget'

Software

Figures 11–16 show the most popular packages used for accounting, membership and fundraising and give some indication of satisfaction levels by stating the percentage of users who would recommend them. Despite continued scepticism towards Sage among analysts, it has once again grown its market share, standing at 51 per cent, up from 49 per cent in 2006 and 42 per cent in 2005. It therefore continues to dominate the charity accounting market, partly as a result of its wide range of products to suit all sizes of organisation. However, the proportion of users who would recommend their Sage product has fallen from 89 per cent last year to 83 per cent. Among small charities this figure rises to 93 per cent, possibly because larger charities are not using a high enough specification Sage product in an attempt to save money.

'No accounting package really meets a charity's needs completely, and I've tried a few.'

For the first time this year we asked how satisfied users are with aspects of their accounting software (see figure 7). Web enablement and price are the two areas with most room for improvement, the majority rating their software as 'average' in these regards (37 and 39 per cent respectively). It is encouraging to see that reporting is the area charities are most satisfied with, 62 per cent rating it as 'good' or 'very good', indicating that the work accounting software providers have put into addressing this long held complaint is bearing fruit.

Fig. 11: Accounting software by percentage of users

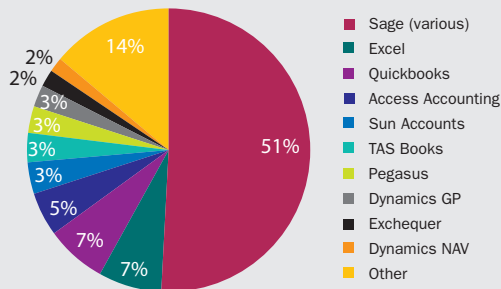


Fig. 12: Users who would recommend accounting package (%)

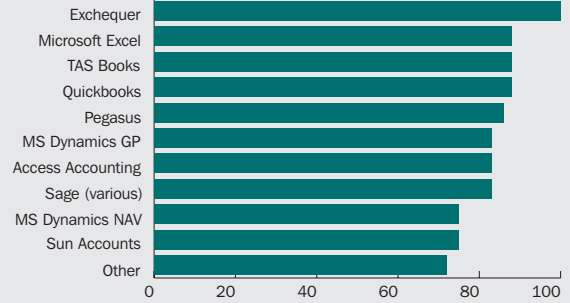


Fig. 13: Membership software by percentage of users

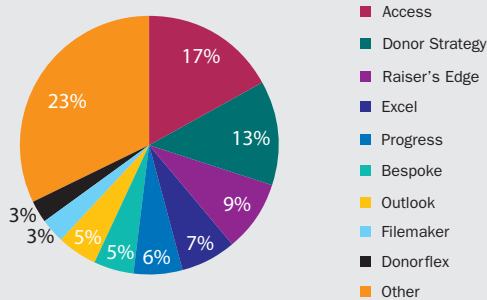


Fig. 14: Users who would recommend membership package (%)

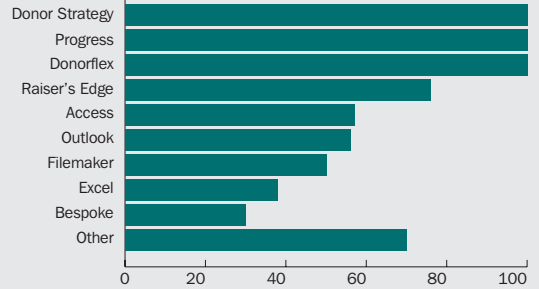


Fig. 15: Fundraising software by percentage of users

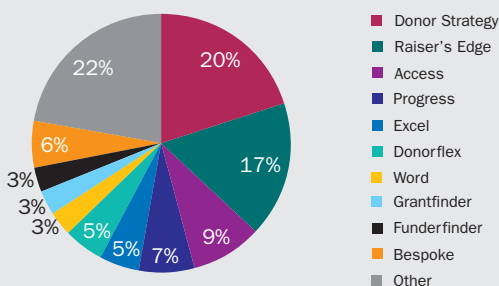


Fig. 16: Users who would recommend fundraising package (%)

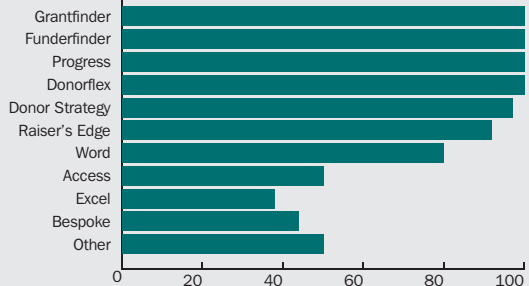
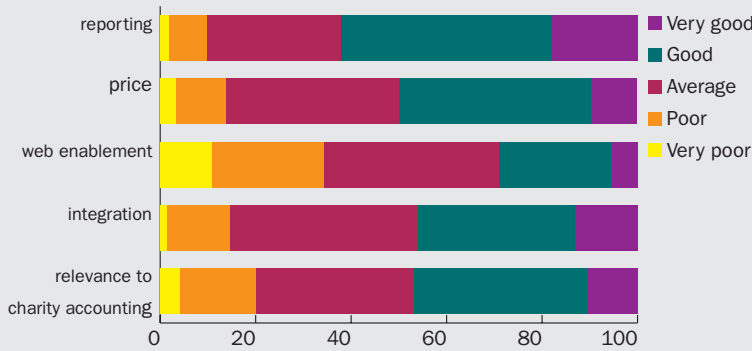


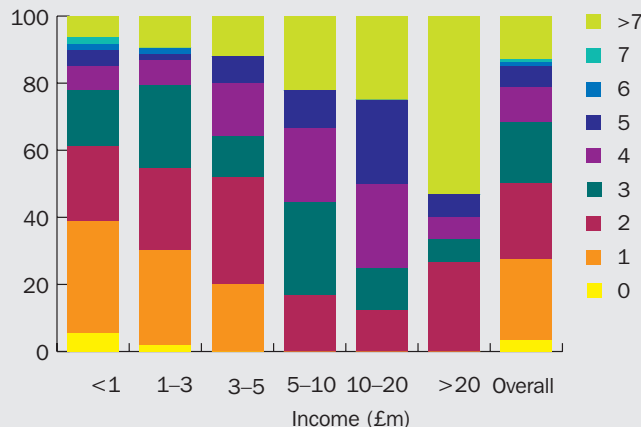
Fig. 17: Rate your accounting software on the following: (% respondents)



'Our accounting system is poor but the cost of upgrading is beyond us. We have a variety of small databases which should be replaced by one that links all the services to the centre but the costs and organisation is beyond us. We are upgrading our website this year but do not have resources to keep it up to date.'

The database market remains fragmented, with a third of respondents using software outside of the top nine most popular responses, while the use of bespoke software has fallen from 11 per cent in 2006 to 5 per cent as tailor-made databases continue to become very much a legacy of the past. Microsoft Access heads the list with 18 per cent of the market, but is well down the approval ratings with just 57 per cent willing to recommend it to others. Access is ubiquitous due to its availability as part of the Microsoft Office package, providing smaller charities with an affordable and easily available solution, rather than particularly strong functionality. Indeed, two thirds of respondents using Access are in the small charity bracket.

Fig. 18: How many databases do you have in your organisation? (% respondents by income band)



Charity Software's Donor Strategy heads the list of fundraising software, with 20 per cent of responses, 60 per cent of which lie in the small charity category. Blackbaud's Raiser's Edge remains the software of choice for the mid-to-large sized charity, 96 per cent of its users having an income above £1 million. Both have strong approval ratings. Nearly a quarter of respondents will be reviewing their fundraising software in the next 12 months, with a similar figure for membership/contact management, and 17 per cent will be

reviewing their accounting software.

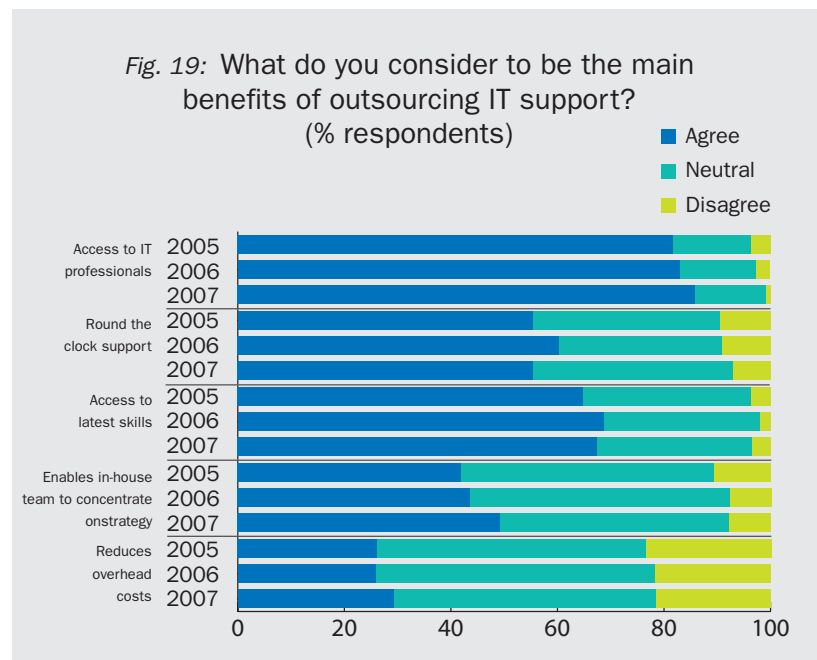
Microsoft Office 2003 is the most popular office package with 59 per cent of the market, followed by Office 2000 on 29 per cent. Almost three quarters believe it meets their needs, 27 per cent say it does mostly and only 1 per cent say it does not. Microsoft's dominance is further reflected in email software, with Outlook leading the way on 73 per cent, followed by Outlook Express on 17 per cent. Satisfaction levels were similar to that of office software as a whole, and interestingly users of Outlook Express were just as satisfied as Outlook users. Just 13 per cent of organisations use some sort of open source software, with 6 per cent considering it, and nearly a quarter are not sure if their organisation does or not.

'All our applications meet our current needs, but they are not necessarily used as fully as they should be. Part of the reason for this is skill and/or resistance by some staff to changing working practices.'

Nearly 30 per cent of respondents state there are applications they need but don't have. Of these, 64 per cent cite cost as a reason why they don't have them, 40 per cent blame a lack of skills to use the package, and 13 per cent say they cannot find the package they require.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing of helpdesks has continued to rise, with 39 per cent doing so either fully or partially, compared to 36 per cent in 2006 and 34 per cent in 2005. Outsourcing of hardware and software maintenance



on the other hand has declined slightly, with a total of 68 per cent doing so either fully or partially, compared to 71 per cent in 2006. It's a similar story for network management, with 58 per cent doing so fully or partially compared to 61 per cent last year. 65 per cent rated their suppliers of IT support as either good or very good, with only 5 per cent rating them poor.

Figure 19 shows how charities perceive the benefits of outsourcing. The sector is on the whole continuing to warm to the concept, with more respondents agreeing that reduced overhead costs (86 per cent), enabling the in-house team to concentrate on strategy (49 per cent) and access to IT professionals (86 per cent). Agreement that outsourcing brings access to the latest skills and round the clock support are key benefits

has fallen marginally to 67 and 55 per cent respectively.

On the issue of outsourcing allowing an organisation to concentrate on strategy, one charity argues: 'One of the main benefits I perceive is that my internal team can focus on providing value when it comes to information systems and particularly presenting information where outsourcing can't; this is because in this area each organisation is unique in the systems it uses and the information it requires. Service providers will find it much more difficult to provide a service that has the same level of knowledge, both technical and about the organisation, and is as economical as an internal team.'

In terms of the perceived disadvantages of outsourcing, scepticism is on the decline. Just over a quarter agree that it is cheaper to have in-house

support, compared to 30 per cent in 2006 and 33 per cent in 2005, while 34 per cent believe external staff do not understand their needs, having been stable at 36 per cent the previous two years. Just 16 per cent believe outsourcing leads to a loss of control compared to 20 and 22 per cent in 2006 and 2005, while only 4 per cent believe it leads to job losses, a marginal fall on previous years.

Over 60 per cent of organisations manage their website in house, while 36 per cent use an outside agency, and 2 per cent don't know.

Security

Figures 20 and 21 show how the sector's security measures are changing over time. Charities are seemingly less concerned about external hackers, but more are conducting penetration tests, except among large charities where the proportion has declined from 47 per cent in 2006 to 27 per cent this year. Additionally, the number of organisations suffering a virus attack in the past year has fallen to 23 per cent from 38 per cent in 2006. Norton was the most popular virus software on 30 per cent, followed by McAfee on 27 per cent.

Web application security tests conducted by NTA Monitor have shown that charities and not-for-profit organisations are more secure than the average organisation against potential website attacks. Roy Hills, technical director at NTA Monitor, says: 'While charitable institutions seem to be ahead of most in securing their websites, our findings indicate that they still need to tighten their policy on IT security housekeeping and its implementation.'

Fig. 20: What security measures have you implemented for IT systems? (% respondents)

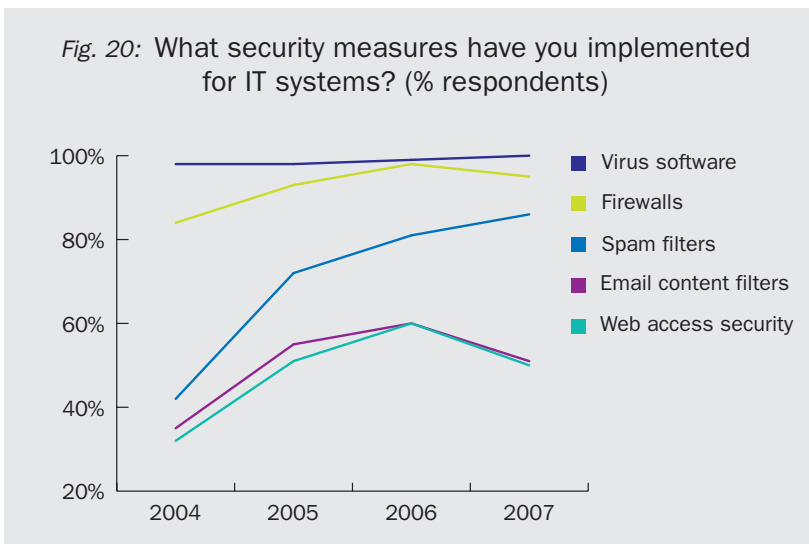
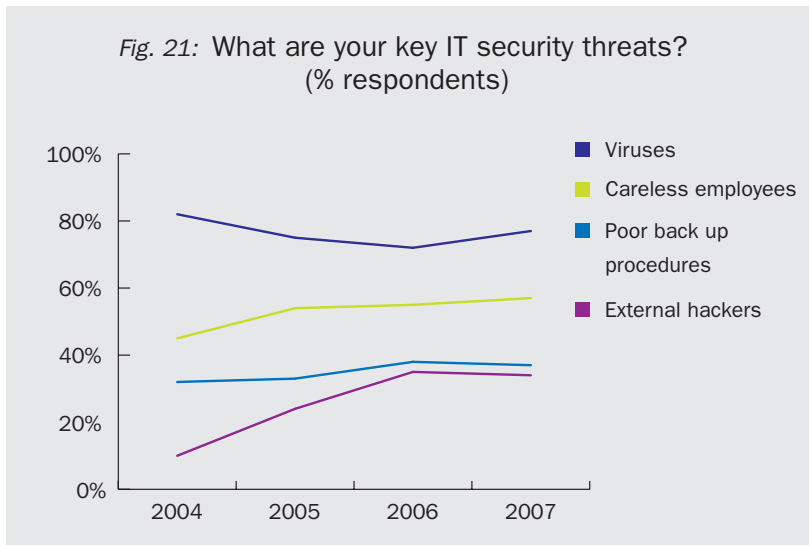


Fig. 21: What are your key IT security threats? (% respondents)



'What a cautious lot charities are when it comes to IT. There is very little indication of any vision amongst IT directors, about the ways in which IT could empower people and services, save money or cut costs. With only 13 per cent spending significant sums on IT consultants and so few either looking at Open Source or Windows Vista its hard to see a picture of charity IT surging forward, or where the new ideas are coming from.'

Joe Saxton – nfpSynergy and chair of Institute of Fundraising

With an ever increasing number of people using the Internet to make charitable donations, organisations should take every precaution towards protecting these revenue generating and efficiency enabling systems.'

Other findings

- Trustees continue to become more comfortable with email, this being stated as the primary communication tool by 51 per cent of respondents, compared to 46 per cent last year and 36 per cent in 2005.
- In terms of online transactions, 33 per cent of websites accept donations, 24 per cent shopping payments, 16 per cent offer fundraising functionality, and 11 per cent membership subscriptions.
- Almost half say they have not spent anything on consultants in the past year, up from 42 per cent last year. 37 per cent spent less than £10,000, down from 39 per cent. 87 per cent who have used them feel they were good value for money, up from 83 per cent.
- Of those charities with more than one database (*see figure 8*), 21 per cent say there is a lot of duplication of data, 79 per cent say some duplication and no one said there was none.
- The most popular umbrella body is NCVO, with 28 per cent saying they turn to them for help with IT issues. They are closely followed by CFDG and the ICT Hub, both on 24 per cent. CFDG scored highest for quality of service, with 42 per cent rating them as 'good', while the most disappointing body was the ICT Hub, with 21 per cent rating its service as 'poor'.

Fig. 22: Do you have regular penetration tests? (% respondents by income band)

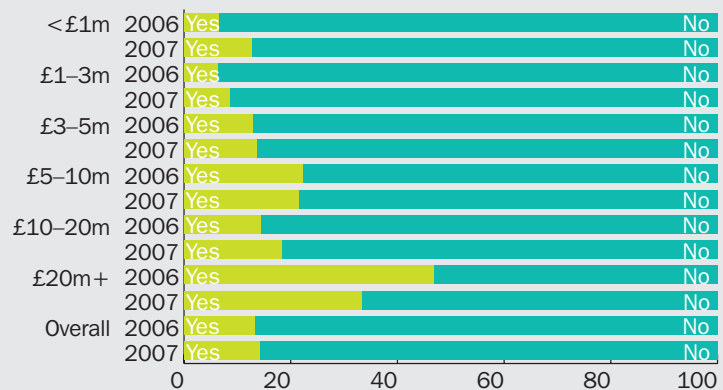
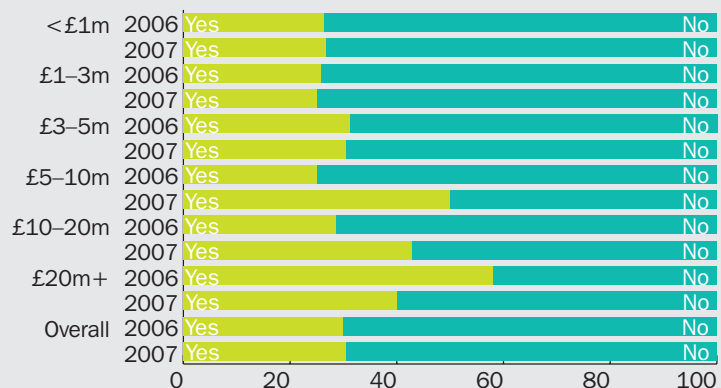


Fig 23: Do you have annual security audits? (% respondents by income band)



Future trends

John Tate, CITRA

'I am hopeful that in the coming year finance directors will bottom out the real cost of their IT function and the cost per user of IT. I hope too that real focus will be given to the return on investment from any new IT expenditure. This will help to really drive the benefit from technology. Forward-thinking finance professionals will be considering where the IT budget should lie, with the possibility of handing it back to the users rather than being controlled by the IT department.'

Carrie Goodbourn, CS Group

'The move towards service oriented architecture will enable more sophisticated interfaces to be built between disparate databases and data sources enabling charities to build an environment that will provide their supporters with a first class experience maximising the impact of every point of contact, especially via the web.'

John Bird, ESIT

'Look out for Windows Presentation Foundation (WPF), which is part of .Net version 3 and is built into Vista. It will see a step change in appearance of the next generation of 'smart' client applications. Anyone selecting web solutions for cosmetic or presentation reasons will now want to consider smart clients too – and these will have loads more functionality as well. Applications will move away from flat forms and jump off the screen, so Minority Report will become a reality.'

Piers McLeish, Armstrong Consultants

'The technology building blocks which make up effective modern solutions,

eg. middleware code which allows different systems to talk to each other, web enablement, PDA solutions etc., will continue to mature at a fast pace, enabling organisations to get more for less with more reliability, performance and user-friendliness.'

Jon Jorgensen, Asyst Solutions

'Using the internet to access information and run systems will become more and more desirable. Being able to create a self-service environment with a low cost of ownership will be a route many charities will start to move towards. This will empower everyone within an organisation and remove bottlenecks that closed systems produce. Such self-service environments will allow for purchasing control, time capture, role based reporting and collaboration.'

Jonathan Air, CharitySoftware Ltd

'E-learning will evolve, empowering users to get the most out of their systems. Data display will be more visually creative within databases, such as instant geographical map views of supporters and photo family-tree views of relationships. Email and text alerts will be triggered from databases when records, events or campaigns are updated. Online communities that enhance the service delivery of charities will grow. The buzz about technology will be about enhancing intimacy.'

Luke Mellard, Intelligent Solutions Consultancy

'I definitely see hosted services growing but this may not be the best or the cheapest way to go, so organisations should approach with caution and evaluate fully, hosted solutions vs. their own hardware.'

Ian Ryder, appiChar

'There will be ever more use of communications technology and the expectation to access data from anywhere. Online services such as Google Apps will get more attention, and other big players such as Microsoft will get in on the act. Smaller organ-isations will take a look – more reliance on outsourcing as organisations realise the benefits of not having to keep internal staff occupied and motivated.'

Paul Appleby, Protia

'Vista PR will continue to push a new platform only home users really benefit from, and Blackberry as a company will see a much reduced market share as other vendors promote their non-Blackberry handsets that support Microsoft Exchange push email. Meanwhile Google will see its online document and spreadsheet tools extend to presentations and databases. The take-up of such online applications will also grow but so will concern over the world's largest indexing company being privy, under their accepted terms of use, to index and catalogue your information.'

Steve Garnett, salesforce.com

'This year we'll see more charities ditching the expensive, monolithic and inflexible software of the past in favour of online applications. Given the reach of the web there is no reason why charities should be stuck in the IT past struggling with outdated applications that don't match their needs today. The days of the software sharks preying on charities for easy money are numbered.'

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We are a charity-centric service provider with a full range of services including:

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- Helpdesk
- Asset management
- Consultancy

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The following charities have already chosen ServiceTec to help provide them with the robust and efficient IT infrastructure they require to enable them to fulfil their charitable objectives effectively.

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