Proving the value of IT is always tricky. You invest thousands-if not millions-of dollars in hopes of creating greater efficiencies that reduce cost or opening opportunities for new lines of revenue. Quantifying those values into an ROI statement that has some basis in reality-difficult, but priceless.

Some people would say the equation is quite simple: Take the amount of money you spent on a new system, subtract the licensing and maintenance cost of the old system, add the cost (reduced, ideally) of operating and maintaining the new system, then subtract the amount of time and money saved through eliminated processes.

ROI, though, is a moving target. How do you prove value of IT after the acquisition and implementation of hardware and software? How many ROI models predicted a specified amount of savings only to have those savings never materialize? How many systems implementations were supposed to simplify processes only to have equally complicated processes emerge? Funny how the ROI calculation the vendor shows you on that fancy worksheet is never what you get.

What IT departments and service providers often forget is that the ultimate value proposition isn't measured in dollars and cents but in the user experience. The success of services such as Google and Saleforce.com is based very much on their ease of use and delivery of promised capabilities. The success of Apple's iPod, iPhone and iTunes is founded in superior ease of use and user experience. Companies struggling with their products and services (did someone say Microsoft Vista?) can often find their challenges rooted in poor user experiences and unmet expectations.

Consider the example of BT: When the British telecommunications giant began offering help desk services to its business customers, particularly SMB clients, customer satisfaction ratings initially hovered around a dismal 20 percent. The problem wasn't with the ultimate resolution, but with the delivery of the service. Users would get frustrated after being passed from one technician to another.

BT deployed Citrix Online's Go-To-Assist, a remote access tool that gives admins the ability to look into a client regardless of its location or connection. BT combined the power of Citrix Online's tool with its ability to transparently escalate to different levels of support-the user would get the problem resolved in a single session without knowing multiple technicians were poking around the machine. The result was an astounding improvement in customer satisfaction scores-97 percent-and a significant improvement in customer renewals.

Citrix Online is drinking its own Kool-Aid and taking the power of Go-To-Assist to another level by combining the Net Promoter model to its internal support services. Net Promoter measures customer satisfaction with the aim of getting everyone to the point at which they would actively promote your product or service. Rather than simply looking at its IT department from an expense and savings perspective, Citrix Online is measuring and rewarding its IT staff based on how well the IT department serves its users.

"It's about what metrics and models you are going to reward and encourage, and how you can prevent gaming the system," says Citrix Online president Brett Caine. "It's about being relative to the experience; metrics will tell you volume and time, but don't tell you about experiences."

Many enterprises are already looking for IT budget justifications that go beyond simple cost reductions and operational savings; they're looking to IT to improve their businesses. Improving and measuring end user satisfaction can show the power of smart IT investments. Improving end user satisfaction leads to improved productivity, which in turns leads to-we hope-more revenue and growth.

Isn't that what all businesses want from IT?