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Digital transformation: It's more than just a technology decision

While technology is certainly one of the important decisions that must be made by a company embarking on a digital journey, it does not represent the starting point of such a transformation. So said Bill Hoggarth, national sales manager, Digital Business Solutions at Datacentrix, speaking at the recent Business Intelligence and Analytics conference at Sandton Convention Centre. Hoggarth explained that the first step must be to identify the big opportunity, big idea or big problem within the organisation – before the big data – and then weave the threads together with these end-goal objectives in mind.

“From a business perspective, the answer often lies in the data, but *why* you need the data in the first place is what needs to be identified upfront. You have to start with the end in mind and work backwards; imagining how future data sets will drive real organisational change.”

Hoggarth cited the example of Crossrail, a new railway in London, which will be a high frequency, high capacity service linking 41 stations over 100 kilometres underground through central London from the east and west. It will give 1.5 million additional people access to central London within 45 minutes, reduce journey times and create new journey opportunities.

“And while it is not only one of the most ambitious transport schemes in London and the World for the past fifty years, as well as being the largest construction project in Europe, the £20 billion project came to an abrupt halt,” he said, clarifying that a major delay faced by the organisation was that it could not get insurance during the underground drilling process.

“Crossrail's solution to this problem was to install a network of 250,000 geo sensors, which would provide data on the smallest shift within the ground and send the relevant warnings to stop construction. Only with this network in place could they get the necessary insurance in place to move forward.

“Without meeting this specific business need and using technology to track the relevant data, the project was a non-starter.”

What Crossrail managed to achieve with its geo sensors, he added, was to identify a challenge or need and see how technology, and the data gathered via these solutions, could help to achieve this objective.

“We want data to become a proactive source of competitive advantage, driven across the entire organisation. Digital transformation goes hand-in-hand with business strategy – it is impossible to transform or change behaviour without being aligned to business strategy,” he added.

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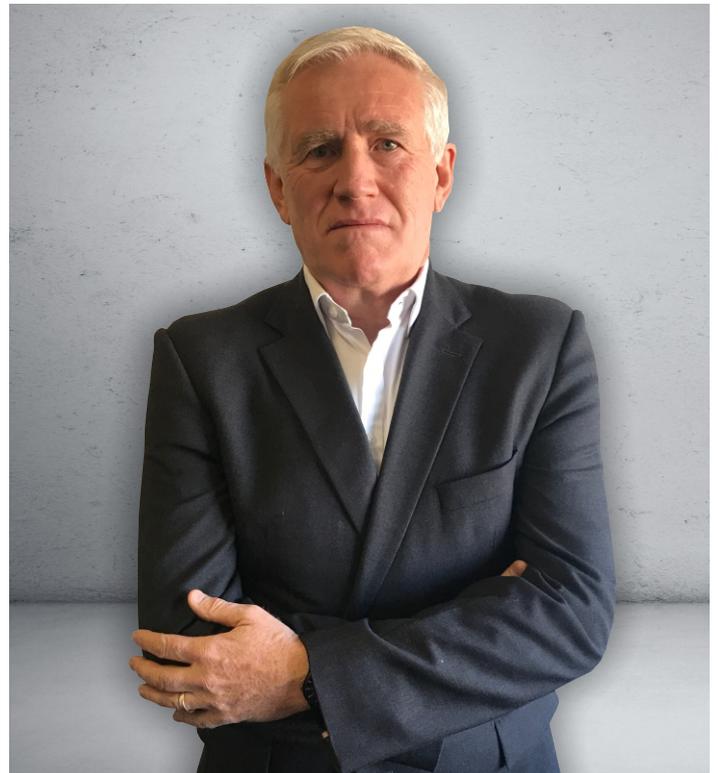
“Taking this type of approach will also help free up staff for more creative decision making. A South African cinema company provides an excellent example of this sentiment locally, with the automation of the ticket and snack purchasing process at its theatres.

Although staff are no longer needed to physically sell tickets to cinema-goers, the movie exhibitor actually employs more people now than previously. The difference is that, instead of performing rote, mundane booking duties, staff members are freed up to perform a more valuable, creative job function. In fact, this heightened focus on the customer's experience, and how staff can enrich this, has seen the average revenue per person per visit more than triple.

“We're entering a brave new world, where data is captured by IoT devices, leveraged by AI, consumed by bots, and managed on the blockchain, and this glimpse into the future of data should be applicable for at least the next 20 years.

Organisations that take this business-focused view, and look beyond the technology itself, focusing on the way in which they engage with it, will stand the test of time,” Hoggarth concluded.

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