

The digital revolution and how to survive it

In the early 1800s, William James Chaplin did something daring. Chaplin was called the 'Napoleon of Coaching,' due to his overwhelming market share in the UK's horse-drawn coach services. Yet he sold it all and reinvested in what was then a controversial new industry: the railways.



Nigel Moulton

It made Chaplin even richer. Yet a few decades later, the bubble burst on railway stocks and sent many to the poorhouse. Chaplin wasn't among them, but it does illustrate that a business revolution can cut both ways.

The conundrum

This is the conundrum facing business leaders today. The world is again tipping into a new age, this time a digital technology revolution that is already changing the rules. Not getting onboard is certainly the worst strategy. Yet a ticket to ride is not only expensive but also complicated.

How can companies determine what is necessary for them to become part of the digital world?



The six rules of digital disruption

Ilse van den Berg 10 Mar 2017



Speaking on the sidelines of the [Dell EMC Forum](#), held recently in Johannesburg, Nigel Moulton offered some advice. As the EMEA CTO of CPSD – the converged platform and solutions division of Dell EMC, he has a front row experience of the advantages these new technologies are delivering, as well as the difficulties companies encounter when trying to understand and adopt them.

One key rule

If success in the digital age could be distilled to one key rule, Moulton has a straightforward answer: it's about separating signals from noise: "Where I'm starting to see examples of the digital revolution is where job roles, roles that didn't exist prior to us doing things with data and analytics, are starting to appear. It's the growth of data science, the growth of

machine learning, artificial intelligence and programming and language skills where what you're trying to do is not so much write lines of code, but interpret data.

"People who can interpret the data, separating the signal from the noise: there's a massive amount of value in that. I'm not sure it, as a function, existed broadly prior to this sort of conversation."

Demand evident in overseas job markets

The demand is evident in overseas job markets: Across Europe and the UK, data science vacancies have grown by double digits. In countries such as France, there is nearly a 60% increase in these type of roles.

But finding the right signal also requires the right technology environment. Traditionally IT has been kept at arm's length from the rest of the business. This, says Moulton, needs to stop. Technology leaders must be at the top of the company in order to bring technology and business objectives together:

"When you put a CIO on the board, what you saying is: 'I trust that individual to guide me from a technology standpoint.' So I need that individual to be aware of what's happening in the market, both from what's possible and what's practical, because sometimes what's possible is absolutely not practical. Sometimes there are external governance rules that dictate that to be the case."

This can encourage knowledge sharing among other leaders in the business. The barriers need to come down on both sides, Moulton added: "Executives of all cloths need to be curious. They have to figure out that they want to understand this and want to get engaged in it. Yet there is an element of some of this technology having these 'magical' qualities to people that don't understand it. So you put a CIO on the board who can guide the board about the best decisions they need to make."

Fundamentals of the digital revolution

These two areas create the fundamentals of the digital transition. The goal is to gain better insight from business data for efficiency, deeper customer understanding or predicting where your sector may be going. The catalyst is a leadership that is willing to grasp technology, with the help of other leaders sitting at the decision-making level.

The possibilities are astounding. Just as the horse coach made way for what would become a better and more dominant mode of transport, data-driven businesses are creating a new landscape. This is not the time to take a wait-and-see attitude: "Don't miss the opportunity. You're not going to find these things out unless you go exploring. Frankly, if your competitors are out there exploring, you should be out there exploring too."

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