THE DIGITAL IMPERATIVE

Finding the way to take IT further

An interview with Marie Measures
Chief Digital Information Officer
Apex Group

Introduction

If technology is inevitably going to continue to be the driver of significant change, then is IT infrastructure up to speed or falling behind?

In The Digital Imperative initiative commissioned by Foundation IT, organisations which are really focused on their relationship with their people, customers, and suppliers will be talking about what they consider to be the mission–critical issues to get right, and how they identify ways of taking IT further.

Their views will form a series of papers leading up to the preparation of a digital book. This is one of the interviews to be included.

Continually on a journey

"Don't think you ever achieve digital transformation. It's a continuous evolution, a journey rather than a destination."

Marie Measures is chief digital information officer at Apex Group, the single source providers of financial services for corporates, family offices, and financial institutions. Her role is described as defining and then implementing technology and a strategy which will deliver business goals across the worldwide business, which has 12,000 employees and ninety-four locations.

"Companies can fall into the trap of thinking passively that the cloud is just the equivalent of a data centre somewhere else," she says, "but our thinking should be about using the cloud to innovate quicker, to enable the cycle from idea to production to be as rapid as possible.

"I remember going to San Francisco more than a decade ago and being introduced to the cloud as a requirement for fast learning about new technologies, to build solutions faster, get quicker feedback, and to be able to move forward at the earliest opportunity. Up until the advent of the cloud, introducing new ways of working was more cumbersome for an organisation.

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Marie Measures

"But regardless of the potency of the cloud, if the culture of an organisation isn't positively disposed to change, that is going to make digital transformation very difficult.

"It's never as simple as being about automating a manual process. You've got to think about dependencies, the eco system in which a task exists; basics which you have to get it right. While individuals will know their little bit of an end-to-end process, they won't necessarily have an understanding of end-to-end dependencies.

"I've taken it as read that an organisation has validated there is demand for what is being proposed, a business imperative, otherwise you can put a lot of effort into digital transformation only to find there is no resonance with the customer and your own people don't believe in it either.

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"The starting point has to be to look through the lens of the customer. Put yourself in their shoes. Where do they see any friction in processes – what needs to be addressed, the reasons why you are proposing to introduce better technology?"

"Digital transformation is synchronised with business transformation so an organisation needs a chief executive who believes IT is at the heart of their operation, not simply a support function," explains Measures.

"I have a CEO, the founder of the business, who is passionate both about change and the client. From an Apex Group perspective it's all about how do we maintain that customer-centric view of business at a time of unprecedented growth, the group has more than doubled in size in the last year, to be able to harness technology to continue to anticipate their needs rather than just delivering more of the same with improved efficiency.

"It means looking at how can we use artificial intelligence for predictive analytics, with natural language processing, sentiment enabling, so, for example, we enable better web chat.

"A business in our position is unlikely to gain a competitive advantage simply from adopting new IT, but it can, for instance, from innovative physical technology. I'm interested in how the internet of things combined with machine learning will help us. I'm excited by artificial intelligence, but there has to be sufficient thought about the basics such as the risk parameters. You need to be able to articulate your algorithms, and there is a need to
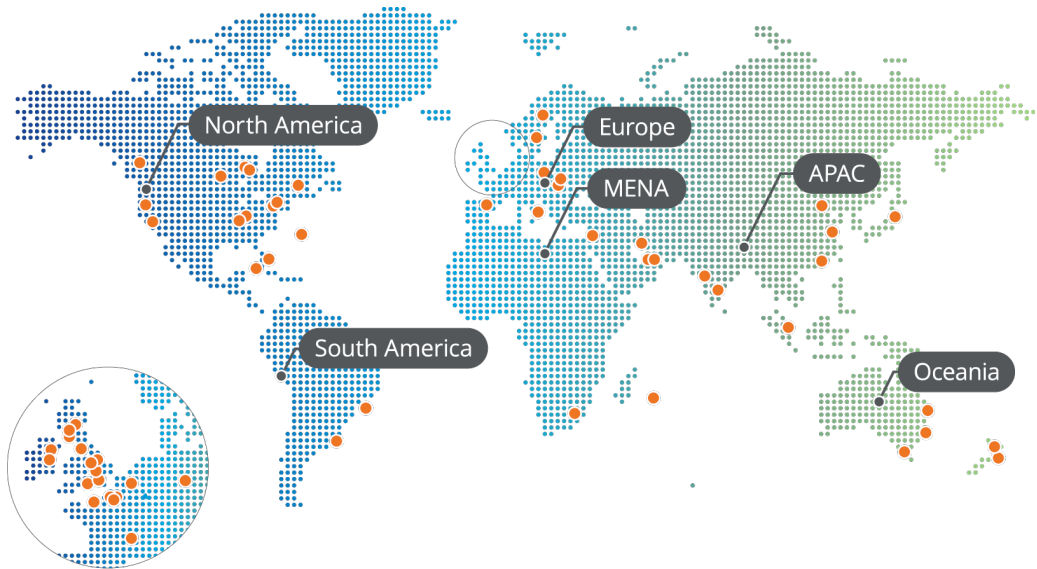
The Apex Group in June 2023

have your eyes wide open to understand the route you are taking, otherwise it can be a dangerous path to take. Imagine wrong data being amplified by artificial intelligence."

According to Measures, an organisation that doesn't have 'technology' on its executive committee is going to find it harder to build knowledge across the team. "It also makes it less likely there will be a realisation, let alone an understanding, of what technology is out there which could help it achieve its goals," she maintains. "Everyone on the executive is responsible for making digital transformation work. We believe leadership is about collaboration and inspiration.

"I describe my job as managing a seesaw, balancing service with innovation. If one side is out of balance, we're spending money where it might not be a priority, and if it's the other side then we're not investing how we should and could miss an opportunity.

"It's interesting. When I talk to people about the CIO you want to have or be, I ask is it just about keeping the engine running smoothly? Are you more interested in the actual technology? Is it about being directly involved with business strategy and applying digital transformation to move the business forward?"

The latter requires a particular discipline, Measures suggests. "The one thing I tell my team is whatever we are introducing, one thing is fundamental: it has to be able to adapt to change easily. Gone are the days of ten-year investment cycles. Now it's about the need to be able to pivot. In the final analysis, the output of technology is to drive revenue growth, achieve risk reduction, minimise cost, and to meet business objectives more expediently.

"My view is that just because IT and business strategy are inextricably linked, with the latter being the lead, it shouldn't restrict technological innovation.

"A company needs to put in place guard rails for risk in order to test and prove the value proposition of new technology. It's about turning risk appetite into architectural principles within which to operate. For us that would include inputting data once
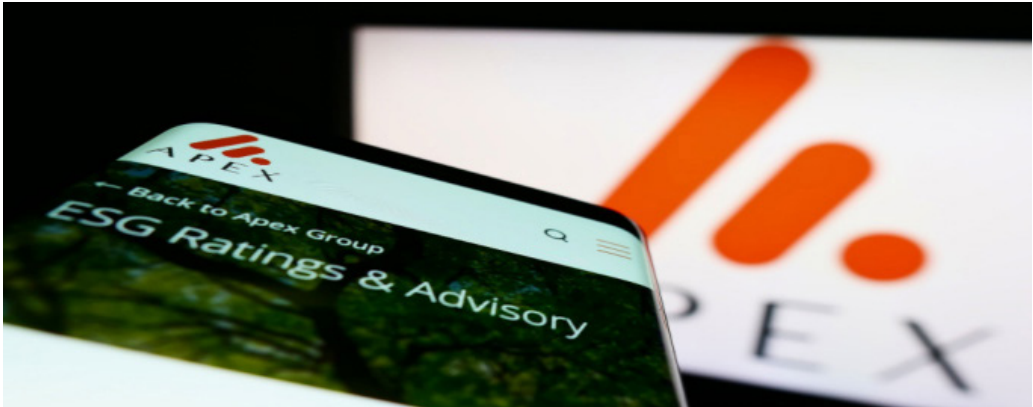
and then it's integrated, that if a process can be automated it should be, and that there should be no human intervention in production. Otherwise you could argue that the application of new IT becomes reactive because the mindset is that you find a solution and then identify whether there is a problem to apply it to.

"Our focus has always been on how to make it a seamless experience for the user, which means understanding working patterns and the applications people actually need. It's not about finding the easiest technology solution to manage, but what works best for them in the best interests of the business."

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About Foundation IT

Providers of a managed IT infrastructure service (IaaS) that helps creates and enables growth in uncertain times.

Our solutions include Managed Infrastructure, Secure Cloud Storage, Disaster Recovery, Managed Desktop & VDI, Managed Backup, Incident Management, Compliance Management and Security Managed.

A sample of the clients who trust our safe-hands infrastructure service include Enstar, Rackspace, Russell & Bromley, St John Ambulance, Cynergy Bank, Bam Nuttall, Applied Weighing International and Zoological Society of London.

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About DECISION magazine

First published in 1988, DECISION magazine reflects the business lifestyle, the trials and tribulations, the hopes and aspirations of business owners and directors responsible for businesses with a turnover of £5million and above across the south of England.

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