

Swivel Chair Integration

Lorri White, Managing Director at Bamboo Technology Group Ltd, considers the importance of automation, integration and digital strategy.

Imagine it is 4pm on a Friday afternoon and you have just remembered that you meant to send your teenage daughter the money for her train fare home from Uni this weekend. Even though she is earning now and should be paying for it, you quickly log in to your internet banking from wherever you are and make the transfer. Simple.

You delight in how technology has made your life easier again. No other human hand has touched the transaction and you sit safe in the knowledge that it's been completed without error. (And your daughter will make it home for the weekend to treat the house like a hotel and eat all your food!)

Grateful for the forward thinking approach your bank has to technology and safe in the knowledge that those funds are moved by the simplicity of connectivity and integration of systems, you don't then give it another thought.

But what really happens behind the scenes; and how would you know?

During a recent Digital Business presentation, I was surprised to learn that over 80% of the banking sector have not developed their service systems to enable real time transactions. These transactions that we take for granted as automated are, in many cases, completed with the efficiency of 'swivel chair integration'.

This, as I discovered to my amazement, is exactly as the name suggests. You input your request through your online banking portal, hit submit and confirm – and through it goes, to your bank service team. Someone then picks up that request in a workflow, 'swivels' their chair to face another screen and uses a different portal to apply the change in the core banking system. Transaction complete.

Costly and inefficient? Yes. Prone to error? Even with a team of outstandingly accurate individuals, the answer is still a yes.



We could discuss the integrity of this service proposition, and many others, for hours without effecting change. So, perhaps the discussion we should be having instead is this.

How many of our own systems are run in this way and what can we do to change them? Is a shift in direction, focus and behaviour what's needed?

Or, we could tackle the more important question - if we map our customer journey, where might we improve it?

In a world where business has concentrated on selective manual workflows for decades, the move to enabling and intuitive tools can be a big jump. Simply understanding that this is what digitising business is about is the first hurdle, but what does that mean to the people responsible for managing this part of your business strategy.

Decision makers will need to start thinking about different architectural building blocks. Data interrogation, integration, platforms as a service, the Internet of Things, security, risk and governance, social and mobile. All these considerations should be standard agenda items for any forward thinking business.

Whilst it is always good to know our own two-year internal focus and investment on automation and optimisation of services and systems plays at the forefront of market pace, research makes an important point. Our clients, supply chain and channels may not yet have started this journey. So there is the potential of facing a huge challenge in the next five to ten years.

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How will they tackle this and who in their supply chain will help plan and drive this change with them? Research shows that SME decision makers in this field know they need to change focus. Data management, Exchange and IT security top the bill in the coming years. Businesses are acutely aware of the need to have strong IT leadership to justify investment, strategy and management of this moving forward. There is a conscious shift taking place in the focus of the IT decision maker. Translating that into the Board Room for further action will take time though.

As businesses that have gone through this process early, ICT providers can and should step up. Whilst there is so much to introduce to the market, each with its own key challenges, in the first instance we should encourage, support and help manage IT strategies and the move away from legacy systems of record.

Many companies are running tens or thousands of applications and as decision makers move from Capex to Opex budgets, the challenge of optimisation and automation investment versus business as usual becomes a very real hurdle.

The reality though is that replacing legacy systems will bring cost savings. In addition, optimisation and automation of 'useful' applications combined with efficient data exchange workflows can be justified against minimised long term spend, customer journey experiences and forward thinking strategies.

When the customer experience is king, how much longer can this be ignored.

It's something we understand at Bamboo. We have moved away from multiple manual processes, developing a central database application that feeds as many support functions and systems as possible. Minimising human interaction, cost (and likelihood of error), we have opened up our traditionally internal service actions to clients and partners. Not swivel chair integration but a true integrated service proposition.

Commands are directly implemented at network level. One action then feeds CRM, post-provisioning task management and billing engine functions.

Complemented with service reporting that stems from single point of entry, the margin for error is minimised, localised and most importantly, manageable at a far lower cost.

Initially, the 'killing off' of selective manual workflow legacies was a challenge. In some areas, a little like prizing blood from a stone. But a very necessary step forward too. It has meant we can now put much more time and effort into the appropriate pro-active management of our clients and business, rather than placing that emphasis on reactive, cost intensive, internal challenges.

In that respect (and in my opinion) IT managers who are hired to also 'kill' legacy systems should be part of the essential shift in behaviour or performance criteria. At the very least addressing how many applications are in use in a business.

We should also be asking, how many of these applications still run because we simply haven't switched them off? What is the cost of continuing to run, manage and report on them when they aren't really needed? What else could you be doing with this budget?

For the past 20 years, the ICT industry has been categorised as fast moving and constantly changing – mainly due to the speed at which the mobile, social and data world is advancing. So it is all too easy to assume that every other industry around us has moved at the speed.

Widely available research papers tell us that whilst steps are being made, this is largely not the case. As ICT providers, we have a responsibility to lead, educate and champion integrity of proposition for our valued customers. We have the experience and expertise to help improve customer journeys and lead the next moves in IT and communications.

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If you'd like to understand how Bamboo can work with you on your ICT strategy please visit www.bamboo.tech or call our team on **0800 804 4040**

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