

IAB Insight Series: The role of technology in achieving business objectives

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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The latest Johannesburg edition of the monthly IAB Insight Series took place at the Park Inn by Radisson in Sandton on Thursday, 27 June, this time focusing on the role of technology in enabling business performance in the digital economy.

Roan Mackintosh, commercial director at DQ&A South Africa, Elizabeth Mathew from Microsoft and Dee Chetty, lead - Accenture Interactive Africa each presented on the subject, followed by a panel discussion led by Thandeka Mali, lead marketing strategy at Showmax, MultiChoice and featuring two of the speakers, Mackintosh and Mathew as well as Carl Jordan, senior business development manager at biNu and Ashleigh Footit, group programmatic and data manager at Hive Digital Media: Caxton.



Thandeka Mali of Multichoice, Carl Jordan of biNu, Elizabeth Mathew of Microsoft, Ashleigh Footit of Hive Digital Media at Caxton and Roan Mackintosh of DQ&A South Africa.

The core discussion was around the changing role of technology and how to leverage it and turn data into meaningful insights.

Access and skill sets

Commenting on the role of technology from a publisher point of view, Footit said they focus on the sell side of programmatic, which she believes has enabled them to be more automated and streamlined.

Whereas from Jordan's side, the single biggest thing here is access, because if you do not have data you cannot access the digital economy. At biNu, they look at the whole ecosystem, from brands to government and non-government organisations to their customers. "In terms of the whole ecosystem, for us, it's about access, because you can grow all these digital assets or make consumers aware of our mobile app, but if they can't get access to those digital services, then the whole system breaks down.

"70% of consumers in South Africa do not have access to the digital economy, so we're never actually going to be able to grow from a numbers perspective unless we solve that data issue, where it becomes accessible to everybody, and that's what we're trying to do in terms of allowing access to our technology."



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Jessica Tennant 8 Mar 2019



For Mackintosh, it's around skill sets and maximising the utilisation of technologies through partnerships with agencies or service delivery partners. He explained this using the analogy of technology as a vehicle:

"You can go and buy the Ferrari of technology, but you're just using it to get down to the shops to buy milk and bread. Now, if we take this analogy one step further, and we say, 'OK, you've got a Ferrari'... Most people in this room would have done their driving licence; they know how to drive. So, most companies look at those digital technologies and they go, 'I know how to do media, I know how to do CRM, I know how to do all this stuff, let me just drive my Ferrari.' Personally, I've had the privilege of sitting in a Ferrari, and when you get in there, you actually realise pretty quickly that this is not a normal car. There are numerous different settings on the steering wheel; there is not a gearstick in sight. I had to sit there for five minutes to figure out where the reverse was because it's a separate button entirely. There's this other button that says 'launch'. There's a heads-up display that has got the tyre pressure for each individual tyre, and heat for each tyre. And I remember going, 'Wow, OK.' And I can drive that car, right? I can drive it down to the shops. I can drive it up the road. But pretty soon if I don't understand why it's telling me that there are different tyre temperatures, I don't understand that I should wait until a certain point before I start driving, before I start cornering harder, before I start accelerating faster. And for me, that analogy works really well in this digital ecosystem in that a lot of clients are trying to drive a Ferrari themselves, and the reality is that they need partners, they need educational pieces and skill set levels within the broader digital ecosystem within the country. There's a shortage and people need to adapt to that."

Speaking of which, Mathew said a lot of organisations are siloed. "It's no easy task bringing everything together to get the insights and the real ROI on the data that we have. I find a lot of organisations struggle with that."

Footit added that there's a lack of people wanting to upskill themselves. "I find that people are waiting for their company to give them training rather than upskilling themselves."



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Turning data into insights

“There’s this idea that in order to harness big data, we have to create a data lake... everyone talks about a single customer view and central repository of truth and to a certain extent that’s true but in terms of the marketing space, because it is so reactive in real time, you can’t be putting it into a central repository,” said Mackintosh. It’s more around activation data and making sure that it’s readily available when you need it.

“Instead of thinking about big data as this data lake or data warehouse... it’s more about understanding where those repositories sit across various technologies. So, there’s a role to be played by solution architects and people who look at data flows. But as a marketing team, you really need to be clear about what data you need and why you’re needing to use it, and then you can architect the systems to do that without doing this big data thing that takes three days or overnight queries to run all those things in order to collate the audiences you are after.”

Footit said they use a data management platform to analyse their data. “There are different reporting metrics that you can look at and break down that data. So, say you’ve got a specific segment that you’re looking at, in the data management platform, it will overlay different other segments on that primary segment to inform you more about what that segment is all about, and then you can activate it through various channels,” she explained.

At the rate technology is moving, you can get to a point where machine learning does a lot of this for you, said Mathew. “This helps things get faster, but I think as a business, you need to understand what you’re needing and what will have the best impact on business outcomes.”

“The technology itself is great,” said Jordan, “and the data itself is great, but it’s definitely also about having the right people and communicating and interpreting that data... And oftentimes, depending on what kind of organisation you’re working with, they can be at different levels in terms of where they are in terms of their skill sets themselves, so people are very important in terms of using that data and bringing it to life.”

To this point, Mackintosh added that it’s around this division that exists within organisations between the marketing team and the IT team. “Very often business intelligence (BI) is seen as a separate entity... and what we’re finding is the more that you break down those silos and the more that you cooperate internally, actually the marketing department, because they’re closer to the customer, as we move to customer-centric businesses, the marketing team is becoming that kind of custodian to bring all those different kinds of services in.”

He referred to an airline they’re working with. “They’re actually bringing in those skill sets. They have a data engineer, they have a data architect, they have a data analyst that are all sitting with the marketing team, which is an organisational shift.

“So, absolutely and 100% the technology is there, the data is there, but organisationally we need a shift to leverage that data.”

And what technology you use depends on what you are trying to achieve. “Instead of looking at technology as a solution and an endpoint in its own right, it’s to look at the business objectives, how we can utilise the technology, how we can fuel it with data and how we can empower our people to do that,” concluded Mackintosh.

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