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Maintel CIO Summit 2017: the debrief

CIO Summit: the what, the why and the who

The what

The Maintel CIO Summit brings together key IT leaders from our customer base for an interactive, PowerPoint-light day of lively discussion, insights and ideas sharing around all things digital transformation.

The why

This event gives our customers the opportunity to step out of the office and meet like-minded peers from across industries to share their business IT priorities and challenges, gain inspiration and highlight lessons learnt from their communications journeys.

The who

The CIO Summit saw us gather CIOs and IT directors from companies across the retail, financial services, charity, education and property sectors, along with senior leadership figures from the Maintel team.

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What's on the CIO's agenda?

In a fast moving, competitive landscape, IT directors are under greater pressure than ever to ensure that IT and communications strategy is both fully aligned to and able to effectively underpin business growth and profitability.

Here are some examples of what CIOs are prioritising in order to achieve this:

- Driving the customer journey towards mobile as the retail model continues to evolve

- Maintaining robust and resilient networks in the face of ever-growing security threats

- Using technology and UC to deliver superior multichannel customer service

- Meeting rising demand from Gen X for digital engagement, both internally and externally

- Finding the necessary bandwidth to successfully and reliably carry video

- Harnessing more advanced technology to compete with online-only competitors.

Key CIO challenges

"We're trying to avoid spending wads of capital on hardware and spare capacity and embracing the cloud and scalability."

"Service is now a key differentiator – customer interaction is tactile, and transforming that into a digital experience is a real challenge."

"It's all very well having nice broadband fibre in our rural locations, but when everyone is trying to use it, the connectivity just isn't there."

"We want to offer customers a mobile journey but our back-end systems struggle to work with the mobile tools we want to use."

"We have people who are keen to innovate but who don't really understand technology. Educating them that there are different ways of doing things is a real challenge."

"Over reliance on legacy platforms is seeing us struggle to connect with younger demographics using different technology. "

"If the network is down we can't trade anymore – we need reliable telephony to make the sales journey easy."

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Shifting priorities

At a time of political instability, delegates named economic uncertainty as the major challenge facing their businesses.

Consumer confidence, changing incomes, interest rates and the implications of Brexit were all highlighted as key factors affecting IT investment.

Concerns around belt tightening, access to skills in a post-Brexit world, changing regulatory requirements and currency variations emerged as key challenges facing not only CIOs, but organisations on the whole.

"Growth has always been a key part of any business strategy, but this has changed to maintaining competitiveness."

In the face of uncertainty around the future, CIOs are focusing on:

- Being nimble and reactive
- Blocking out speculation and focusing on business as usual
- Diversifying services to minimise risk
- Training and developing existing talent.

While business priorities may be shifting, one thing remains clear – investing in technology remains the cornerstone of dealing with these challenges by helping organisations ensure they remain lean, agile, competitive and able to connect with changing customer behaviours and demographics.

"Investing in technology is the very crux of doing business. Without technology, there is no business."

Realising the benefits of UC

Reductions in needless travel, faster moving projects, improved collaboration, more effective feedback mechanisms and **huge drops in internal email traffic** were all cited as distinct benefits of unified communications as call centre, back and front office teams and remote workers become better connected.

"Our internal email volume dropped by 20% as a result of implementing IM technology."

But the UC landscape isn't standing still – the growing presence of a younger workforce accustomed to instant responses is seeing players like WhatsApp and Facebook Business beginning to replace more traditional tools like Outlook and Slack in the enterprise. While the panel agrees this is likely to become common practice, the security challenges it presents remain a real concern for IT teams.

So what's on the UC wish list for CIOs? Video and mobile remain king – whether that's business deals conducted via video link, giving customers a fully integrated retail mobile journey or conducting remote consultations and appointments.

What exactly is unified communications?

- Presence and IM
- Screen share and document collaboration
- Fixed/mobile convergence
- IP telephony
- Web, video and audio conferencing
- Persistent chat and collaboration tools.

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Ensuring business continuity

Technology issues that impact business continuity, like the recent BA failure, remain a key concern for CIOs.

> ## "One mistake shouldn't cause a huge failure – that's a sign of a lack of investment across the board."

One important factor identified by CIOs is that funnelling budget into more advanced technology projects that drive sales can see the central infrastructure that keeps things working neglected.

To avoid potentially disruptive issues, our panel recommends:

- Continual investment in the right technology and staff training

- Ensuring a single point of failure isn't possible

- Implementing controls and protocols around who's allowed to do what

- Enforcing strict data centre access

- Making sure legacy systems are consistently repaired and replaced

- Having a clear contingency plan in place should the worst happen.

IT and communications systems are becoming increasingly complex and overlapping. While this can see great business benefits in terms of digitisation, streamlined processes and improved collaboration, it also means that IT teams are seeing their teams span a much broader range of disciplines.

Identifying clear individual roles and ensure everyone is working towards the same goals is crucial to avoid outages, failures and breaches as the IT team continues to evolve.

> ## "We've spent the last 20 years connecting technology together with UC – if one component fails, we're all scratching our heads."

Is cybersecurity moving from an IT issue to a board level issue?

Security was namechecked as "the issue that will never go away" for IT teams, an ever-evolving concern that always requires attention – and one that's gaining the attention of boards of directors.

Delegates discussed challenges around the principal cyber threat sources:

- **Criminal behaviour** – selling data on the black market for money

- **Hacktivism** – compromising brand reputation by hacking customer-facing sites

- **Espionage** – state sponsored hacking to gain a competitive advantage.

The **"human firewall"**, however, was named as the major weakness within most organisations, highlighting that aside from technology investment, education, creating a security-conscious culture and eliminating paper-based human error as far as possible are all vital to staying attack-free.

In light of this, CIOs now feel that budget isn't always the issue – user education is, moving security to new realms outside of the IT team and into the wider business. Security is now evolving into a board-level issue, with strict vetting needed across the board for any business – and not just the IT team.

A key driver of this is the **General Data Protection Regulation**, set for introduction in 2018. This will see tightened security regulations and compliance place increasing pressure on IT teams, introducing data protection by default and demanding that teams adopt continual vigilance in ensuring that systems and technology are robust and resilient.

> **"If you don't have someone at a senior level with an interest in security, it can be very difficult to make it a priority."**

If you're interested in joining next year's event, contact **marketing@maintel.co.uk**.
Here's to another year of success stories, insights, challenges and UC journeys at next year's event.