

CIO Panel Session and Civil Society Charity Tech Breakfast

I was delighted to host a very entertaining, challenging and honest panel discussion on the topic of *'The route to CIO'* at our quarterly meeting in June. Our panel members, who included Michael Shaw (Casual Dining Group, Burger King), Chris Cook (Royal Society of Chemistry, Manchester Airport Group), Vincent Richardson (Microsoft Philanthropies) and Jane Deal (The Law Society) were refreshingly open about their journeys to CIO and the mistakes and opportunities along the way.

The biggest learning to share is that there is no obvious, single path to the CIO role. Our panel all followed diverse routes into the CIO chair, which is good news for those with an eye on that career path, and also a recognition of the breadth of skills, experience and knowledge in our sector.

Looking at the way that the CIO role interacts with others at senior level, there were a range of opinions about whether the CISO role should report to the CIO or not. The general consensus was that it probably shouldn't. The key critical success factor however was that the CISO has 'unfettered' Board-level access, and that the CIO has a part to play in ensuring this access including coaching and sponsoring the CISO.

A lively discussion ensued about whether the CFO should report to the CISO, perhaps that was a little more contentious....

Our panel also expressed some candid views on the biggest challenges, turbulent trends and the main tech for charities to consider in the future. Cyber security has been and will remain one of the biggest risks and challenges that we face. Cloud technologies and their use have been problematic and revolutionary in equal measure.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been both a hugely disruptive technology and one which is also key for charities in the future. Interestingly, this was also supported by the discussion at the Civil Society Charity Tech breakfast that I hosted on June 27 at CIWEM. However, adoption is not as complex or scary as sometimes it is badged.

It can be very beneficial for charities get their heads around the use of AI, and the ways in which is can improve supporters' journeys and facilitate fundraising and some charities (such as NSPCC) are already on the road in using voice technology and AI. Did you know for instance that 20% of internet searches are now carried out using voice technology?

The NSPCC have put AI at the centre of their strategies for fundraising and supporting children and young people through Amazon's Alexa. Breast Cancer Care are using Alexa to support women in carrying out regular breast checks. After all, if you can use your voice to activate Alexa for the guidance, you have your hands free to do the check.

Another interesting takeaway from that event was that we need to stop thinking about different channels, and instead think about different types of user. There are three user types, and they all find information, products and services in different ways. They also correlate to our behaviour in the physical world:-

1. The browser - the person who is "just looking"
2. The store directory user - the person who wants to know "where is it?"
3. The asker - the person who asks "can you help me find.....?" and wants guiding

Unless we ensure that we provide the tools for all three types of user to access our products, services and messages, we're going to lose them.

I'll leave you with what I think is the most important message from both events, and this is not new news. EVERYBODY makes mistakes. All of our CIO panel members shared some pretty jaw-dropping stories from the coalface, and I'm still cringing from the scale of some of them. Mistakes are an inevitable part of life and work, and we shouldn't hide away from them. They're our greatest learning opportunity and can drive significant change and innovation. We all mess up, and it's how we deal with the mistake and get things back on track that is the real measure of success.

Laura Dawson – July 2019