

Playing digital catch-up

 By Leigh Andrews

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As we enter a new era of digital business, CEOs need to leapfrog themselves before they can leapfrog their organisations into the 21st century. Here's how you can do so through hard work, self-reflection, untraining, retraining and reprogramming.

There's a new paradigm of business that's keeping CEOs and the rest of the C-Suite awake at night. IBM's digital and cognitive team assert that anyone involved in commerce needs to be aware of the way [technology and all-things digital](#) have changed the modern consumer and how we do business.

But if operating 'in the cloud' and working with the internet of things seems more pie-in-the-sky than grounded business sense, there's a chance you're already falling behind. It's time to play catch-up.

Wendy van Schalkwyk, CEO of MI-Ashanti International, explains how you can keep your business on trend...

1. Is there any industry that is not affected by the world going digital?



Wendy Van Schalkwyk

Van Schalkwyk: Every company today will be affected by technology advances in the 21st century as it's fuelled by technology and high performance teams. While the larger scale of companies play catch up over the next five to ten years, all organisations will eventually become fully baked with technology as their underlying asset. If not, they risk ceasing to exist when their offering becomes redundant and has lost all market relevance. In the world of the 21st century, the internet of things, machine-to-machine or machine-to-man (m2m) technology devices, cars, fridges and homes will have the ability to communicate their needs and inform man of his or her needs even before they think they need it.

While the 20th century was driven by creating large scale industrialised organisations operating in silos, the 21st century organisation is a fully integrated, lean and mean machine, highly competitive with added performance, given their high performance intellectual technology abilities and entrepreneurial culture to match big data to market needs and demands and capitalise on seizing market opportunities long before they emerge in our realities.

In order for this to become a reality, you'll need to focus on acquiring investments and resources that help your operation mimic market demands and supply chains. Leaders of the old paradigm need to overhaul themselves for a less self-controlling, creative and collaborative leadership style that is relevant to markets today.

2. How can CEOs then keep their businesses on trend?

Van Schalkwyk: CEOs have to keep themselves on trend by ensuring they are up-to-date with the latest and best ways of how to do business in the 21st century. This requires leadership growth and a new culture of existence. You need to lead and guide your organisation through this difficult time of pivotal transition at a mental, emotional, physical level to a higher purpose state of survival and culture, where technology-driven innovations and business model changes becomes the new norm. It requires that leaders step down from their castles and step into the operation, bringing leadership to a more humble and servant leadership style where leaders become enablers for change, real time and have rewired and redefined themselves to think, act and lead differently in order to unlock success from those around them. It requires a whole new set of lenses through which to see the world and only the brave with make it across. You need a blueprint of your business operating model at your fingertips to see the whole operating system and understand it intimately to commit it to innovation.



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3. How can the C-Suite then balance traditional business morals with the fact-based world of mobile?

Van Schalkwyk: You need an underlying set of brand values that drives the business with authentic leadership ethics and good governance as the transparency wall between business and world today is seamless. The boundary walls are down and business is in a symbiotic relationship with its existing and potential customers. Key to this is good leadership to enforce good governance and a work ethic, in which data and information is treated as hard assets with value. Accuracy of data will be king to making well-informed leadership and business decisions. The success of 21st century organisations boils down to trust, accountability and establishing trusting relationships with your customers and stakeholders. The lines of separation and blurry spaces can no longer be hidden by the excuse against time or against a line of smoke and mirrors.

4. Talk us through the role of digital disruption and making companies leapfrog to the future.

Van Schalkwyk: You either strategically plan, implement, leapfrog and survive or you don't strategically plan, do mediocre changes you think are good enough and risk commerce death, it's as simple as that. Interestingly, business lifecycles in the 21st century become a lot shorter, but if you know that in advance as a CEO you will know what to do to manage this effectively in the 21st century of business. Welcome to the paradigm, a whole new world awaits!

Van Schalkwyk can advise you on making the 'digital business transition', especially as her International Master of Business Administration dissertation topic is 'How to reduce the failure rate of start-up entrepreneurs in the 21st century'. Contact her directly on wendyvanschalkwyk@gmail.com, 062 749 0701 or 021 782 0961.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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