

The time to become a disruptor is now

By  Brett St Clair

15 May 2018

Are African businesses ready to become disruptors? Disruption is a trendy term - but disruption has been around since the big bang, and we've seen it operating through time at different scales.



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What excites me is that for the first time in history, we can foresee digital disruption. The question is, do we just react to it, or do we jump right in and compete?

“ Now is the time to commit to building digital businesses: regardless of your service or product type, every business has to be a technology business. ”

In the last thousand years, we've seen series of revolutions - from industrial to the internet - disrupt existing stakeholders, even though these cycles sometimes took many years to happen.

What we're seeing now is the exponential acceleration of technology causing these cycles to take place in a couple of years. For example, Google's announcement last week of Google Duplex, where an AI assistant speaks exactly like a human and makes appointments for you via the phone.



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It opens up huge possibilities as well as raising huge concerns. But it is a clear reminder of how quickly disruption now happens.

As a business executive, are you going to keep holding the course or are you going to take that bold step forward and go digital?

African countries have an advantage

In African countries, we have an advantage, because taking the leap away from a legacy investment and traditional style of work is much easier than elsewhere. We are not as heavily invested in these modes as other western or even eastern countries.

Furthermore, new cloud technology is now accessible in minutes on a pay-as-you-go model, which only became possible in the last two to three years. There is no longer a need for long-term investments.

How to get ahead of your competition

If you are ready to start your journey, there are proven approaches to get ahead of your competition.

1. The first step is to ask a set of different questions about the technology you are currently invested in. Can your servers be provisioned instantly? Can you launch new services or products in days, hours, minutes and seconds, or

do you still have to wait weeks and months? If the latter is true, this is a clear signal to make a move to the cloud.

Even more important than scaling up is scaling down: if your tech does not solve the customer problem you're looking to address, you can shut it down in seconds. Why pay for servers if they are not being used? With Google's Cloud, for example, you can automatically close servers when they're not in use, saving vast sums of precious capital.

2. Next, you need to ask different questions about your data.

It no longer suffices to use data as a status progress gauge for the past month. Your data is your instrumentation that guides all decision making. A great example is to ask if you can use data to track every part of your customer's experience when buying your product or service - because if you can't, then you are missing opportunities to fix customer problems and create an incredible customer experience.

To reach the heights of an Emirates airline experience you need to act like them and behave like a business solely driven by data. To understand your data, you need to make use of tools like Google does - to store vast sums of data and process it very quickly to make instant decisions. The exact same technology that Google uses for itself is available at a click of the mouse for your business.

3. The third step is to think about your service or product offerings.

Are you ready to scale it to millions of customers? In today's world, businesses are no longer constrained by massive upfront investments in hardware or resources. Tiny startups can launch and within weeks be competing against the world's largest businesses with minimal capital outlay.

Put your products through a set of internal questioning to see if you can grow fast instantly, and then search for examples where people have done so and learn from them.

4. Finally, be prepared for just how much how your team's work will change and be open to this. Your staff will appreciate it, as long as they are given the opportunity to grow themselves and constantly improve their environments.

We have so much untapped talent sitting behind a desk consumed by manual mundane tasks. Take your people with you and learn new ways of working, such as 'agile' and 'lean startup' - these are now the norm in securing huge efficiency and effectiveness from all types of teams.

“ The trick is that it starts with you. Use new tools in your business, try new methodologies and build businesses that are comfortable with constant change, because this is the new era of work we live in. ”

My personal mission is to choose to not be the same and instead to adopt digital best practices and apply scaled solutions to a new set of customer problems.

The time to become the disruptor is now!

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ABOUT BRETT ST CLAIR

Brett St Clair is CEO at Siatik, one of Google's leading African cloud partners. He has 20+ years experience in the global digital landscape. He was previously Barclays' digital transformation director for Africa, where he launched a world-first with chat banking in Facebook messenger. Prior to that he was Google's Africa lead for cloud services and led AdMob's expansion across the continent. He was also the first keynote speaker in Africa to accept bitcoin as payment.

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