

SA businesses moving closer to data-driven decision making

By  Brian Timperley

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In recent years, established South African businesses have become more aware of the importance of data and its potential role in high-level strategy as well as day-to-day operations.



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To date, this awareness has been largely theoretical, with businesses remaining unsure as to how to begin harnessing their data and turning it into actionable insights.

In 2019, however, we believe this will begin to change. Businesses now have access to easy to use data analytics tools such as Microsoft's Power BI, as well as increasingly robust connectivity solutions. Importantly, traditional approaches to IT network security are also changing in response to unprecedented levels of cyber fraud.

Let's take a closer look...

Business Intelligence (BI) to gain traction

Put simply, Business Intelligence (BI) is about drawing businesses important data from different sources, and creating live and meaningful reports based on this data, instantly and dynamically.

The whole point is to provide more accurate, up-to-date and real-time reporting to guide decision-making and strategy at every level.

Within South African businesses, a common tendency is to look for quick-fix solutions, which often result in disappointing results.



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Business intelligence adoption is a journey, and as more data becomes available, so the reports and resultant decisions continue to improve, for both short-term and long-term views.

The importance of this approach is steadily being acknowledged in the local environment, with larger businesses looking to implement fully fledged BI platforms and solutions – and also working with experienced IT partners to better harness existing data.

With markets being so competitive and increasingly saturated, savvy business leaders are looking to leverage BI to boost growth and achieve critical competitive advantages within their sector.

Innovation will drive IoT rollouts

Although the Internet of Things (IoT) is a technology that has in fact been around for decades, IoT is starting to catch the attention of local business leaders – and will likely make great strides in 2019.

IoT refers to an ever-growing network of physical sensors that feature embedded communications back to a centralised system.

This communication produces valuable data, in real-time, which allows systems and people to better understand the various operating environments and design solutions proactively – instead of retroactively.



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According to consulting house, Africa Analysis, there were more than seven million devices connected to dedicated IoT networks in South Africa in 2017 - and the firm estimates that this number will double by 2022.

Arguably, IoT networks create big data faster than any other platform, which unlocks the potential for an infinite number of use cases across sectors.

Lumkani fire detectors, for example, are low-cost networked devices that can detect fires as soon as they flare up. These devices, which have been designed specifically for informal settlements in South Africa, register rapid spikes in temperature - triggering an alarm that uses radio frequencies to alert devices in neighbouring homes.

Local businesses, like Utility Systems, have enabled a hybrid of IoT to convert legacy mechanical water-meters into smart water-meters that can monitor and control water usage for both municipalities and homes.

Although widespread adoption of IoT use cases has often been inhibited by power availability and connectivity restraints in SA, we believe that local innovation will increase adoption and investment significantly in 2019.

Zero Trust Model to influence cyber security strategies

With sophisticated cyber fraud and threats such as ransomware now a daily reality for every company, IT security experts are exploring a model called Zero Trust.

This approach is centred on the view that nothing - either inside or outside the network perimeter - can be trusted without verification. In essence, it assumes the worst.

Given that most enterprises are now failing to prevent data breaches using conventional, perimeter-based approaches (firewalls, bots, etc.) the Zero Trust model provides a far more robust approach – particularly given the increasing capabilities of built-in Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems.

While this model is still a new concept for many SA users, we expect that it will gain significant traction as cyber fraud rises.



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Additionally, more companies are looking at adaptive security, which is an approach to cybersecurity that analyses behaviours and events to protect against and adapt to threats before they happen. Adaptive security provides real-time network security monitoring that scrutinizes the network for anomalies, malicious traffic and potential vulnerabilities.

If a threat is detected, the enterprise platform automatically initiates security measures that counter the threat in a number of ways. This is a parallel approach to the Zero Trust Model that we expect will grow in adoption, particularly as AI capabilities improve and become more integrated.

ABOUT BRIAN TIMPERLEY

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