THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY PARTNER WILL MAKE YOU SMART

The much-discussed topic of digital transformation is essentially nothing more than enterprises utilising today's technologies to enable them to operate at a higher level, by leveraging these to improve efficiencies, increase performance and boost profitability.

Ehimare Aire, CTO, Altron Nexus

A good example of this, suggests Ehimare Aire, CTO at Altron Nexus, is the way industrial applications utilise the Internet of Things (IoT) to soak up data from the physical world, which is then analysed, and the resulting information used to improve outputs within their operations.

"This, of course, is just one manner in which organisations are using digital technologies to make their businesses smarter. However, it must be remembered that being 'smart' involves a journey of continuous improvement – it's not a once-and-done scenario, but rather one where the goalposts are continuously moving," he says.

"Ultimately, an effective smart solution that genuinely adds value will be designed for a specific industry or vertical market. However, organisations considering adopting a smart approach must realise that vertical-specific apps can only be effective if the business itself has the relevant digital enablers in play first. These enablers include cloud computing capabilities, intelligent connectivity – like a software-defined wide area network (SD-WAN) – and real-time analytics on AI platforms."

As far as cloud as an enabler goes, Aire indicates that the best strategy here is likely to adopt a hybrid approach, as this offers the best of both the public and private cloud worlds. Intelligent connectivity should accompany this hybrid strategy, he adds, since both of these will be mission-critical aspects of the organisation, once smart technologies become an inherent part of the business.

"Intelligent connectivity is the step up required by organisations if they wish to ensure the functionality of their smart apps. A standard, best-effort level of connectivity is not good enough for such apps, which is where SD-WAN comes in for example. By adding intelligence to the network, several underlying best effort networks can be turned into a more resilient, enterprise-grade network with commensurate levels of connectivity uptime.

"Implementing and managing such enablers is not always easy for organisations whose core business lies outside these bounds. For this reason, Altron Nexus offers a full end-to-end smart solutions capability, wrapped up in a managed service offering. As an enabler of digital transformation, we're able to provide the cloud, the network and the integration, and then in conjunction with key ecosystem partners, we can also bring together all the elements needed to customise a smart solution to suit the specific customer's needs."

He adds that more than this, the company's managed service offering means that apart from the platform and various customisations involved, Altron Nexus also prevents costly downtime and ensures effective levels of operation for the customer, improving efficiencies and service levels.

"Importantly, when implementing these smart solutions, one has to always ensure the organisation's people are carried along, as for many of these, acceptance of such transformation can be difficult, since people tend to struggle with change. Furthermore, the job security issues raised by implementing AI are another challenge to be managed, as is the sweating of legacy assets. For me, the biggest challenge in building a smart business remains the mindset shift required by its employees.

"As an African company, Altron Nexus is also well-positioned to ensure that CIOs are not bombarded with cookie-cutter, Eurocentric solutions, which don't always work as well in Africa. Instead, we focus on Africa's own unique challenges – like the impact of rapid urbanisation on infrastructure, public safety issues and energy consumption – and address these with smart technologies that are designed in and for Africa," concludes Aire. ■

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