

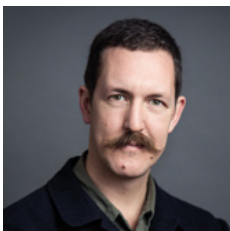
Next Generation Working

The Way We Work Is Changing

Businesses need to embrace the technological revolution if they are to succeed in the 21st century – that was the message heard at BT Business’s next generation working event, where we heard from futurist and broadcaster, Ben Hammersley.

“Why have you recruited people who can only be trusted to work when they’re locked in your office?”

Ben Hammersley,
Technologist & Writer



Innovate Or Die

Ben kicked things off by sketching out his view of what businesses need to do to remain relevant in 2017. The exponential growth in computing power and capabilities is something humans have not experienced before, in any previous technological revolution. And this makes some fundamental changes to how we, as individuals and businesses, should see the world. Forget making predictions about 20 years in the future he argued, as we now live in a world where Uber, Airbnb Instagram and countless other tools that have reshaped entire industries didn’t even exist ten years ago.

And it’s important that businesses foster a culture of innovation to meet these challenges, he explained, by pointing to the cautionary tale of Kodak. In decades previous, Kodak was one of the largest companies in the world. In fact, the company’s own in-house engineers even invented the world’s first digital camera in 1978. But the unwillingness of the executives to risk disrupting its then profitable business of manufacturing Kodachrome photographic meant that the technology was not developed, and as a result, Kodak is no more.

In fact, Ben noted, the same week that Kodak filed for bankruptcy, Facebook paid a billion dollars to acquire another company: Instagram, which had 10 employees to Kodak’s 36,000, and which built a business on creating digital filters that mimic the look of Kodak’s old film.

Kodak was a victim of Moore’s Law, the expectation that computing power will roughly double every single year. By failing to realise just how quickly digital technology would catch up with what was then state of the art film.

The challenge for businesses then is keeping up, Ben admits that the era of exponential technological change is stressful, because it is unintuitive to humans.

What he recommends is that businesses ask themselves the question: What year are we living in? What technologies are used in the workplace? Are 2017 technological tools being used across the business? And what incremental changes can be made in all areas of the business in order to rethink how things are done using modern tools?



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These small changes can add up too: he gives the example of airline KLM. If he needs to change a flight, he can speak to the company through the same Facebook Messenger app that he uses to speak to his friends and colleagues. If he needs to change his flights on another airline he regularly uses... then he needs to send them a fax. In this situation, KLM has a clear business advantage, simply by meeting the customer where they already are, adding an extra layer of convenience.

Ben’s incrementalist approach even works for transforming his personal life. He used to spend ten minutes queuing in Starbucks after dropping his daughter off at school. Now, he uses the Starbucks app to pre-order his drink so it is waiting for him when he arrives. A small change, sure – but it saves him ten minutes every day, and makes his life that little bit better in the process.

So how can businesses be more like this? How can they transform digitally to meet the challenges of 2017? “Digital transformation is not a single event”, he says arguing that it is about creating a culture of innovation across the entire business, and every aspect of what a business does should be challenged.

Ben calls this “constant legacy-free reinvention”, and recommends that businesses take a couple of days every month to really think through their processes and how they could be improved by new technologies.

This includes things that are so ingrained that businesses might not even think about changing at first, like working in the same office. “If my job is taking data, doing something to it and pushing it on, my job can be done from anywhere”, Ben says, “The internet doesn’t care where I am, why should my employer? Why should my business? If the only answer is ‘that’s the way we’ve always done it’, then your digital transformation process hasn’t even started as you’re not even in 2017.”

If businesses are nervous about changing habits like this, then Ben has a simple, provocative question: “Why have you recruited people who can only be trusted to work when they’re locked in your office?”

Watch the extended highlights of the event to hear more from our expert speakers

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