Digital Leadership Forum

Member Spotlight: Dmitry Bagrov, Managing Director,

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Becoming intelligent data-driven organisations is top of the agenda for business leaders. What do organisations need to do to move towards this optimum position in your view?

Somewhat controversially my short answer is businesses need to do nothing.

My view is that companies need to turn this statement on its head and, rather than working from the starting point that they need to "become intelligent data-driven organisations", they should focus on how to exceed their customers' expectations. If using data can help you achieve better results for your customers then you should use it.

Biologist E.O. Wilson famously said, "We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom." We will generate more data in 2019 alone than we have in the past 5,000 years of human history. So, the issue isn't lack of data, but what we do with it to better serve our customers.

What's the most challenging, exciting project/initiative you are currently working on?

Currently we are building a system from scratch for a large client, which is always exciting because it means that we can work with them to chart a new course. We are also working on major upgrades of a number of legacy systems – enabling companies to migrate information into integrated systems that work for today's environment.

One of the things I'm really enthusiastic about is a CSR project we are running, developing a resource to help protect children from the current digital threats through the use of technology. The resource is based on the "Dot Com" programme, which has been running as a paper based resource for fifteen years and helps school children in the UK learn how to manage risks online, empowering them to ask for help if they are frightened or worried. The project is led by Essex Police, alongside the Dot Com Children's Foundation charity, and will be delivered by teachers.

To continue to drive DataArt forward we are currently focused on transforming the business into a scalable sales focused organisation. This is exciting and challenging in equal measures, as it means teams are called on to perform in a different way, to develop new skills and become more sales-orientated in their approach to business. While sales orientation may not be the natural state for a typical team member in a software company, thankfully everyone is on board with the new approach.

Of the current crop of new fast emerging technologies, which one stands out for you and why?

I'd have to say Scratch. It's not the very newest, fastest emerging technology, but it is an outstanding product and use of technology. Developed by MIT Media Lab, it's aimed at children and young teenagers and is free and globally available. It uses interactive stories, games and animation to enable children to become "code literate" from a young age. In a fun, creative way it teaches children to develop systematic reasoning skills and the ability to work collaboratively with other people across the globe. The programme is playing a big part in teaching skills that are crucial for the 21st Century, making coding and programming more popular. Scratch has played a large part in taking

coding from the perception that it is a niche skill-set for a few people, to being a part of everyday literacy.

AI is a key preoccupation for companies at present, are you doing any work in the AI governance area?

AI is certainly a big preoccupation in some quarters. The technology, is only as good as you train it to be, and that requires human understanding of data. Contrary to common belief, we are nowhere close to being overtaken by AI. AI for the sake of AI is pointless. Just because something is possible, doesn't mean it's viable. However, there are some instances in which algorithms do a better job than humans – for example in mortgage approvals, which are better based solely on hard facts, rather than human judgement.

AI throws up very interesting ethical conundrums. Part of the preoccupation is fear. A big fear right now is that our phones are listening to us and then responding individually, as appears to be the case sometimes. In fact, data is more commonly collected in order to study the buying habits of large groups. Recently, Sky News reported that "Amazon staff listen to Alexa recordings and put them in chat rooms" – however when they spoke to Amazon it emerged that the review teams for the tech giant are using the recordings to help train AI responses, to enhance Alexa's ability to understand human language and speech patterns.

For me, where AI crosses the line in commercial transactions is when it is so slick that a buyer may not be aware that they are buying something. Consent is the key here. We all want convenience, but we must always be aware of consent, and asked clearly for our consent to buy. This is an instance in which regulation and governance are vital.

How does being a member of the Digital Leadership Forum help you?

The main benefit we have found, so far, of DLF membership is the exchange of ideas about things that firms need to do to drive their business forward across multiple sectors. The forum allows us to

widen our network and connections, share best practice where we can, and engage with digital leaders in different industries. It is great that the sessions are so focused on specific topics, allowing us to send our most relevant team members, whether they are client-side engagement managers, or from our marketing team, enabling all to develop and deepen their knowledge.

Are there any key insights you have gained from being a member of the Digital Leadership Forum?

The content marketing session back in March was extremely informative and made us realise we need to push our content out much further. DataArt holds across its teams a vast amount of knowledge, experience and wisdom and we need to become better at sharing it more widely with more people. While we have always done a limited amount of content sharing, we need to be doing much more, and widen our reach.

Can you recommend a tech book you are reading which you think other members could gain value from?

I don't read tech books, but I recently enjoyed reading How to be a footballer by Peter Crouch. It's a self-deprecating story about an elite sector with commentary on the absurdities of the modern football industry.

I also highly recommend Dance with Chance: Making Luck Work for You by Spyros Makridakis, Robin Hogarth and Anil Gaba. It's about understanding the role of uncertainty in our lives and careers. It posits that even top experts misread the role of chance, despite being aware of all the relevant statistics and headlines. It shows how they often underestimate the role of luck, and, consequently, often fall victim to the "illusion of control." It also explains how a better understanding of uncertainty helps can help us improve the way we deal with chance in our lives, careers and decision-making.

Dmitry Bagrov, Managing Director | DataArt UK

Dmitry Bagrov led the establishment of DataArt UK, and oversees all aspects of its operations, from sales to production and HR management. In his time as Managing Director, Dmitry has built DataArt UK into a fully-staffed provider of end-to-end solutions, working with some of the world's most respected companies. He has led teams to gain a range of clients including Betfair, SiS, Coller Capital, Ocado, British Gas and major UK banks and financial services firms.

Dmitry is a regular media commentator on business technology issues and has been quoted in the Financial Times, The Times, The Guardian, TechWeekEurope, TechRadar, Forbes, the BBC and numerous other news outlets.

Dmitry has an MS in Computer Science from St. Petersburg State University and an MBA from Cass Business School.

DataArt is a global technology consultancy that designs, develops and supports unique software solutions, helping clients take their businesses forward. The company is trusted by some of the world's leading corporate brands including Nasdaq, Travelport, Ocado, Betfair, Regus, Meetup and Apple Leisure Group.

If you'd like to talk with Dmitry more, then please get in touch: LinkedIn | Twitter | Email

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