# INTERCONNECT 2016 – where Customers lead, and IBM As-a-Service is on display

Along with some 23,000 others, we attended IBM's InterConnect 2016 event in Las Vegas. IBM enlarged last year's event with a special focus on customers who led nearly half the sessions. In fact, for the first time, customers kicked off the event; reviewing details of successes built on IBM offerings. It was some 30 minutes before an IBM executive appeared on-stage.

There was ample opportunity to interact with IBM experts, staff, customers and partners. IBM also exposed details of the changes, results of their internal transformation to a services-driven company. Major technologies featured included Cloud, mobility, analytics and cognitive computing technologies. Here's what struck us as especially interesting.

## Advancing and Speeding Cancer Research

We found one story of particular interest. We met with Dr. Piers Nash of the University of Chicago's Center for Data Intensive Science (CDIS). IBM Cloud Object Storage using Cleversafe technology enables CDIS to centrally store and manage vast amounts of genomic and clinical data to accelerate medical discoveries. This approach allows researchers nationwide to collaborate via shared access to harmonized data sets, speeding discovery and enabling precision medicine.

Cleversafe's object-based storage allows management of unstructured data and is able to scale to handle petabytes of data. The combination allows CDIS to collect, manage, secure and analyze petabytes of data. Dr. Nash indicated that these capabilities are what makes CDIS efforts feasible.

CDIS hosts over 5 PB of data files. Genomic data and associated clinical metadata from centers around the country is cleaned, standardized and made available to researchers through a web portal and APIs.

Medical research requires very large amounts of data for optimal results. Collaborative research fuels major breakthroughs in precision medicine. CDIS efforts drive advances in continuously updated, data-driven, analytics-informed discovery, diagnosis, prognosis, and optimized treatment protocols. These speed diagnosis and allow creation of customized treatment protocols for individual patients as it advances algorithm-assisted, personalized medicine.

## Offerings replace Product

The InterConnect event underscores IBM's transformation to a digitized enterprise. This was foreshadowed in a statement by now retired Steve Mill. His wish was that IBM products would disappear. Instead, customers would simply purchase IBM and what it offered. The current focus on services delivered and enabled by IBM does just that.

Offerings equate to **IBM As-a-Service**. It can be a platform (Cloud, storage, application, etc.), a stream of data (visual, financial, weather, location, spend, etc.) or fully automated processes in apps designed to address specific problems (travel, investment, workplace safety, etc.). IBM with its partners has an offering to address the issue or build a solution.

The event revolves around technology-based innovation, specifically Cloud, Mobility, Security, Cognitive Computing and Data Analytics. But the focus isn't the technology. It is about the innovators and developers quickly building new businesses and rapidly revitalizing traditional enterprises. It is about how technologies facilitate the delivery of innovative solutions to all manner of complex, disruptive problems. It spotlights large enterprises, small startups, medical research, financial services firms, 100+ year-old and brand new manufacturing firms, and visual and graphics studios. This is happening in new, as well as traditional markets as they transform themselves to deliver services to consumers.

The workshops and sessions discussed 'offerings' as service and capabilities the result of efforts of innovative developers that exploit technologies. The 'how-to' sessions talked about 'doing', not dwelling on product features or internals.

In key note sessions, customers discussed expected, as well as fortuitous opportunity in offerings and emerging markets. They demonstrated implementation practicalities. There was no scarcity of IBM and customer staff willing to share visions of future promise. These were out-numbered by those providing the details, demonstrations and practical insight into the results of making technology work for them.

This made InterConnect 2016 that rare event delivering value to both executive and operations staff. Participants shared their experience, insights and, sometimes pain, in reaching success.

In an Analyst-only session, SVP Robert LeBlanc spoke about the continuing evolution of the IBM Cloud unit. Reorganized General Managers are focused on delivering offerings that make it easier for clients and partners to exploit technologies, such as Cloud Integration, Cloud Platforms, Cloud Managed Services, Cloud Videos, etc., not developing product.

Offerings are to address the day-to-day concerns of those in the enterprise responsible for achieving organizational goals. This mirrors a transformation already underway in enterprises. There the emphasis is on delivering value and reducing time-to-market. Rapidly evolving technology, markets and competition drives these priorities.

## Reflecting changes in Business Behavior

All enterprises and organizations are becoming increasingly digitized in response to market demands. "Product" creation along with technology application now involve totally different processes. For years, the model has been to acquire infrastructure and assets to build and run a company. For many, not all, but many, this is changing. No longer is it a question of 'moving' to the cloud, nor in many cases even 'owning' infrastructure. It turns out, ownership is less

important today. Now, it's about being able to access what is needed, when it is needed, where it is needed and for only as long as it's needed.

Now a new UI can be built by assembling pieces available from a public API library, specifying needed service capacity, storage, testing facilities, etc. to access as needed. Entrepreneurs can conceive, model, create and test without permanently investing in all that infrastructure. The process extends to enterprises, partners, initiatives and cooperative arrangements.

## The Innovator/Developer takes center stage

"Developers" now control the heart of the business with their ability to quickly create new service offerings by leveraging technology. This message was conveyed implicitly in the stories of new companies built to deliver service offerings using Cloud environments (like Bluemix), API libraries, mobile technology and multiple different kinds of data.

It was communicated explicitly in hands-on demonstrations of solution building. For example, by using Cleversafe to break down barriers by "harmonizing" disparate data types from video, social media, tracking apps so it can be analyzed to create user-specific services.

A roll-call of presenters, Alpha Modus (stock trading), Westpac (branch banking), Roskilde Music Festival, Siemens (building management), Volvo (driverless cars) and the USA Olympic Cycling Team (in-race feedback for competitive advantage), provides some idea of the breadth of application today.

But, the "developer" is not restricted to just the IT staff. The digitization of services by means of Cognitive Computing, mobility, visualization and platform technology puts powerful data collection, analytics and visualization abilities in the hands of non-IT specialists. There were dynamic demonstrations of app building using published APIs in an API breakout session.

## The Final Word

All-in-all, IBM made good on its promises to deliver insight and information that would be valuable to both executives and operations staff. They clearly communicated their vision of a Cloud future with seriously disruptive changes to come as technology driven changes lowers the cost of entry and competition in a service-driven market. In addition to their work in Cloud, Cognitive Computing, Mobility, Big Data and Analytics, they identified Visualization and Security as two areas of the future focus. We look forward to the results.

IBM made clear its commitment to an "As-a-Service" economy as the emerging model for market interactions. They aren't the only ones saying this[1]. However, they lead the efforts at transforming internal operations, promoting and delivering what's needed to realize the vision.

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[1] For an interesting discussions on the topic see the Winter, 2016 issue of *The Independent Review* , www.independent.org.

They face significant challenges in a far from robust world economic climate. Their success is far from certain, but they are definitely delivering some compelling and persuasive evidence that such transformation can be rewarding.

The event wasn't without its glitches. IBM has a number of challenges to deal with, not the least being building market share in evolving Cloud and Mobility, even as they define Cognitive Computing and Visualization. Transitioning from the old to the new is always tricky. A far from robust economy doesn't make it easier. IBM's been through tough times before. InterConnect suggests they will do so again.

Finally, IBM inspired attendees with success stories from startups and mature organizations. They challenged attendees to apply what they learned at InterConnect2016 in their own activities. Urging those that did to take their place on the stage next year to tell their stories. We think more than a few will do just that. We plan to be in Las Vegas to listen.

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