

Interview for Spanish media June 2010 with Patrick Dixon, Europe's leading futurist and strategy guru.

How can we take advantage of the opportunities that technology brings to the development of companies?

The first thing is to take every opportunity to do things we all know about, but which very few businesses do well. Companies can grow 10-30% in a year or two with careful attention to their use of technology.

For a start, take a good hard look at your website and get others to give their views. We easily get blind to how our customers really see us. Websites can turn from world-class to obsolete in 3-4 years in some rapidly changing industries. When was your website last completely rebuilt?

Can people find your site easily when searching on Google? Does your website appear in the top of the search listings for important words that customers may enter when thinking about your kind of products and services? Does it explain clearly enough what you do? Is it easy to contact you by email, SMS and phone from information on the website? Are the product descriptions attractive and up to date with great photos? Are you selling your products and services online? Is the buying system easy and fast to use? Remember that even a 10-15 second delay in a web page appearing can lose you 15-20% of your sales.

Remember that mobile devices / smart phones are selling fast and a rapidly growing number of your customers may already be using them to search for products and services. Google maps and other location-based services are also growing in importance. Is your company registered with Google Maps and other services? A good app for a mobile phone can promote a company, drive new sales and encourage loyalty.

How good are your customer information systems? Can you instantly identify those that bought a particular product, or who have bought from you regularly? Are you able to mail them separately with special offers? When your customers phone, how long does it take you to pull up all their information on your screen? Are your information systems integrated so that all

information about the customer is available to all who may need it instantly?

How can we achieve the best results through sustainability?

[youtube:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8W412aAWQU>]

There are two main reasons to be green in business: first because it feels the right thing to do, and will please our customers. The second is because taking green decisions directly saves money. In the past, most business leaders tended to think about sustainability as something which costs money – being kind to the environment and so on. However, with oil prices settling at over \$70 a barrel, efforts to save energy make financial sense as well as being environmentally friendly.

Manufacturers and other heavy energy users will gain significantly in most cases by doing an energy audit. Many companies will do this free of charge, and some will also complete entire projects at no cost, by charging their bills against the reduction in energy use over the following 3-5 years. Companies like Johnson Controls and Siemens offer many different financial packages at attractive rates, to help companies sign contracts. They do this knowing that a very large number of energy saving actions will pay for themselves in a relatively short time.

For example, electric motors are one of the main manufacturing costs – because of the power they use. But new motors typically save around 20% of power. Energy is also wasted heating and cooling liquids and gases, when maybe 90% can be saved using heat exchangers. It is important to take a wide view of the total benefits to the business, including image and brand.

How can we build new business models through technology?

[youtube:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvUyU1I8sUw>]

Technology is about innovation: doing things different to serve customers better. Innovation breaks old business and creates new opportunities. Take British Sugar for example which bought a gas turbine to make their own electricity for their factory. They also use the waste heat to cook sugar, and pipe waste gases over 2 kilometres to the largest green house in Europe. Before they piped the CO₂, the green houses were growing 35 million tomatoes a year. Now they grow 70 million. So British Sugar started as a sugar refinery, became a power generator and is now a tomato producer.

The important thing is to be agile and alert. Constantly watching how technology is evolving. Another example could be an insurance broker that always sold products face to face or over the phone, that uses the power of the web to become a 100% online insurance company, maybe comparing many different products from different companies.

What is the influence of technology in people management? How can we fill the gap between virtual world and personal relations in a business environment?

[youtube:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1t3yh6laO0w>]

Number one or two career priority (except in times of economic crisis) is usually work-life balance, and technology can really help here. Home working is a much more efficient way to do tasks like writing a long report or sales document, and also reduces time spent travelling. Meetings are still very important, but many people work with colleagues across other nations or in other cities. We need be sure to equip our teams with the best technology we can afford, to save them time, and increase their job satisfaction. Also remember to use social networks like LinkedIn – which now has more than 35 million managers as members. Some companies now do most of their recruiting through these networks.

What are consequences of using technology in talent development?

[youtube:http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kZl15houUc w]

Most executives watch YouTube and other video sites – sometimes for entertainment, but often to help them develop skills or learn new things. But we also need to remember the importance of getting teams together, particularly if they are rarely all in one place, to build common vision and strategy, as well as trust and co-operation.

Who will be the leaders of the future?

All leaders need vision: strategy is simply the battle plan to turn vision into reality. Passion is also vital. You have to believe in what you are doing if you want people to follow. All the best leaders in human history have appealed to higher values: making a difference, making life better. If you can show your people how they can help do that, if you can connect with all the passions people have, they will follow you to the ends of the earth, buy your products and services with pride, and what is more, as we see in non-profit foundations, they may even be willing to work for you for next to nothing.

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