

How DigiPlex redefined 'future-proofing' for digital business

Outsider perspectives and a culture of constant innovation have enabled DigiPlex to change the conversation about sustainable business strategies

In a rapidly digitising world, data has emerged as the lifeblood of the global economy. Storing, securing and moving this data is now a critical strategic concern. While companies around the world are trying to capitalise on increasingly connected and intelligent business, a breath-taking pace of change presents a relentless challenge.

Sitting at the very heart of this challenge is the data centre. As the volume of data in circulation has exploded, so have demands for new and better methods for storage, security and transfer. While many companies are straining at the limits of conventional server farms, one Nordic company, DigiPlex, is changing the conversation.

Byrne Murphy, Chairman and founder of DigiPlex explains how his background and perspective helped him lead DigiPlex to a position where it addresses today's most pressing business challenges as well as the trends set to dictate tomorrow's strategy.

What brought you to the data centre industry?

Byrne: When I first came to Europe in the late 1990s, my interest was in property development. I was building a portfolio of Europe's first outlet centres just as e-commerce was beginning to take off. I quickly came to appreciate how important the physical infrastructure was to the digital revolution. All digital activity today runs through data centres, from streaming content and browsing online to the rapid increase in artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics. In fact, IT insight firm Gartner predicts that by 2020 the average person will be having more conversations with AI robots, who live inside data centres, than with their spouses.

Back then, however, the physical side of the digital equation – such as data centres – wasn't paid much attention. If anything, storage was just considered another IT issue, tucked away from the board's notice as long as it wasn't causing problems. My background in real estate and in opening new markets let me recognise the vital importance of location, but also the direction in which the market was headed.

What steps did you take to future-proof your own business?

Byrne: If DigiPlex was going to be a global leader, it had to address the big concerns businesses were just starting to realise: accelerating cost, scalability and security for their digital strategies. The largest operating cost for any data centre is in power, most of which is eaten up by cooling. More data, means more cooling and rapidly growing cost.

Basing DigiPlex in the Nordics allowed us to take full advantage of the incredibly low price for clean, renewable energy, and to leverage the naturally cool climate to make cooling easier. The region's highly stable government and excellent digital infrastructure were further bonuses, especially in the long term.

Over the seventeen years DigiPlex has been in operation, we've worked consistently to build an international reputation for best-in-class energy efficiency, innovation, stability and security.

While this helped us grow our business and improve our proposition, we also realised the need to challenge our own thinking. In the past four years, we have hired in several senior people from

outside the data centre industry who could further refine our strategy and the way we work with businesses. We evolved our proposition beyond just appealing to the CIO, to bring a compelling case to the CFO, the CEO, company boards and even investors.

How has your businesses challenged conventional thinking about sustainability?

Byrne: Business continues to change at a breakneck pace. It's a challenge to know if the IT investments you make today are going to be fit for purpose in 2020, let alone 2025 or 2030. This has left a lot of businesses at a loss for strategies that could truly be considered sustainable. Our approach has been to look beyond the easy decision points and address the market the key issues that are going to arise.

Data centres are hungry for power, so they carry a large and growing environmental footprint. They already account for two percent of the world's yearly CO₂, and that's on the rise. Businesses ignoring the carbon footprint of their digital strategies are walking blindly towards potential fines and taxation, let alone major reputation damage. DigiPlex took the decision in 2004 to use exclusively renewable energy and to take full advantage of the substantial tax incentives for using the Nordic clean power. This lets us offer businesses a way to improving their green credentials while immediately realizing major cost savings. We estimate a firm deploying 100 megawatts will save approximately \$1 billion over 10 years, just by choosing to place a data center in Sweden or Norway versus a U.K. equivalent. That's based on the difference in the cost of power alone, and a significant saving for even for the largest companies in the world.

What other lessons should businesses take about sustainable strategy?

Byrne: In a technology-driven industry such as the data center sector, innovation needs to be a collective state of mind deeply rooted in the corporate culture. At DigiPlex we live and breathe the "innovate or die" maxim. We constantly innovate to further reduce our power consumption and to make sure we get maximum value for that we use. We developed our own award winning unique concert control solution, for example, that compliments a highly efficient air-to-air cooling system. Together these innovations enable us to take advantage of the cool climate more efficiently than any conventional water cooling solution. We will even redistribute excess heat that our servers produce back into local community, heating up many thousands of homes in the process, helping reduce the overall demand for energy.

So, by challenging ourselves to go further, we increase our short and long-term proposition. DigiPlex is set up to offer both a short and long-term cost-saving proposition, while also inviting businesses to join virtuous cycles where they can actually help sustain and preserve the planet as they grow.

What is next for DigiPlex?

Byrne: Whatever way you look at it, we live in an incredibly exciting time for business. The fourth industrial revolution is unlocking new potential every day, and more businesses are realising the chance to grow while taking responsibility for our collective future. DigiPlex will continue to ensure we're setting the standard for the most compelling, responsible and long-term solutions for data centers - one of the most central elements in the digital world. We shall continue to bring sustainable digital strategies to the board level of all our customers.