

EBOOK

A woman with dark curly hair and glasses, wearing a striped shirt, is smiling while working on a laptop. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue layer featuring a white hexagonal pattern and a glowing circular light effect. A dark blue rectangular box is positioned at the bottom, containing the title text.

# Unpacking the Future Impact of Microsoft Technologies

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# A word from Triad's Microsoft MVP

Pieter Veenstra

Microsoft Most Valuable Professional | Triad Group PLC



Microsoft used to be extremely rigid in their development process.

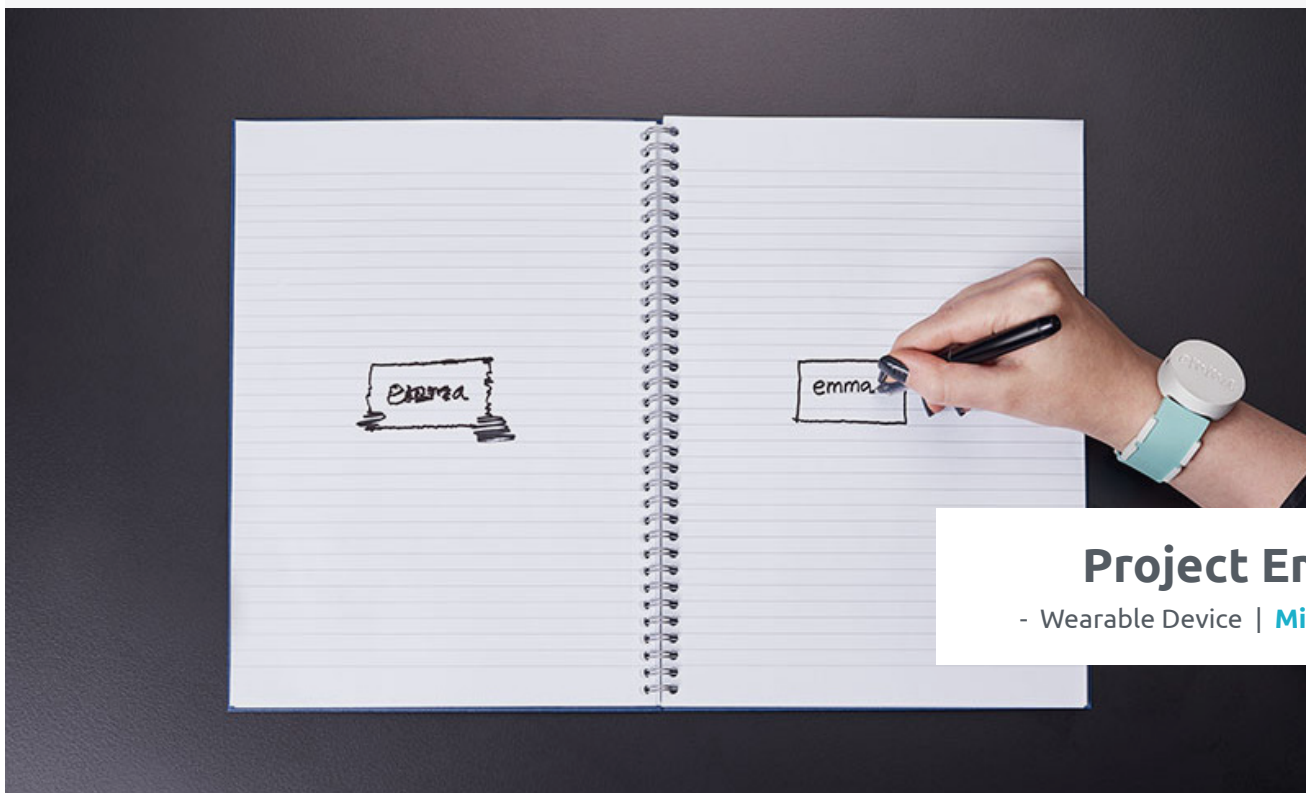
Every six months, they'd release a big, new update. People would complain that things didn't work and then they'd have to wait another few months before the issue was solved. An approach that is well documented.

In **David Rottenberg and Jeffrey Shuman's** book *The Rhythm of Business*, they explain that Bill Gates found business success because he followed a specific pattern – developing, testing, learning and refining his products with each attempt.

**"Bill Gates knew that his customers wanted and needed a simpler, more graphical computer operating system, so Microsoft developed Windows. After it was developed, naturally, the firm tested it in the marketplace. It wasn't right, so the company brought back the product and worked on it. After another test it still wasn't right. So, the company did some more work, tested it some more and, this time, helped by improvements in the speed of computer hardware, Windows was a sensation and Bill Gates had done it again. But what had Bill Gates really done? Very simply, he had followed the rhythm of business; developing, testing and refining a product or service until it was right."** - **David Rottenberg and Jeffrey Shuman** | *The Rhythm of Business*

Today, Microsoft's rhythm has evolved as the business embraces a more agile way of doing things. This approach has changed the whole company. Now, we get updates more frequently, which means that issues are resolved in no time at all. Sure, this may be a very "techie" inspired example of how MS continues to evolve, but for me it illustrated the journey the company has taken in terms of how they used to work and how they work today.

And we see this in the breadth of innovation in so many aspects of the work Microsoft is currently doing. On the one end of the spectrum, we have groundbreaking inventions like “Emma”, a wrist-worn device the brand created to drastically reduce the tremors experienced by a 33-year-old Parkinson’s sufferer. But this is just one aspect of how MS is contributing to our changing world. Other groundbreaking work includes their research into artificial intelligence (AI) supercomputers and quantum computing, offering the potential to solve some of the world’s toughest problems.



## Project Emma

- Wearable Device | [Microsoft](#)

On the other, we have more new functional - technologies coming soon. Tools and solutions that enable modern workers, whether in the office or a remote location, to get their jobs done at a time when business is advancing so quickly. At the forefront of tools that help a remote workforce collaborate are Microsoft Remote Access that creates a ‘mixed reality’ to enhance remote working capabilities and solve problems faster.

The findings of our recent survey revealed that it is these innovations that are having the greatest impact. It’s less about the paradigm-shifting, leading edge solutions and more about upping efficiency. Modern businesses aren’t concerned with reinventing the wheel. In fact, they’re looking for ways to make it better and more useful, which in turn makes businesses more productive, and ultimately, more profitable.

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# “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.”

**Or can you?** The expression is typically used to describe situations where people are unwilling to try new ways of doing things. This aversion is usually motivated by the fact that people have been doing things in a particular way for a long time and aren’t keen to change things up. While the saying may still be thrown about today, the truth is that an old dog can learn new tricks but only if it has will, and the opportunity, to do so.

## And that first part is what’s really important.

Microsoft has found such incredible success because they have the desire to change. To routinely release new iterations of their products and then use customer feedback to improve and develop a solution that works. These iterations aren’t failures, they’re opportunities to do better things.

A master of the long game, it’s safe to say that Microsoft has a pretty impressive track record. When the company was founded back in 1975, the machines they were selling were called microcomputers. This name was chosen to distinguish their desktop offerings from the massive machines that were commonplace at the time. The name Microsoft proved a fitting one for a company that made software for computers that were more dainty in size.

To uncover how companies in the UK are using MS technologies today, we interviewed more than 50 business executives about their current IT and technology needs. Talking with everyone from COO’s and technical directors to VP’s and project managers, we wanted to find out how businesses across a variety of industries are using Microsoft technologies each day.

These tech experts outlined what tools and solutions are having the greatest impact across their organisations and offered a snapshot of their experiences working with the Microsoft stack. Another focus of these conversations was around the future impact of MS technologies. We wanted to find out what strategies these IT pro’s are putting in place to prepare their organisations for all of the changes brought about by digital transformation.

**Sound interesting?**

Keep reading to find out what they had to say...



# Chapter 1:

## How modern organisations are using MS technologies

It may be hard to believe but Windows 1.0 was released at the end 1985. Fast forward more than 30 years and the software giant that has long dominated the personal computer operating system market has expanded into cloud, search, email, gaming and unified communications.

### But how are modern businesses using these tools and technologies?

**Adam Monnery**, Head of IT at the Museum of London, suggests that Microsoft is almost doing a “land grab” as they attempt to offer all of the tools a business could possibly need. While the museum is currently not at the point of fully leveraging all of the MS services and solutions just yet, they certainly are on the journey. Monnery believes the only barrier they experience is having the necessary capacity in terms of staff to keep up with everything and adopt all of the new offerings strategically. **Guy Dixon**, Head of Technology at Ctrack Technologies, agrees:

**“We’ve got the full Microsoft stack here. We’ve found it to be a good complete package. Our main challenge is really just to get the most out of it.”**

- **Guy Dixon** | Head of Technology, *Ctrack Technologies*



## — The power of cloud

Office 365 and Azure proved standout MS solutions favoured by the survey participants.

According to **Pieter Veenstra**, a senior consultant at Triad and a Microsoft MVP, one of the reasons why cloud has gained such incredible traction – aside from the obvious cost, reliability and flexibility benefits – is the fact that people are no longer concerned with the nuts and bolts of technologies.

**“People no longer need to understand how these things work. They just need them to work.”**

- **Pieter Veenstra** | Senior Consultant and Microsoft MVP, *Triad PLC*

It is perhaps unsurprising then that at the end of 2017, Forrester forecast that more than 50% of global enterprises would rely on at least one public cloud platform to drive their digital transformation efforts and improve the customer experience in 2018.

More and more, people want to be able to work from any location, accessing their emails and other important information no matter where they are, says **Ian Butcher**, Radian Group Ltd, Acting Head of IT. **“For us, this was one of the main drivers of Office 365. Where historically we would host everything on site, we’ve transitioned more and more to the cloud.”** We’ve made a big push towards mobile working. While MS handle the availability part of the equation, we just have to make sure we get the right devices and have the necessary expertise to support them properly.

For many organisations, the cloud offers a more affordable, more reliable alternative. But this doesn’t mean that migrating is easy. We are predominantly an on premise based organisation, says the **service delivery manager** at a social housing provider. We have Azure but we’re still in the testing phase. Two things piqued our interest in the MS cloud, he explains. Firstly, we are a small organisation, we have an older infrastructure and we want to take strain off our physical servers. Secondly, we also lack the knowhow about cloud to manage it effectively, which is why we’re happy leaving that to the experts.

According to a **business executive** from a group of vehicle repair centres across the UK, using cloud services is quite different when contrasted with how organisations bought infrastructure or servers in the past. It takes some getting used to if you want to get the most out of it, he notes. There are cost savings but there are also quite easy ways of spending a lot of money rather quickly, without realising it. So, making the most of the opportunities of cloud computing requires a different type of management.

## MS in action

### Enabling a growing franchise business

Signs Express is the UK's most successful signs and graphics franchise with close to 80 franchised businesses in the UK and Ireland. According to **Mark Poole**, a non-executive director at Signs Express, about three years ago the business was using an email service that wasn't making the grade. At the time, they had horrific problems with spam and many of their emails weren't properly sent or received. **"I was called in to look at the risks to the business. And these were really high. So, I decided to move to something I knew and trusted. And that something was Microsoft,"** explains Poole. The company rolled out Office 365 to fix their email woes. As a franchise business, they had to migrate more than 65 businesses across to Office 365 and opted to do so in smaller, more manageable batches. During this trial period, emails were coming in and going out seamlessly and spam was going into the right folder. Many of our franchisees had experienced problems emailing public organisations, like schools and councils in the past, notes Poole. But during the trial period, they enjoyed a 100% success rate.

### Museum on the move

The Museum of London is moving to a new location in West Smithfield. While the move is an exciting one, ensuring that the move happens without a hitch is proving a little stressful for **Adam Monnery**, Head of IT at the Museum of London. Will the new building have a server room? Which services will we move to cloud? How do we build applications for the future? These are just a few of the questions he has to address. The museum has a disproportionately large amount of file storage needed for an organisation of this size because they need to be able to house large digital archives. And the format this data is stored in is extremely important. **"As a museum, it's about digital preservation rather than just file storage. So it's a case of us needing to be make sure that we can access this historical data in 100 years time and not just 5 years time."** And it's not just about storing the information, according to Monnery, as part of the relocation, they also want to improve on how they present content to visitors - think interactive exhibits and galleries, smart signage; all of which will be hosted on cloud technologies.





## — But what are the alternatives?

All businesses across all industries have, at some point, been hampered by legacy processes.

Upon reviewing these ways of working, they often discover that just because something has always been done in a certain way, doesn't mean that there aren't better/smarter/more affordable ways to achieve the same outcome. With this in mind, we wanted to find out if modern businesses were open to exploring any alternatives to Microsoft.

Perhaps the most obvious option is Google apps, the search engine bigwig's suite of cloud-based productivity apps. But integration and reputation prove a drawcard keeping businesses within the MS family.

**Adam Monnery** notes that the museum could explore some of the offerings from Google. But they need the integration offered by MS; everything just works together without any issues.

That said, he would be open to an alternative if the right solution came along.

**"If someone came out with a really competitive solution at a much lower price point, which had additional features that we needed, we would certainly look at it. But at the moment, the way MS seem to be developing - especially when it comes to their productivity tools and Office 365, they're definitely going for even more global domination."**

- **Adam Monnery** | Head of IT, *Museum of London*

The only way we would go somewhere else would be if we found something that complemented Microsoft nicely, says **Andy Hughes**, Technical Director at Synergy. The company heavily uses Microsoft Hyper V to meet their virtualisation needs. Having built the business on the Microsoft stack, they wanted their hypervisor to also be Microsoft. This approach carried all the way through to their operating system and the applications on top of that.

All of this was done for the continuity and seamless integration offered by products that intermingle nicely with each other.

**Guy Dixon**'s apprehension about alternatives is related to Microsoft's track record and the company's core focus. **"As a business, you want a solution built to support businesses. I think that Google is still a consumer-focused organisation. Sure, there was a time when there was a real business case for Google Docs. But since the launch of Office 365, I think that opportunity has largely gone away."**

When you see the Microsoft logo, you know that what you're getting has a certain reputation, notes the **service delivery manager** from the social housing provider. You know where they come from and, at the end of the day, you've got a certain amount of trust in the product before you've even started using it.



## MS in action

### Costing conundrum

While the alternatives seem to lack the same functionality and reliability offered by MS technologies, there are some drawbacks to the Microsoft stack. From the perspective of a social housing provider, the subscription costs associated with cloud-based offerings are challenging. A fan of Microsoft Project, he has had to move away from using the software because with roughly 800 employees, the licensing fees are simply too expensive. The company actually uses an alternative cloud-based project management solution. I'm always astounded by the number of project managers I meet who haven't used Microsoft Project at all, notes the **service delivery manager**. He doesn't believe it's a case of people not wanting to use it - in fact, he described it as a fantastic tool - but he thinks that it's priced too high.

# Chapter 2:

## What tools and solutions are having the greatest impact?

By 2020, it is forecast that about 1.75 billion people will be part of the mobile workforce worldwide. This accounts for 42.0% of the global workforce. But in order for these workers to be efficient, and remain productive no matter where they are, they need to be able to work like they would were they sitting at a desk, in an office, all day.

**They need to be able to collaborate, anywhere and at any time.**

Back in 2015, **Forbes** wrote an article about why collaboration is the new competitive advantage. In the piece, the publication noted:

**“Today, competitive advantage is not driven by the resources you control, but rather by those you can access”**

- **Forbes** | Why The Ability To Collaborate Is The New Competitive Advantage

And according to **Gartner**, content collaboration platforms have the potential to transform how individuals and teams work - both inside and outside organisations. As businesses get more comfortable with remote working, and collaboration tools and platforms improve, the range of skills and talent an enterprise is able to access is no longer limited by geography or time.

When asking this group of business execs what MS technologies were currently having the greatest impact on their organisation, those that enabled seamless teamwork were the top picks. They included:

- **Skype for Business**
- **Microsoft Teams**
- **Sharepoint**

We run a pretty distributed organisation, notes an **IT expert** from a group of UK vehicle repair centres. So it just makes sense for us to embrace online collaboration, rather than trying to get everyone together in the same place, at the same time. For example, my IT team is made up of just 20 people, he says. But no two people are based at the same site. So we have to communicate in different ways because regular team meetings simply aren't viable.

Our different centres phone each other quite a bit, so we introduced Skype for Business more as an instant messaging tool than a video calling platform, according to **Mark Poole**. In addition to this, we're embracing a "one-to-many" approach and using Skype for Business to host training presentations and workshops at our head office that can be viewed by our entire workforce.

For **Sheryl Newman**, Vice President for the Association of Scottish Businesswomen, Sharepoint is having a significant impact, even though it isn't being used as widely as it should be. Companies want to have better control, they want anytime, anywhere access, especially with people moving around so much. For me, considering all these things around collaboration and communication, I think Sharepoint is a highly influential management tool.

MS Teams gives people an official place to be collaborative and form teams and work together, states **Adam Monnery**. Rather than making use of alternative collaboration tools like Slack or Trello, which are employed in a largely ungoverned way, with MS Teams we have an "official" solution that enables collaboration across different departments.

## MS in action

### Tracking tech across the globe

Ctrack is the global leader in vehicle tracking, fleet management and insurance telematics solutions. With offices across Europe, in the UK, South Africa and California, it's safe to say that the business needs solid communication tools to ensure that all the office around the world remain in contact. But if everyone in these different offices is spending just one hour on the phone each day phoning different clients and customers around the world, those costs add up pretty quickly. **Guy Dixon**, Ctrack's Head of Technology, cites Skype for Business as the ideal solution to meet their needs. The company previously made use of very expensive dedicated teleconferencing systems but given the distributed nature of the organisation, Skype for Business voice and video calls – and instant messaging – is a hugely popular choice for communication across the business. **"Skype for Business is certainly transforming things for us and has drastically reduced our costs."** Another good thing about Skype for Business is that you can send invites out to people who don't use Office 365 and they don't have to install any Office software to be able to use it.

# Chapter 3:

## MS technologies going forward - exploring what the future holds

Change used to be the only constant but, today, even change is changing.

**“You can’t just keep doing the same old thing you were doing before. You have to take your skills and attack new frontiers.”** - Bill Gates | Founder, *Microsoft*

Bill Gates shared these words during a TV interview in 1996. In the same interview, he said: **“In the business of technology you have to think about what are you missing. What is the research or customer feedback that you should be paying more attention to? That kind of focus has helped drive us forward through all the milestones the company has had. Certainly, the Internet is a great example of that. We had to tear up our plans and step back and say how do we really embrace all that’s good about the Internet?”**

This agility and adaptability holds particular relevance today.

For **Sheryl Newman** as technology becomes a key differentiator between successful and unsuccessful businesses; one of the new frontiers that requires attacking is the perception of IT. **“IT used to be seen as being quite in silos, quite separate from the business. But I think that this perception, and the role of IT, has to change and they have to be more forward thinking, more strategic, more helpful in order to drive the business forward. From my perspective it’s about how the technology can work for your business, rather your the business working for the technology.”** We often see companies that make large investments in new technologies simply because they’re new. But they should actually be having conversations around what they want to achieve and then finding the technologies that support these ways of working.

But changing perceptions isn't easy. In fact, in many instances, change itself is the problem.

**“Change is and always will be complex. Some people welcome it with open arms and are really up for it, while others are just like, nope, I don't want to do this, I'm happy working the way I am.”**

- **Ian Butcher** | Acting Head of IT, *Radian Group Ltd.*

Making people more comfortable with change is about showing them how new processes will make their lives easier. This is where change management is essential. You almost have to coach people and really, really demonstrate the benefits to them. Our leadership has changed quite a bit over the last year. A few guys have left and new guys come in, which has made it easier to make broader cultural changes because these are being driven from the top.

The one challenge I see internally is figuring out how to help people to make that shift in mindset when a change is required, explains **Guy Dixon**.

**“My IT manager still believes success is based on the number of servers he has in his server room and the idea of servers being in someone else's cloud or even being completely managed is quite alien to him.”** - **Guy Dixon** | Head of Technology, *Ctrack*

In saying this, he admits that once these people get on board, you'll see the same person who was vehemently against getting rid of legacy infrastructure is now more than happy to support Office 365 because they're not getting phone calls in the middle of the night because someone can't access their emails.

If you're introducing new technologies, there will almost always be a resistance, unless users can see a real personal benefit in doing so. This is something you need to get across before your project even gets off the ground, advises a **UK vehicle repair chain executive**. This requires a fair bit of internal marketing and education, which many companies have neither the time, nor the money to do.

People are often held back by fear, adds **Sheryl Newman**. Alleviating these fears is the responsibility of the business. A commonly held perception, when it comes to any form of IT training, is that users can just learn what they need to know on Google.

**“But, this isn't enough. Organisations are introducing systems and environments that are quite foreign. They may look familiar but users need to be shown how to use them in relation to their job roles. If you can't get users on board, your applications are going to fail and you're going to waste a lot of money and time.”**

- **Sheryl Newman** | Vice President, *Association of Scottish Businesswomen*





## Training change

A car repair company with more than 25 years in the business, who is distributed across 130 different sites throughout the UK. The company's **IT Director** admits that getting people to use tools like Sharepoint and OneDrive has proved tricky. Most people are quite content with folders and shared drives and the business has had to coax them into thinking about storing their files and data in a different way. How are they addressing this? A combination of "carrot and stick" to induce the desired behaviour, says the IT Director. He explains that in some instances they've had to remove access to certain shared spaces where data used to be stored, effectively forcing their staff to utilise Microsoft storage products. They've also had to run some fairly significant training and communication exercises to showcase exactly what these MS technologies can do and to teach people how to use them. We're starting to see more people using links to share data with each other, rather than sending massive files back and forth to everybody via email. This certainly isn't standard practice yet, but we're getting there, he says.

## How different businesses approach change

In **Sheryl Newman**'s experience, there are three different ways that organisations are approaching change as part of their digital transformation efforts.

**#1** There's a will but there's no way – These companies have very strict guidelines, they don't react well to change and shifts have to be done incrementally.

**#2** There's a will AND there is a way – These organisations are open to change but getting them to learn about new tools and approaches can be difficult.

**#3** There's a whole lot of everything – These people are aware that they need to keep moving to stay ahead and they're very open to change. They love change and will go at it with gusto.

# Final Thoughts

**Adrian Leer**

Managing Director | **Triad Group PLC**



For me, the current MS value proposition can be divided in two. On the one hand, there is a widespread recognition that Microsoft looks after all of the day-to-day stuff that businesses need. On the other, there is this new and exciting world of possibilities.

I believe that many business executives struggle to comprehend the actual scope of what Microsoft can offer. It's like there is some sort of "hidden prize" that businesses understand is out there but they're just not entirely sure how to get their hands on it. I would argue that the issue lies in actually accessing and using these new innovations, which makes it critical for industry experts to share their experiences and their knowledge in an effort open up the world to the art of the possible.

Today, we talk about some of the things that Microsoft is doing - like AI and robotic process automation, for example - as being wildly advanced and disruptive. But in no time, these innovations will be part of the everyday, enabling capabilities we can't even comprehend right now. If we just look at how Microsoft has changed over the last two years, it's quite phenomenal. MS is now more focussed on offering a positive user experience and optimised to meet users where they are.

Reflecting on the Microsoft of a few years ago, one could argue that they weren't really getting it right. But after a long hard look in the mirror, this tech industry stalwart came up with ways to be more responsive, to outdo threats from various new kids on the block and, perhaps most importantly, to challenge their own status quo. In my mind, this makes MS a safe bet. When you look at how they've revised their approach, it demonstrates that they're an organisation that listens, which if you ask me is no mean feat for a business of this size and with such a longstanding legacy.

# Biographies



**Andy Hughes**

Technical Director | **Synergy**



From scoping to design to execution, Andy has over 27 years' experience in the development and delivery of innovative business systems. Working primarily in the technology industry, Andy continues to demonstrate his technical leadership skills.

Andy has an established reputation for quickly recognising and subsequently delivering the specified requirements for key stakeholders. Andy joined Synergy Technology Ltd in 1998 where he has held several key roles rising to Technical Director in 2008.

In the role of Technical Director, Andy pioneered the development of a technical infrastructure that utilises the outsourcing of business services for expanding, innovative SMEs across the UK. With this infrastructure in place, Synergy Technology has provided and managed vital business services to prestigious clients including Manchester City Football Club, City Football Group, Legion Group and Euro Car Parks.

As part of his working relationship with Manchester City Football club, Andy's leadership and relationship skills enabled him to develop onsite technical teams with the competence to continually meet the ever-growing demands of the club's fast-growing IT systems.

Andy continues to stay at the forefront of technology and development of business systems, and as the Director of Innovation, he ensures the CITADEL brand continues to facilitate the most up-to-date system solutions and that they are ready to meet future technology trends.

# Biographies



**Guy Dixon**

Head of Technology | **Ctrack Technologies**



Guy Dixon is an independent technology consultant who has held senior technical leadership roles in a variety of businesses, ranging from those in Financial Services to SaaS IoT.

Guy's technical background is in software development and system architecture, utilising the Microsoft technology stack, including Microsoft .Net, SQL Server and of late Microsoft Azure.

At the time of the interview, Guy held role of European Head of Technology at Ctrack (an Inseego company).



**Adam Monnery**

Head of IT | **Museum of London**



Established IT professional with experience delivering IT services to all sectors. I have strong infrastructure experience specialising in networking, storage, virtualisation and security. I'm skilled in operational delivery and the leadership of multidisciplinary teams.

Experienced in running projects to deliver IT change and transformation, surfacing and defining business needs, identifying and procuring solutions and leading on implementation.



**Ian Butcher**

Acting Head of IT | **Radian Group Ltd.**



Ian Butcher is the Security and Applications Manager at Radian Group. He has almost 25 years' experience in various IT roles from Service Desk through to software development, IT Management up to senior level and now Cyber Security.



## Mark Poole

Non-Executive Director | **Signs Express**



A proactive and committed Senior IT professional with exceptional Management skills and knowledge and particular expertise in strategic planning and amelioration of systems. A self-starter who thrives on learning new skills and embracing new technologies, and is able to lead and motivate others. A confident communicator who possesses excellent interpersonal and relationship-building skills with the drive and ambition to rise to any challenge.



## Sheryl Newman

Vice President | **Association of Scottish Businesswomen**



Sheryl's experience is borne from a 23 year career predominantly in Technology focused projects. Sheryl started her career holding a management consultant role for a leading American IT organization specializing in collaboration and adoption of new technology. And worked to support a leading Energy Companies new technology projects. Sheryl launched Appetite for Business in 2016 as a vehicle to help organizations investing in Office 365 and associated apps see value from their investment and works globally to support companies of all sizes to achieve this aim.

Over the past four years, she has been named Business Success in Scotland led by a Women, Spirit of Enterprise award, Top 50 rising stars by Insider UK and in 2018 Female Leader of the Year in Scotland in IT. She was one of the founders of Girl Geek Scotland. Sheryl is a keen supporter of Women into Business and Technology as a sector to help raise the profile of talented and inspiring women. She is an avid charity worker and sits is one of Cancer Research UK Women of Influence.

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<b>Mark Poole</b>	<i>Non Executive IT Director</i>
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<b>James Bunney</b>	<i>Director</i>
<b>Nick Wright</b>	<i>Head of IT</i>
<b>Neville Fernandes</b>	<i>IT Project Manager</i>

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