

FROM ADOPTION TO ADVANTAGE – HOW TO MAKE REAL ESTATE TECH WORK HARDER

Experts from across the built environment sector joined MRI Software and *BE News* to discuss where they are on their technology journey, where they are aiming to get to and how they plan to get the most out of tech



INDUSTRY GUESTS:

Dan Foryszewski, managing director, MRI Software

Sam Hay, chief executive, Livingway

Crispin Gandy, chief executive, Argo Real Estate

David Goldberg, founder and chief executive, POD Management

Samantha Kempe, co-founder and chief information officer, IMMO

Allan Lockhart, chief executive, NewRiver REIT

James Massey, managing director, MRI Software

Colin O'Reilly, senior director, MRI Software

Rupert Parker, founder and chief executive, Building Passport

Jonny Rosenblatt, co-founder, Spacemade

Wybo Wijnbergen, chief executive, Infinitospace

Richard Williams, chief executive, Ringley Group

Debra Yudolph, founder and chief executive, SAY Consulting

Liz Hamson, founder and editor-in-chief, *BE News* (chair)



In business, technology can be a true differentiator. Companies that focus on getting more value from their systems, and continually improving how they use them, will be the ones that win.

By combining best-in-class tools with a central system of record, a unified platform enables teams to work better, smarter and faster. It enables easier hiring, quicker task completion and a digital-first approach to how work gets done. But this is all easier said than done.

Where are companies on their tech journey, where do they want to be and how do they get closer to realising the advantages

of tech and making it work both smarter and harder? These questions were among the topics debated by industry experts at a roundtable sponsored by MRI Software.

QUESTION: What is the current state of play with your companies – do you have a defined tech and data strategy? And where are your organisations on the journey from adoption to advantage?

LOCKHART: There's a long way to go for us. We started with our data, which increasingly we have coming in on a regular basis, covering the likes of customer spending



Allan Lockhart



Crispin Gandy



Jonny Rosenblatt

and rate collection. We try to get that data organised in the right way to get to our decision-makers, meaning they can make better decisions on a more consistent basis.

While people are making those judgements, it is about time efficiency but also about making challenging conclusions. People drive performance, so we are using that to push performance through our business. We are taking it seriously. Our board is focused on technology and AI, and keeping in mind the risk perspective, because today you need to be extremely careful.

WIJNBERGEN: InfitSpace started life as a technology-led company, even before AI was

being used in the way it is today.

Over time, for us, the opportunity for AI has sat across several areas: helping us make better choices, improving efficiency across the business and creating a stronger experience for our partners and customers.

We are still on that journey, but the focus is very much on applying technology where it genuinely adds value, rather than using AI for the sake of it.

The shift from adoption to advantage comes when AI becomes part of how a business operates day to day, not as a separate experiment but something that helps teams work smarter, move faster and make more informed judgements.



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Crispin Gandy

GANDY: We've spent last year looking at our data. If that is not in order you cannot implement AI. We found it was in multiple locations – and not as organised as it needed to be.

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The challenge is now sieving through the products out there – we are like kids in a sweet shop with ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot. It feels like we are always learning but also making mistakes.

ROSENBLATT: We generate about 10,000 enquiries, so different product types





Rupert Parker



Richard Williams



James Massey

indicate different members of sales teams, different people across the businesses. Previously that was central, which means churning through each one.

To put a tool in place – an AI email conversation that starts that process – you need to get the data right and have the feed of information at any given time, with no mistakes. We brought on a product we did not build ourselves and stitched together various bits of a system to make it work together.

It took six months, and we lost enquiries along the way, because some data feeding through was not accurate. But you must go

through that testing stage; otherwise you will not know where the issues are. You have got to get the foundations right.

QUESTION: Is everybody else here starting with a database, or has anybody just leapt in with AI?

WILLIAMS: Do you really need to automate or AI this piece of work in the first place? There is no point wasting time with automation if the action is not needed. The first step is to review your processes, prioritise them and then decide whether to automate or AI.

MASSEY: You cannot have a bottom-up AI strategy. You must be led by people at the very top of the organisation, who have got to take feedback on board. Also, you would never base decisions off inaccurate data in anything else, so why would you want to use an AI strategy to do that, unless the data is valid at the gateway, which has now become so diverse.

Point of entry is no longer just a graphical user interface. It is an 'Internet of Things' sensor, a footfall counter, a building management system integration, an access control platform, a block of flats – it could



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Sam Hay

be anything. This is a huge amount of data. It begs the question: what is useful, actionable?

PARKER: Without exception our clients start with multiple silos of data; widely spread and non-linked. For them, gathering everything together is the biggest hurdle. The next issue they face is understanding whether this data is reliable, as sources vary and there is rarely a clear governance trail.

QUESTION: Are people rolling out AI solutions because they feel compelled to, rather than because they want to?

HAY: We looked at where the roles were just the data and we thought about how we could be looking to AI to make things faster, as opposed to starting right there with the data.

You still need to build or have a say in the way the bots improve what the answers are, what are they looking for, and then you must train it. That itself can be a process where we need manpower dedicated to make it right and fluid in the business.

FORYSZEWSKI: AI appears to have a quicker rollback than legacy technology, where you are putting in a full enterprise resource planning system. If you are not, then taking the time to train that AI data means problems to produce that data point again.

QUESTION: To what extent do you think AI

going to disrupt everything?

YUDOLPH: What our clients value is guidance when there is so much information accessible through ChatGPT or Claude technologies.

With the businesses we are advising, from an operational view, there is a real divide between the new, with a blank sheet of paper, who do not have historical data, who can start from day one, and those who have a real resistance to embracing AI. With the latter, we have been surprised when they come and say “we’ll set up a more traditional operational system first and then layer in AI afterwards”.

The quicker we stop talking about it as optional the better. We should expect that every system we are using is going to be driven by AI.

For businesses it is hard. I understand if you have got all your data, you have got to modernise and, in some ways, it is negative that we pulled AI out as a book to discuss, whereas we should just be talking about modernising and automating.

QUESTION: Are we going to see AI making critical strategic decisions, or are humans still in the loop?

GOLDBERG: The short answer is no. AI should never be a decision-maker. While it can take lots of data and allow you to see trends and interpret that far faster than humans, people are still needed to make decisions.



Debra Yudolph



Samantha Kempe



Wybo Wijnbergen



Real estate has always been about doing more with less and AI gives the industry a real opportunity to do that

Wybo Wijnbergen



Dan Forszewski

QUESTION: Is AI moving faster than the industry?

KEMPE: In the past few months, AI has blown up. We have been producing tech and had machine learning and data scientist experts for a long time, but even just in the past three months, it has gone to the next level. This is especially true with Claude introducing the Opus 4.5 and what that can do for financial modelling. Microsoft Copilot then released its co-work version in March.

Everyone is catching up with each other. We need to draw a line at some point,

because we keep trying to produce and change. It is not for the sake of it, but rather something amazing comes out and you are so inspired about what it can do, and how it changes the vision for what the product should look like, and how agent workflow should work.

The risk is you do not ultimately deliver a product, meaning we have had to internalise, with someone to start using it, rather than just keep iterating on it.

QUESTION: Are there any products out there that will get left behind very quickly,

or does everything coming through now have a potential application that could be transformative?

WILLIAMS: I get called once if not twice a week with a new product, and they can be so similar you cannot choose between them. While we have much of our own technology anyway, I will listen to the pitch but still be thinking 'I heard that one last week'. Everybody is coming into it with very similar solutions, with only slight differentiations.

WIJNBERGEN: Real estate has always been



Colin O'Reilly

about doing more with less and AI gives the industry a real opportunity to do that. There is still a lot of hesitation, however, and in some cases fear around adopting it.

The risk is that the longer companies wait, the harder it will become to catch up. AI will not replace the fundamentals of real estate, but it will increasingly separate the businesses willing to adapt from those that are not.

QUESTION: Will humans still be needed in an AI future?

GOLDBERG: As business owners, we have a responsibility to work out quickly where we are going to use people, because we still need them. The question is where they will fit in the ecosystem of what we have become in a world where AI is doing a lot of the jobs for us.

We will find a solution, because we have seen it happen repeatedly over the history of humankind. We are just not sure where they will add value today, but we have got to start thinking alongside the areas of where they will.

QUESTION: What's the single biggest challenge you face on your journey from adoption to advantage? What is the biggest benefit you can achieve on that journey and how confident are you that you will achieve it?



David Goldberg

O'REILLY: Making sure with our technology companies that AI is built in, rather than bolted on, is imperative. We have still got to do what our clients want. That is the key aspect, and I am confident we will be doing it for 50 years.

FORYSZEWSKI: It is about uniformity. For us at MRI, as a global software company with lots of different products, with broad solution suites and humans and developers giving us time to get random acts of AI, as we call them, is how we can have a uniform AI strategy globally that provides the most from an AI engine.

MASSEY: Technology leadership isn't simply about delivering answers. It's about helping organisations ask better questions. Customers understand their challenges, we understand what's possible, and the real value comes from bringing those perspectives together. □



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