



MISSION CRITICAL IT

Making Business Thrive

**INTERVIEW WITH
RICHARD SAWNEY
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
FEFO**

Commissioned by:



Introduction

Interestingly, Bill Gates once said that “the advance of technology is based on making it fit in, so that you don’t really even notice because it has become part of everyday life.”

Interestingly, because within a timescale which is unprecedented in business, IT has moved from supporting function to in effect, controlling function. So what could the influence of IT be, say, five years down the line?

This is one of the interviews for a book commissioned by Tailor Made Technologies and to be published by DECISION magazine, in which businesses which are really focused on the relationships with their staff and customers, share what they consider to be the issues they have to get right in terms of IT.

Standing out from the rest

What differentiates Feefo from the plethora of Trustpilots and Tripadvisors couldn't be more significant – or fundamental when you think about it. The reviews they generate are from people who are validated customers of a business and have actually purchased the product or service they are writing about.

When someone buys a Mazda car for example, it triggers the Feefo system to fire out an email to them. The recipient ticks the number of stars (up to five) in the ratings bar and there is a box in which they can post comments.

The merchant can't be selective about who is contacted although it can direct Feefo just to a particular product in their range.

And while the merchant can choose to put up a selection of reviews on their website, there's a button to press to see all the reviews relating to that company or its offering, which are hosted by Feefo.

Not that it's necessarily counter-productive if a merchant exposes a particular gripe. According to Feefo chief financial

Richard Sawney



officer Richard Sawney, it could result in a more positive reaction than seamless five-star reviews. “If a merchant gets a one star review, it’s an opportunity to put up a reply to ask the customer to call them so that they can put things right,” he explains. “If they react in the right way and then post what they have done subsequently, it means that they are more likely to influence a potential customer than by presenting a complete set of five-star reviews.”

But how to categorise Feefo as a business? Are we looking at a content provider? “That would be more of a glance,” says Sawney. “We’re a subscription-based software company, developing technology as well as providing a service. Our business is all about collecting feedback ethically and then drawing insight from the customer reviews which enables businesses to make more confident decisions. ”

Founded in 2007, Feefo attracted investment three years later from Nicholas Wheeler (Charles Tyrwhitt shirts, The White Company) who sold to private equity in 2018. Every month, some five million emails are dispatched by Feefo for 5000 brands worldwide, with a six to seven percent response rate which isn't 'weighted' to take into account review requests sent to customers of supermarkets who are less likely to post each time after a weekly shop.

The software developed by Feefo enables retailers to set the time parameters for getting in touch with regular customers so they aren't contacted every time they happen to pop in and just buy a carton of milk.

"We have hundreds of millions of email addresses in Google Cloud, and our security is being audited by different companies at least once a week," explains Sawney. "We used to have a server room but as a company grows so does the physical space requirements to house its own IT infrastructure, and the concept of having a remote data centre is in reality just having your own server but at a different location."

"Statistics suggest more than 30% of consumers buy online after going through reviews, so this is a process which is now an intrinsic part of the buying cycle," suggests Sawney.

A reason why Feefo have been developing an aggregation tool, so if a merchant has a customer who bought say a Samsung TV, the review they post (not their data) is shared with the manufacturer.



The merchant allows Feefo acting on behalf of the manufacturer to grab the review even if uses a different platform, and vice versa.

“Artificial intelligence means we will be able to allow a merchant to pick up trends or issues from the reviews,” adds Sawney. “We are also looking at how we can include input from potential clients who would give their reasons why they didn’t buy from a particular merchant.”

Meanwhile, law makers and regulators across the globe are de facto pushing Feefo centre-stage. Federal law which is expected to be passed in the US will make it an offence if a review isn’t bona fide. European Union countries are going to require a site to declare if a review is from a verified purchaser.

According to Sawney, the biggest IT issue for a company like Feefo isn't kit or systems. "If a business wants to ramp up development, recruiting IT staff is horrendously expensive and candidates expect to be able to work from home even if in reality the nature of the work means they are going to be spending more time in the office with colleagues. With more homeworking, I sense the transfer of information and the development of ideas will slow down because a team works better while gathered together round a screen rather than being on screen.

"If more people are working from home a company will need group sessions for a catch-up to share information, and then it all becomes very formal. Rather than having a spontaneous ten minutes chat over coffee, you need to book an appointment in the calendar to speak to a colleague."



Feefo's head office - a rural location beside a farm

Another challenge is whether there is a willingness within an organisation to accept change which will be brought about by technology – although Sawney says that doesn't have to be the case.

“Whoever is going to be touched by new IT has to be immediately comfortable with what is happening,” he explains. “In other words, it can't be a full hit in one go; the introduction has to be gradual. So for example, CRM is only as good as the information which is entered, so that's a discipline which is mission critical, and people have to buy into the reason for it if that is going to happen.

“The really crucial thing is that you can't introduce software and expect it to work without having champions for it in the business, even if that means bringing someone in with the sole purpose of managing people through the change process, someone who knows how to win hearts and minds.”

www.feefo.com

About Tailor Made Technologies

Since 1994 Tailor Made Technologies have been delivering professional IT, communications, cloud, and cyber security solutions for businesses, education and public sector organisations across the UK. Through their 28-year track record TMT have been ranked 6th best managed service provider in EMEA and 2nd in the UK, as well as being featured on The Sunday Times Fast Track list for a decade.

Accreditations include ISO 9001, ISO 27001, Investors in People, with TMT's 105 engineers looking after 2200 customers and 11,000 managed devices, meeting 96% of service level agreements.

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About DECISION magazine

First published in 1988, DECISION magazine reflects the business lifestyle, the trials and tribulations, the hopes and aspirations of directors and managing partners responsible for businesses with a turnover of £3million and above in the south of England and London.

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