

K3 Retail speaker

The vision of Intelligent Systems & what it means to you

Max Way | K3 Retail

Delivering intelligent systems

Significant investments by Microsoft in developing cutting-edge technologies are enabling K3 Retail to deliver increasingly intelligent systems that are built atop the recognised and well used core Microsoft capabilities.

Speaking at the K3 Retail 'Make Happy' conference in London recently Max Way, head of multi-channel retail at K3 Retail, says: "Microsoft is spending a lot of time and effort on machine learning and AI. It is the biggest bet on AI [in the technology sector], which is being fueled by the \$13 billion it spent last year alone on these tools."

When this is brought to bear as a complementary capability alongside the likes of Dynamics 365, LinkedIn, the Office suite, and the various solutions delivered by Microsoft's partners then K3 Retail and its clients will be major beneficiaries.

Humans bring it altogether

"This is not a vision, it's about bringing together what is already there and for it to be a harmonious single piece of intelligence. Inter-operability is the key and we all know business is not a set of discrete activities. But it's the intelligence of humans that brings this all together. At Microsoft they are putting a lot of time into making sure it has systems of intelligence that can do more of this for you," he explains.

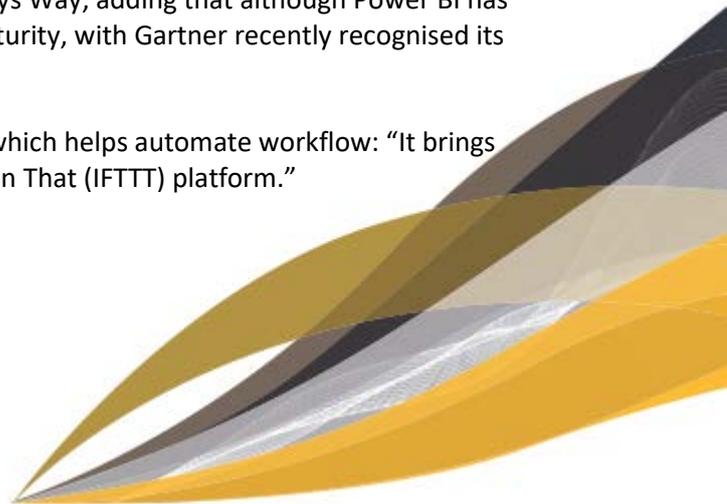
The systems of record and engagement - the traditional ERP and CRM solutions - are coming together in Microsoft's systems of intelligence hierarchy. It defines this concept as bringing together the key aspects of: systems of record; systems of engagement; productivity tools; and communicational tools.

Leveraging data is key

Retail is a fast-moving industry and businesses are being challenged by technology-driven market changes. To counter this Microsoft is bringing some of its capabilities more to the fore. These include Business Intelligence with its Power BI empowering users to leverage data in their businesses.

"Teams need to be able to infer meaning from the data," says Way, adding that although Power BI has been around for 18 months it has only recently come to maturity, with Gartner recently recognised its capabilities.

Workflow is also being addressed through Microsoft Flow, which helps automate workflow: "It brings in a level of automation like that delivered by the If This Then That (IFTTT) platform."



Keeping up to date

One of the big challenges retailers face with their IT teams, in a world driven by mobility, is operating with the latest versions of software across their entire organisations. “They are struggling to keep up with mobility and being able to bring in the new versions of business solutions such as Dynamics. This should become much easier as we now have the tools to be able to do this,” says Way.

Connecting the various tools, some running via apps, is also being addressed with Microsoft PowerApps that provides a PowerPoint-esque solution for connecting various systems.

These will increasingly be combined with the power of AI as Way says there is lots of progress being made by the big players including Microsoft, Facebook, IBM, Google, and Amazon. “There is a lot of sharing between them and they are opening up their books in order that they can all improve their capabilities. I’d like to think that Microsoft is the leader because they have all the pieces - the intelligent systems - and they own the stack in which AI can be infused. And this is being pushed out, so retailers can benefit from it.”

Way also acknowledges the impact automation and AI will likely have on workforces - as up to 30% of UK jobs are deemed to be under threat from automation. This is certainly a challenge, but he says retailers must “explore the technology and think about the capabilities that are available in the AI suite”.

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