

# One-on-One Interview Series

## CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER



**ODGERS BERNDTSON**  
Search Intelligence



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## Chief Information Officer

Odgers Berndtson is the 6th largest executive search firm world-wide. Our CIO practice leadership in the region is a reflection of our 15 years of achievements across Asia Pacific.

This interview series will take you inside the mind of Asia's most forward-looking Chief Information Officers. They will share their personal views on their impact on society, the evolution of their role, the new technological trends and their experience with the millennials.



**Steve Lee**  
CIO/SVP (TECHNOLOGY)  
CHANGI AIRPORT GROUP

With an incredible 490 awards, Changi is the world's most awarded airport. After serving with the Ministry of Defence and as the CIO of Kuok Singapore, Steve Lee joined Changi Airport in 2009 as their CIO. He shares with us his vision, where the people, - his teams or customers, are his centre of attention.



### **A GREAT CIO'S VISION...**

...is about being a good leader. My vision is to create an IT team where everyone gets to perform to the best of their ability. I value strength in diversity. The end goal is a team that is committed to enhancing our customers' experience, succeeding with our partners and being the best in the business. The vision is always about people and leadership, never projects or technology.

### **DO YOU THINK A CIO CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON SOCIETY AT LARGE AND ON SUSTAINABILITY?**

Increasingly, information about a thing is just as important as the thing itself. For example, a delivery service today is no longer just about the parcel, but also the tracking of the parcel. It's the same for the "smart nation" concept, where the physical and virtual worlds meet.

In this aspect, CIOs have a crucial role to play because this is where information comes into play. It is important for CIOs to deliver and implement projects that improve the lives of a substantial number of people. They don't just talk about the philosophical aspects, they go deep into creating and solving problems for organisations and society. With good information, issues such as poor utilisation of resources, manpower, vehicles or access can be improved.

### **CYBERSECURITY**

The more digital the world becomes, the more we need to secure our digital space. The rapidly increasing adoption of digital through mobile and all kinds of channels means that it has become a very good target for cyber criminals and rogue states. The number of threats is growing fast; cybersecurity is no longer an option. If you want to be digital, you have to secure your digital space.

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE ROLE OF THE CDO AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE CIO'S ROLE?**

I value diversity and in my organisation, we have a committee of professionals in their own fields, all of whom work hand in hand to continually refine our approach to customer service and the Changi Experience. The committee meets monthly to discuss, strategise and direct technology-driven customer initiatives. Marketing, commercial operations, service and IT are all key stakeholders and, as the CIO, I am the default facilitator. On some things we disagree on, we raise the issue to our management committee and the COO for further deliberation. This joint approach provides a flexible dynamic, as opposed to having a single CDO decision-maker. The diversity of the committee is our strength.



## **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

For us, the customer is at the heart of everything we do. In an airport, whether you are doing retail or customer journey facilitation, it's all about service. Providing the human touch and understanding customer perception are key. With about 150,000 people passing through the airport every day, you need the ability to service everybody as well as you can, and to ensure service is not compromised. But in the rare event that there is a gap in service, the ability to recover quickly is very important. The CIO is the service centre for the company; he needs to be responsive to his clients, and the client's clients. We need to think from the customer's perspective to understand what the customer really wants when we design systems.

## **WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH MILLENNIALS?**

My son is 21 so I know Millennials. I think they are fun to work with. In Singapore's context, our Millennials are more empowered and are hungry for opportunities rather than money. I see that in my son and in my young staff. I think it's good; it augurs well for Singapore. They have grown up in the age of social media so technology adoption is not a challenge for them. Stakeholders at the senior level need to be convinced on some new ideas, whereas the young guys are like "why are we not doing this?" On the other hand, they don't have enough experience about what needs to be done to make simple changes happen. At least motivating them to think this way is not difficult. It's more about training them and working with them so they figure out what it takes to make things happen in an organisation. They are also not constrained by the ideas that more senior people have. That's why I tend to hire younger people – about 30% to 40% of my hires are fresh grads.



## DATA AS A COMPANY ASSET

My job is about information, not data. I'm a Chief Information Officer. The data volumes and channels have multiplied but I don't see much change. Information as a company asset has been around for 2000 years. Its importance is not really the question, it's what you can do with it and the speed with which you can do something with it. There's also a mindset change required for many people to move from intuition and experience-based decision making to data-driven decision making. When things were simpler, it was easy to make data-driven decisions because you only had five sets of data. You could create a simple statistic or some kind of table that was easy to understand. But as data becomes more pervasive and is generated at a higher speed, we need to figure out how to grapple with the amount of data and how to make decisions using certain kinds of data. That's the struggle now: how to handle and manage information in a way that helps with decision making. We need to frame problems in the right way to solve them collaboratively based on a data-driven approach.

## WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE AS A CIO?

As a CIO, my people are the most important to me. It's about people and their capabilities, their morale and their careers. The biggest challenges are how to keep them motivated and being able to identify future trends in order to re-skill, re-train and partner better with other people. This is important not just now but for the future.



## Eduardo de Barros

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Eduardo de Barros is a Consultant in the Singapore office focused on CIO, CTO, CSO, CDO roles, part of the regional Information Technology team operating across South East Asia. He studied I.T. during 6 years and started his career in 2005 as the Chief Editor of an Information Technology magazine. His passion for recruitment appeared while building a team within a start-up, thus leading him to join a global recruitment firm. He then founded his search firm in Geneva, where he built his reputation in recruiting technology experts for private banks. Of Portuguese origins, he is raised in France and has learnt business in Switzerland.



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