

Customer Perspective

It's not just technology that drives Emma Pitt-Steele's management of BT's IT, it's providing value and fulfilling real business needs

Ask Emma Pitt-Steele about the ins and outs of IT and, disarmingly, she'll tell you she doesn't know the detail. 'People expect me to know everything about IT and I don't,' she says. 'That's why we employ talented people. I see myself as a manager – leading teams of experts, getting things done and concentrating on the customer requirements.'

Pitt-Steele is head of BT Exact's applications and infrastructure management business. This is BT's technology powerhouse. 'The systems we run also play a key role in defining the experience of customers when they contact BT,' she says, 'and my job is to look at things from that perspective.'

'If you understand the customers' business focus, you have more commercial awareness, a sense of pride in what you are doing,' she continues. 'This is empowering; it allows our teams to take ownership of projects. It drives up service. And you deliver it at a better cost too, because poor service is expensive.'

She believes that CRM begins with business strategy. 'The way that BT delivers its services has to be a key differentiator for the company. And strange as it sounds, with IT operations it's vital not to get too focused on the technology. Everything we do has to fulfil a business requirement.'

With IT vendors launching products faster than they can be deployed, Pitt-Steele knows that 'any IT changes made need to take advantage of what the technology has to offer without impacting the running of the company.'

What this equates to in practical terms is staying service focused, she says. 'We think about the BT people who work at the sharp end. In call centre processes, for example, we have to remember that people could be inputting details on screen for up to eight hours a day. Is the technology easy to use? If you make it pleasant for them, they are more likely to deliver good service to callers.'

One of the biggest issues for IT departments and IT infrastructure companies is driving down costs at the same time as driving up service resilience and security. BT's approach is to consolidate management of all its computing estate. 'We have responsibility for about 60 per cent of the company's computing. We have to standardise, gain economies of scale and prove to the rest of the company that we will give them excellent service for a better price.'

Her team plays a critical role in many of BT's major forward-looking programmes. 'Systems are a critical part of the company's plan to transform its networks to fully integrate the delivery of voice, data and multimedia services,' she explains.

'The aim is to encourage customers to trade with BT online and there is a drive towards new styles of mobile communications. Probably the biggest challenge is co-ordinating the volume of change at the same time as running the day-to-day business but change is a fact of life in the IT world now and I would rather be driving that change than being driven by it.' n