

# NEW APPLIED NOW

A large, stylized purple arrow graphic pointing to the right, partially overlapping the text "NEW APPLIED NOW".

## IN CONVERSATION WITH ROBERT WOLLAN

### Introduction

**How companies interact with their customers and the channels they use to engage, understand and deliver products and services are fascinatingly changing with the introduction of new technologies.**

**Companies are struggling to keep up with the advancements and the pace of which technology is arriving. But those that are trailblazing are onto a winner when it comes to sustainable growth and prevention of being disrupted.**

**I got the opportunity to grab a coffee with Robert Wollan. Accenture's Senior Managing director whilst he was touching down in the UK to deliver a workshop to his colleagues. I asked him about what he is seeing out there that it's getting him really excited.**

### Robert Wollan

This week was interesting. It started out in Silicon Valley talking to some clients who are actually the kinds of innovators everyone's looking at and they want to understand what's next, and it was combined with talking to an incumbent player who was anything but really focused on the future. So it's been a good week of contrasts.

### Interviewer

On a day to day basis, who in the C suite is actually really interested in this area and who are you engaging with the most?

### Robert Wollan

Well I'm spending most of the time with CEOs and what I call the Chief Growth Officer. That really is different from company to company and sometimes it's the head of strategy who's been asked to go think about what's next or what's new. Other times it's the CMO or the head of sales, head of a business unit who frankly is just trying to drive new growth, you know, stuck at a 1% growth

when they're looking up and seeing other companies that are less brand visible but they're seeing 9, 10, 15 or maybe 100% growth. So I spend most of my time with really those two groups thinking about their growth agenda.

### Interviewer

What are you seeing that perhaps we're not seeing yet, that's out there that's coming?

### Robert Wollan

Travel around a couple stand out to me. I love what Disney is continuing to do and it's not for the reasons you think of, right, an experienced company. They continue to show as I took my kids through that they understand the monetization aspect. They only seem to invest in the areas that can be turned into money and I sometimes happily will pay for it. I don't like the bill when I get it but I will pay for that innovation. So they don't have any wasted energy in their space; I think that's a good takeaway, and they continue to evolve in that space.

I think the second interesting area I see real innovation happening is not just the incumbents, the Airbnbs or the folks who are disrupting. Right, we often talk about Airbnb of the world but what's interesting is how the incumbents are fighting back, paying attention to how a Marriott Starwood is thinking about taking advantage of their global scale and size to go against a digital player is really interesting. You can see on their website and their mobile apps, these are real investments. So a second big wave of innovation tends to be in that space.

And maybe the third is around subscription services. You know, these companies that you probably have seen – Trunk Club or Blue Apron or Home Fresh, Birchbox – these companies have truly changed the cycle time and are winning the war of relevance. I mean we're paying a higher dollar value to have those things delivered to our home and they are creating interesting cases for incumbents as well as new subscription players coming into the market.

So all three of those I think are really great fodder for innovation for just about every company in every industry.

## Interviewer

And those are the exciting, more consumer-facing companies that we're probably more prevalent to seeing, but if we look at the more sort of grittier companies out there – the utility companies, the energy companies, the big heavy industry companies – how is it different in to those more consumer-facing? Are they following? Are they doing it in a different way? What are you seeing there?

## Robert Wollan

How companies are working at much faster speed to actually create new capabilities or leverage digital, they're becoming as important in the B2B space as in B2C. Whether you're talking about going – those grittier companies, those industrial companies; I'm talking both in consumer goods and industrial that are talking about direct to consumer in a much more serious way than they ever have before. Or they want to create consumer-like ease of being a company to do business with, even in a classic B2B setting.

So, yeah, there's always going to be some good differences but in this case the growth aspect of both B2B and B2C have a lot of the shared elements of ease of doing business much more focused on relevance and real value delivered. So there's an opportunity to blend that

maybe that we haven't been able to do before.

## Interviewer

What kind of skillsets do the trail-blazers need to have? You're interacting with these people, what are you seeing that's unique to these leaders that are making them move away from the rest of the pack?

## Robert Wollan

Yeah, I think universally there's an appreciation of data and the right amount of data to focus on. I think that we're settling in now, that the role of data has become a key differentiator between the players who are succeeding and the ones who are distracted.

I think the second big characteristic is those who are appreciating where the disruptions in technology affect their business disproportionately. Everyone wants to have artificial intelligence and blockchain and cloud and some of those pieces. Not everyone has a good grasp of exactly what proportion and at what speed each of those should be focused on, and that's really what a lot of us are talking to our clients about. Getting that balance right because that's the sweet spot.

So the capabilities of those leaders to appreciate which trends they need to pay attention to and in what proportion really does separate them from most of the rest of their peers.

## Interviewer

For those younger next generation leaders, what's their world going to look like within this space in 10 years time? It will be totally different. Have you had a glimpse of what that might be for them?

## Robert Wollan

Well I mentioned earlier the subscription services. How it translates into disrupting industries we have yet to figure out but I think if I were looking for a crystal ball, this is not a fad, this is essentially giving a little bit of a blueprint, and for companies who fairly evaluate what they do today, they might realise they've got a pretty big gap.

## Interviewer

If we were to leave listeners with one message in the style of a tweet to get them excited or inspire them or call them to action, what would be in your message?

## Robert Wollan

I think my tweet would be something to the effect of don't fall in love with cool, fall in love with money because the options today where you could invest time, energy, make a bet on the future is exponentially exploding.

There are more options that I put in the cool category. The winners are the ones who can figure out which ones they can translate into money.

## Interviewer

Robert, it's been an absolute pleasure talking to you and hearing you talk with excitement and passion about this area of the business. I know you're immersed in it on a day to day basis. You've got the workshop here in the UK and then where are you off to next?

## Robert Wollan

I'll be primarily across the US in the coming weeks, then Asia but back here in the UK in two weeks. So, we have a lot to cover around the world but it's a great part of the business.

## Interviewer

Well let's catch up when you're next in and we'll hear some more about what's going on in your world around customers and channels. Robert, thank you very much, it's been a pleasure.

## Robert Wollan

Thank you, appreciate it.

## Interviewer

Take care...

## Conclusion

**That was a fascinating conversation with Robert. What I took away from it is that those trailblazing clients he is working with are transforming and unifying their channels to align with changing customers' requirements. They are also delivering highly relevant and deeply personalized experiences for customers and clients. Which means they remain relevant and secure growth for the business. They also appear to be prioritizing their technology investments and that maximizes the impact they make.**

**Join me next time when we continue our conversation around New Applied Now.**

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