

Cloud-Enabling The Developer Community

By Don Browning

The world of corporate IT has changed. A new class of company has emerged. These digital leaders, like Turner, are disrupting their industries, and central to this disruption is a paradigm shift in how IT departments operate.

Not that long ago, inside most companies including Turner, all things technology were centrally commanded and controlled by the IT organization. This monolithic approach to delivering IT services increasingly became a friction that depressed innovation and made companies less competitive. Frustrated, developers started to go around IT to directly purchase and access IT services. This gave rise to the world of shadow IT, and while this improved agility and speed, it weakened companies' ability to holistically adhere to security and compliance standards.

Three years ago, we at Turner IT began the journey to reinvent ourselves. We understood the huge opportunity presented by embracing the emerging world of cloud technology. We understood that Microsoft, Google, and Amazon would constantly compete and leapfrog each other with cool and innovative services and technology.

We have over 650 developers across multiple brands including Adult Swim, Bleacher Report, Boomerang, Cartoon Network, CNN, ELEAGUE, FilmStruck, Great Big Story, HLN, iStreamPlanet, Super Deluxe, TBS, Turner Classic Movies (TCM), TNT, truTV and Turner Sports. All of these developers and brands have their own timelines and priorities that impact the overall IT infrastructure.

In order to become a digital leader, our developers would need self-service access to the latest, best-of-class technologies available from every and any cloud technology provider. Access to this set of cloud services would create an opportunity to innovate at speeds that would have previously been impossible and ultimately build great products.

We understood that the role of central IT at Turner needed to change from dictating what technology developers used and when/how they had access to it. The new role of IT would be to provide friction-free, but well-governed, self-service access to best-of-class technologies and services available from every and any cloud technology.

We needed to centralize these activities and make the cloud available across all teams so they could be productive and operate independently, while at the same time ensuring that they didn't unnecessarily overspend or do something to put the company at risk. Finding this balance was not easy.

The first year of our transformation involved getting our feet wet by doing pilot migrations, getting organizational buy-in and experiencing a lot of trial and error.

The second year our mantra became “migrate or die,” and we moved a majority of our applications and data to the cloud.

We are now in the third year, and are focused on optimization, policy enforcement and clean up. We effectively centralized the policy enforcement function across all of our brands. In hindsight, we should have implemented automated policy enforcement from the start.

Starting in year one we had to reinvent the IT organization (people, culture, processes, systems, trust, and collaboration) from the ground up.

First, we had to rework the culture of IT. We had to reset the mindset of control to one of enablement.

Second, we had to upskill our team to understand and embrace these new technologies and the new role of IT. The prototypical role of IT has changed from an administrator to more of a consultative role that looks a bit like a combination of a management consultant and an analyst.

Third, we needed to establish and build supportive processes that made it easy for developers to get what they needed but also allowed us to ensure that they were meeting our expectations of security and compliance.

Fourth, we had to find new tools that were built for the cloud world and enabled developer productivity. Importantly, we picked tools that provided automation that would allow our people to scale (without adding more headcount) and would ensure our new processes were consistently executed. The result is that we actually improved our security and compliance posture over our traditional infrastructure.

Fifth, we had to learn how to support experimentation and innovation so the developers could create and implement better products faster.

Sixth, we had to break down organizational silos through communication and collaboration to achieve strategic alignment.

And last, but not least, we had to build trust with the developer community. We had to prove to them that the new IT was their partner and fully invested in their success (and that we understood what success for them looked like.)

“We understood that the role of central IT at Turner needed to change from dictating what technology developers used and when/how they had access to it.”

(speed and agility) and combined it with all the best things of the command/control world (security and compliance).

The results of our initiative have been easy to measure. Developers now move more quickly. They can experiment, build, and ship features that customers really want and do so with greater velocity. As a result, Turner has seen increases in productivity, market share, and profitability.



Don Browning

Don Browning is the VP of Cloud Architecture at Turner. Don is responsible for the global entertainment and news company's transformation into a cloud-first organization.