

# The Discovery Journey: Becoming a Premier Cloud Digital Leader to Disrupt the Media Industry

By Dave Duvall

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At Discovery, through the leadership and vision of our CEO, David Zaslav, we are a consumer-focused, content-first corporation. To continue to build and nurture our base of superfans, we must guide the reinvention and transformation of technology at Discovery.

After an 18-month journey, we are now cloud-first and our mission as a technology organization is:

- 1) To facilitate the rapid development of new content and;
- 2) To amplify content to consumers when, where and how they want to consume it

With a short planning horizon in an ever-changing media landscape, we must react quickly, innovate freely, fail early and inexpensively, and rapidly scale successes to thrive.

To capitalize on the disruption facing our industry, our CTO, John Honeycutt, envisioned transitioning our global supply chain and business systems to cloud infrastructure.

- **Content should be where the consumers are.** 5 years ago, Discovery produced top tier and lower tier channels and sold it in a B2B marketplace – life was beautiful, and it was an amazing business for a lot of media companies at the time. As we advance into the digital age, this long tail of content will shift to be part of our digital offerings, and our business will increasingly involve direct to consumer and social offerings. The linear to digital transition is driving our content to the cloud where it is accessible for our superfans, where they can access our content on any screen. If our consumers and partners are in the cloud – we need to meet (and beat) them there.
- **Fail fast, fail cheap.** Our technology organization must enable the highly efficient, innovative business Discovery is known for. We are a disruptive innovator in a transformative media landscape; we must continue to move forward quickly and readjust our strategy as we go. Working in the cloud offers a strong advantage as it is less painful to fail and much simpler to scale our successes.

Our journey to the public cloud didn't happen overnight. There were several key areas that we had to consider and work through:

- **Progress requires transformative change.** To drive business forward, Discovery's traditional IT and Broadcast Technology teams went through a reorganization. This process is integral to success, as people are what makes Discovery great. As we embarked on this digital transformation journey, we recognized that there would need to be a culture shift that would require vetting in new ways of working, new processes, new skills, and new tools to remain relevant and compliant with policy. We were honest and open with the team about the goal - to be a cloud-native and cloud-first media company, across all lines of our business.

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If you can align an org around a clear vision – the process gets amplified very quickly.

- **Garner support from your senior leadership.** In addition to garnering support from the traditional IT and broadcasting teams, we also needed to work with our senior leadership and board on why this move would benefit Discovery financially as well as strategically. Consuming resources in the cloud, the consistency and predictability of spend is maximized. With the cloud, we are flexible in our experimentation and we can scale out successes much more rapidly to capture the full commercial value of every opportunity.
- **Become a service provider.** We had to acknowledge that we were now a Technology as a Service (TAAS) provider. We needed to build out our cloud strategy, make commitments to the business units, and ensure that we were built in a way that we could back these commitments up. You oversee governance, but not daily decisions. This is a challenge for many traditional IT teams, you are perhaps still building the railroad - but no longer driving the train. The org pivots to enforcement and compliance, enablement and amplification, and strategy and planning. This is a hugely powerful shift – away from “undifferentiated heavy lifting” and into a technology as an enabler AND strategic partner mindset.

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One of the most important elements of becoming a digital leader was adapting the technology organization to this new way of doing business. We understood that purposeful, structured change management was integral to the transition process.

- **Rethink your assumptions.** The media industry is changing swiftly; consumer expectations have changed radically and to continue to grow and change with consumer needs, we must forget what worked in the linear model and discover what works in digital.
- **Your fears are your requirements.** The problems and fears that came out of our earliest planning sessions became the requirements that we needed vendors to solve for Discovery to operate in the cloud. Those initial internal sessions full of fear and disbelief created the requirements list we handed to vendors and our internal engineers to tackle.

We learned a lot of lessons over the 18-month transition. The top three are as follows:

- **Multi-cloud.** Assume you will be multi-cloud from day one and build your strategy, people, processes, and systems with this expectation; prepare for acquisition of new clouds through M&A, provide access to best-of-class services from the cloud service provider of their choice, build multi-cloud resiliency, avoid vendor lock-in. Trying to move from a single cloud strategy into a multi-cloud strategy requires a sound foundation to avoid resource spend on rework.

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- **Policy enforcement Day 1.** We wanted to tap into the agility, speed, and self-service nature of the public cloud but had to also assure best practices, security, and compliance. This means that our developers must be disciplined, build to have good uptime, and support compliance and auditing. Having well-defined standards creates accurate system placement to find any exceptions and allow for quick remediation. And ensure you have automated means to enforce those standards or else your standards are simply pieces of paper collecting dust in a drawer.
  - **Don't be afraid to go first.** Ask the tough questions. We asked at the beginning of the process, "why is broadcast still almost exclusively on-premise?" Someone has to lay the groundwork to drive the industry forward. We have taken risks for substantial reward and must continue to do so to remain relevant in this ever-changing media landscape.



### **Dave Duvall**

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