

The Fall 2012 Executive Forum Series | Hosted by MDI Group



Oct 2 :: Phoenix
Capital Grille – Biltmore

Oct 9 :: Atlanta
McKendrick's – Perimeter

Oct 10 :: Greenville
Larkin's on the River

Oct 18 :: Dallas
Crescent Hotel – Downtown

MDI Group recently hosted its Fall 2012 Executive Forum Series with events that took place October 2-18, 2012 in each of the four markets in which it operates: Atlanta, Dallas, Greenville and Phoenix. The discussion topic was “Leveraging Big Data for Business” and technology executives representing more than 40 organizations shared their developments and challenges in this rapidly expanding area of technology.

MDI Group’s executive forums are invitation-only networking events and no vendor or sponsor representatives are allowed to attend. The focus is to provide an environment that is conducive to sharing ideas and best practices for what’s next in technology. The following summarizes the discussion among attendees from all four forum events, which was facilitated using four topic questions.

Discussion Topics and Summary

How do you and your organization define Big Data?

In 2012, more than 2 quintillion bits of data is expected to be produced. The rate at which data production is growing is even more mind-boggling. But more than just the amazing amounts of bits and bytes, Big Data is most commonly defined by the big challenges associated with harnessing data to produce useful information. Most IT executives agree that there is tremendous potential with all the “unstructured data” they already have.

Are you collecting and managing Big Data currently? If so, what systems are you using?

Every organization collects and stores a great deal of data already, mostly in the form of backup systems and when required for legal compliance or diligence reasons. Many types of systems are currently in use, and many leaders are grappling with the issue of expanding owned hardware or moving to cloud-based solutions. The real concern with managing data is this: How do we get the pathways of many different data management systems to intersect down the road, no matter which pathways we choose today?



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Is your company already leveraging Big Data? If so, how? What areas of the business are driving the demand for Big Data's use?

Most organizations represented are taking their first steps with harnessing Big Data to generate valuable insights and improved operational efficiencies. Some interesting examples include a leading airline that tracks trade show events in key markets to determine flight schedules and pilot availability, a high end retailer that monitors social media posts with GPS information and responds even while a customer is in the store, and a financial group that uses change points in customer lives such as marriage or births to adjust their marketing and service offerings.

The operational areas of businesses such as logistics and purchasing are among the most common departments driving demand for and currently leveraging Big Data. However, customer facing areas of businesses including sales and service are anxious to figure out how to turn “transactional data” into a more powerful resource for predicting buyer behaviors and influencing decision makers.

What are the key challenges or risk factors involved with your organization's use of Big Data?

Leveraging Big Data involves technology challenges, to be sure. However, most technology leaders agree that selling the potential of Big Data poses an even greater challenge. Business leaders must gain a vision for what Big Data can do, but it’s difficult for them to “wrap their minds” around a dizzying array of complex problems in order to understand the ultimate payoff. For example, since IT departments are often responsible for a sizable portion of operating expenses already, CFOs are reluctant to make additional investments into unproven data needs.

IT leaders also recognize the need for new personnel – including business and data analysts – who can serve as intermediaries to the various areas of an operation and understand how to make the best use of data resources. However, IT departments are strapped for resources already and have to “put out the fires” before undertaking new projects associated with Big Data.

When it comes to accessing and leveraging data from various sources, security is always a chief concern. Not only can data be stolen, but malware and viruses can ruin software and hardware for both businesses and consumers.

Other comments and ideas:

All forum participants agree that the potential and payoff for leveraging Big Data is tremendous. It’s a very exciting time to be in technology as new innovations in data analysis are on the horizon, new businesses are emerging to take advantage of the possibilities that Big Data offers, and IT departments evolve from being cost centers to becoming key differentiators for their business and strategic mechanisms of growth and profitability.

ABOUT MDI GROUP

MDI Group focuses exclusively on providing IT Workforce Solutions that help organizations tackle “what’s next” in terms of emerging technology projects and challenging business objectives. Services range from contract staff augmentation and project teams to contingent workforce management and MSP programs. MDI Group's headquarters are located in Atlanta, Georgia with office locations in Charlotte, Dallas, Greenville and Phoenix.

Its Executive Forum Series consists of invitation-only roundtable events hosted in metropolitan markets throughout the United States for IT executives and thought leaders. For more information, visit www.mdigroup.com.

Special thanks to the distinguished leaders from MDI Group's client organizations that participated in the Fall 2012 Forum:

American Airlines	Neiman Marcus
Apollo Group	NetApp
Arizona State University	Novelis
Boston Consulting Group	Palmetto Bank
Dr Pepper Snapple Group	Parkland Health
Easton Bell Sports	Rent-A-Center
eInstruction	Scottsdale Healthcare
Fluor	Sealed Air
Grand Canyon University	SunTrust
IntercontinentalExchange	Texas Computing
KnowledgeFactor	US Foods
L2C inc	Wilmington Trust
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LMG Data Mining	Zale Corporation
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