

PRESS RELEASE

Goodbye to brick-and-mortar companies, hello to digital platforms

21 October 2019: How do existing businesses transform successfully into platform companies? This is the focus of noted strategist and business leader Bramhope Group CEO **Isak Marais**. He holds an MBA from the Henley Management College. A sought-after and respected speaker and opinion leader, Marais has authored numerous industry-specific articles.

“The Bramhope experience is similar to those of established unicorn platform companies such as Uber and Air B&B, which followed a similar route whereby the value creation model transformed over time,” Marais points out. Bramhope’s transformation has reduced its total cost of ownership by up to 60%.

“The first thing to note is that it is not only about technology or IT platforms. An IT platform is only an enabler for this journey. Really transforming to a platform company requires a paradigm shift, and this is never easy.” This transformation is akin to a journey. A true platform company evolves over time, and the journey often involves detours.

“The end result is not so clear that we can design or plan for it from the outset, but we commence by reflecting carefully on the nature of the existing company, its value propositions and products, and its strategy,” Marais adds.

From a strategic point of view, it is essential to understand and identify what the company’s core value proposition could be. This evolves from the core business of the existing company. However, platform thinking assists in identifying a unique value proposition. Platform thinking includes considering customer needs and behaviour, the potential of various IT technologies, connectivity and real-time feedback loops, as well as partner coordination and collaboration.

“This sounds deceptively simple. However, digitisation and digital transformation subtly alter perspectives of the core business. Identifying this value proposition sets the ‘true north’ of the journey, so that we can keep the direction for the platform transformation even when the end result is not yet clear,” Marais highlights.

Bramhope’s own platform journey started with an initiative to reduce the total cost of ownership and risk for customers. In order to implement and support this initiative, the core business processes had to be digitised. The key value proposition is to understand and manage customer consumption in such a way that significant value is realised for customers.

Platform thinking involves analysing how the essential value proposition is supported through partnerships, and hence platform partners become key considerations. Partners in the Bramhope platform are offered new markets and visibility of demand from these customers. Platform thinking also considers technology and big data, which allows it to more accurately measure and predict the consumption behaviour of customers.

A platform transformation encompasses a fundamental change of a company’s strategy, from managing risk and investment to identifying and optimising key business processes, framing the company culture, establishing key infrastructure, and establishing new roles and responsibilities. During this process, the IT platforms necessary to support the core business become crucial, and are elevated from being a support service to a key business function.

This occurs once the ‘true north’ is set, which automatically means that supporting the business’s new value proposition becomes the key function of the technology platform. The IT infrastructure becomes core, but only because and when it aligns with the ‘true north’. This infrastructure is

necessary to enhance customer and supplier support, provide key insights about the core business obtained from data and artificial intelligence, ensure feedback loops, and provide the metrics and measures necessary to ensure that the company stays true to its path. "This is why the confusion about what a platform company entails often centres around IT platforms," Marais notes.

Bramhope has been refining its platform approach since 2002, to the point where today it can measure and predict critical areas such as consumer behaviour at a micro level. While traditionally such MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Operations) services have been out of the reach of most companies, Marais has developed an industry-first business model whereby such systems can be 'leased' at a fraction of the full purchase price.

"We have had a lot of enquiries in this regard from companies wanting to manage their own stock and keep track of their purchases. Essentially companies can 'rent' a licence at a nominal fee per user to assist them in managing their stores," Marais explains. This makes the transformation to a digital platform that much easier for many brick-and-mortar companies that considered such an evolutionary step beyond their capabilities and resources. "It takes platform thinking to a whole new level," Marais concludes.

It is due to such an industry-leading approach that Bramhope has been recognised by Accenture as one of the Top 3 Most Innovative Companies in South Africa in its category. It has achieved TT100 (Top Technology 100 Awards) status for two consecutive years, and was recently awarded the sub-Saharan Africa PPE Industry Customer Value Leadership Award by Frost & Sullivan.

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Notes to the Editor

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About Bramhope Group

Since 2002, the Bramhope Group has specialised in industrial supply, including MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Operations) goods and consulting services, PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), health, safety and hygiene products, as well as specialised products for the outdoor and leisure markets. Innovative e-business solutions for the sourcing, procurement and supply-chain-as-a-service assist clients with streamlining business processes in order to ensure reduced cost of ownership and operational risk.

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