
Profit Through Technology – Lessons from the Middle East

If you ever doubted the power of technology to create change – massive change - then recent events in the Middle East should now leave you doubtless. What started as a small public protest on a Facebook page; evolved into a major revolution of the populous in the streets of Tunisia (January 25 Revolution); and ended in the altering of a political process that led to massive change at the highest political levels. Now, if that's not power to change, I don't know what is.

...And what does that have to do with business? Plenty!

- What is significant is not just the change technology enabled, but the speed with which it came!
- What is significant is not just the power of the technology, but its influence!
- What is significant is not just the science of how technology worked, but the capacity it created!

The environment in this case happened to be political, but it could easily have been your business. As long as the four elements of performance objective, process, client system and competition are related in a dynamic environment, technology can deliver a significant advantage.

In the case of Egypt, the performance outcome that was achieved was the accelerated pace of removal of Mubarak from office; the process affected was the political process for transitioning leadership; the client system was the population that took action as well as the global audience; the competition was the pro-Mubarak forces that sought to counter the protest movement. The advantage delivered to the revolutionaries was speed, influence and capacity.

Your business can equally leverage the power of technology to deliver the speed, influence and capacity required to accelerate performance toward business objectives; alter a process to enhance efficiency; influence your internal and external client systems to take action in a particular direction; and catapult you ahead of any competition. That is what “profit through technology” means.

It took barely a month for the combined power of the Internet, mobile phones and social media platforms to enable Egyptian revolutionaries to achieve their objective. It took only days to rally the masses; and hours to coordinate protests. So, was the technology effective in helping the leaders communicate, collaborate and coordinate across distance? Absolutely! More importantly, it was effective.

But what also raised its head was the power of corporations and governments to influence access to shared digital media. This is not a new argument (freedom of speech and access to information has occupied public discourse for ages), but it does advance a newer dimension. Susan Nunziata illustrates this newer dimension in her February 12th 2011 article, “*Facebook 2, Arabs 0*”, with the point:

“Facebook and Twitter and Internet access and wireless networks are, in fact, powered and controlled by corporations (and, sometimes, governments)...our ability to communicate through social networks, mobile devices and the Internet itself is dependent upon the decisions of corporations - each of which has its own vested interests in whether or not to keep the connections open....If you have any doubts about how corporations might use that power, all you have to do is look at the cyberwar that rages around WikiLeaks after corporations such as Amazon, MasterCard, PayPal and Visa terminated their services to the whistle-blowing site. Even in Egypt, Vodafone initially acquiesced to government demands in the early days of the revolution and shut down its wireless networks. Now, Vodafone is “working hard to build up trust with the revolutionaries who will shape Egypt's future”, according to CNN journalist Rebecca McKinnon (quoted by Nunziata).

What this means for your business will depend on the change you intend with technology. But what is independent of your intentions is the added value technology delivers if you have the vision and skill to leverage it.