

## Event Overview

The MCA Consultancy Buyers Forum event “The Digital Disruption” hosted by Deloitte in October 2014 was extremely revealing about the challenges of buying Digital effectively. The event was held as part of the MCA’s Year of Digital.

Digital is huge for consultants and buyers alike. Panel chair, Paul Connolly, MCA Think Tank Director, advised that 25% of all consulting activity is now Digital and that 94% of business leaders in a recent MCA survey rated Digital as a top priority for their business.

Guest panellists Rob Price and Royston Seaward, Heads of Digital at Atos and Deloitte respectively, indicated that often clients would engage them to help advise on how they could “go Digital” without really understanding what that means. Consultants, they argued, are ideally placed to offer dispassionate advice on how Digital can be properly deployed by organisations to support their key business goals.

Audience members were curious to know how to identify and evaluate the best sources of Digital insight and also how to measure the success of an engagement. Measurement was felt to be particularly challenging, given that a hallmark of Digital is its unpredictability – and any honest Digital guru will accordingly admit to limited certainty about the future. The panellists suggested that projects should have measurable near-term goals and that the best Digital consultants will already have a well-established track record in this area. They also suggested that ‘showing’ rather than ‘telling’ clients what good looks like is now an increasingly visual process in the Digital Age, with the use of high quality graphics, informatics and even games becoming the norm.

Breakout sessions explored whether Digital consulting required a different type of buying process, referencing the current good practice principles that are laid out in the CBF Blueprint. The workshops evidenced concerns among participants about the ownership and accountability for Digital across businesses and the degree to which Digital was strategically linked to clear business goals. Coherent relationships between strategic insights about Digital and the buying process for Digital “kit” were felt to be essential. Some participants also observed that scoping and evaluating Digital advisory services was trickier than assessing traditional consulting, especially as the buying process itself might need accelerating. Others however felt that the existing Blueprint guidance remained sufficient, especially if buyers take the trouble to make a preliminary assessment of their overall Digital advisory needs in the context of wider business goals.

Paul Connolly observed that consultants are a materially important part of the Digital value chain. MCA member firms employ many Digital radicals, who understand just how far-reaching its potential is and the scale of the changes being wrought by Digital “disruptors” like the Cloud, social media and Big Data. They understand that in an era where a commuter can access books, newspapers, games, music, their office, their domestic heating system, make calls, text, watch TV, all on the same small device, boundaries between previously separate industry sectors are collapsing and new expectations about service quality and accessibility are being created. But they also appreciate the needs of business and of service providers, who want to understand Digital in terms of its effects on the bottom line, its impact on skills requirements and organisational design, and how it can help attract and retain customers and meet the needs of service users. Getting expert advisors in early could help those for whom Digital is a “known unknown”: something they know exists, but don’t understand, and in relation to which they thus risk making poor buying decisions, especially for Digital “kit”.

Paul Vincent, Chair of the Buyers Forum, said the outputs from the workshops would be used to explore ways to improve the Digital buying process. He felt that not only is it necessary to better understand what represents good consultancy value, but also to better appreciate how Digital may be disrupting the established buying practices in other areas of IT spend. As the boundaries around Digital buying decisions become increasingly blurred there will inevitably be a greater number of interdependencies for clients, consulting firms and procurement professionals to try and manage.

For more details of the MCA’s Year of Digital initiative visit the MCA website at [www.mca.org.uk](http://www.mca.org.uk)