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How to Thrive in the Autonomous Era of MediaTech

Matt Stagg in conversation with Ben Vandenberghe, Skyline Communications

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IAMT Studio Visual Podcast Series

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Ben, for people — very few people, if any — that don't know you, can you just give a brief overview of Skyline and what you do there?

Sure. Well, a lot of people may not know Skyline, but they probably know our DataMiner platform. Our DataMiner platform is basically today a full-blown operating system. It's an operating system that enables media organisations, satellite operators and service providers to consolidate their technology ecosystems across vendor boundaries, across different domains, and to consolidate all of that into what you could say is a unified digital twin — and to really capitalise on the full capabilities of the data, the value of the data, the control capabilities and all of that. So it's really about unifying an operation, a complex technology ecosystem, into one unified digital version of it and leveraging that. That's really the key thing.

That's great, and that's why this is going to be such an interesting episode. Because it's not just that DataMiner solves a massive problem in the industry — you yourself understand the industry and have seen the trends. So, what's the thing you're seeing that actually could be deployed at scale in twelve months' time? And what's the one thing you think will fizzle away?

Well, I think today it's very important to cut through the noise. There's a lot of noise, there's a lot of things happening. These are very existential claims. There are very important things happening, and it's not only happening in the media industry — it's actually a global thing. But it's very important, especially for strategic leaders, to cut through the noise and understand what the essence of it is. And that's a little bit the schizophrenic situation that we're in.

I see a lot of companies looking at this and thinking about it like it's a big transformation — a huge thing: how are we going to deal with this? But you're spot on. This is also about taking the time to reflect on where you need to go, and that's everything about the intelligence era. But at the same time, stepping back and seeing what you can do today, what you can achieve today.

As a matter of fact, it's one of the big things I'm talking about with a lot of leaders: time to value. You can have big plans, but the world is changing so fast that value is now time to value. Whatever value you think you will deliver, if you deliver it late it could be completely gone.

So it's very important for everybody to look into this and to look at the bigger picture. What does it mean moving into the intelligence era? What's the ultimate end goal? And for me, the answer is that everybody needs to understand that we're in a very unique time, because organisations start scaling on their platforms, not on headcount. And that's a big, big thing. It's not only happening in the media industry, but I think it's very applicable to the media industry because there are a lot of people involved in the whole process of capturing content and delivering content. So this is a really existential thing happening right now.

It is very important, then, to take a step back and look at what it is that we need to do today. Where do we need to go? And in that context, I think it's important to understand the bigger picture. The past twenty years we lived in what I call the digital era. A lot of organisations had been deploying software left and right, in different pockets, different departments, for different purposes. And the past maybe five to ten years, everybody felt: well, how do we bring all of that together? You feel the urge to bring things together, to consolidate things.

That's a very important thing — that's the move from tools to platforms. If I have to say one thing: moving into the intelligence era is first making sure that you build that complete foundation. Gen AI is all about amplifying it. It will amplify what you have. If there are any defects, any missing connections in that ecosystem, it will be amplified.

It's kind of like fake news.

Yes. You can expect a lot of things from Gen AI, but if you're going to feed it information and data that is incorrect or incomplete —

Garbage in, garbage out.

Exactly.

Plus, it's accelerated. You don't just get the same garbage out, you get a lot more.

Absolutely.

One of the things — and I'm going to use it because I heard it — is time to value. We sort of grew up in an era where you'd go in and say, "We want to do this project." The CFO would go, "What's the ROI on it?" And that's all anyone stood on, and that's tech standalone. Hey, what is this piece of tin, and when do I get my money back for it? "Time to value" really struck a chord with me.

Yes. And it is something that is generally applicable to the entire world. This is a world where there has never been so much opportunity. That's also reflected, for example, in startups. There have never been so many startups. There's never been so much opportunity. We've seen startups that go from zero to a hundred million in no time with a few people. Then again, we have also seen an unusually high rate of startups failing.

That shows the dynamics of this. Time to value is all about being able to focus on what you need to focus on. And I do think it's very applicable to the media industry, because this has been an industry that has been very focused on the engineering aspects — building these organisations that do these complex workflows — and that legacy is still in the minds of people.

But when time to value comes into play, you really need to reflect on where the value is. Anything that is table stakes, you need to move away from that. You don't have time to build everything from the ground up. It's kind of like saying: if I'm going to drive a race with a race car, I'm going to build a custom race car. If that race is next year, okay, you can be a bit more hands-on, a bit more creative in how you build that car, and you could say, "I may have more people and deeper pockets, so I'm going to go full custom." However, if that race is next week — no matter how deep your pockets are, no matter how many people you have, you cannot buy calendar time.

No. And one of the things I always say is that in times like that, when the timescales are short and you can't buy time: don't let perfect be the enemy of very good.

Absolutely, that's spot on. And that's something you have to reflect upon. If we can achieve ninety per cent of the value within a short time frame, maybe we have to settle for that and move on to the next step, rather than being very focused on that one thing and spending too much time on it.

So it's very important for the industry to learn: what can we get out of the box, table stakes? What is important? What do we need to focus on? What is going to set me apart from anybody else in the industry? What is unique for me? Where is the real value that we deliver? Making that differentiation.

But the thing is, this is a responsibility from the leadership. You have to really set clear direction for engineering teams and different departments across organisations. And some media organisations are complex. They have a lot of departments, a lot of teams that still operate within their domain, make their own decisions, have their own budgets — and that makes it sometimes challenging. But it is so fundamental and existential moving into the intelligence era.

Because if I were a strategic leader, one thing I would want to make sure is: are we going to be able to scale on that agentic layer? Are we going to be able to not have to work with people all the time, for every little step of that workflow? How am I going to get there? And the first step is really to unify and consolidate. Make sure that you have only a select few strategic platforms that you're working on. Could be for finance, could be for different domains. But you need to consolidate on platforms. I'm not saying you need to run on a single platform, but that consolidation needs to happen.

You cannot allow teams to make point decisions based on isolated budgets and isolated projects if that bigger picture is there. So it's very important for people to put that focus in an organisation and to make sure that everybody aligns with that longer-term goal.

And this comes to something I'm quite passionate about. You mentioned silos in big organisations — you come here, you go onto a stand, and you'll be hard pushed to talk to someone who understands storytelling and creative outcome. Because they're getting all of this great tech — and we love tech, and it is brilliant, here's some cloud and here's an AI for you — and it gets to the editorial and they're going, "This doesn't help me. It's great, but it doesn't help me get that story onto the screen."

I think that all pays back into organisational change. If we're having a fundamental shift in the way workflows work, there's so much technology — why does no one ever talk about organisational shift?

So, if we were going to sit here in two years' time, what's the one capability Skyline must stay ahead on for your business?

What we want to deliver is the ultimate operational intelligence. It's all about being able to say to our customers: we can take very complex ecosystems, we can consolidate those ecosystems, and we can deliver a capability that gives you tremendous value out of the box but gives you all the space to be creative with your own intelligence.

Because I'm always saying: what you need to produce is unique intelligence. Intelligence that is unique to you. This is not about Gen AI in general — "I can do what you can do" and all of that. It's really to think about what is going to make this unique. It's my business workflows. It's my priorities. It's my strategy. It's my technology. It's my type of services. Even things like business models. And being able to consolidate that into that new ecosystem, what I would call competitive intelligence — something that is going to be different compared to anybody else — and to be able to take that intelligence and plug it into that new end-to-end enterprise agent-to-agent layer that you will see emerging. That we can provide that capability in that ecosystem.

Other organisations are going to focus maybe on a FinOps agent or other types of agents. But that's our goal: to deliver that ultimate capability.

That's fantastic. I know that you will have enjoyed this, and if you can get to see Skyline, you must — they really do solve problems. And I think also having this conversation, where you can hear the buzz outside in the background, is what makes IAMT really unique in terms of an industry association.

So thank you again, Ben.

Thank you. And we'll be back again later.

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