



CIO Issues

Turner Broadcasting CIO Scott Teissler on Technology Innovation

By Pam Baker

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"We are constantly pushing the envelope," TBS CIO Scott Teissler told CIO Today. "CNN recently broadcasted from completely devastated areas in the wake of the Tsunami and the war in Iraq -- yet our news coverage was crystal-clear. That came from our own innovations. We have very significant technical demands, and it is much harder than it looks."

➤As CIO and CTO of Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. (TBS), Scott Teissler oversees technology groups that support the gamut of companies under the media giant's umbrella.

Aside from TBS's entertainment and news cable television networks, Teissler is instrumental in the company's technology strategy, policy development and implementation, and represents Turner Broadcasting in technology matters involving parent company Time Warner and

other Time Warner companies.

TBS is home to familiar cable television networks such as TBS, TNT, Cartoon Network and Turner Classic Movies, as well as specialized networks such as Turner South and Boomerang. Its groundbreaking news network, CNN, is among the world's most popular sources for news and information.

In its 20 years on the air, CNN's reach has expanded to 15 cable and satellite television networks; two radio networks; 12 Web sites; CNN Mobile; and CNN Newsource, a syndicated news service.

Additionally, TBS feeds sports fans' appetites with its ownership of the Atlanta Braves, and the Web sites of nascar.com and pga.com.

Due to the diverse nature of the TBS family, Teissler is faced with the challenge of weighing technological advances versus worldwide consumer behavior patterns from the dual -- and often opposite -- perspectives of both mature and new business units.

On any given day, he enables CNN reporters to broadcast from the center of a catastrophic Tsunami or the blood-bathed battlefields of Iraq, oversees the re-engineering of constantly changing Web sites, and looks over the behind-the-scenes workings of a professional ball team.

But in this moment, he talks exclusively with CIO Today about a world on fire with technology and the demands on I.T. to make sense of it all.

CIO Today: What are your top concerns as CIO?

Teissler: The trick is to effect innovative change without assuming too much operational risk; to measure the potential increase in efficiency against the loss of efficiency in implementing technology requiring new skill sets. In general, you must understand the real risks and the real returns, and when to defy either.

The tendency in I.T. is to reduce risks across the board, but sometimes you must deliberately increase your risk to stay ahead of the competition. It's a very fine balancing act.

My preoccupation is on how to increase the ability of the business units to respond to competitive pressures and changes in the marketplace. And, how to balance vastly different needs among our mature and new business units.

CIO Today: Has the I.T. environment changed from 5 years ago?

Teissler: The available tool kits are getting better and better ... and we are getting better at using them.

Marketplace changes are accelerating. The pace is up. Competitors are faster. Consumer behavioral changes are progressively quicker. You have to pay close attention and you have to have decision and planning processes that don't wander around too much.

CIO Today: How have new legislative demands affected the I.T. department and the CIO in particular?

Teissler: Sarbox costs a lot in terms of people and time, but not so much in terms of expenditures, since we were mostly there anyway. For us, it is more about [infrastructure](#) 📦 since we are not a transactional business. We actually manage to cope pretty well.

The process required by legislation is questionable in terms of efficiency. The things we are required to look at are generally beneficial, but there are far better ways of doing it.

CIO Today: Which enterprise component or technology will be growing most in terms of its slice of your company's budget pie in the next 12 months?

Teissler: We will continue to work towards getting more productivity out of our mundane I.T. investments so we can shift more money towards more cutting-edge investments. Certainly we will be licensing bits of technology to use in our own innovations.

We tend to avoid the herd instinct, preferring to develop our own technological recipe.

CIO Today: Can you walk us through the decision-making process of implementing a large-scale business process management initiative?

Teissler: We are blessed with a stable core of decision makers who all work well together. The team constitutes a distinct competitive advantage.

A great deal of intellectual energy is applied and we do have an appreciation for processes, but we are not trapped by procedures. We do have best practices in place, but we prefer to retain the flexibility necessary to create something extraordinary. It is part of our culture to be self-aware, self-conscious of our needs and where we intend to go strategically.

Hence, we have no canned process.

CIO Today: What are one or two software or hardware products your company uses that you would describe as "outstanding?"

Teissler: There is a great collection of tools now. Data networks are great; you can get lots of bits of data for almost nothing and that certainly is fundamental to a media business. Standardization in middleware, communication tools, communication networks, all of those are competitive spaces with a lot of good offerings. There is simply no need to name one or two brands -- odds are the ranking will change by morning because of the competitiveness of the space anyway.

The hard part is knowing enough about enough of them.

CIO Today: Which emerging technology do you see as most important to the enterprise?

Teissler: Delivery technology is interesting to us, but not nearly as interesting as consumer behavioral patterns. You have to be very comfortable with technology, so much so that you can turn your back on it and focus on the consumer. We are always gauging what

technologies are popular with the consumer.

For example, TV watching is an entrenched habit, but who's watching what is much more fluid. So, we have to pay attention to a whole range of competitors -- not just other television networks -- but other technologies vying for our viewers' attention.

We are constantly pushing the envelope. Case in point: the smallest form factor. Our portables are trade secrets, so I cannot discuss the particulars. But do keep in mind, CNN recently broadcasted from completely devastated areas in the wake of the Tsunami and the war in Iraq -- yet our news coverage was crystal-clear. That came from our own innovations. We have very significant technical demands, and it is much harder than it looks.

CIO Today: Where do you go to do your research on new technologies?

Teissler: We have our own R&D group called Platform R&D. We named it that to distinguish it from our other R&D groups that focus on audience and consumer research, among other things. Our staffing model is based toward subject experts, that is, our subject experts become managers, not the other way around. There is, of course, no such thing as a "New Stuff" expert. So, our experts are very topic specific.

We have a number of academic relationships as well and we constantly work to identify new product and prototype development.

We know we need to be players or hobnob with players of innovation constantly. So, we are constantly canvassing and creating innovations.

