Specialist network

Disruptive Innovators Network

PIN Proptech Innovation Network

Faster Horse

by Ian Wright CEO, DIN

I promised to return to my question are social housing providers building a faster horse?

Firstly, the answer to the question in my view is yes. Whether you look at the investment and adoption of technologies (There has only been one large scale housing management system built this century so most housing providers are working on code from the 1990's and possibly the 1980's) or the way we identify and look at problems.

Take how we consume and store data as Chris Marsh highlighted there is 2.5 quintillion Bytes of data out there of which <1% of that data is actually used.

99.9% is waste, and for the most part we don't have the skills to analyse it well either.

But and there is a but, there is nothing inherently wrong with building a faster horse if that is what the customer wants.

However, for the first time in my nearly 40 years in the sector we have competition and whilst it is relatively small scale at the moment it is growing at pace. And you know what, they aren't using any code from the last century, in fact they aren't using any current housing IT providers. They are not interested in horses! The service experience they are looking to deliver will be at a level that very few social landlords will be able to match.

So, what is the real question I think social housing leaders have to ask?

Well, it was something the wonderful Frank Mattes shared with me last night. The real problem is not convincing people to buy the new but to convince them to let go of the old. The power of the status quo is significant and in a non-competitive market why would you invest time and resources when your tenants aren't going anywhere.

In fact, I was ruminating this morning that we have had 7 DIN members transformation leads leave their jobs in the last year. They didn't move on to something else they were just exhausted and burned out from trying to drive change in a structure that simply didn't want/need to change.

One of my current questions I ask exec teams is 'what is the last experiment you ran?' It elicits so many different responses but mainly that shiny shoe moment of looking down until we move on. And I think this is at the nub of why this is so hard. Much as we would like to be seen as leading edge and innovative, our set-ups are simply not aligned to what is required to be innovators.

Innovation happens at the edges of the business, and this makes us uncomfortable. We aren't going to transform the way we deliver services by looking at other housing providers (unless you love horses).

I'm not sure if this makes total sense yet as I'm convinced there are other sectors out there also building faster horses, it's just not a place I feel comfortable with when the problems we need to solve seem so big.

Feel free to challenge, disagree or add to the debate I'm sure we will keep coming back to it.

Now I'm off to back a 50/1 cert running in the 5.00pm at Wolverhampton!