



# MISSION CRITICAL IT

## Making Business Thrive

**INTERVIEW WITH  
PETER PARKER  
DIRECTOR  
STRIDE & SON**

**Commissioned by:**



# Introduction

Interestingly, Bill Gates once said that “the advance of technology is based on making it fit in, so that you don’t really even notice because it has become part of everyday life.”

Interestingly, because within a timescale which is unprecedented in business, IT has moved from supporting function to in effect, controlling function. So what could the influence of IT be, say, five years down the line?

This is one of the interviews for a book commissioned by Tailor Made Technologies and to be published by DECISION magazine, in which businesses which are really focused on the relationships with their staff and customers, share what they consider to be the issues they have to get right in terms of IT.

# Combining technology with re-assurance

When the visitor paused at the door as they were leaving and took another look around the offices of Stride & Son, director Peter Parker kind of knew why.

“In fact,” he recalls,” “they actually said this really didn’t look like an estate agency, unless it was one from the 1960s, but they found it more re-assuring than the usual techno-led contemporary interiors.”

The reality though is this. The family-owned property services and auctioneers business established more than 130 years ago realises it is dependent on technology for its continued existence, and hasn’t shied away from embracing it to turn re-assurance into results.

“Technology gives us the same potential coverage as multi-office firms because the first place people look for property is a Rightmove or similar platform,” says co-director Tom Prower. “They scroll through the properties rather than register the name of the actual estate agents.

*Peter Parker*



“In ten years’ time, will we still have potential purchasers viewing a property in first instance or initially to narrow the selection down, will they be wanting to have digital fly throughs of each room of the house, the garden, and a drone overview of the location from the comfort of their sofa?

“And of course, technology has lowered the barriers to entry. I spotted there’s a new local estate agency which just had a website presence for a year before opening an office. That kind of start-up couldn’t have happened without technology. The internet means anyone can set up a company with a reach which is immediately worldwide and limitless.”

Which is really apparent when it comes to the auction side of the Stride & Son business. “Twenty years ago we would have been reliant on advertising and footfall, and on the day of the auction to get from one side of the sales room to the other was



like trying to get across a battlefield because of the sheer number of people,” recalls Parker. “Now they view lots on line from the thousands of pictures we upload. Technology means bidders are attracted by the items we sell, not our location. If someone is looking for a Chinese vase, then it’s largely irrelevant where the auctioneer is based, but you still need to be known and for your brand to be trusted.

“Every auctioneers will up-load their catalogue onto platforms such as the sale room.com, followed by digital alerts and then a review after an auction. With so many platforms it’s time-consuming for a small firm. If we employed someone full-time just to deal with social media, they’d occupy themselves completely which is a scary thought.

“It’s interesting that the pandemic has resulted in a greater everyday acceptance of technology. I can give you a very simple example. Rather than having to make a forty-five-minute journey to value a piece for auction, the seller can email me pictures. The use of Teams and Zoom accelerated during Covid-19 not just because of the business imperative; in lockdown older generations acquired the technology to keep in touch with their families, and became comfortable with it.”

With the on-line auction platform, the bidder has access to a live stream, but far from improving the auction process, technology, says Parker, has actually slowed it down. “It’s not because of the technology as such but without the vibe of being in the live auction room, people can take longer to decide from the comfort



of their home,” he explains. “The atmosphere has changed in a negative way: technology has taken away the collective drama, but then the achieved prices are better.

“In the actual auction room I can see a bidder shake their head or I can sense they have had enough. There is no indication of that online because you can’t see them, so from the silence the auctioneer assumes they have stopped. Because of eBay though, people believe it’s better to bid at the very last moment, but that isn’t necessary at an actual auction. In an actual auction room environment we would work through at least 120 lots in an hour; online that number can drop to sixty-five.

“And the biggest problem with buyers who are more disparate geographically is that they tend not to collect their purchases straight away. Before, the buyer would load up their car or van at the end of the auction and drive away. Now, a week later, we can still be housing a thousand items.”

Ironically, payment can take longer as well. “In person, purchasers would settle up on the day,” explains Parker. “Online, when someone registers to bid, they have to put in their financial details, but after five days there can still be twenty percent who haven’t paid so there is the additional cost of having to chase them up.”

On the other hand, Stride & Son don’t have to worry about something which is a major concern with e-commerce. Being disappointed in a purchase isn’t a reason for returning an item back to the auction house.

“So there is a necessity for good imagery on the internet so that any imperfection is more visible before a bid is made,” Parker points out. “But I have been astonished by how many things



people are prepared to buy on line without physically seeing the item – that accounts for 65% of our auction sales.”

With a degree in business studies, Parker’s interest in antiques led him to join Sotheby’s where he studied fine art valuation; later he took a general valuers position with Bonhams.

He left the international firms arena because he felt at an independent practice his work would be more appreciated, and joined Stride & Son eleven years ago when his predecessor decided to leave after thirty-five years. “He retired early,” adds Parker. “I remember when I first started our surveyor had a secretary who was ninety-two. She only decided to stop work when she found it too difficult to get up the stairs to her office.”

A concern that Parker has is that technology can effortlessly add to complexity if you let it. “We have a one page contract with the vendor for the sale of their property but it isn’t unusual now to find contracts which run to ten pages or more. Why? Because technology makes it easier to churn them out.”

“Then” he adds, “the danger with digital communication is that we skim rather than read, whether that’s an email or a set of terms and conditions. Only once in the last year has anyone said they had gone through the t’s and c’s and wanted an adjustment.”

[www.strideandson.co.uk](http://www.strideandson.co.uk)



### **About Tailor Made Technologies**

Since 1994 Tailor Made Technologies have been delivering professional IT, communications, cloud, and cyber security solutions for businesses, education and public sector organisations across the UK. Through their 28-year track record TMT have been ranked 6th best managed service provider in EMEA and 2nd in the UK, as well as being featured on The Sunday Times Fast Track list for a decade.

Accreditations include ISO 9001, ISO 27001, Investors in People, with TMT's 105 engineers looking after 2200 customers and 11,000 managed devices, meeting 96% of service level agreements.

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### **About DECISION magazine**

First published in 1988, DECISION magazine reflects the business lifestyle, the trials and tribulations, the hopes and aspirations of directors and managing partners responsible for businesses with a turnover of £3million and above in the south of England and London.

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