

The buzz in 2016

Hong Kong IT leaders expect big data and analytics to go mainstream as momentum of real-life deployments build up in 2016

By Computerworld Hong Kong Editors

As part of *Computerworld Hong Kong's* year-end tradition, we asked IT leaders in Hong Kong to peer through the proverbial crystal ball to predict the technology buzzwords that would become a reality in the next 12 months.

2016: The year of big data and analytics

Many local IT leaders both in the public and private sectors share the belief that big data will be the top IT development in Hong Kong in the next 12 months.

Indeed, big data is one of the emerging technologies that are specifically mentioned in the blueprint of the newly established Innovation and Technology Bureau (ITB).

“Momentum is building up on big data analysis in both public and private sectors, making data scientists the highest in-demand professionals in the IT industry,” said Allen Yeung, the new GCIO.

MTR Corporation's head of IT Ted Suen feels that big data was overhyped in 2015. But he said it is going to pick up in 2016, with the complementary development of Internet of Things (IoT), which is the foundation for data collection.



Kwok from Lockton: Technology projects that were put off or ignored before because nobody was following up on them could be revived

“Together with IoT, I expect big data implementations will pick up more in 2016 and in subsequent years,” he said. “I don't see large-scale application in these two areas in Hong Kong, because a lot of people still do not really have a clear definition of big data.”

Meanwhile, Suen noted social media and analytics appear to be a more realistic combination.

“I see quiet a number of companies are working on these two areas,” he said.

Ageas Insurance's CIO Henk ten Bos, one of the winners of the Hong Kong CIO Awards 2015, seems to agree.

“In the last couple of years, there was a lot of hype around big data, especially the opportunities that the information from social media would bring,” said ten Bos. “Although I don't think that a lot of companies are able to monetize on this big data concept yet, it did help to raise the awareness that turning (internal) data into information to better service customers will be extremely important in the coming years. The technology that can help to achieve these insights has become much more user friendly, easy to use and affordable.”

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—Henk ten Bos, Ageas Insurance

ITB as catalyst to real IT development

Many Hong Kong IT and business leaders are pinning their hopes on the creation of ITB as a watershed moment that will allow the city to take its rightful place as one of the digital hubs of Asia.

“With the ITB finally approved, I think technology projects that were kind of put off or ignored before because nobody was following up on them could be revived,” said Suk-Wah Kwok, regional CIO for the Asia Pacific at Lockton Companies (Hong Kong). “With ITB, there is now at least a widely recognizable central body, which will put technology and innovation as a priority, and drive technology projects.”

She added that Hong Kong will be in a catch-up mode as rival Singapore has been doing better in recent years in the area of technology and innovation. “I expect that big data and business analytics and cloud adoption will become prevalent in 2016.”

Paul Haswell, partner at Pinsent Masons, followed the same line of thought. “The majority of investment and innovation is coming from private sources, and there has been a focus on the

Suen of MTR Corporation: I wish for a real smart city with full integration of different emergent technologies



retail and property sectors over IT. If this doesn't change in 2016, then Hong Kong will continue to lose ground to its Asian competitors, not least Singapore and Mainland China.”

As high hopes land on ITB, the newly appointed leader of the bureau Nick Yang also shares similar views with many in the industry. When asked what development he wished to see in the technology space, he said “bitcoin, building up on big data analysis in both public and private sectors and no more cybersecurity breaches”.

Wishing for a smart city

With the increasing adoption of big data, industry insiders are now casting their eye on an even bigger goal: the transformation of Hong Kong into a truly smart city. Many have expressed high hopes with the establishment of ITB, which has already articulated the same goal.

“I wish for a real smart city with full integration of different emergent technologies,” said Suen from MTR Corporation.

As legislator for Hong Kong's IT sector, Charles Mok also dreams of seeing a smart city become a reality, particularly through open data policies.

“I would like to see more big companies making data sets openly available to the public for re-use, analysis and innovative application,” said Mok. “This is what can really enable a smart city to come true instead of remaining a lofty ideal.”

One contributor that is turning the smart city concept into reality in Hong Kong is Uber. This year's police arrest of their drivers and staff, after InvestHK invited them to set up operations in Hong



Mok of LegCo: I would like to see more big companies making data sets openly available to the public

Kong, created headlines. The company's general manager in Hong Kong Sam Gellman said he expects to see more collaboration between different parties in 2016 to address the increasingly complex problems that are tightly woven into the fabric of cities.

“In order to truly realize the potential of the innovations and technological advancements in such areas, technology companies, communities, policy makers and other stakeholders will need to work more closely together,” said Gellman.

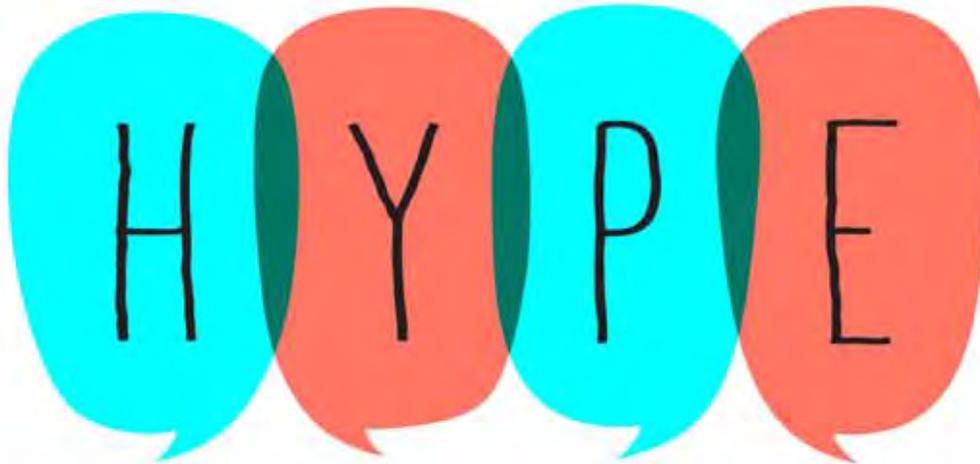
He pointed out that no single party could successfully tackle these challenges by itself.

“I hope and expect that we will see a greater shift towards these types of collaborations and partnerships in 2016. I see the establishment of ITB as a potentially positive indicator,” Gellman concluded. ◀

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Failure to launch



Foresight, unlike hindsight, is never 20/20. A range of “new” technologies that were expected to come into place in 2015 have missed their mark, leaving some local leaders disappointed.

Here are some of them, which were unable to live up to the hype in 2015:

1. 3D printing

CIO of Ageas Henk ten Bos noted that the popularity of 3D printing in early 2015 was supposed to have revolutionized some manufacturing businesses, but instead seemed to die down by the end of the year.

“It looks like this initial hype is now over, and I think it will still take some time before such 3D printers will become useful and affordable in the mainstream,” he said. “I find it, however, fascinating to see how quickly 3D printing is bringing results to, for example, the healthcare sector for prosthetics or facial reconstruction.”

2. Autonomous cars and augmented reality

Autonomous cars are taking more than their fair share of market attention, according to Hong Kong legislative councilor Charles Mok.

“Self-driving cars have the potential to change transport industry, but reliability and how they work with the existing infrastructure and the laws are great challenges ahead,” Mok said.

But he added that privacy issues and the business model need to be sorted out before autonomous cars can go mainstream.

Meanwhile, in a similar context, augmented reality (AR) with IoT was also seen as a big hype in 2015 for Suk-Wah Kwok, regional CIO for Asia Pacific at Lockton Companies.

“The underlying concept is not completely new,” she said. “In fact, the concept of computer objects being able to learn by interpreting data dated back to the 1980s, when the concept of machine learning and artificial intelligence emerged.”

She added that the major difference is, back in the 1980s, people had to explicitly write learning programs and make

data available to these programs for them to gain intelligence. “The proliferation of mobile devices and interconnectivity of every device and program makes data automatically and readily available, making IoT a concept that can affect everyone,” she said.

3. Bitcoin

There was a lot of hullabaloo around bitcoin in late 2014 and early 2015 as government regulators and FSI insiders mulled over its perceived benefits and risks. Interest in the digital currency, however, appeared to fizzle out as the year ran its course.

“Bitcoin had lost its steam in attracting VC (venture capital) investment, dropping from HK\$230 million in Q1 to HK\$85 million in Q3 of this year,” said GCIO Allen Yeung.

4. Apple Watch

Apple Watch was seen to underwhelm thousands of fans for releasing a “half-baked” product, according to Paul Haswell, partner at Pinsent Masons focusing on technology and employment law.

“Tethered to the iPhone with weak battery life and far too expensive, the Apple Watch was a solution in search of a problem, with early adopters suggesting that one of its bestselling points was that it ‘saved them having to get their phones out of their bags as often’.”

But Haswell also offered some suggestions regarding how wearables could become successful: “Apple Watch is a good example of how wearable tech actually has to have a clear purpose that it excels at in order to succeed. I’m hoping the revision of the Apple Watch takes this on board.” ◀