A chief executive officer's journey into the gig economy
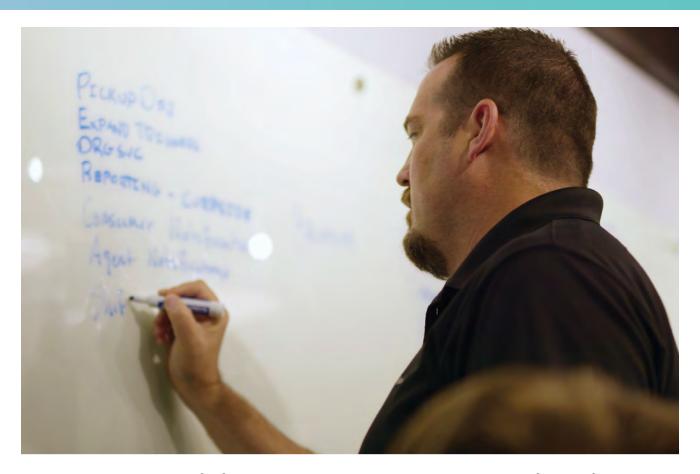
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'Trust or lack of it is at the root of success or failure in relationships and in the bottom-line results in business.'
-Stephen Covey

Earn trust and you earn loyalty – some principles are eternal, even in business. From pre-industrial times to today's gig economy, trust has been the 'red thread' running through every customer transaction, ultimately determining winners and losers. It was as critical to an early-19th-century ice merchant making home deliveries as it is to a grocery store chain offering online shopping and curbside delivery services in the 21st century. The difference between then and now is the customer's level of expectation; what a business must do to earn their trust and loyalty.

In the gig economy, transparency is king. A shopper waiting for a grocery delivery at their front door or a manufacturer waiting for a parts shipment at their loading dock will no longer accept an hours-long delivery window. Thanks to digital disruptors, customers expect highly accurate ETAs and real-time visibility into the delivery's progress. They don't want surprises and they don't want to wait for something to happen; they want to feel control over the experience.

Business visionaries, like Chief Executive Officer of Glympse Chris Ruff, have recognized that proximity, location and time data fuel the gig economy. The ability to deliver ETAs and live map experiences has become the new catalyst for success and every business is being transformed by it.

Chris' personal story shows how he is leading Glympse's development of best-practices for leveraging location data to build interactive experiences in customer-facing ecosystems. With Glympes' customer engagement platform, he's carving a niche in the gig economy. The platform is helping Glympse's retail, field services and logistics customers add context to every transaction, elevate their customer service, deepen customer engagement and even introduce an element of delight to the customer experience in both the consumer and B2B scenarios.

Leader profile

Chris' technology leadership experience spans over 25 years in the software, mobile and IoT industries. He's an entrepreneur whose passion lies in building highly scalable and disruptive technology companies. He's a thought-leader and sought-after speaker on the gig economy and how its emphasis on short-term engagements, where you're only as good as your last transaction, is driving disruption across a range of industries.

Chris takes a hands-on, entrepreneurial approach to leading his company's efforts to build pleasing, personalized and efficient experiences, grounded in contextual location data. He's built a robust partner ecosystem and ushered in an agile development environment, including a microservice architecture and API-based infrastructure, that supports continuous innovation as he drives the evolution of Glympse's core value proposition into the gig economy.
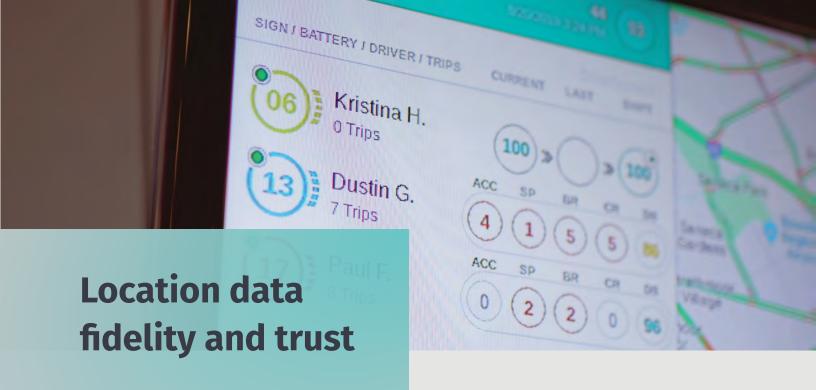
Beginning the journey

The power of location context and location sharing became real to Chris shortly after assuming the CEO role two years ago. His ah-ha moment came in the form of an anecdote told by a Glympse customer – a cable service company. A new cable customer who'd scheduled an installation greeted the company's technician at the door with a freshly brewed cup of coffee before he'd even knocked. Chris saw how location data, location sharing and transparency had upended the poor service reputation cable companies had earned over the years. In fact, the customer experience had improved to such an extent that this company's tech was welcomed with hospitality instead of hostility.

A cable company improving its field service experience is just one use-case. Business models in virtually every industry are shifting from an exclusive focus on making and selling products to curating the company's response to a customer-driven event and elevating that experience. Some industries are moving more quickly than others.

"Any company facing Amazon as a competitor, whether in e-commerce or at the retail level gets it. They know they need to step up their customer's experience," Chris says. Glympse's greatest opportunity has traditionally lied in helping businesses manage the 'last mile,' the point at which products and services are being delivered directly to consumers – roadside service providers and retail businesses offering online ordering and pickup or delivery services, for instance. "They're pushing forward aggressively with better delivery solutions, better curbside pickup solutions, and a host of other applications that allow their customers to get a higher level of service."

Though in the long run Chris envisions focusing on the entire value chain, there's a new market on his radar – the 'middle mile'. E-commerce is transforming freight transportation and supply chains; shipments are getting smaller and more frequent, and delivery windows are getting narrower. "We've had conversations on the retail side and with a large restaurant franchise and they're interested in the middle mile, as they deploy inventory between distribution hubs or between restaurants or stores. They want to provide transparency to that part of the supply chain," Chris notes.

Location data fidelity and trust

Location data adds necessary context to any journey experience. Its accuracy - fidelity - and the associated ability to accurately predict ETAs and provide a live-map experience are fast becoming differentiators in the drive for customer trust and for optimizing efficiencies.

A trucking company with thousands of assets moving throughout its delivery network defines 'fidelity' in terms of how closely they can pinpoint an asset's location and the distance it's traveled in any length in time. On any given day, hundreds of problems may occur; trucks break down, accidents and traffic jams happen. Without high-fidelity location data, that business and its customers are virtually blind to how its network is working and the level of service it's providing.

Customer engagement and operational efficiency-improvement concepts, like 'hyper-localism,' put more of a premium on location fidelity at a granular level than ever before. Companies are exploiting it as a competitive differentiator.

Retailers, for instance, want to engage the customer from the moment they drive into their parking lot. On a B2B level, companies delivering construction materials to multiple locations on a large job site want to make sure the right person is at the right place at the right time to receive each delivery. From an operational efficiency perspective, trucking companies want deeper context on asset movement. It's no longer enough to know that a truck has moved 30 feet in 10 minutes, companies want to know why. Hyper-localism, the ability to pinpoint location within meters, allows them to understand if the truck is in a traffic lane or a fueling line. Fueling wait times from one location to the next can be compared and shared with other drivers.

"If Jimmy John's is a minute late on a sandwich delivery, it probably doesn't matter much, but if you're delivering a multimillion-dollar part that needs to be installed before it deteriorates, high fidelity is business-critical. The same is true if you're stuck on the side of a road waiting on a tow truck in a blizzard," Chris says. "Over time, every company - Jimmy John's or AAA - will be judged on its accuracy, so even if fidelity's not critical in one particular transaction, chronic inaccuracy will eventually erode trust."

Chris doesn't exempt Glympse from such judgment. "Customers, ours included, are going to choose service providers that meet a higher standard. So, we feel like we're going to need even to keep getting more accurate because the bar is going to rise continually. Our partnership with HERE means we don't have to take on that burden ourselves. We can work with a leader in the location technology, live maps, analytics and the data we need to keep increasing and improving the experience for our customers."

Building a partner ecosystem

The gig economy's pace of change demands efficiency and agility, calling organizations to focus on their core value propositions and rely on partnerships for complementary expertise and capabilities. "You decide what your company's DNA is and then focus on being the best at that. Our DNA is improving relationships between our customers and their customers," Chris says. "Beyond that, we license capabilities through APIs. We've built a partner ecosystem of companies that see the customers we're targeting as valuable customers for their business and who have the flexibility to innovate with us. It accelerates our time-to-market for new products. Speed is how you win in the future."
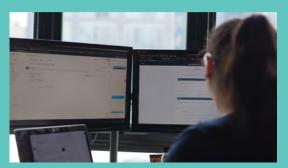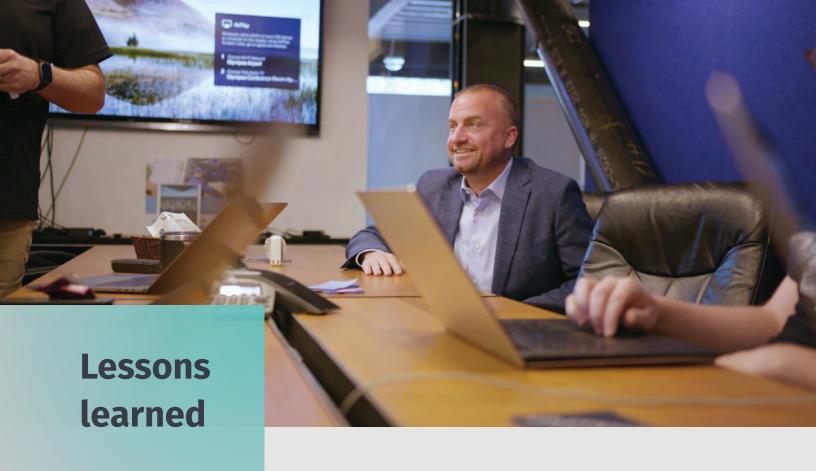

The Glympse platform leverages enterprise-grade location APIs and SDKs and real-time map tracking from HERE, as well as other 3rd party software solutions for product/service delivery, curbside pickup (BOPIS), roadside assistance and more.

Chris points to his company's recently released two-way IP messaging platform as an example of Glympse's ecosystem at work. "The platform leverages ETA and a live map experience, but goes further by giving both the service provider and the customer the ability to engage in a private, secure conversation where they can update the other should circumstances change. Something as simple as that elevates the experience, which delivers on Glympse's value proposition. I really believe the most innovative new solutions come when the brightest minds focus on a problem and then bring their ecosystem together to be best-in-breed."

Lessons learned

Chris believes the one constant in the dynamic gig economy is the consumer and their fundamental desire to buy quality products from trusted providers. In that sense, consumers have never changed, just their level of expectation has. Where they were once satisfied with a transactional relationship, they're now demanding a real-time dialogue with their service or product provider. Ironically, the exchange they want doesn't include phone calls or conversations with service technicians or customer service reps; they expect up-to-the-minute information literally at their fingertips.

Data and having a data strategy are the keys to meeting those elevated expectations. "Absent either, you're going to fail on your promise to consumers," Chris says. "I think the future of all business is data. It gives you the ability to keep adding fidelity to all of the services you provide. Predicting what consumers want before they know it; providing the right products and services at the right time; accurately understanding traffic and congestion so that a company can optimize its service delivery strategy - all of that is built on a foundation of data."

The need for a data strategy is increasing year after year. As Chris looks back on 20-plus years in technology, he says the gold standard used to be delivering applications and providing the minimum amount of data needed to help individuals do their jobs. In the gig economy, success means getting ahead of what customers need, improving products and helping them improve efficiency through analytics and machine learning. That's the new gold standard.

"We're now in a world obsessed with the last minute, the last-mile, where context is critical to the customer experience. Data – particularly location data - provides that context. Without it, businesses can't staff correctly," Chris says. "Their customers might be waiting too long for a pickup or they might not be home when a delivery arrives. A company may not know if it has enough drivers to fulfill the delivery, because they're not tracking those drivers. A unified location data strategy solves all of those problems."

He's dedicated to employing the massive volume of data Glympse and its partners capture as raw material for enhancing customer engagement experiences and identifying new opportunities for Glympse customers to increase revenue and efficiencies. "Today, we're relying on the intelligence that we get from our partners, like HERE. However, as we're able to share more of the data we're capturing with our partners it'll certainly benefit us, our partner ecosystem and ultimately our customers. I think we're at the very early stage of this game, and it's only going to get better."

Reflections from HERE

The smartphone, and the big data & analytics technology behind it, has triggered a wave of transformative consumer engagement experiences that continues to flourish as technology advances. Consumer-centric industries - retail, transportation, insurance, telco, financial services – are primary beneficiaries (or in some cases victims) of this disruption.

Disrupt, or be disrupted is on the mind of every c-suite around the world. Cloud platforms and marketplaces have democratized access to technology, giving rise to innovative thinkers and doers who can now put fantastic ideas into practice and create entirely new business models. The smartphone provides a direct link to consumers and a wealth of data about consumer patterns that never existed before. Tech innovators like Chris Ruff, CEO of Glympse are dedicated to harnessing this opportunity, building mobile solutions designed to serve consumers better, and to help organizations optimize resources for efficiency and scale.

Location data is focused on consumer engagement. Retailers need to know when a person drives up, buys online or is picking up in store, but they also want to market to people when they enter the parking lot. They want to pull them into the store for a last-minute purchase. That type of customer engagement is feasible because of hyperlocalness and it opens up numerous e-commerce opportunities. Providing Glympse customers with a real-time understanding of location and arrival time allows innovators, like Chris, to help businesses build trust in the gig economy.

For today's consumer, convenience, value and sustainable use of resources are top priorities. Consumer-centric organizations are held to an extremely high standard set by the likes of Amazon, Uber and Big Tech in our mobile society. Tech innovators like Chris Ruff of Glympse rely on partners to deliver foundational technology, including high-quality location intelligence so their teams can focus on delivering perfect customer experiences to an ever-evolving marketplace.

About HERE Technologies

HERE, the Open Location Platform company, enables people, enterprises and cities to harness the power of location. By making sense of the world through the lens of location we empower our customers to achieve better outcomes – from helping a city manage its infrastructure or an enterprise optimize its assets to guiding drivers to their destination safely. To learn more about HERE, including our new generation of cloud-based location platform services, visit **360.here.com** and **here.com**