

# A Digital Transformation

An Interview with Lou Petreski,  
Executive Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Active International



Lou Petreski

**EDITORS' NOTE** Lou Petreski brings more than 25 years of IT experience across a variety of industries, including finance and insurance, consulting, entertainment and media, and apparel. Prior to Active, his experience brought him abroad for several years as Country Chief Information Officer for GE Capital, Czech Republic. Before moving abroad, Petreski held senior positions at GE Capital, Trecom Business Systems, Viacom/MTV Networks, and Liz Claiborne.

**Will you discuss the critical role that technology plays within Active's business?**

As a client-centric company, technology plays a foundational role for us. Over the past several years, we have made significant investments to ensure that we have the latest technology to support the needs of our clients and our business. This includes enterprise infrastructure improvements, predictive modeling and analytics, adtech/martech platforms, e-commerce, and artificial intelligence.

**How did you approach your technology needs?**

We developed our technology strategy with a few key elements at the forefront. First, media, which is our largest practice area, has gone through tremendous disruption, and that isn't going to change any time soon. The accelerating pace of technological change, combined with consumer behavior that is driving this change, meant that we had to have platforms, applications, and solutions in place to enable our clients to engage with those consumers.

One of the ways we did this was through the development of a proprietary automated television platform called Xena. Powered by IBM Bluemix and machine learning technology, Xena enables us to aggregate local market inventory to create an automated national network. By automating the estimation of impressions and optimizing inventories, we are able to provide a cost advantage to our clients who are interested in placing national media, along with analytics to measure ROI.

We also offer a cross-channel, cross-device attribution platform with customized analytic tools. Whether it's online video, programmatic, social media campaigns, or device mapping, we're leveraging and building the latest technology to deliver audiences on behalf of our clients, based upon client-specific goals and objectives.

**Where does artificial intelligence fit into your business operations?**

Artificial intelligence and machine learning are being integrated into our business operations to help us better understand our client needs, which in turn will help us develop new solutions and services to help them achieve more. This might include identifying new areas for consumer engagement, faster ROI reporting, what-if scenarios, and other predictive analytics to help them gain more information more quickly. Of course, this data will also help us run our business more efficiently by helping us better identify growth opportunities and manage risk. As an IBM shop, Watson and Watson Analytics represent a strategic opportunity to integrate machine learning into our business so that we can enhance the solutions we deliver to our clients and run our business more effectively.

**How critical has it been to communicate these changes internally so the employees understand it?**

Communicating the implementation and launch of new technology to employees was critical. One of the things we did was implement an agility leadership program starting with senior leaders of the organization. This provided an ongoing opportunity to discuss the technology changes we were making, reinforce how they fit into the company's pivot to becoming a business solutions company, and provided a platform to discuss employee training and expectations. As part of this program, we created cross-functional teams from the business side to work on these projects with our IT team, to help deploy the new systems we committed to, and to reinforce their importance.

**With your global footprint, will this be a uniform system that is used internationally as well as domestically?**

Yes. Everything we do has a global deployment and we have global presence on the teams as well.

**As a pioneer in its category, will you discuss Active's transformation into more of a solutions company?**

We're looking at the customers' full range of needs, taking a holistic approach to end-to-end solutions and looking at where else we can provide value to the customers. All of our technology is focused on improving the bottom line for our clients, on improving the value we deliver, as well as for our business.

**How important has executive buy-in been in successfully implementing new technology?**

From a senior leadership standpoint, the commitment to technology and the understanding of how technology can propel an organization forward is absolutely critical. The buy-in, support, and sponsorship from our executive committee has ensured that all employees understand the benefits and the importance of our technology initiatives.

I'm fortunate to be CIO at a company that invests in technology and realizes what it can do for us.

**Will you talk about the evolution of the CIO?**

In the past, the CIO was viewed as a back-office function, but today, the CIO has a seat at the table. I'm part of the leadership team, which means I have a detailed and firsthand understanding of what our clients need and what they are asking for. This allows me to improve the value we deliver to the customer through technology.

**How much of a concern is cyber risk and cyber security, and how much can be done to safeguard against these concerns?**

This is one of the top 10 priorities for any organization. At Active, we're trying to be as proactive as possible by doing risk assessment, intrusion detection testing, and staying current with the latest factors that are available out there. Every organization is vulnerable and we treat this as a highest priority and are investing as much as we can to be proactive in this area.

**What is it about Active as a company that has made it a place you've wanted to stay for so much of your career?**

It's the entrepreneurship and senior leadership we have. Active is a forward-thinking company and the executive team has always shown a desire to improve and evolve.

**How important is it to build a better understanding that Active is a value-oriented business solutions company?**

We not only look at the problems at hand but we also look at what other services we can deliver as a whole, be it in travel, freight, media planning, or even a product we might not have yet. This is why we are calling ourselves a business solutions company. ●