

## Powered by Technology

An Interview with Melanie Kirkwood Ruiz, Chief Information Officer, ABM

**EDITORS' NOTE** As Chief Information Officer, Melanie Kirkwood Ruiz is responsible for several critical areas of ABM's business, including the optimization of ABM's IT infrastructure to enable greater business innovation; enhancement of service delivery through client-facing technology and data-driven insights; and development and execution of technology strategy that supports ABM's business transformation at both the enterprise and line-of-business levels. Kirkwood Ruiz is a progressive technology leader with



Melanie Kirkwood Ruiz

20 years of experience across diverse industries including technology, commercial real estate, manufacturing, healthcare and aviation. She joined ABM from Cushman and Wakefield's technology group, where she was responsible for developing and executing the technology strategy in the Americas. She has an MBA from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management and both a master's and a bachelor's degree in engineering from Cornell University.

**COMPANY BRIEF** ABM ([abm.com](http://abm.com)) is a leading provider of facility solutions. ABM's comprehensive capabilities include janitorial, electrical and lighting, energy solutions, facilities engineering, HVAC and mechanical, parking, landscape and turf and mission critical solutions provided through stand-alone or integrated solutions. ABM provides custom facility solutions in urban, suburban and rural areas to properties of all sizes – from schools and commercial buildings to hospitals, data centers, manufacturing plants and airports. ABM Industries Incorporated, which operates through its subsidiaries, was founded in 1909.

### How do you define ABM's mission and purpose?

Our mission is to make a difference to every person, every day with the purpose of taking care of the people, spaces and places that are important. From curbside to rooftop, ABM provides a comprehensive and essential range of facility services that includes janitorial, engineering, parking, electrical and lighting, energy solutions, HVAC and mechanical, landscape and turf, and mission critical solutions. Enabled by technology, ABM is focused on our client and team member experience through our use of data and modernizing our digital ecosystem.

### Will you discuss your role and key areas of focus?

Leading all technology strategy and operations for ABM, my team and I are focused on transforming a traditional IT model to a modern technology model

that focuses on driving value and revenue for clients, increasing client retention and elevating our use of data and insights with clients and our team members. Of course, we continue to bolster our security practices and technology as new threats arise, upgrading our current ecosystem, and designing and deploying new solutions using AI, machine learning and the like. Again, focusing on the business and our clients is first and foremost for our technology team.

### How has the role of the CIO evolved and how critical is it for the role to be engaged in business strategy?

Historically, you would see IT as a behind-the-scenes function for organizations. Now, it's critical to the success of an organization that the CIO/CTO and technology teams be at the forefront and entrenched in the business and with our clients. Previously, 80 percent to 100 percent of our time was spent on back-office IT, ERP and Infrastructure. It's now flipping to most of our time leading technology strategy and transformation for the business – our clients and operations. Providing the best-in-class client and team member experiences is our focus while keeping our landscape and data protected more than ever.

### How is ABM optimizing its IT infrastructure to enable greater business innovation?

In addition to modernizing our systems which will lay the foundation for the work ahead, this will fuel our data and advanced technology solutions. Innovation, new technologies, data science, Internet of Things (IoT), and extended realities will only be maximized with an optimized core such as the move to cloud computing and having a connected ecosystem. These alone will allow us to build valuable insights across technologies, connect to our clients seamlessly, and use the new tech and innovation to differentiate and have more adjacent client offerings. It will also allow us manage operations easier and increase our automation in the field.

### What are the keys to enhancing ABM's service delivery through client-facing technology and data-driven insights?

We have aligned our data solutions and client-facing technology completely with our corporate strategy and transformation office. This alignment puts both data and client tech at the forefront and is a game changer. We continue to invest in these areas and make them as agile as possible so we can incorporate our client's needs quickly and enhance our go-to-market product offerings with data and tech.

### How is ABM using technology to support its business transformation?

Our business transformation is 100 percent enabled and powered by technology. We will continue to modernize our entire ecosystem and add emerging technology to our portfolio. Our business transformation will be supported by upgrading our ERP and deploying a state-of-the-art workforce management system with advanced scheduling and forecasting to manage our 100,000+ person workforce. For example, we recently launched a smart parking solution on the West Coast that creates a powerful parking experience and insights for our clients. We continue to develop smart solutions for our clients in all our industry groups.

### Will you highlight ABM's commitment to building a diverse and inclusive workforce?

We cultivate a culture where our employee team members feel seen, heard and valued, and have the confidence that they belong and are receiving the encouragement and support needed to contribute and grow a career with us. Our leadership is committed to advocating for the value that comes with a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, which is being recognized at ABM and on my teams. Having team members with differing viewpoints can be beneficial for problem-solving and innovation. As part of one of our corporate social responsibility initiatives, we're building a pipeline of talent in technology and increasing the opportunities for involvement by a diverse and inclusive workforce. We are doing amazing and deliberate things here that turn our values and commitments into meaningful and measurable action.

### Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?

With an increased interest in diversity, equity and inclusion across the board in the past few years, women with an interest, the capability and the acumen for STEM have more opportunities than ever to lead. We must provide guidance to professionals and for future generations – nurturing the curiosity in STEM for young girls and women who have not yet entered the workforce. Industry leaders need to expand access, mentorship and engagement opportunities for women. These efforts help build the network and connections necessary for professional growth and success. For executives and other business leaders, taking the time to engage with minority or underrepresented communities can be eye-opening and a learning experience that can help broaden their horizons. Sometimes, you need someone to show you what you may not be able to see in yourself. ●