



TECH STAR



Mark Slaga: Dimension Data America's Technology Voice and Visionary

[By Akbar Ali]

As chief technology officer of Dimension Data Americas, Mark Slaga isn't just another techie expert—he's the driving force behind the company's technology vision, making sure that the specialist IT services and solutions provider maintains its competitive standard by constantly implementing new and innovative technologies into the company's offerings. Being one of the technological brains of a growing \$3.1 billion company is no simple task, but through a core set of professional values and personal ambition, Mark has become a recognized industry expert whose insights are as valued and nuanced as the technology he works with.

Mark's career in technology took root at the age of 19 during a summer telecom internship with the Air Force and Pentagon. He spent his days gaining exposure to the rapidly developing IT field while working nights waiting tables at ChiChi's. He recalled, "The busy summer certainly instilled in me the value of hard work. My internship was stimulating – I enjoyed learning more about new technologies and working with talented people, and the entire experience helped jumpstart my career."

The influence of his father was another important factor in his decision to pursue a career in technology: as an electrical engineer for the Navy, his father displayed an unimpeachable work ethic and attentiveness to details, ultimately moving up to direct international programs.

Mark earned his B.S. in Management Science-Decision Support Systems while an undergraduate at Virginia Tech, a time he described as "a fantastic experience." His time at college wasn't just hard work and studying, though; he managed to make it a fully rounded experience: "I participated in a social fraternity and intramural sports, enjoying the interaction and competition with other students."

Throughout his career he has furthered his academic and professional credentials,

taking executive courses at Kenan Flagler School of Business at the University of

North Carolina at Chapel Hill and earning certification as a Cisco Certified Internetwork Expert (CCIE) in 1996.

His first job after graduation was as an engineer with Texas-based IT services provider Perot Systems, where he worked on a project for a property and casualty insurance company designing the company's network infrastructure.

In 1997 he accepted a position at a boutique network consulting firm called RPM Consulting. It was at this firm that he began to assume leadership responsibilities, helping establish a new region for the company in eastern North Carolina.

Two years later RPM had been acquired, prompting Mark's advance to TimeBridge Technologies, which would later be acquired by Dimension Data. While at Dimension Data, he served as National Practice Director of IP Technology (IPT). His primary duties included building the company's IPT practice within the United States, which he achieved with great success: "We had a fantastic team, and the market was ripe for growth. Within two years, Dimension Data's IPT practice was Cisco's second largest in the U.S." The team which Mark managed was responsible for more than 400 IP telephony projects and the deployment of more than 250,000 IP phones, carrying Dimension Data to new heights by

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I love spending time at Atlantic Beach, NC, with my family. I also enjoy fishing and golf.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. I'm currently listening to *Getting Things Done*, a time management book by David Allen, on my MP3 player. I have also been enjoying music from *Three Doors Down*.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *CIO* magazine.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Shark*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. I don't have a single role model but instead try to emulate traits and qualities from a host of different people.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. My 4-year-old and 2-year-old are constant sources of laughter. I'm also a fan of slapstick movies.



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For Mark, this wasn't enough: he elected to assume additional tasks at Dimension Data, implementing a contact center practice as well as working on security and networking practices, which collectively have been beneficial both to the company and to Mark's career development.

"All of those leadership roles and technical components have been integral in my career formation. Now as Dimension Data's chief technology officer, I am responsible for the strategic direction of Dimension Data North America, as well as the management of all internal systems and technology," he said.

Among Mark's more memorable accomplishments was his leadership role in Dimension Data's IPT practice where he was able to achieve tremendous success in spite of the fact that he was unfamiliar with the technology and had never held such a high-profile position before. He noted, "The technology was new to me, and I had never run a national organization before.

Through a lot of hard work and collaboration with a talented team, we achieved notable success."

There have also been a number of mentors and influential colleagues who have played important roles in shaping Mark's perspective and career in technology. He notes that "you can't underestimate the importance of a mentor or trusted adviser to help guide you and address questions." Three mentors have been particularly instrumental throughout his career, all from different backgrounds and all of whom he still maintains close contact with: his father, the COO of TimeBridge, and the head of solutions and marketing at Dimension Data. They continue to offer valuable input when he utilizes their expertise as a sounding board for his ideas. Mark observed that "being able to bounce ideas off a wide variety of individuals is a great way to gather well-rounded feedback."

And the best career advice he's ever received? "The Golden Rule applies at work just like at home," he said.

To have achieved so much success in such a short period of time in an ever-changing and volatile industry like technology is a remarkable feat in itself. Over the years, Mark has gleaned much wisdom and asserts four key points to those just starting out: "I would tell young IT professionals to consistently push themselves beyond their comfort zones – when you challenge yourself, you'll reap rewards. Additionally, it is important to maintain a balance of reactive and proactive activities in every job you do. Also, listen to your clients and your employees. They can alert you to changes in perception and to important trends, and can also provide valuable feedback. Finally, ask advice from people you respect. The best decisions you will make are well-informed ones."

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