It’s hard to think of an industry-leading company that could survive without a great CTO. These important individuals and their teams play vital roles in making Los Angeles businesses, institutions and nonprofit groups successful. Their decisions often impact all aspects of a business, including their company’s growth, profitability, functionality and competitiveness in the marketplace.

This is our fifth year of celebrating the cream of the proverbial crop among Los Angeles’ finest IT leadership minds with an awards event for those who have their hands on the steering wheels of new technology. Our annual Los Angeles Business Journal CTO Awards, held Tuesday, June 7th at Casa del Mar in Santa Monica, give us the opportunity to stop for a moment and applaud the IT inventiveness and technological achievements of the corporate space’s hi-tech men and women – the often unsung architects and enablers of our companies’ operational successes.

Indeed, it’s the CTOs who are often charged with providing the operational tools required to match a CEO’s vision for a company. So for all the great CTOs celebrated by our awards this year, we say thank you and congratulations! Your tireless contributions to the companies you serve and ultimately, our business community as a whole, are appreciated.

Also, many thanks to the support provided by our presenting sponsor, Robert Half Technology.

This year’s list of superb finalists (all profiled in these pages) – each an example of excellence in the field of corporate technology stewardship – made it even more difficult to arrive at the honorees. We are particularly excited to shine a light on twelve particularly outstanding honorees announced in eleven categories. We applaud each of the honorees and the terrific finalists who are also profiled in these pages.

Best regards,

Matthew A. Toledo
Publisher & CEO

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DR. NEAL RICHTER  
CTO  
Rubicon Project

Dr. Neal Richter believes that the technology function of a company like Rubicon Project must embrace the needs of the customers, the market, its employees and its shareholders. This mentality has led Dr. Richter to break down typical corporate barriers and has defined his leadership style and focus to ensure that Rubicon Project’s roots as a technology innovator flow throughout the company. Moreover, in an environment of constant innovation, Dr. Richter mixes creative wisdom with scientific analysis.

While at many companies ensuring customer satisfaction starts and ends with a sales team, Dr. Richter has pioneered a different approach and has made it a personal mission to ensure engineering interacts and has a personal dialogue with customers on a regular basis. He believes that seeking out unsolved problems are among the best ways to truly understand the wants and needs of a customer is to be ingrained in the relationship from the onset. This has been an effort that he has championed throughout Rubicon Project and one that demonstrates his unique approach to the CTO role.

Using the Agile process across his team of approximately 230 engineers around the world, Dr. Richter enforces a dual workflow approach. The first workflow focuses on sound engineering fundamentals building scalable solutions with a focus on automation. The second is a longer-term innovation workflow where engineers talk to customers and prioritize needs based upon the scope of the need and the benefit to the customers. His leadership has enabled Rubicon Project Engineering to empower everyone on his team to decentralize tactical decision-making and prioritization and focuses on getting solutions up, running and out the door.

ALAIN AVAKIAN  
CTO  
BlackLine

In the two years that Alain Avakian has been CTO, he has dramatically increased BlackLine’s readiness for the future, all while continuing to foster an environment that makes BlackLine a great place to work. Avakian was hired as CTO of BlackLine in March of 2014, based on his skills learned from over 25 years of experience at several growing Internet companies where he was instrumental in providing the technology vision, strategy and leadership to help organizations scale from concept through public offerings, acquisitions and beyond, coupled with his rare mix of exceptional interpersonal and management skills.

BlackLine had been looking for a CTO with the ability to scale and optimize everything the company was doing from an infrastructure and development perspective. Under Avakian’s direction, the company now monitors every aspect of the platform from page load times, capacity, uptime, web, cache, database, key performance indicators, access permissions and more. Once he had given his team the tools to analyze all of the data, Avakian focused them to use the tools prior to deployment of any new release, to ensure every release has a net positive effect on performance. He focused the company on security and quality above all else, refusing to release any new feature to production that does not pass the strictest quality controls. He mandated 100% unit tests through test-driven development, hired 12 engineers to concentrate on QA Automation across the board, and buttoned up our software development lifecycle through very well defined sprint teams that integrate Quality Assurance from the get go.

As a result, today BlackLine’s availability metrics (average uptime of 99.999%) beat out the competition and the company has a customer retention rate of 98%.
EMERGING BUSINESS AWARD

JUSTYNA DENUIT-WOJCIK
Chief Technology Officer
Enplug

Justyna Denuit-Wojcik leads the largest department at Enplug, the engineering team. Because Enplug’s core product is a software solution, having an experienced and successful engineering leader is critical. Not only does Denuit-Wojcik oversee the engineering team’s product development, she also actively writes the core code used for Enplug’s software. Uniquely, the company is able to release new features each week because of Denuit-Wojcik’s diligent planning and focus.

As Enplug’s CTO, Denuit-Wojcik also provides mentorship and hands-on training to each member of the engineering team. Her team-first demeanor resonates through her entire department. As a result, the engineering team is constantly in communication with each other to ensure their individual code is compatible.

Denuit-Wojcik also spearheads the product ideation process. She created an easy-to-use online system for the entire Enplug team to contribute creative ideas and improvements for Enplug. Each month, she sends out a detailed performance report on all the new features developed and bugs fixed. When new product features are proposed, she collaborates with the sales team to calculate the potential new revenue generated. She also built an automated system to track the ROI of new features and how many customers actively use the additional functionality.

In short, Denuit-Wojcik has a keen understanding of how new technology and features translate into sales and marketing and other parts of the organization. She works closely with the sales team in order to bring on new business and with the support team to keep current customers happy. She sets high standards for current customer support by tracking the number of incident reports each week and communicating with the executive team how this data is decreasing over time and leading to more satisfied customers.

EMERGING BUSINESS AWARD

BROGAN BAMBROGAN
CTO & Co-founder
Hyperloop One

Brogan BamBrogan, (formerly known as Kevin Brogan, prior to changing his name after marriage), co-founded Hyperloop Technologies, Inc. – now known as Hyperloop One – and currently serves as the revolutionary transportation company’s Chief Technology Officer. Hyperloop is developing what it refers to as “the fifth mode of transportation.” It will allow the world to transport people and goods inexpensively, safely, and at speeds never thought possible.

High energy efficiency coupled with electric propulsion yield an energy elegant, carbon free mode of transportation. And to enable on-demand transport, Hyperloop pods are much smaller than most planes and trains and are designed to depart as often as every 10 seconds.

BamBrogan served as an Interim CEO of Hyperloop until September of last year. He had been an early team member at SpaceX where he saw firsthand the power of a truly bold vision. He is proud to have been part of a team that put rockets into orbit, delivered goods to and from the International Space Station, and is on its way to radically advancing human spaceflight.

As Senior Staff Engineer of Propulsion he played a critical role in some of the most difficult technical challenges faced by the company. He had primary design responsibility for Kestrel, the upper stage engine of the Falcon 1 rocket. He led the early design of the Dragon spacecraft, including detailed work on the Draco thrusters and primary heat shield. All of this work included hands-on support in every phase of design, analysis, fabrication, vendor & schedule management, development testing, assembly, and integration on the final launch vehicle or spacecraft. He now brings this unique set of skills and experience to his key technology-driven role in the creation of the future of ground transportation.
SMALL NONPROFIT AWARD
TAK FUJI
VP of Information Technology
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network

Tak Fujii was recruited to the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network as the organization’s tech leader to upgrade the technology needs for a growing enterprise. Fujii’s first action was to implement a strong information technology governance structure. He followed the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) framework and implemented Incident Management, Release Management, Problem Management, Service Desk, etc. to stabilize and create reliability from the existing network, server and application environment. While implementing each section of ITIL, he educated the information technology team on the merits of each. The greatest impact was the immediate stabilization of the “tech” environment. The increase in uptime and reliability generated under his stewardship provided Tak with credibility among his Executive Leadership peers opening a dialog where the information technology team could take on a greater role in supporting strategic business initiatives.

As an adjunct instructor, Fujii approaches the communication of the technology plan as an opportunity to educate and collaborate with his customers. Fujii has the ability to break down complex concepts and put them into lay terms, making them easy to digest and understand. He also uses current events to further communicate the value of implementing certain technologies such as security, which are necessary to provide a secure computing environment.

Fujii follows the philosophy of Gallup Strength Finder to leverage each of his team members’ innate strengths to position them for success. He does not focus on weaknesses, rather he spends time discovering what each team member’s natural inclination is and focuses on projects, tasks, etc. that will make each successful. Since each team member is able to work on projects and tasks that make them successful, the entire team is positive and works collaboratively to support the strategic goals of the organization.

LARGE NONPROFIT AWARD
SAJID AHMED
Chief Information and Innovation Officer
Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital

Sajid Ahmed is one of the C-suite executives at Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital. He was actually the second employee hired, after the CEO. Ahmed and his team are central to the hospital’s business, as it is his vision and their hard work that created the hospital’s state of the art IT infrastructure. He or a member of his department attends every clinical department staff meeting to keep informed of any IT needs or issues. Ahmed is hands-on on all projects and he himself is “in the trenches” every day.

Ahmed is one who leads by example, keeps himself informed, practices creative problem solving, and constantly challenges himself to succeed. He is often inspired by best practices in the industry and his first reaction is to create ways to improve upon them in his own organization.

An idea Ahmed has implemented across his entire HIT department was to establish a “buddy” system, pairing similar team members with each other on projects, encouraging them to seek creative, efficient workflow. His openness to new ideas is steeped in his quest for information and insight, where Ahmed keeps himself informed about all things Health IT as well as outside of the industry. Thorough research was key to his creatively designing the innovative HIT infrastructure of the hospital.

His leadership and direction to complete his vision ultimately led to the distinction of the hospital achieving Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society - Level 6 (a recognition that has only been bestowed to only approximately 20 percent of all hospitals nationally) within the first 6 months of its opening. This is truly an unprecedented accomplishment.
GOVERNMENT AWARD

DAVID ALEXANDER
Director of IT Security
Los Angeles Department of Water & Power

Deftly blending leadership skills and technical knowledge, David Alexander relies on empowerment, diversity, and engagement throughout his team at LADWP. He opts to promote leadership from within the team by encouraging the team to collaborate with and guide the stakeholders throughout the organization in a mutually beneficial manner.

Currently, Alexander is working on numerous cutting-edge projects for the DWP. His ability to understand security elements as they relate to a larger world and the need for critical infrastructure, further indicate his value to the community.

He engages in all levels of the organization. This is especially challenging as the organization is operationally and financially divided into three separately functioning units. He must manage three sets of liaison activities and continue to ensure a strategic and tactical execution of an enterprise IT security program. Where possible, Alexander attempts to draw all three organizations to the table in all aspects of his Security Program. He engages individual contributors with the value of cyber security, supervision and management in the principles of data protection, and executives in the support and value of IT security. These channels are continuously maintained and cultivated as each message channel has its value in the identified messaging.

Additionally, being in a civil service environment, Alexander has to accommodate the associated challenges to the hiring processes associated with such employment. He seeks people who are self-driven, motivated, great thinkers, and people who are adaptive. He provides these people with training by determining where the organization is headed, current operating gaps, and a clear idea of candidate capabilities. Currently, all of his employees have attained and maintain at least two security-related certifications – leading to a stronger, forward-looking team.

CYBERSECURITY PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

CHERYL F. SANTOR
CISO
Metropolitan Water District

Cheryl Santor is responsible for the cyber security of the Business and SCADA networks for Metropolitan Water District, servicing more than 19 million customers in the Southern California region. She and her team provide security measures to assure the safety and security of the water systems at MWD. She manages the Information Security Team, Customer Support Team, Software Compliance and Vendor License Management at MWD.

An example of her forward-looking nature, Santor started reviewing mobile technologies years ago when the first indication of business heading in this direction. Identifying risks and rewards for the business early on and conveyed that to management to investigate methods to providing applications in a secure method. She is involved with initiatives to provide secure mobile connectivity to the business network that incorporates mobile business applications to assist management with productivity in conducting work for the business. The business has started to adapt and engage in mobile technologies since the presentations.

She is always looking at emerging technology and how it will fit in the organization to understand the risks and identify the benefits to be gained. She recently assisted the SCADA Team to bring cyber security tools to provide vulnerability assessments, network mapping and configuration management in order for the team to have a continuous view of their network environment.

In addition, Santor was part of the team invited by ISACA to create the Cyber Security Nexus (CSX) program to provide a certificate to college graduates, individuals changing careers to Cyber Security or those interested in becoming cyber security professionals. This program was instituted to provide resources for the United States at large as it has been identified there is a shortage of Cyber Security professionals.
Henry Park’s 3GC Group is a consulting firm, value added reseller and managed services provider focused on Converged Networks Technologies servicing enterprise organizations globally. The company provides system design, implementation, integration and management services for a complete end-to-end turnkey solution.

Park started 3GC Group in 2003 as a result of enterprise businesses that were ill served by the technology service providers who were inexperienced with the new “Converged Networks” movement in technology; migrating all business communication applications onto a unified data network.

With expertise in all areas of business communications from fixed mobile convergence and cellular to Wi-Fi, PBX to call centers, email to instant messaging, video to video surveillance, network infrastructure to network security, software integration to hardware implementation, Park and his team at 3GC Group provide complete solutions utilizing the latest and best in class technologies.

Henry Park’s passion for technology and customer service is the driving force of his success as an effective IT service partner. He regularly demonstrates integrity, honor and leads through example.

Park is very much both a visionary leader and a team member. The passion he has for both business and technology is infectious and helps guide the organization. He focuses on bringing out ideas from the team and assign real accountability to mutually agree on a short, mid, and long term strategy for the direction of the company from all participants. This includes clear explanations on the business goals of the company, much of which evolves from feedback from the existing client base and partners, and together with the team, coming up with the technologies and service models to provide to 3GC Group’s clients.

The leadership team includes Dr. Ben Gordon, Vice President of Enterprise Infrastructure Services; Dan Restmeyer, Vice President of Corporate Systems; Debbie Simkins, Vice President for the Office of the CIO; Nitin Gotmare, Vice President of Healthcare Systems and Services; and Sudhakar Gummadi, the Vice President of Information Technology Security and Molina’s Chief Information Security Officer.

Each senior leader is extremely effective at establishing strong ties with Molina’s business and proficiently promotes his or her relationships through the executive levels of the organization. Each senior leader works to promote honest communication with the business that is both bi-directional and continuous. This effort by each assists to elevate the importance of IT’s role in the organization. Indeed, Molina IT’s senior leadership team and their relationships with the business are critical to the organization’s collective success. This is promoted and understood through all levels of the organization and has been embraced as the guiding principle. With a clear vision of the relationship that IT holds with the business, the senior leadership team can focus their teams on Molina’s mission to provide quality healthcare services to people receiving government assistance.
HONOREES

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

MARILYN GILLETTE
Director, Information Technology Services
J. Paul Getty Trust

Marilyn Gillette joined the Getty in 1997 when The J. Paul Getty Trust opened its Getty Center as the home of the world’s largest cultural and philanthropic organization dedicated to the visual arts.

Since launching in 1997 with Gillette among its key founding staff, and through ambitious projects in Los Angeles and around the world—including conservation work, publications, exhibitions, grant initiatives, and training programs—the Getty has worked to make a lasting difference in conservation practice, art historical research, and museology and to promote knowledge and appreciation of art among audiences of all ages.

During her 18-year tenure at the Getty, Gillette has provided outstanding leadership and consistent delivery of disciplined, reliable and high-quality IT services to support the Getty’s ambitious projects in Los Angeles and on a global level.

Prior to her essential infrastructure-building efforts on behalf of the Getty, Gillette was an IT Consulting Partner at Ernst & Young. She received her MBA from Pepperdine University and her BA in Computer Science from University of California, Santa Barbara.

Establishing the technology framework and all related systems for one of the most culturally significant organizations in the nation has been a task that surely can’t be overstated in terms of importance. Gillette’s trailblazing work has firmly cemented her status among the local legends of information technology excellence.

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ALBERT AHDOOT  
C O L O C A T I O N   A M E R I C A

Out of the things that make Albert Ahdoot such an excellent technology executive is that he listens with his ears, eyes and heart. He pays attention to others and understands that when leaders step down from their corporate perches a true conversation can take place. By taking a vast interest in the employees at Colocation America, he promotes communication through conversation — talking with employees and not just to them. This interactivity creates an open and fluid conversation. Ahdoot has a clear vision, plain and simple. His aptitude empowers him to effectively identify opportunities that someone with out his experience may not notice or know how to properly execute. His inspiration and vision in leadership allows Colocation America to be more lean and flexible, helping the company adjust faster than competitors. It also helps increase insight into how to improve the flow of delivering value to customers, and his insight helps Colocation America to quickly pivot the direction of the business when the time presents itself.

KUNAL ANAND  
P R E V O T Y

As co-founder and CEO of Prevyo, Kunal Anand not only leads the company’s engineering team, he is also heavily engaged with all of Prevyo’s strategic customers. He can, and does, therefore deliver guidance to the entire organization, not just on the technical elements of the product offering, but also on effective sales, marketing, operations and support aspects of the business. Each day Anand leads 30-minute “stand up scrums” that bring the entire engineering organization together. This has doubled efficiency, productivity and output in 2016. He also sets an example for employees by demonstrating how to code the hardest features. For example, Prevyo’s Web Services support was designed, coded and tested by Anand in less than one week — a project that typically takes six months! Each week Anand is participating in at least five customer meetings, either at their offices or via phone. Anand has a strong relationship with our customers, and in turn, they respect his thought leadership and amazing insights into the security industry as a whole.

SCOTT BURNS  
G O L D I N E ,   L L C

Scott Burns’ tech leadership abilities can best be described via a recent experience. Earlier this year, Goldline began its move to change the location of its headquarters, which houses nearly 160 employees. As Vice President of Technology, Burns was tasked with three major projects: moving from an analog phone system to a digital phone system, migrating all production systems to a data center and supporting Goldline’s relocation efforts. Burns did all this while also successfully managing other projects focused on innovative new product launches, business intelligence and daily demands that equated to hundreds of additional production changes in 2015. These tasks could not have been accomplished had it not been for the team-work fostered under Burns’ leadership. His goal is to create a safe environment where his teammates can express themselves without any judgment. Through this environment, employees feel more comfortable with taking innovative chances.

CAL NET TECHNOLOGY GROUP

Cal Net Technology Group is considered by many to be among the premier providers of IT Services in Southern California, because it understands its customers, their technological needs, and has built an exceptional organization that is accountable and delivers. This starts at the top of the organization with CEO Brian Kreiner and a focus on understanding businesses’ changing needs, which translates to the alignment of the entire Cal Net organization to the success of the companies it works with. Cal Net postures on cyber security awareness and education training with a team focused on the connection the business and technical aspects to deliver an overall solution and not just a point solution with services. As the Cal Net team continues to develop their skill sets through intentionally road-mapped certifications and team experiences, we see a transparent benefit afforded to the organization through higher value delivery.

JOHN COLEMAN  
G R A N D P O I N T   B A N K

At Grandpoint Bank, where the CIO is critical in almost all aspects of marketing, operations, finance and risk management, John Coleman brings to the table his skills as a problem solver, deep thinker of how relationships connect, and advocate and leader in cyber security. Coleman’s colleagues report that he is particularly good at balancing risk and growth objectives — something not always seen in a tech executive.

TIM COLLINS  
J U S T F A B

Tso Collins’ tech leadership style and approach at JustFab are all about respect, calm and remaining ego-less. He has incredible respect for people and genuinely values their opinion. He listens intently — which can be hard to pull off as a busy CTO with 20 different things happening at any given minute. He respects others’ time and values opinions regardless of level or reporting structure. Collins has been able to work with the Senior Leadership team directly in communicating the strategy, roadmap and contributions of his team and how that affects the KPIs he’s working with. Collins knows that that model has worked in the past during JustFab’s growth but that the company is at the tipping point where that model is inconsistent and not scalable to the company’s current size. Collins also understands the importance of having this visibility across the entire organization and not just the Leadership team and is actively working on a plan to expand that communication.

SEAN DANIELS  
W I L D W O O D   S C H O O L

At Wildwood School, Sean Daniels, the school’s Technology Director, looks to align technology initiatives and school goals. He constantly works to build a strong IT foundation, and help ensure that technology is helping Wildwood deliver on its mission of providing top tier education for its students. In one example, Daniels has taken an innovative focus on cloud solutions to provide 24/7 access for education while reducing cost. In another example, as the head of the IT and Ed tech department, Daniels has been integral in laying the groundwork for the development of Wildwood’s new technology learning space (techad). The space allows students to exercise their creativity around areas of technology that include designing, building and tinkering. He is also working with educators to drive their “innovation labs” and spearheads specialized lesson plans with this program, helping Wildwood to use IT as part of its curriculum.
Pablo Da Silva
New Horizons Learning Group

Pablo Da Silva has worked hard to create an environment where his employees are comfortable, happy and most importantly, growing personally and professionally. All New Horizons Learning Group IT team members have free access to all of New Horizons’ training offerings, and are encouraged to take advantage of them to develop themselves.

As a technology training company, Da Silva strongly believes in being on the cutting edge of technology. In addition to leading a successful business unit, he is a highly personable leader that creates a favorable environment for employees. Recognizing that financial success is driven more by people, Pablo is not afraid to make changes to that. A true leader who goes above and beyond to ensure that his employees are comfortable, happy and most importantly, growing personally and professionally. All New Horizons Learning Group IT team members have free access to all of New Horizons’ training offerings, and are encouraged to take advantage of them to develop themselves.

Marc Entous
Stephen Wise Temple

Marc Entous is a proud alumnus of Stephen Wise Temple Early Childhood Center, Elementary School, Middle School and Nossay summer camp. Additionally, Entous helped organize and teach the Temple’s children’s Morning Minyan program for nine years. His parents have been members of Stephen Wise Temple since 1965. Having had Stephen Wise Temple as a backdrop for much of his youth, Entous now makes the Temple his professional home as well.

Entous began working as a Database Consultant for the Activities and Youth offices, and, in August 2001, became the Database Manager for Stephen Wise Temple and Schools. As of July 1, 2015, Entous took on the role as the Temple’s Director of Information Technology.

Victor Gajendran
Ticketmaster

Victor Gajendran is a unique technology leader who goes above and beyond his immediate mandate to take his team and the organization to the next level of performance and achievement. He creates a values-driven organization that drives his team towards problem ownership and the best kind of internal motivation leading them to do their best, most creative and innovative work. The results speak for themselves.

Gajendran can take a demotivated and overwhelmed operations group and turn it into a values-driven cohesive team that accomplished truly amazing goals. By focusing the team on core business values rather than short term goals, relentlessly communicating with all stakeholders, championing uncompromising transparency, aligning every task with the company’s strategic vision and motivating people by their participation in value creation, Gajendran has led his team to build a state-of-the-art continuous delivery pipeline that launched software 8 to 10 times a day. Thanks to these efforts, Ticketmaster literally took months of cycle time and reduced it to hours.

Lori Getz
Cyber Education Consultants

Since 2004 Lori Getz has worked as an Instructional Technologist in Los Angeles. She has a Master of Arts in Educational Technology from San Diego State University and is certified by iso.org as an Internet Safety Specialist. In 2009, she founded Cyber Education Consultants and began speaking to parents, teachers and educators about Internet safety, security and ethics. Since that time she has reached out to Internet users across the world.

Her mission is simple – to help bridge the gap between a young generation of digital natives and their parents and teachers.

Today, Cyber Education Consultants provides workshops, professional development and consulting services to more than 100 schools across the country. She is on the cutting edge of innovation when it comes to technology in schools. She has developed a comprehensive program that integrates IT policy, security policy and school policy and delivering technologies to teachers and students.

David Girdner
Antropy

Antropy, which was co-founded by David Girdner, has a proven track record of delivering robust, cost effective IT solutions to small businesses throughout Southern California. Founded in 2001, by Girdner and Jody Marc Cohn, Antropy provides a wide variety of Information Technology services to a diverse set of clients ranging from single user home offices to corporations with multiple locations across the nation.

Girdner and his firm service a list that includes accounting firms, private K-12 schools, entertainment companies, law firms, and medical practices.

Under Girdner’s stewardship and technical know-how, Antropy is committed to providing excellent service and robust IT solutions that fit the needs of a variety of businesses. He strives to develop partnerships with his clients to ensure the highest levels of service and satisfaction.

Hugo Gordillo
Capgemini

Hugo Gordillo of Capgemini is a Service Delivery Manager responsible for the design, implementation, operation, and governance of best practice ITIL Service Management processes and tools for medium to large enterprises. He works closely with global infrastructure and application delivery teams to ensure compliance with SLAs. He partners with the customer for the development and implementation of each IT service strategy, service management methodologies, and designs for new services.

Gordillo works closely with Capgemini’s customers to understand business requirements and deliver solutions on the ServiceNow and BMC Remedy platforms. He has expert level knowledge of Incident Management, Problem Management, Change Management, Release Management, Asset Management, Network Infrastructure Management, Service Desk, and IT Outsourcing. His strengths include leadership, communication, process development to implementation to improvement, technical operations management and business relationship management.

Mark Govatos
Crossroads School

At Crossroads School, Mark Govatos has a unique perspective of how an IT organization should deliver for its user base as he has been with the organization for close to 30 years, starting as a Mathematics Instructor, moving to Mathematics Department Chair, and leading the Computer Science division before moving into IT administration.

From these roles Govatos understands the complexities of how a school operates and the role that IT plays in the education process. He has insight to the needs of the teaching staff, department staff, and administration staff. This has helped him create deep relationships with all of Crossroads constituents and he has become a vital part of the school’s staff. He has a hand in the day to day running for all technology of the school. He has been given the responsibility of negotiating all contracts and keeps open line of communication with all vendors or personnel that have to do with the schools technology needs.
LUCA JACOBELIS  
CAL NET TECHNOLOGY GROUP

Luca Jacobellis came up through the ranks as the very first employee of Cal Net and learned every aspect of the business as he rose from technical perspective and a business perspective. He has experience in all areas, from engineering to administrative to management, and is able to apply that vast experience to help him relate to the various departments within the Cal Net culture, bringing together groups with different priorities and agendas.

Because of Cal Net’s steady growth and success over the last twenty years, it is a complex company comprised of many moving parts that must work together seamlessly in order to function successfully. Jacobellis’ primary role as Chief Operations Officer is responsible for the general success of the operations of the company as a whole, from every aspect of IT to engineering. He includes his staff in key areas of the company’s structure to ensure that all departments are well informed about ongoing needs as well as the latest projects that are being planned.

JEFF JENSEN  
MICHELMAN & ROBINSON

Jeff Jensen is well respected at all levels of the Michelman & Robinson organization and the firm’s management trusts him implicitly. Last year the firm made a major move of over 60 attorneys and staffers from their Encino office to a new Westwood office. Jensen led all aspects of this move, which included continuously keeping the executive committee abreast of the move.

Jensen oversees Michelman & Robinson’s technology plan. In the last year alone the firm has seen major upgrades to phones, computers, video conferencing, backup servers, and disaster recovery, among others. And while he has pulled all of this off without a hitch, he has truly excelled in communicating the changes to the firm. He has delivered the message through email, lunch & learn, partner meeting, executive meetings, and the like. He also works to make sure all members of his organization have a chance to give input on decisions and are kept in the loop about changes and updates.

Winston Johnson

At Gotham Media, Winston Johnson believes working closely with his executives to understand where he is headed with the company product strategy. Developing a clear product vision and identifying the strategic goals that are most important to the organization -- with metrics based around revenue growth, customer acquisition, reducing churn, etc. Johnson understands that if the stakeholders can agree upfront on vision and strategic goals, there will be less confusion about product priorities later on.

Johnson believes in using a high-level roadmap to talk the executives through a handful of plans. Open communication with department heads in engineering, sales, marketing, and customer support is essential. He discusses their top priorities with them and determines together how those priorities fit into larger themes and strategic goals. Johnson also promotes improvement of the livelihood of his owners, managers, and employees -- increasing compensation levels and offering performance bonuses or additional vacation time.

NOAM KATZ  
TUITION.IO

Noam Katz ensures that the technology powering Tuition.io’s student loan contribution platform is seamless, scalable, and secure for its clients. In March, Fidelity Investments signed on as a client and within weeks, Tuition.io’s platform was powering student loans for 5000 Fidelity employees.

The onboarding process was flawless. Taking insights from the consumer version of Tuition.io, Katz built the infinitely scalable enterprise product from the ground up and hired third party commissioned penetration testers. The “ethical hacking” tests came back with a perfect score. Tuition.io’s platform is built with end-to-end encryption, and is encrypted down to the core of the database level. Within Tuition.io, many of its employees have student debt themselves, so they understand the burden and feel a strong connection to the product.

Katz’s team is mission-driven. Every line of code that Katz’s engineering team at Tuition.io writes contributes to the greater good of helping solve the student loan crisis.

YONG LI  
ENGAGE:BDR

Yong Li has more than ten years software development experience and six years of digital advertising industry experience. He joined engage:BDR in its early stages and helped build the engineering team from the ground up. Prior to that, he worked in multiple startups and research centers, which helped him develop agile and open-minded technical expertise.

When Li arrived at engage:BDR in 2010, the engineering team had only a couple of people. After restructuring it and ensuring more fluidity and efficiency, he now manages a team of 15, including an offshore team. Part of his strength lies in his openness. Li has an open-door policy for any team members and also holds weekly one-on-ones with them. This way, he ensures that all problems appear on his radar and that his team members are equipped to solve them.

Li’s vision has encouraged engage:BDR employees to think not just a few months in advance, but one year in advance.

BRAD MARYMAN  
MARYMAN & ASSOCIATES

Brad Maryman is an experienced computer forensics consultant. Prior to founding Maryman & Associates, he served as a Supervisory Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation for 29 years. During that time, Maryman conducted and supervised investigations, and served as an Information Systems Administrator and Security Program Manager. Maryman has conducted forensic data acquisition, retrieval and analysis on a multitude of digital evidence including electronic business records, network logs and encrypted files. Additionally, Maryman has a wide range of electronic discovery experience, specifically recovering and processing electronic records produced by a variety of computer operating systems and applications.

In 1991 he founded the FBI’s first Computer Analysis Response Team (CART) and served as its team leader. He established the agency’s first state of the art computer forensics laboratory, which is now replicated across the nation. Drawing on his years of training and experience with U.S. Government Investigation processes, he has consulted for corporations and public agencies to perform all scope security assessments and special analysis reviews.

NOAH PETERSEN  
TM FINANCIAL FORENSICS LLC

Mx Peteresen, the IT Manager for TM Financial Forensics, LLC is excellent at applying high-end technology solutions to meet the needs of his business. TM Financial Forensics is a national business and disputes consulting firm specializing in financial, accounting, economic, engineering, scheduling and damages analyses.

As a one-man IT shop within the organization, he does an exceptional job and is dedicated to excellence. He is very responsive to business needs and is always looking to do things better for the businesses he works with. Recently, he has been working on a secure high-availability network for the organization.

JIM PUERNER  
TUTOR PERINI CORPORATION

Jim Puerner created a three-year strategic plan for Tutor Perini Corporation’s IT processes and cascaded it through the entire organization. When it comes to his key to successfully leading the initiatives he’s completed, he explains that “It’s extremely important to be open and share what you’re doing and why. Providing that context and giving people a chance to express their concerns helps gain alignment for your plans and initiatives.”

Puerner also uses a very formal strategic planning model that starts with the company’s mission and strategic plan. He’s quick to point out that the business strategy should drive the IT strategy. His IT strategic plan cascaded to a set of Key Strategic Initiatives (KSI) which are then synthesized to 0-18 month objectives. The KSI and objectives become part of his team’s development plan. Puerner employs technologies that are sustainable, supportable and repeatable. This allows Tutor Perini to leverage its collective buying power and deploy solutions extremely cost effectively.
RAJ RAJKOTIA
NEXTGENTM, LLC

Rai Rajkotia as a senior IT executive leader has worked and managed large teams at Toyota, Westfield, Bank of America and General Motors. Learning best practices from these large organizations, he has built NextGen TM and applied lean strategies to help clients leverage technology. His company and team specialize in a new wave of disruptive technologies such as Social, Mobile, Analytics (Big Data) and Cloud.

Rajkotia has consistently provided transformative strategies and consulting services to client companies since 2005. He has a strong background in Finance and Technology Management that has helped companies transform and currently they are an emerging Technology Startup Incubator Company for the Los Angeles region. Rajkotia and NextGen TM have incubated several startups and have successfully launched FundDreamer, a Technology Startup Incubator Company for the Los Angeles region.

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Advait Shinde
GOGUARDIAN

Advait Shinde is a leader who loves to code. This creates an interesting dynamic. When it comes to code, he is in total bliss impacting the future of GoGuardian and its entire engineering department. As a co-founder, Shinde is fully invested in developing the company’s business plan, pricing models, and future product roadmap.

Shinde develops his team by allowing them unprecedented levels of responsibility and authority. He shows immediate trust in team members, whether seasoned veterans or new hires, knowing that the more ownership someone has of a project, the more likely they are to “sweat the details.” He looks for independent spirit, collaboration, enthusiasm, and technical prowess in new hires and because he is a coding prodigy, there is a very high bar that must be met by all new employees in engineering. He is constantly hosting discussions, Q&As, and panels with his team, and speaks at other events around LA discussing technical problems he and his team have solved.

NAVEEP REDDY
ENPLUG

At Enplug, Naveep Reddy communicates his technology plans and business value through the organization by constant education. Every member of the company is expected to have a high level understanding of the technology used. Individual project managers are encouraged to perform their own research on technology solutions and suggest superior choices to the incumbent solutions. The process made in making technology decisions is always clearly laid out by Reddy and his team and critiques are not only allowed, but also expected.

Creative thinking is promoted and fostered by Reddy via extremely high levels of cross company communication. A high level of understanding of the core product company-wide produces a fertile environment for innovation. Processes are improved, new features are developed, and issues are resolved by this persistent collaborative interchange - directly impacting business efficiency positively for increased revenue generation and high levels of agility that is a significant competitive advantage in an industry, which adheres to ‘traditional paradigms.’

JOHN SIEGEL
SKID ROW HOUSING TRUST

As CTO for Skid Row Housing Trust, John Siegel has proven himself to be an adaptable leader with a strong business sense and extremely high technical skills. His tenure as CTO has led to the cultivation of his ability to listen to his team and incorporate different perspectives leading to the success of his endeavors.

Siegel is a collaborative person and doesn’t dictactor where the team is going but allows his team members to collaborate with each other and develop their own ideas and skills. He generates consensus. His attitude and approach of not having all the answers has helped him to garner support for his programs and initiatives. He views all of his achievements as being the result of teamwork and he quickly offers the credit to his remarkable staff rather than accepting any credit for himself. The success of his team, however, is without question a direct reflection of his vision, leadership, and support.

HOVIG SAFOIAN
SADA SYSTEMS INC.

Over his 35-year career and 16 years of running SADA Systems, Hovig Safoian has fostered many teams whether in infrastructure and development, or business development and design. Safoian believes in grassroots initiatives and through his open communication, he has fostered creative thinking by making the "impossible" possible. He allows young minds to flourish through diversification, participation in hackathons, and close relationship/trainings with gurus at Google and Microsoft. Safoian regularly encourages IT and tech teams to not just create products and services, but also create what people need and want to make their lives better and their work easier.

Safoian keeps a flat structured environment, giving employees the opportunity to share creative ideas and solutions with managers and executives openly and support to solutions to address customer needs. But every idea has to be supported with SWOT analysis and potential costs vs. projected revenues. This allows the team to always develop for the every changing market and impact customers.

HERSEL SHOUMER
LA NETWORKS

Armin working at large enterprise corporations for 16 years and achieving the highly regarded Cisco-CBIE certification in 1997, Hersel Shoumer formed LA Networks, an IT consulting and networking company. LA Networks’ mission has always been to become its clients’ trusted advisor by delivering best of breed solutions. Since its humble beginnings, LA Networks was built as engineering and consulting firm with extensive expertise in the areas of Unified Communications, Wireless, Data Center Architecture, Wide Area Networks, and Local Area Networks. The LA Networks differentiator is a passion to deliver excellent value and service to its customers and partners.

Since he launched, Shoumer has demanded excellence from his partners and employees by the following core principles: Honesty and Integrity, Leadership, Family values, Open Communication, and Passion in Technology. LA Networks has grown to become one of the best-known privately held and highly technical IT solution providers in Southern California, with over $25 million in annual revenue.

STAN STAHL
CITADEL INFORMATION GROUP

Stan Stahl, Ph.D. is the President of Citadel Information Group. A pioneer in the field of information security, Dr. Stahl entered the field in 1980. He has been committed during his entire career to information security and process improvement. Whether as a pioneer in the development of the first firewalls, or as a current trusted advisor to small and medium business, Stan works tirelessly to make sure that business understands the risk of not properly securing their computers and understands how to work towards the goal of fulfilling both legal and ethical obligations to secure information. He is highly respected within the community and by his own team.

Dr. Stahl works with each client and student to make sure that they understand the critical aspects and benefits of securing their systems. He is only interested in making sure that they improve their standing as businesspeople, and is repeatedly interested in their success.
Michael Sylvester, LA County Department of Public Social Services

Michael Sylvester is Department Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Assistant Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS). He is paving the way with his leadership, with an emphasis on utilizing leading edge technology throughout Los Angeles County to modernize our systems and make the most of contemporary technology.

Sylvester looked to modernize mission critical technology solutions to fill the gap between demand and resources. He successfully communicated this vision to the department’s executive team who provided their full support, and to his IT management team and staff who were critical in bringing his vision to fruition. For example, in 2010 Sylvester and his team developed a Mobile Technology Initiative to identify, shape and deploy modern mobile technology that could improve efficiency and customer service.

This initiative extended public assistance services beyond the traditional office visit, improving customer service and organizational efficiency by enabling self-service through mobile and browser-based technology.

David Watts, Netfuzion, Inc.

Netfuzion’s CIO, David Watts is very detail oriented and incredibly thorough, and ensures that his clients’ expectations are aligned with his own and those of his team. He places special emphasis on clear communication. He focuses first on clarifying and articulating the client’s business objectives. Secondly, he lays out for the clients how technology can best accomplish those objectives along with the pros and cons of each choice. He works to perform all of this within the context of the client’s specific objectives, infrastructure, budget, and compliance requirements.

Another strength that Watts exhibits is his long-standing business relationships, not only with clients, but also with his connections within the industry and outside his industry throughout Los Angeles. Watts supports the growth of other businesses through his involvement in Provisors, a network of business professionals and advisors, and through collaboration with other IT related vendors.

Ken Weiner, GumGum

Ken Weiner joined GumGum as its first employee in 2007 and in the eight years since then has grown his engineering team from zero to 30. During this time, he groomed five people for management roles and successfully elevated them to leadership positions within the organization. Before GumGum, Weiner developed his leadership skills as an engineering manager at LowerMyBillS, where he helped lead his team in re-architecting their entire lead generation and API testing platform to be based on modern web development frameworks. Through his leadership, the engineering team was able to scale the platform and adapt to different product verticals, leading to the company being acquired by Experian for $330 million.

At GumGum, Weiner has enabled the engineering team to consistently demonstrate its position as an industry leader around several software engineering disciplines. He frequently encourages team members to author papers and present at various technology conferences and meetups.

Ben Widhelm, CREXi

Ben Widhelm is a passionate, product-focused innovator. His technology expertise and drive to produce cutting-edge products inspires his team and clients. His opportunistic approach and openness provokes his team to add pockets of value to their work. He possesses deep technical skills and is able to solve complex issues quickly and effectively.

With his ample experience building deep technology solutions at Burstly and leading engineering teams at Millennial Media, Widhelm possesses the natural leadership to steer the CREXi team to prosperity. At CREXi, recruiting and developing top-level engineering talent is among Widhelm’s highest business functions. He empowers leads associated with the functional components of the platform to share their domain expertise through structured and unstructured deep dive sessions. Where many technology executives and managers are overly protective of their code bases, junior team members are able to get their hands dirty and develop tools and support systems that bring them along much faster than in other firms.

Jonathan Wong, Playboy Enterprises, Inc.

Playboy originally recruited Jonathan Wong for his skill sets in building and migrating large enterprise infrastructure and technology at the cusp of a private equity acquisition. The acquisition involved the collapse of 15 legacy sites, the ground-up build of a new world class headquarters; the migration of multiple petabytes of data; and the reverse engineering of hundreds of home grown applications within a short timeframe. Wong adapted existing technologies to the newly defined business model, which was to transform the 60-year-old business from media empire to brand management company. He then began to shift a new pool of custom applications to drive revenue initiatives for the newly designed business.

Within his first three years, IT operational costs were reduced by 43% and performance gains were seen across the board by up to 900%, while still adhering to enterprise best practices. Wong is currently working directly with Private Equity on building a shared services model of IT to help build operational efficiencies through economies of scale across Playboy’s portfolio companies.

Yao Vinterfeld, LA Tech Network

Yao Vinterfeld started at LA Tech Network over 18 years ago at an entry-level position, and has held almost every position in the organization. This depth of knowledge about the company from the ground up has given him a deep understanding of the systems and processes. Vinterfeld knows how accounting functions in relation to the web store, how the sales team interacts with the technical support team. He has been a part of the product roadmap for most versions of the software and even proposed and saw to completion the development and deployment of an iOS app of the company’s product.

This intimate knowledge of the interconnected systems helps the Vinterfeld to effectively communicate with the executives who run each department. He understands their needs, who their department affects and how it is affected by others within the company. He is also able to encourage communication between departments and find ways for them to achieve common goals more efficiently.

Phil Walker, Network Solutions Provider

Phil Walker instinctively understands that building is not necessarily about invention, but about the process of making an invention real. He is constantly energized by new ideas, yet has the staying power to see them through to fruition. Walker is happiest and most driven at the start of things. He instinctively sees new opportunities for new products, new companies, spot niche markets; take ideas and make them real.

The process he has implemented at NSP has created an execution-based focus. Using innovation and out of the box solutions are among the reasons NSP is one of the fastest growing cyber security solutions providers in the country. Walker has also created best of breed solutions for NSP’s internal office as well as its customers, giving the company a technology only empowerment solutions process that gives the company a competitive advantage. NSP solutions have created 102% increase in revenue.

Paul Sunok

Paul Sunok, who serves as the Director of Agile360 (a division of Entsys Solutions, Inc.), is always looking forward to helping his clients get better at what they do. He looks at business needs and attempts to find ways for his company to help them meet these needs in the best way. He’s always asking strategic questions, but more importantly, really wants to help his clients grow and get better.

What really tends to impress those who work with Sunok is that he is always looking to find new and innovative ways to implement better and better solutions while staying within the customer budget. He’s perpetually willing to go the extra mile to do the right thing, do it quickly, and do it at the right price. On top of that, his team is dedicated to excellence and repeatedly surprises us with their level of skill.

PAUL SUNOK
AGILE 360, A DIVISION OF ENSYS SOLUTIONS, INC.

October 13, 2016

Yao Vinterfeld led LA Tech Network for an 18-year career. His passion was to advance the organization from a small startup into a growing company that was recognized as a leader in the tech industry.

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“Safeguarding our clients’ money is a sacred trust.”

C.J. Walker, Founder, 1907

What was true 108 years ago, is still true today.

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California’s Strongest, since 1907