

Microsoft's global teams apply FT trusted insights to guide successful business decisions

ft.com/group



The challenge

As one of the world's Big Five technology companies, Microsoft employees across the world need access to trusted and reliable insights that can be held with the high standard that their reputation demands.

The solution

Microsoft's corporate library rolled out an FT Group Subscription to all their staff, offering award-winning information to add an edge to their conversations with customers and partners, and to ensure staff are building out the bigger picture for business decisions.

The benefits

Not only do they have access to this business information that helps guide their decisions, but Microsoft employees can also customise their content by region, customers and business areas, to ensure their information is topical, credible and irrefutable.



It's very difficult to discern legitimacy and illegitimacy in today's world. For trusted brands like the FT, it's more important than ever for those publications to reassert that value proposition and reassert that they are the places where you look for the truth.

Virl Hill

Head of Worldwide Business Development & Strategy, Media & Entertainment, Microsoft



Large corporations have a larger footprint

One of the world's largest corporations, Microsoft develops, licenses, manufactures, supports, and sells computer software, consumer electronics, personal computers, and related services.

Ranked No. 21 in the 2020 Fortune 500 rankings of the largest United States corporations by total revenue, the corporation is considered one of the domestic Big Five technology companies.

Over the past few years, there's been a greater focus from the company on Cloud technology, software for organisations, and crafting solutions for companies to operate at their optimum performance.

Working with companies around the world requires a strategy of proactivity over reactivity, and a global intelligence that is expected of a company of its size. Viril Hill is the head of worldwide business development and strategy in Microsoft's Media & Entertainment Division.

"I'm predominantly focused around enabling media companies, publishers, and content creators to move their workflows, their data and insights solutions into the cloud."

His role requires an exceptional amount of global insight to ensure the growing division continues to expand. Working with several clients isn't uncommon at Microsoft, however.

Corporations and businesses purchase a product through a partner of Microsoft, and that partner handles the transaction for them. Steven Parry, a

partner success manager for the UK arm of Microsoft, sits in this side of the business, operating with a goal of ensuring the partners have a wide-reaching understanding of commercial needs, and that the partners are as globally focused as possible.

"We support our partners in enabling those customers with the right technology, that we've got the right partners from an industry skills perspective, from a technology workload perspective, with the goal that those projects and those engagements are running successfully," he said.

Ensuring solutions are at their best is a large part of Steven's role, and this is replicated in the US with Sam Sides, a solution specialist for modern workplace, modern applications, IOT and data analytics.

He engages with Microsoft's Western enterprise customers, to ensure that Microsoft's Azure software is deployed appropriately throughout companies.

"I work with the largest customers we have, and craft solutions that leverage our technology, and help them implement it," Sam said. "I help sell projects and programs that customers use to accelerate the adoption of our software."

Working with such a long list of clients can come with information challenges, particularly when communicating across borders.

A US corporation, the company was keen to ensure that a library of materials was available for their staff, from all around the world, that would help to ensure that the insights they received were as global and far-reaching as possible. This is where the Financial Times was brought in to help.



The Financial Times is credible, and it's reliable, and it's an information source that I can trust. Microsoft employees can and will benefit from access to the FT, because there's just such a wealth of information available to them from the FT.

Steven Parry

Partner Success Manager, Microsoft



Reputation of success, and reputation to be further ahead

The requirement of being one-step-ahead is something that runs through Microsoft as a whole, and having the FT as an information resource was a vital addition.

“There’s no option to fail,” Sam said. “We’re held to a high standard and commensurately we are priced accordingly. We have to deliver on the outcomes that we commit to.”

Without the skill set, and the information available to staff, it would be a challenge to provide this high level of service to their clients. The FT is one useful global asset that can do this. Steven offers further insight into the competition Microsoft has in certain fields.

“Most of these partners I work with happily sell competitor products and services, so we need to stay a step ahead of the game. How we’re enabling them, supporting them, and prepping them to be ready for whatever the next wave of technologies is that comes in, is so vital so that we’re not on the backfoot.”

But enabling and supporting them doesn’t just come from the services Microsoft provides as a company.

From an employee standpoint, you have to be seen as a reliable and trusted source of information. To perform at such high levels requires a high degree of intelligence in your subject matter, and your client’s business markets.

Steven utilises the FT regularly in his conversations with partners. “You can take snippets from FT articles, or an infographic that you’ve seen, reference it in conversation, and it comes with such credibility. It’s such a useful tool.”

Changes in society, market and global work

Of course, with such a large company and such a large remit of clientele, Microsoft has to be on the pulse of changes in society, business and markets.

Oksana Meleshykhina is an engineering program manager for Microsoft Teams, and having worked for the company for the last five years, she is now covering the UK, Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium, and Denmark for the product group.

Working with this many countries asks a lot of Oksana to be keeping in the loop with the international progression, and how a business’ requirement can change.

“The Microsoft Teams engineering product group is a part of the company which writes the code for Microsoft Teams, maintains the services and runs the teams in the customer facing role,” Oksana said. “I talk to customers to understand how they use our technology and feedback to our designers and the engineering team what needs to be done to address a customer’s business requirements.”



Reading the FT makes me more relatable. I’m able to engage more deeply with those that I work with, that I’m selling to, or who I’m partnering with. I view it as an essential part of my role.



Sam Sides

Solution Specialist Modern Workplace, Modern Applications, IOT and Data Analytics at Microsoft

A vast number of countries, with a vast array of information needed to keep in touch with national changes, Oksana said it doesn't come without potential difficulty.

"To keep up to date with what's happening on top of your normal day to day job is impossible. So, this was the challenge, navigating in the sea of knowledge."

"Without the FT, I wouldn't be as prepared," she said. "The most important facet to my job that the FT affects is the perception that this is a serious publication which I can refer to whilst not questioning it, alongside so much data sources and truth. This is probably the one source where I can find anything to do with the financial markets, and understand how my customers are doing."

Whilst financial markets are an important part of understanding your customers, finance is not the only thing customers and partners need you to be aware of to be a good asset.

Societal changes and leadership alterations are going to help a relationship and rapport build much more for those client-facing roles within Microsoft. Steven's role has a requirement for a wide ranging view of what's happening globally, which he said is key to how Microsoft operates.

"You can get an edge going into those conversations with those partners, if you have a broader understanding of what's happening in that partner's business," he said.

"How they are as a company, are they going forward or going backwards, are they flat, what does the makeup of their organisation look like: these are all important questions to know the answers to."

"I find that I need to stay current on not only my customers and their business problems, but also the industries in which they operate," Sam said. "These factors that drive those businesses to make decisions, I have to know inside out."

"For this, the FT is my go-to global source of information. It allows me to stay current, and to make sure that I understand because ultimately, when you're selling to senior leaders, representing a knowledge of what's happening in their world and their situation is critical."



I'm a technical person, and for any technical person it's a window in a different world. The FT helps to build out the bigger picture for understanding your customers, the financial situation and trends, and where the world is going.



Oksana Meleshykhina

Microsoft Teams Engineering Program Manager, Microsoft



Easy access to FT content

This requirement for not only global knowledge, but current knowledge, meant it was important that gaining access to these insights was crucial for Microsoft.

Thankfully, the FT has a multitude of features that Microsoft employees can, and have utilised.

“When I’m at home, I check my mobile app, and sometimes I get the email digest, to scan it and see if I haven’t missed anything,” said Oksana. “I can quickly find the information rather than try to browse through everything, through subscribing to topics and getting alerts.”

Email alerts are one way for users to customise their FT experience. When browsing FT content, readers can subscribe to topics, trends, people of interest and newsletters, which will send alerts to your emails with relevant news, custom to you in your myFT.

This type of customisation is why Microsoft employees have found the FT subscription so valuable. By receiving news in a timely manner, it can help business decisions move quicker, and conversations with clients move forward with trust, and in a more efficient manner. Sam talked through his experience with personalisation on FT.com.

“I had a session with one of your team members to help me to customise the FT to make it more relevant, and to really understand the platform,” he said. “Working with the FT closely was so simple. It didn’t take very long for them to walk me through the capabilities of the site, and how I could personalise it for the companies that I monitored.

“They helped outline how I would configure FT to set up email alerts for daily briefings and summaries, whether that’s on the companies I follow, or for the topics I need to keep up with, such as the global markets.”

Viril also spoke with one of our customer success managers, with the intent of setting up Single Sign On (SSO) for all Microsoft employees.

With SSO, users do not need to remember a password, and with a Microsoft email address, it will automatically log you in after validating. This is one barrier to entry to valuable content that has been removed through the use of the FT.

“Launching our SSO process was incredibly smooth, very cooperative and very enthusiastic,” said Viril. “Working with the FT, when you have enthusiastic partners that are willing to lean in on these solutions, and take an attitude of ‘yeah we’re gonna get this done, we’re gonna figure out’, it makes things exceptionally smooth.”

“All I said to our Microsoft partner, ‘here’s the FT team, and go make this happen. Let me know when you’re done and let me know if you have any problems.’ The next thing you know I get an email from him saying okay it’s all done it’s ready to go. I wish that everything in my job would go that well. It was tremendous.”

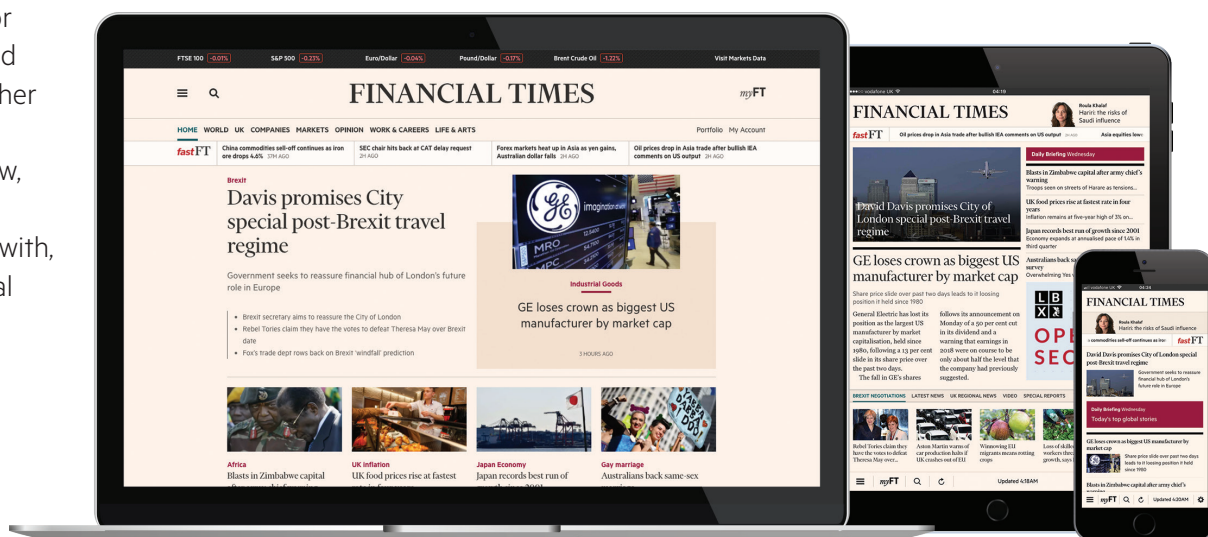


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Sam Sides

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