

New Cisco Systems CEO Chuck Robbins seeks to speed up networking giant

August 5 2015, by Pete Carey, San Jose Mercury News

In his first week as Cisco Systems' new CEO, Chuck Robbins made an immediate impression, moving quickly on plans to create a leaner, faster-moving company out of the networking colossus.

Cisco was born in the mid-1980s as a company that made routers, a piece of networking gear that proved to be an essential component of the Internet, which was just then taking off. By the tail end of the dot-com boom in 2000, Cisco briefly was the world's most valuable company with a stock market capitalization of more than \$550 billion.

Now a changing marketplace created by new technologies, cloud services and the Internet of Things is a challenge and an opportunity for all networking companies.

Robbins studied math and computer science in college and worked for a while as a computer applications developer. "In my heart, I am absolutely a geek," he says.

Robbins spoke with the San Jose Mercury News about his vision for the Cisco in the second Internet revolution. The interview has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: You joined Cisco in the midst of the first Internet revolution, and now you say there's another one underway. How would you describe the new revolution?

A: We believe we are on the front end of what we call "the Internet of Everything," in which you go from having 15 billion devices connected to having 50 billion devices to potentially 500 billion devices. When you connect all these things that were previously unconnected, the capability to drive value for countries, for companies, for cities, is going to be even greater than it was in the first wave. We think that [technology](#) can play a huge role for companies, or for countries trying to drive job growth or GDP growth, and we think we're on the front end of that now.

Q: You did some globe-trotting recently, didn't you?

A: It went incredibly well. When you go around the world and you talk to leaders, whether it's companies or prime ministers or presidents, you actually have reinforced that we're on the front end of a massive next wave that's out there. We were in China, meeting with many of the important leaders there. We met with the [prime minister](#) in India, and a couple weeks later we met with President (Francois) Hollande in France. We met with senior leaders in Italy; we met with (Prime Minister David) Cameron in the United Kingdom, and we met with senior leaders in Germany as well. We also met with the CEOs of many companies.

All of them are looking at how technology can fundamentally help them define their strategy. (Indian Prime Minister Narendra) Modi wants to digitize India with 100 smart cities. He focused on manufacturing, so we're going to help him with manufacturing. France is being very progressive relative to economic reforms and is focused on how technology can fundamentally change their business environment. So we committed to education and to funding many of the startup communities there. It's just fascinating to see how technology has become so mainstream.

Q: Your favorite words these days seem to be "fast," "speed" and "quickly." What's the rush?

A: I have been in the technology industry for 28 years. I started as an applications developer on an IBM mainframe at a financial institution. As we looked at how long it took for us to deploy technology, we were very comfortable with multi-year projects. Today everything's happening at a pace that is exponential compared to what we've seen in the past. So I believe that as a company we have to be able to move as fast or faster than the whole industry's moving. It's going to require us to execute more quickly, make decisions faster, deliver on our technology commitments faster, speed up our development cycle and every thing that we do. That is what we're going to be focused on.

Q: Cisco in the mid-'80s was a startup with one essential product when the first Internet revolution happened. Now it's huge. Is that an advantage or disadvantage in the current wave of disruption?

A: The complexity in our business is much greater than it was back then. We have a much broader customer base. One of the biggest challenges we have is where is it we will play? There are so many opportunities out there. It's really key for us to understand which areas of the market are moving at which time, which areas can we really accelerate based on our capabilities, and which areas we need to leverage our partner systems, which is one of our key competitive advantages.

Q: You mentioned the Internet of Things, or the Internet of Everything, as Cisco calls it. Why is that important to Cisco?

A: Cisco over the last 30 years has driven convergence. Everything has converged to the Internet protocol. The Internet of Things is simply the convergence of this next wave of those protocols and technologies that aren't currently connected to the Internet. That's very much in our sweet spot. We help our customers garner greater value as a result of being connected.

Q: You've spoken about bringing the computing power to the data, rather than bringing the data to the computer. What does that mean?

A: If you think about what's going to happen - when you connect these systems to the network, they're going to generate massive amounts of data and the value to the customer is going to be derived through the insights from that data. A simple example is where are the current parking places available to a driver. That's going to be garnered from information that's coming from sensors, but you need to process that within a timely fashion in order to provide a real time opportunity for the driver of a car. So you have to push the capability to process that data closer to where that data is, or you've lost the opportunity. My view is, as an industry we have to bring the computing and the technology power to where the data is so that you can make the decisions while it has value.

Q: Transitions can be unsettling. What is your message for Cisco's customers, employees and shareholders?

A: The good news is that (former CEO) John (Chambers) has put us in a position for this transition to go seamlessly. The strategy's working. What I believe I can do is help us move even faster than we have in the past.

Chuck Robbins

Occupation: CEO, Cisco Systems

Previous jobs: Head of Worldwide Sales, Cisco for more than 17 years;

Education: University of North Carolina, math major with a

concentration in computer science.

Home: Los Gatos, Calif.

Family: Married, 4 children

Birthplace: Grayson, Ga.

Age: 49

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Five things you didn't know about Chuck Robbins

1. His very first job was repairing lawn mowers
2. His parents thought he'd be a preacher
3. He played junior varsity basketball at the University of North Carolina.
4. The first person he told when he got the CEO job was his wife, then his mom and dad.
5. His teenage son and daughter started a business together

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Citation: New Cisco Systems CEO Chuck Robbins seeks to speed up networking giant (2015, August 5) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-08-cisco-ceo-chuck-robbins-networking.html>

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