

Highlights from the 2014 SAS Global Executive Forum

☒ Last week, Washington, D.C.



Last week, Washington, D.C. hosted this year's [SAS Global Executive Forum](#), an analytics conference which brought together several thousand computer

programmers, IT experts and industry thought leaders to participate in demonstrations, workshops and presentations around the theme [Potential of One, Power of All](#).

CNSI's resident Data Scientist Jim Harbour was on hand throughout the three day event, which featured keynote speaker and former Secretary of State Colin Powell. In addition to his expertise in international affairs, leadership and management, Powell also knows a thing or two about computer programming. The U.S. Army asked him to learn the skill as part of his graduate program at George Washington University. He commented on personal leadership styles and encouraged the crowd to trust in their staff to fulfill the duties of their position in what was an engaging and compelling speech.

One of the key focuses throughout the first day's events was the opportunity associated with analytics and big data. Philip Mudd, former Deputy Director for the FBI and CIA, provided his own insights on the power of analytics and what he thought was the biggest hindrance in its use_ inability to ask the right questions.

Mudd drew from past experiences in the FBI and CIA and stressed that unless we focus less on having the right data and more on the questions we ask to facilitate informed

analytics, we may miss something right in front of us.

Day two focused on innovation and collaboration. Geoffrey Moore, author of *Crossing the Chasm_ Marketing and Selling Disruptive Products to Mainstream Customers*, spoke at length about the transformational cycles that exist for any disruptive technology. According to Moore, technology adoption comes in waves. While tech innovators and visionaries all play key roles, it is the pragmatists that push the envelope to find adoptable solutions.

SAS Senior Vice President of Best Practices Jill Dyche presided over a panel discussion about innovation and collaboration in 'the new IT' – big data, big analytics, and the ways in which companies are adapting to new data environments. Dynche noted that shrinking budgets and IT departments can set an organization back, but stressed the importance of collaboration between IT departments and business driving units.

On the final day of the SAS Global Forum, statistics whiz and a [bioinformatician](#) by training, Sebastian Wernicke discussed the traps that one can fall into when culling data for insights, while Mary Osborne, a business visualization manager for SAS discussed "Star Wars and the Art of Data Science."

While both gave astute observations on data analytics, Osborne attracted more attention, if only because to drive the point home she donned Princess Leia's signature white gown and cinnabon curls during her speech.

All antics aside, the SAS forum again served as a valuable professional incubator, mixing technical and strategic topics and touching upon the benefits associated with leadership and collaboration in the world of IT.