

PROFILE



BLAKE JORGENSEN

IN ASSOCIATION WITH:



Tell us a little bit about yourself.

After graduating from Stanford, I went into the consulting business for a number of years and then into investment banking. I worked with Thom Weisel at Montgomery Securities, one of the pioneers of the technology industry in Silicon Valley. When Montgomery was sold to NationsBank, I became a founding member of Thomas Weisel Partners Group and continued my career in banking for a period of time. I left Weisel Partners to join Yahoo! as its CFO and then moved on to Levi Strauss & Co. as CFO. But I missed the technology industry, so when the opportunity came up with Electronic Arts, I was more than happy to take it.

How many years have you been in your current role as CFO?

I joined the company about four years ago, and at that time we had some challenges. Our operating margins were in the single digits, our stock was at an all-time low of \$11, and our market cap was around \$4 billion. Since then, we have refocused the company on working with consumers, deepening relationships with our game players, improving our financial discipline and growing out our digital live service business, which is where the game industry is moving. Today, our operating margins are at 30 percent, our stock is \$79 and our market cap is \$24 billion. It's a different world, and I think our average employee would say it's a much better place, and the average consumer would say we're a much better company to work with.

How has the CFO's role changed in the last 10 to 15 years?

The CFO's role has become much more strategic than the traditional accounting and finance role when I started in my career. In fact, a lot of roles in finance have changed dramatically over the past several years. For example, the chief accounting officer role has grown over time to become the right-hand person to the CFO and is managing more and more of the control components of the company. Our global controller reports to our chief accounting officer and we have a number of regional controllers who report to him. They all play a much broader role beyond the traditional control function, and this frees me up to play more of a leadership role for the company.

How has technology impacted your role and the controller's role?

When I joined the company, it had just finished upgrading its Oracle system globally, which meant big improvements and greater efficiency for the control function. But we still had some work to do with our forward planning system, which was fairly cumbersome. So we rebuilt our planning system by introducing a Hyperion system on top of Oracle. They both use the same data sets, and this has greatly streamlined our planning process.

What are the top two or three trends you are seeing in the finance function in terms of innovation and technology?

For us, it is trying to integrate the consumer metrics into the financial metrics, so we can better understand how consumers interact with our products, which can help drive better financial results over time. In most cases, that requires internally built software because it's so highly customized to what we're doing. It's really all about doing a better job forecasting and anticipating trends based on what we're seeing from the metrics associated with our game play. People play games on our servers, which means we collect massive amounts of data. This allows us to make better games over time and target what people want to do with the games. It also allows us to understand the financial components of how people play games and design our games for financial benefit as well as for the consumer's benefit.

Are you using cognitive technology in any capacity?

Like many companies, we are just looking into it. We haven't made any major investments, but our team is following developments in this area and how it might benefit us.

What top two or three challenges have you faced in implementing new technologies, and how did you overcome them?

I think it's about not overcomplicating things. If you keep it simple, you will get better results and not overinvest. It's also important to be consistent around the globe—if you are going to implement a system, implement it everywhere. You don't want to have haves and have-nots, and you want everybody to be able to communicate with each other.

Can you give us one or two examples of how you use technology outside of the office and how it has affected your life?

For me, and many people here, playing games outside the office is important, as well as playing in the office. That requires a diverse set of technologies because we tend to play games in many different modes. At night, I might sit and play a game on a console like a PlayStation or an Xbox on an 80-inch projection screen, but then I might play at my desk on a PC or on my iPhone when I'm riding one of the company's shuttle buses.

Describe your perfect day and whether it involves technology.

My perfect day is leaving my phone in my ski locker and skiing all day without it. And, luckily, where I ski, they don't have very good cell phone coverage, so if I take my phone it's only to take pictures. I love disconnecting and getting outside and enjoying the mountains or seashore.

Tell us something that people would be surprised to know about you.

I'm an open person, so most people around here know me pretty well. But I have a skateboard in my office, and I will occasionally go out to our parking garage, which has some great ramps, and ride for a while. People always joke with me about this, but I'm a kid at heart and like to have fun.

If you were not in the corporate finance world, what other business would you like to be in?

If I weren't in the corporate world, I'd like to be a helicopter ski guide. I think that would be a lot of fun. I also have this fantasy about raising goats and making cheese. I would love to make my own cheese, grow tomatoes and enjoy them with a glass of wine.

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