

A portrait of Frank Vella, a middle-aged man with short, wavy white hair, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a dark blue blazer over a blue and white checkered button-down shirt. The background is a solid grey.

# SPOTLIGHT **ON** FRANK VELLA

Chief Executive Officer  
of **Information Builders**

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timely insights and strategies from leading  
global executives.*

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**Frank Vella**, named CEO of Information Builders in January 2019, succeeds company founder Gerald Cohen. Mr. Vella joined IB as COO in November 2017. Throughout his career, he has held technology leadership roles for public and private companies, with a focus on identifying markets and delivering growth.

**Information Builders** provides scalable solutions for data management and analytics, helping organizations operationalize and monetize their data through insights that drive action. IB's integrated platform for business intelligence, reporting, analytics, data integration, and data quality, combined with proven expertise, delivers value faster, with less risk. IB is one of the world's largest privately held software companies.

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# Newly appointed Information Builders CEO Frank Vella shares the 'How and Why' of his focus on the customer, team, and execution

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## Customer

"Information Builders is a 43-year old company that has always been centered on building solutions for customers. Great software or cool features for their own sake were not prime drivers if they did not enhance the customer experience. Evolving our products to match a customer-required solution, that was really important. IB has three founders, and I regularly get to speak with two of them, Gerry Cohen and Peter Mittelman. Serving customers by providing solutions is always a part of their dialogue. Our board measures that as customer retention, and we have enjoyed a 93% renewal rate.

We certainly have had a customer- service and -success organization for decades. But now, Customer Success is a new phrase and a new discipline for us, and it is evolving. We launched a cloud offering in July 2018 which is already a multimillion-dollar business. Yet, customer success, in the context of cloud, is very different from customer support in the context of perpetual license, support, and renewal. One of my major focuses—and this aligns to the three tenets of customer, team, and execution—is building our customer success organization to span many or all disciplines in the company. Our ability to execute will define how well we do at retaining customers, now that they have the ability to be less sticky through cloud."

## Team

"One goal of our team focus is to break down workplace silos. Your team must be more than your direct colleagues. Success requires redefining team to include the entire company. Individual work groups cannot claim success if the company fails to meet its goals. We win or lose together.

We also need to embrace newness, adding diversity in thinking, gender, and background. My direct reporting team has a good balance of new people—as well as people who have been here for years, who really understand how we do things well, and what we need to preserve. They all understand the pace at which we now want to move.

With history comes comfort with the interactions we have with people we've known for a long time, which can mean some norms are not questioned or tested. So, we are driving a new communications cadence; company-wide and division-wide communications and town hall meetings are a regular occurrence. Managers will use key performance indicators to define success for the company, the division, the team, and the individual—all connected. Then, we will have a high-quality product with a highly satisfied customer, and a growing, motivated and diverse workforce. That is how I think about team."

## Execution & Accountability

"We need to shift to driving execution and accountability by defining clear goals and objectives for people, delivered by managers that understand how to assess them. Then people can hold themselves accountable to this agreement. Culturally, that is a big change for us.

I spent 10 years at Microsoft, and a key item I took from there is the discipline of holding managers accountable for the success of their people. If someone was failing or their skills were a mismatch for their role, the manager was accountable for working through that. At IB, we are now conducting a skills inventory to help us understand what skills we have in our people and how we can best utilize them. We are also teaching our managers how to be accountable and constructive in holding others accountable. First-line managers play an extremely important role. My focus is equipping those first-line managers for success, to make them great, so that people love coming to work.

I believe that a leader's ability to succeed in a role often comes down to intangibles. At IB, we have a cultural fit. The focus on customers is natural for me. I believe in investing in people. Gerry and I have a great partnership. Those intangibles make all the difference."