LEADERS REDEFINING PACKAGING AND DESIGN

THE CIO TABLE

THECIOTABLE.COM

LEADERS IN CONVERSATION



COVER STORY

RAJESH LUTCHMAN

Weaving design and function into every package

CEO, SIYAKA

FROM THE EDITORS

Editor's note

Leaders Redefining Packaging and Design

Titles say little about how a leader actually works. That is why we spent this edition with Rajesh Lutchman, CEO at Siyaka.

The chief executive of Siyaka on growing a packaging manufacturer from one small South African plant to sites in South Africa and Mauritius, and why adaptability is his first rule of leadership.

Our cover story follows Rajesh through the choices that shaped the work, from the early years to the decisions being made now, and asks what other leaders can take from them.

Also in this edition: Packaging's new bill lands on the design desk. Producer responsibility fees and Europe's new packaging law turn design choices into line items. Companies that cannot see their own packaging data will pay for it.

Then: The board that cannot read a breach report. Most boards now receive a cyber briefing every quarter. Far fewer could say what would make them stop a product launch. An essay on the gap between being informed and being able to decide.

And: Layne Lewis: Engineering a better way to work. She spent nine years as a systems engineer supporting NASA. Then Layne Lewis took on a different mission: designing a company where serious engineering and a full life share the same blueprint.

We hope you find something here worth taking into your next meeting. ■

The Editors



THE CIO TABLE

In this edition

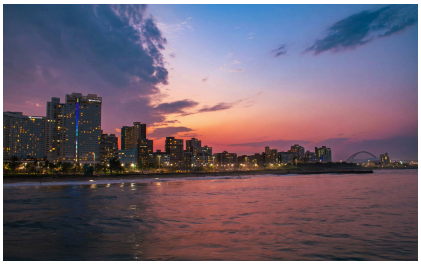


06

COVER STORY

Rajesh Lutchman

Weaving design and function into every package



12

ANALYSIS

Packaging's new bill lands on the design desk

Producer responsibility fees and Europe's new packaging law turn design choices into line items...



18

ANALYSIS

The board that cannot read a breach report

Most boards now receive a cyber briefing every quarter. Far fewer could say what would make them...



22

PROFILE

Layne Lewis: Engineering a better way to work

She spent nine years as a systems engineer supporting NASA. Then Layne Lewis took on a different...

Editor's note **02** *Read every edition* **27**

ADVERTISEMENT

BIZHRS

Payday, on time. Every time.

Payroll processing with statutory compliance built in, for teams in India and the UAE.



Payroll
Runs, payslips and bank files

Compliance
Statutory filings handled

Self service
Employees see and update their own data

Expenses
Claims submitted and approved in the app

Book a demo

bizhrs.com

ADVERTISEMENT

Inveck

Inspections that leave a record.

Checklists

Build them once, use them on every site.

Photos and sign-off

Evidence attached at the point of inspection.

Issues tracked

Findings assigned and closed, not forgotten.



Mobile inspections by Inveck

inveck.com



COVER STORY

Rajesh Lutchman

Weaving design and function into every package

CEO, SIYAKA

Photo: Remy Gieling / Unsplash

Every product carries a story and the first chapter is often written through its packaging. From the crinkle of a snack wrapper to the elegance of a luxury box packaging solutions protect what we value while shaping how we experience it. They guard freshness spark curiosity and often decide whether something is simply purchased or truly remembered.

Rajesh Lutchman and Siyaka bring a rare blend of vision and craftsmanship to this space. Their work shows that packaging can be both intelligent and inspiring, carrying messages of trust and sustainability while capturing attention with design.

A Vision that Grew Beyond Borders

When Siyaka was founded, Rajesh envisioned building a world-class packaging company that would serve both local and export markets. The company began with a small production facility and a dedicated team, but today it has grown into a multi-site operation with facilities in South Africa and Mauritius. This remarkable journey reflects grit, innovation, and a strong commitment to strategic foresight. Siyaka's footprint across the SADC region has expanded steadily, transforming from a small family business into a dynamic leader in high-performance packaging solutions for diverse industries and brands. While the scale has grown, Rajesh has kept the vision rooted in quality, partnership and value proposals.

Leadership Rooted in Family Values

Rajesh attributes much of his leadership style to his upbringing in a business family where hard work, humility, and integrity guided everyday life. His career in packaging has been extensive, working hands-on with every process. This early exposure not only gave him technical expertise but also instilled deep empathy for people at all levels of the business. For Rajesh, decisiveness matters, but listening is equally important. Every major decision involves engaging the team, weighing implications, and aligning with long-term goals. Family remains a core value that shapes the company's culture, especially with his sons Mikhail and Luan now stepping into leadership roles alongside him.

Planting New Roots for Growth

A defining chapter in Siyaka's story unfolded when Rajesh led the decision to expand operations from South Africa to Mauritius. At the time, it was neither obvious nor easy, but he recognized the potential to serve a wider regional client base and to position Siyaka closer to export markets. The company invested in infrastructure, transferred technical expertise, and focused on upskilling local teams while maintaining the same standards of excellence as in South Africa. Today, the Mauritius site stands as a vital contributor to Siyaka's SADC presence and plays an instrumental role in forging strong FMCG partnerships. This bold move proved that calculated risk, combined with long-term vision, could yield exponential results.

Innovation as a Mindset

For Rajesh, staying ahead in the packaging sector means never becoming complacent. He ensures that Siyaka remains aligned with global packaging trends by engaging with international developments, attending industry exhibitions, and maintaining close partnerships with technology suppliers and research collaborators. Yet, as he often emphasizes, innovation is not only about machines, it is fundamentally a mindset. Within Siyaka, this mindset is embedded into every layer of the business. Through the internal training academy and collaborative design sessions with clients, the company encourages experimentation and continuous improvement. The leadership team actively cultivates a culture where ideas are welcomed, failures become learning opportunities, and curiosity is consistently rewarded.

Adaptability as the Core of Leadership

When reflecting on the single most important quality for leadership in today's packaging and manufacturing landscape, Rajesh points to adaptability. The industry is evolving at a rapid pace, shaped by sustainability mandates, digital disruption, and shifting consumer behaviour. He believes that a leader unable to adapt risks becoming obsolete. However, adaptability in his view does not mean reacting blindly. It requires foresight to anticipate change, courage to pivot when necessary, and discipline to remain aligned with a clear purpose. Drawing from his experience, Rajesh highlights that the leaders who balance vision with agility are the ones who transform challenges into opportunities and ultimately thrive.

Building a Culture of Performance and Purpose

Rajesh often says that Siyaka's greatest investment is its people. While technology can be purchased, culture

must be cultivated. At the heart of Siyaka's success is a high-performance environment built on empowerment, respect, and accountability. It is a workplace where every team member feels seen, heard, and inspired to grow. Rajesh and his leadership team provide hands-on mentorship, celebrate milestones, and encourage ownership at all levels of the organization. The internal internship and training programme has been especially impactful. For Rajesh, the equation is simple: when people feel valued and supported, they do not merely show up, they show up with passion.

Empowerment that Sparked Breakthroughs

Rajesh recalls a defining moment when empowering his team led to outstanding results. A group of junior team members was entrusted with leading a new product development trial using sustainable materials. Instead of micromanaging, he and the leadership team provided the framework, guidance, and freedom to innovate. The outcome surpassed expectations. Not only did the team deliver a commercially viable product, but they also proposed efficiency improvements that had not been previously considered. For Rajesh, the experience reaffirmed his belief that true leadership is about creating the space for others to rise and excel.

Technology in Service of Trust

In navigating the rapid evolution of packaging technology, Rajesh stresses the importance of balance. At Siyaka, every new tool or system undergoes a rigorous vetting process before adoption. The guiding questions are clear: Will it enhance quality? Will it create value for clients? Will it increase skills and efficiencies? Rajesh is deliberate in ensuring that the company does not adopt trends merely for appearances. Instead, Siyaka prioritizes strategic investments within the operational realm ensuring maximum harmonizations, holistic supply chain benefits and a high-performance eco-system. The company's reputation has been built on consistency and trust, and innovation must always serve to reinforce those foundations rather than compromise them.

Partnership Beyond Packaging

When it comes to clients, Rajesh views Siyaka not as a vendor but as a strategic partner. From the very first interaction, the focus is on deeply understanding the client's brand, objectives, and challenges. Clients are actively involved in the development process, with Siyaka offering integrated supply chain services and proactive suggestions on packaging design, sustainability, and cost-efficiency. Rajesh believes this collaborative approach ensures long-term partnerships, where the success of the client is celebrated as Siyaka's own.

A Commitment to Care

For Rajesh, sustainability is not a checkbox, it is a responsibility that defines Siyaka's philosophy. The company has embedded it at both strategic and operational levels, introducing lightweight materials, solvent-free lamination, recyclable films, and energy-efficient machinery. Yet, Rajesh emphasizes that true sustainability extends beyond technical innovation. Siyaka also educates clients on the long-term value of adopting sustainable solutions, not only for environmental benefit but also for brand equity. With certifications such as FSSC22000 and BRCGS, the company underscores its commitment to food safety, environmental compliance, and social responsibility. Rajesh believes firmly that doing good and doing well are not mutually exclusive but interdependent.

He ensures that Siyaka remains aligned with global packaging trends by engaging with international developments, attending industry exhibitions, and maintaining close partnerships with technology suppliers and research collaborators.

An Era of a Packaging Revolution

Looking ahead, Rajesh describes the packaging industry as entering an era of a packaging revolution. What excites him most is the convergence of sustainability,



technology, and consumer behaviour. He points to developments such as smart packaging, traceability, compostable materials, and AI-driven production, which are no longer distant possibilities but rapidly becoming industry norms. For Siyaka, the greatest opportunities lie in localisation, export readiness, and helping brands adapt to circular economy models. Rajesh is convinced that African manufacturers have the potential not only to participate but to lead if they remain bold, agile, and collaborative.

The Architecture of Enduring Change

As Siyaka moves into its next chapter, Rajesh is focused on driving acquisitions, expanding into new markets, upgrading infrastructure, and strengthening investment in people. His vision is to create lasting impact through innovation, sustainability, and people-centred leadership. With unwavering commitment to excellence and continuous improvement, he seeks to lead by example, pushing the boundaries of packaging solutions while fostering a culture rooted in integrity, collaboration, and growth. When considering his personal legacy, Rajesh reflects on the belief that leadership is not only about results but about the manner in which those results are achieved. He hopes to leave behind not only advanced products and processes but also stronger teams, empowered individuals, and a more responsible industry. Whether through championing sustainable practices, mentoring future leaders, or driving strategic transformation, his purpose is to lead with intention and to create meaningful change that endures beyond his tenure. In addition, he currently sits on the boards of an Equity Investment company and Property Portfolio entity.

From one press to more than 30 production lines

Siyaka has been operating since 2000. Rajesh started it in a warehouse in central Durban with one printing machine and four employees. The company is now headquartered at Fairways Business Park in Mount Edgecombe, north of the city.

It has since become a multi-site business running more than 30 production lines and combining flexographic and rotogravure printing. Its products include flexible packaging, self-adhesive labels, shrink sleeves and pouches for personal care, home care, pharmaceutical, beverage, food and motor oil brands. Its operating sites are in Durban, Johannesburg and Mauritius.

Siyaka is a Level 1 B-BBEE contributor, and in 2025 it received a KZN Top Business Award in the family business category. Its website carries testimonials from RB, Pioneer Foods and Premier.

The family has rules for succession. Children are expected to gain experience on the open market after their tertiary studies before any talk of joining the business, and Luan, the most recent to join, came to Siyaka after working at Investec. Many of the small team that started the company are still with it.

A R100 million bet on local production

At the fifth South African Investment Conference, held in Johannesburg in April 2023, Siyaka pledged R100 million for a new printing plant at the Dube TradePort Special Economic Zone near Durban. The Department of Trade, Industry and Competition set out the plan in a statement that October.

The case rested on imports. Siyaka's research found that wide-web packaging suppliers serving the Southern African Development Community either had no production in South Africa or lacked the capacity to meet demand, so a large share of flexible packaging was brought in from abroad. The company, which then employed 109 people, projected 20 jobs at the plant at first, rising to about 50 by the fifth year.

Skills were built into the plan. Gravure printing needs specialist skills that are not fully available in South Africa, so Siyaka set out a five-year internship programme covering machine operation, ink viscosity control for high-definition print and the care of print cylinders. In October 2025 trade press reported that a Windmöller & Hölscher MIRAFLEX II central impression flexographic press had been installed at the new Dube TradePort facility.

The same report described the press as one part of a wider modernisation, alongside new converting and finishing equipment, upgraded workflow systems and investment in staff training. Mikhail Lutchman, named in the report as chief operating officer, presented the move as the next stage of the company's growth strategy.

Leading the printing industry's federation

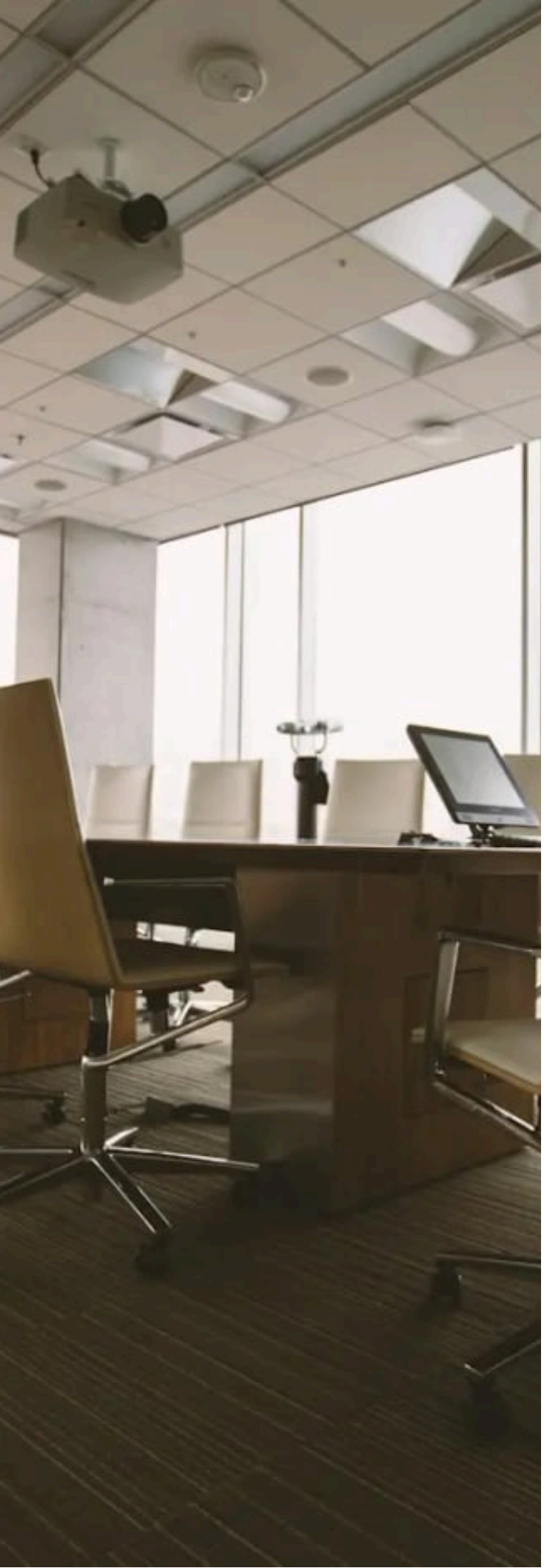
In February 2026 trade press reported that Printing SA had appointed Rajesh president of its board. He succeeds Simon Downes, chairman of the Shave & Gibson Group, whose term was credited with a turnaround at the organisation.

Printing SA, formally the Printing Industries Federation of South Africa, traces its roots to March 1911, when the Associated Master Printers of the Cape was formed. It took its present name in 1990, joined the international print federation FESPA in 2014 and in 2020 added visual communications to printing, packaging and signage as its fourth sector.

He takes the role in a sector working under tighter packaging rules. South Africa's Extended Producer Responsibility regulations, published in November 2020 under the National Environmental Management: Waste Act, took effect for the paper and packaging sector on 5 May 2021. They require producers, alone or through producer responsibility organisations, to meet collection and recycling targets for streams that include plastic packaging. ■



Photo: Petr / Unsplash



THE CIO TABLE

THE COUNCIL

A seat at *the table.*

A vetted circle of senior technology and business leaders who write, compare notes and meet in private.

01 **Write**
Essays and columns published under your name

02 **Compare notes**
Private conversations with peers in similar seats

03 **Meet**
Closed-door roundtables in your region

APPLY AT THECIOTABLE.COM/COUNCIL

ANALYSIS

Packaging's new bill lands on the design desk

Producer responsibility fees and Europe's new packaging law turn design choices into line items. Companies that cannot see their own packaging data will pay for it.

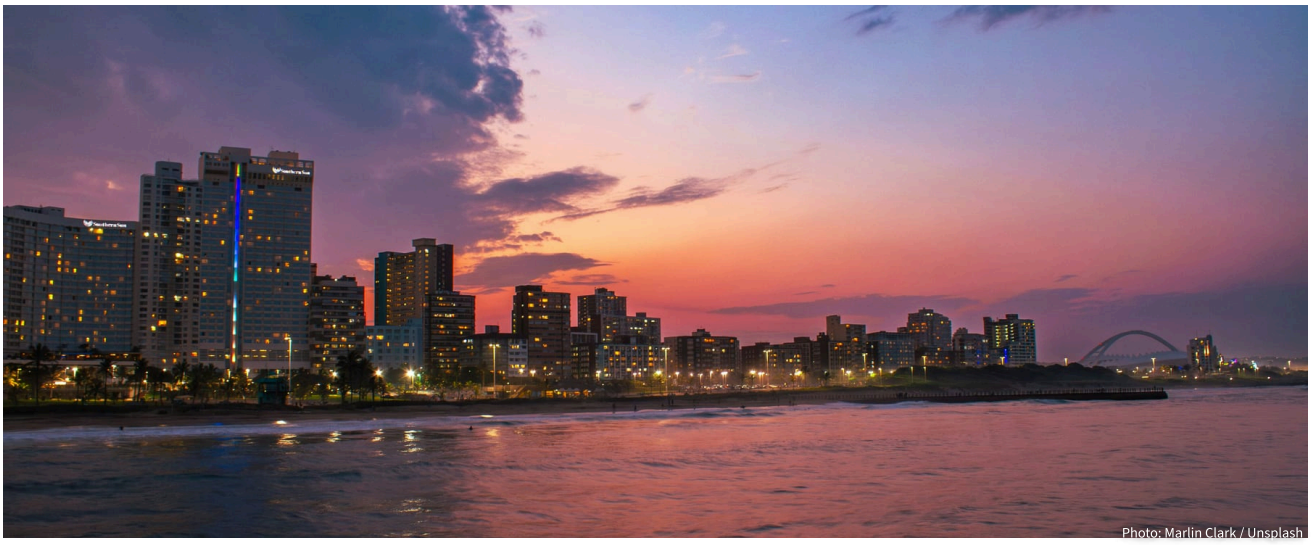


Photo: Marlin Clark / Unsplash

UK companies now pay for the household packaging they put on the market. PackUK's base fees for the first year of extended producer responsibility, 2025–26, run from £192 a tonne for glass and £196 for paper and card to £423 for plastic and £461 for fibre-based composites, the category for paper or board combined with other materials.

The second year is where design starts to cost money. From 2026–27 the disposal fee is modulated by recyclability. Packaging rated red under the government's Recyclability Assessment Methodology has its fee multiplied by 1.2, rising to 1.6 in 2027–28 and 2.0 in 2028–29. Amber-rated packaging sees no change, and green-rated packaging receives a discount paid for by the red surcharge.

Europe's rules apply everywhere at once

The EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation entered into force in February 2025 and began applying across the Union on 12 August 2026. Because it is a regulation rather than a directive, the same text applies in every member state. Food-contact packaging containing PFAS above set limits can no longer be placed on the market, and a harmonised labelling system follows in 2028.

The larger shift comes in 2030. From then, all packaging placed on the EU market must be recyclable, plastic packaging must contain a minimum share of recycled material, and limits on empty space, reuse targets and restrictions on certain single-use plastic formats take effect. Grouped transport and e-commerce packaging will face a maximum empty space ratio of 50%.

The scale of the problem explains the ambition. Eurostat counted 81.5 million tonnes of packaging waste in the EU in 2024, or 181.0 kg per person, up 3.2 kg on 2023. Of that, 67.0% was recycled. Without new measures, the Commission projects that packaging waste would grow 19% by 2030 and plastic packaging waste by as much as 46%.

Design is now a finance decision

These numbers change who needs to be in the room when a pack is specified. A UK brand choosing between a fibre-based composite and a plain paper and card pack is, on base fees alone, choosing between £461 and £196 a tonne. If the composite is rated red, modulation lifts its disposal fee by a fifth in 2026–27 and doubles it by 2028–29.

Those are recurring costs, charged every year on every tonne, and they rise automatically unless the pack changes. For a business selling millions of units, a design decision taken once by a small team can shape a cost line for the life of the product.

Packaging designers have always traded shelf appeal against protection and cost. Recyclability and weight now join that list, each with a price attached, and in Europe the recyclability test will decide from 2030 whether a pack can be sold at all. That moves packaging from a procurement detail to a commercial decision with a measurable return.

It also changes the conversation with suppliers. Printers and converters that can offer mono-material alternatives, lighter formats or evidence of recyclability have something to sell beyond price per thousand units. Buyers who once negotiated purely on unit cost now need to weigh the fee that follows each tonne.

The data problem underneath

Fees are charged by material and tonnage, so a company needs to know, for every product it sells, what the packaging is made of, how much

BY THE NUMBERS

£461

UK base fee per tonne for fibre-based composite packaging, 2025–26

UK Government (PackUK), 2025

181.0 kg

Packaging waste generated per person in the EU, 2024

Eurostat, 2026

19%

Projected EU packaging waste growth by 2030 without new rules

European Commission, 2026

each component weighs and how it is rated. In many businesses that information lives in supplier specifications, artwork files and spreadsheets kept by individual buyers.

Reporting once a year from that base was tolerable when the cost was small. It is not when the invoice depends on it, and when two jurisdictions apply different tests to the same pack.

This is where CIOs earn a seat in packaging decisions. One specification record per item, linked to the product master and to supplier data, lets finance forecast producer responsibility costs and lets designers see the fee effect of a change before artwork is approved. It also gives compliance teams a single place from which to support recyclability claims in the UK and the EU.

Where to start

The first step is a fee model. Take last year's packaging data, apply the published base fees and the red multipliers for the years ahead, and show the board the result by brand and by pack. Seeing the figure attached to named products tends to concentrate minds faster than any sustainability report.

The second is a redesign shortlist: the highest-volume packs rated red, where a change of material or format would pay back fastest. The third is an owner for the data, someone accountable for the packaging specification record in the way a financial controller is accountable for the chart of accounts.

None of this requires new technology so much as ownership of data that already exists in fragments. The companies that build it will treat packaging as a managed cost. The rest will meet it as a surprise each time an invoice arrives.

Sources: gov.uk; environment.ec.europa.eu; ec.europa.eu; bakermckenzie.com. ■

THE CIO TABLE

THE
CIO TABLE

The Table Brief. *One email, every Thursday.*

Decisions, interviews and analysis for people who run technology and finance.

THECIOTABLE.COM/NEWSLETTER



THE
CIO TABLE

Roundtables, *not stages.*

Small conversations between senior leaders, chaired by our editors. No slides and no sales pitches.

Closed door
No press and no recordings

Twelve seats
Senior leaders only

Chaired
By The CIO Table editors

THECIOTABLE.COM/EVENTS

ADVERTISEMENT

Inveck

Know what you own. Know where it is.

Inventory and fixed-asset verification for finance, audit and operations teams. Count, tag and reconcile across every site, online or offline.

Inventory verification
Complete, cycle, quick and blind counts

Fixed asset management
Tag, track and reconcile the register

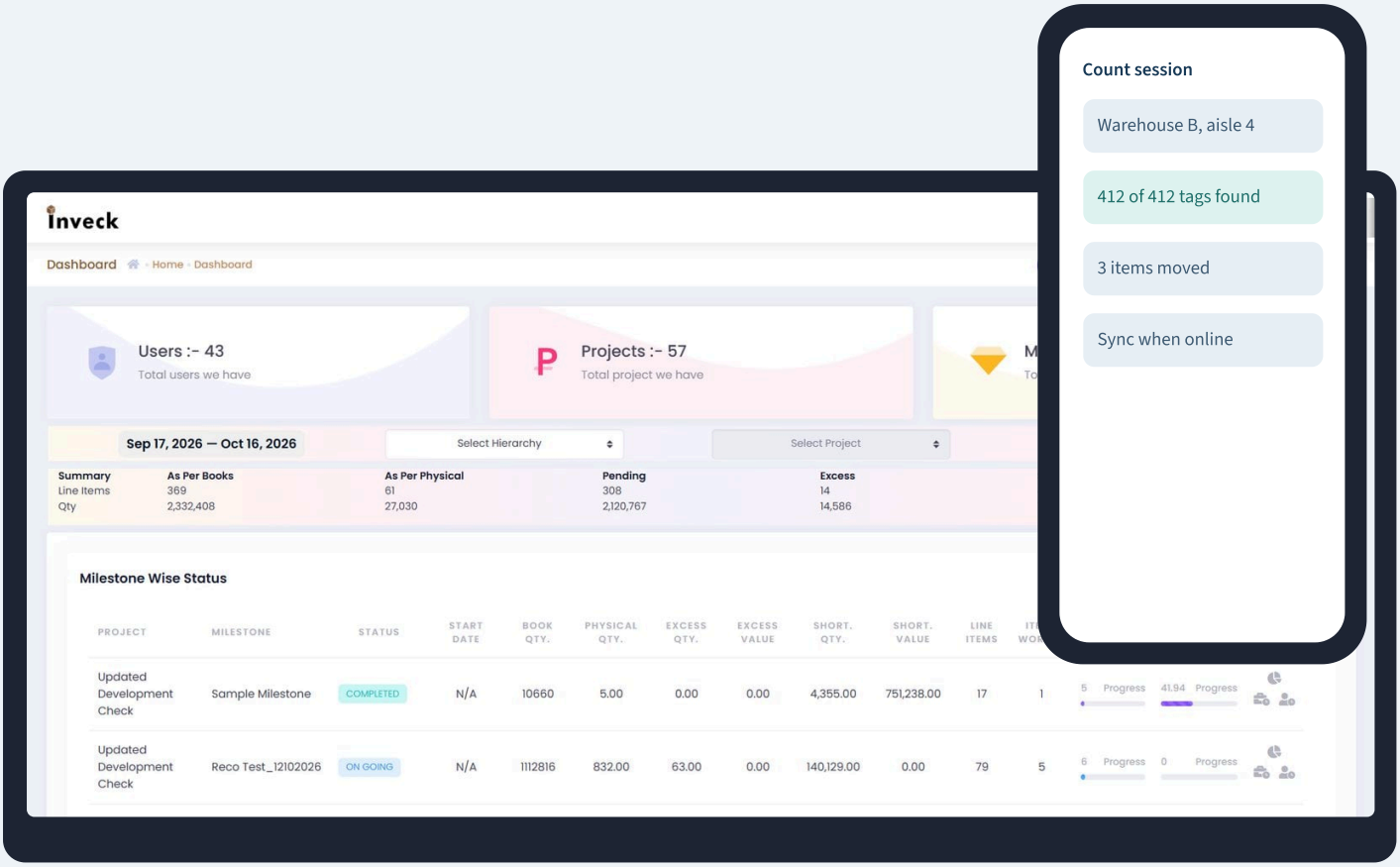
Mobile inspections
Checklists with photos and sign-off

Material movement
Gate passes and transfers on record

Verify smart. Reconcile smart.

inveck.com

ADVERTISEMENT



Variance reports your auditors will trust.

A mobile app for the count, a web dashboard for the reconciliation, and a clean link to your ERP and Excel.

Count offline

Scan and count in basements and yards; the app syncs when it is back online.

Close faster

Book-to-physical variances by site, ready for review the day the count ends.

Audit-ready

Every count, photo and sign-off on record, from the first tag to the final report.



ANALYSIS

The board that cannot read a breach report

Most boards now receive a cyber briefing every quarter. Far fewer could say what would make them stop a product launch. An essay on the gap between being informed and being able to decide.

Boards across Asia-Pacific now hear about cyber risk every quarter, usually late on the agenda, after the dividend and before lunch. The chief information security officer has a fixed slot and a long deck: a heat map with a few amber cells and perhaps one red, a maturity score nudged upwards against a framework most directors could not name, and a page of acronyms defined in a footnote.

The questions that follow tend to be about the red cell. Why is it red? When will it be amber? Rarely does anyone ask what the board would do if it stayed red, or whether anything planned for the year ought to wait until it changed colour. The briefing is accurate and carefully prepared, and directors leave better informed. It is much harder to say what any of them is now better able to decide.

That is the gap. Most of what boards hear about cyber risk is built to inform them. Very little of it is built to equip them.

Instruments built for someone else

The tools in a typical board pack were designed for the people who run security. A heat map shows where the risk register is most worried. A maturity score tracks a programme's

progress against a framework. Counts of blocked attacks and patching percentages show whether the operational machinery is turning. All of these answer a management question: are we getting better? None of them answers the question that belongs to the board, which is what it is prepared to do, and when.

The distinction matters because regulators have already settled whose question it is. In Australia, APRA's prudential standard CPS 234, in force since July 2019, makes the board of a regulated entity ultimately responsible for its information security. In Singapore, the Monetary Authority of Singapore's Technology Risk Management Guidelines, revised in 2021, expect the board and senior management to oversee technology risk. Responsibility has moved up the building. The briefings, for the most part, have stayed where they were.

A heat map tells a board how the security team is doing. It does not tell the board what the board is prepared to do. A director who must decide whether to delay a launch, take a payments system offline or accept that a critical supplier cannot be audited needs something different: a shared sense, agreed in calm conditions, of where the lines are.

Three questions

There is a simpler test of whether a board is ready. Each director should be able to answer three questions without opening the pack.

The first is what would make us stop or delay something. A product launch, a systems migration, the completion of an acquisition. If directors cannot describe that condition in advance, they will invent it under pressure, usually with the project's executive sponsor in the room and the press release already drafted.

The second is how long it would take to restore our most critical service, and who decides during that time. The useful figure here is the honest one, which is rarely the recovery time objective printed on a slide. The useful name is that of the person who can take a system offline, speak to the regulator or authorise emergency spending at three o'clock on a Sunday morning. Too often, the honest answer to the second half is a committee.

The third is which risks we have knowingly accepted, and who signed. Every organisation runs with some unsupported software, some suppliers it cannot inspect and some systems that cannot be patched without stopping the business. That is normal. What matters is whether each was a decision, taken by someone with the authority to take it, or a drift that nobody chose.

The second question is the easiest to test in advance. Take a rehearsal scenario to the point where someone must decide whether to shut down the customer portal. If the chair looks to the chief executive, the chief executive looks to the chief information officer, and the authority turns out to rest with an operational risk committee that meets monthly, the board has learned something about itself that no heat map would have shown. Better to learn that on a quiet weekday than on the night it matters.

A page, a rehearsal and a direct line

None of this requires a new committee. It requires a few changes to what boards ask for and how they spend the time they already have.

Start with a one-page decision log: every risk the board has accepted, the date it did so, the condition that would make it look again, and the name of the person who signed. It should come before the heat map in the pack, and a director should be able to read it in five minutes. If the page is empty, that is itself a finding. It means the organisation has been

accepting risks without telling the board.

Next, run tabletop exercises in which directors play themselves. Many boards watch management rehearse an incident and come away reassured. It is more useful, and much less comfortable, for the chair to sit in the chair, with the real phone list, and be asked forty minutes in whether to pay, disclose or switch off.

Third, hear from the chief information security officer directly from time to time, without the briefing passing through two layers of management on the way up. This is no comment on the reporting line. Material edited for a board tends to be edited towards reassurance, and directors should know what the unedited version sounds like.

Finally, change what director education is for. Most of it teaches vocabulary: what ransomware is, what lateral movement means, how a phishing campaign works. Directors do not need fluency. They need to understand the handful of decisions they may face, how long each one takes, what they will know at the moment of deciding, and how little of it will be certain.

The result should be a shorter pack and a longer, less pleasant discussion, with the decision log first and the heat map in an appendix. The test of whether it has worked is simple: when a shareholder or a supervisor asks what the board decided about cyber risk last year, the chair should be able to answer from a single page, with a name against every line. ■

ADVERTISEMENT

Inveck

Stock counts and asset audits, done on a phone.

Inventory and fixed-asset verification for finance and audit teams.

INVECK.COM

ADVERTISEMENT



BIZHRS

HR and payroll, handled.

Core HR, payroll processing and statutory compliance for growing teams in India and the UAE, on one platform.

- Core HR and self service
- Payroll processing
- Statutory compliance
- Expense claims
- Insurance benefits
- Contract labour

Book a demo

bizhrs.com



PROFILE

Layne Lewis: Engineering a better way to work

She spent nine years as a systems engineer supporting NASA. Then Layne Lewis took on a different mission: designing a company where serious engineering and a full life share the same blueprint.

Her journey at a glance

- 9 years as a systems engineer supporting high-profile NASA missions
- 3 cities (Reston, Houston and Huntsville), each adding to her technical range
- 2 companies: TenXsys, which she co-founded, and Willowview Consulting

Willowview's purpose, in a sentence: lift up clients, employees and communities through deep expertise and genuine humility.

A career that began among the stars

Some people drift into engineering. Layne Lewis was drawn to it. As a girl she was captivated by flight and by the enormous, unanswered questions of space, and that curiosity carried her all the way to a degree in aerospace engineering.

The reward came quickly. Her first major role, with Booz Allen Hamilton, put her in support of NASA's Space Station Program, the kind of assignment many young engineers only dream about. Over the next nine years she worked as a systems engineer on some of the agency's highest-profile missions.

The job kept her on the move. Assignments based her in Reston, Virginia, in Houston, Texas, and in Huntsville, Alabama, giving her a close-up view of how different NASA operations run and a breadth of technical experience that few engineers build so early in their careers.

Every relocation strengthened her résumé. Each one also taught her something no job description mentions: ambition has a price, and it is often paid at

home. Learning to weigh a demanding career against the needs of the people closest to her would become one of the defining lessons of her working life.

Rethinking what success means

Distance eventually forced the issue. Layne's family lived in Tennessee, where her father was coping with long-term health problems, and every new posting seemed to put more miles between them. When she lost him, the grief brought a hard question into focus: what did she actually want her career to make possible?

By then she was married with a young son, and the answer was clear. She needed work that kept her close to the people she loved and gave her the flexibility to be present for them, not just a title that looked good on paper.

Trading certainty for possibility

With her family's full backing, Layne and her husband moved to Idaho so she could join Hewlett-Packard, hoping for a healthier balance between work and home.

The role offered stability but not fulfilment. Much of the work was repetitive, and it left her entrepreneurial instincts restless. Instead of settling, Layne went back to school, completing an MBA with HP's sponsorship and adding the business toolkit that engineers rarely acquire on the job.

That education became a launchpad. Layne co-founded her first company, TenXsys, stepping outside corporate structures for the first time. Building something of her own reminded her how much she loved pushing into unfamiliar territory, and it sharpened a new ambition: to create progress not only for clients, but for the people doing the work.

A company designed around people

Those hard-won lessons became the blueprint for Willowview Consulting. Layne set out to build a firm where flexibility, wellbeing and community impact were not perks but design requirements.

Under her leadership, Willowview supports a diverse workforce, encourages the passion projects that enrich life beyond the office, and values openness and collaboration as highly as hitting targets, with the flexibility to fit very different lives.

Its purpose is easy to state and harder to live: to lift up clients, employees and communities through deep expertise and genuine humility, the same values that shaped Layne herself.

The path to Willowview

- Aerospace engineering: a degree built on a childhood fascination with flight and space
- Booz Allen Hamilton: supporting NASA's Space Station Program
- Nine years in systems engineering: high-profile missions from Reston, Houston and Huntsville
- Hewlett-Packard, Idaho: a move made for family and balance
- MBA, sponsored by HP: the business toolkit to match the engineering one
- Co-founder, TenXsys: her first company and first taste of building from scratch
- Willowview Consulting, LLC: a firm designed around people, purpose and flexibility

Prototypes over promises

Willowview is built to get useful technology into clients' hands quickly, and to make sure they know how to get the most from it. Its work spans three areas:

- Engineering consulting: seasoned engineers who help clients design complex technical systems with confidence.
- Program management: on time and on budget, from planning and prototyping through testing, deployment and beyond.
- Tailored training: from facilitated workshops to full online curricula, built around each client's roles and work environments.

Just enough, just in time

Rather than spending months on theoretical designs, Willowview follows an agile, "just enough" approach that puts a working prototype in front of users quickly. Real-world feedback arrives early in the development cycle, when changes are cheap, and flawed assumptions surface long before they can become expensive.

For clients, the economics are compelling. Instead of sinking money into lengthy pre-market research, they validate value fast and direct resources toward the features testers have shown to be genuinely useful. Decisions rest on evidence from real users, not guesswork.

Prototypes also make stakeholder reviews far more productive. Rather than reading about progress in a report, decision-makers can see it, handle it and react to it, which keeps everyone aligned as a project evolves.

Training completes the picture. Because each course is shaped around the client's own people and processes, organizations finish an engagement with a capable solution and the knowledge to keep improving it independently over the long term.

Case study: turning wearable data into safer, smarter training

When the Army needed a way to capture training performance data from soldiers' wearable devices for its Soldier Sync program, it turned to Willowview. A team combining veteran experience with aerospace, engineering and military backgrounds understood the challenge from every angle, and worked side by side with key stakeholders to deliver a customized solution within budget.

- Real-time sync: device data flows automatically, without manual uploads
- Better training: improves both effectiveness and safety
- Within budget: a tailored build shaped with stakeholders

Where different minds build better

Layne deliberately mixes experience at Willowview. Specialists who served in public-sector roles work alongside colleagues from private industry, and that blend is the point. Candid conversations expose blind spots that any single background might miss, unconventional thinking is encouraged rather than filtered out, and the team can design solutions that no single discipline would reach alone.

Learning is treated as part of the job. Willowview subsidizes continuing education, offers on-the-job rotations into other departments, runs regular seminars on emerging topics and shares wide-ranging reading lists, while multicultural employee resource groups offer community and support. The result is a workplace where fresh ideas, and voices that too often go unheard, have room to rise.

Candour as a client service

The same openness defines how Willowview works with clients. Assumptions are discussed openly and tested at every phase, expectations are agreed early so that both sides pursue the same goals, and senior leaders remain accessible, bringing the directness Layne is known for.

Two-way dialogue catches disconnects before they grow, and decisions are made together rather than handed down. Clients come away confident that Willowview understands their world and will fight for their interests, which is the foundation of long partnerships.

Tomorrow's tools, today

Layne keeps Willowview close to the frontier, so that what the team learns in pilot programs can be transferred into every sector it serves. Model-based systems engineering ties the work together: digital twins let engineers explore configurations that once required physical builds, documentation is generated directly from the models, and stakeholders review clear visualizations instead of dense specifications.

Inside the innovation lab, the team is exploring:

- Computer vision and language AI: experiments that apply AI to automate routine processes
- Humanoid robotics: testing robots that could take on dangerous tasks
- Immersive simulation: validating designs virtually to save cost and avoid risk
- CIMBEO.com: a platform in development that merges live data from many sources into federated digital twins for rapid what-if analysis

CIMBEO.com is the most ambitious of these. Once complete, it is designed to give leaders a full operational picture and evidence-based decision support for their most complex challenges.

Purpose beyond the office

Layne wants Willowview's sense of purpose to travel well beyond its contracts. A flexible volunteer-time-off

policy lets employees give real time to the causes they care about without spending their own paid leave, and colleagues often volunteer side by side, strengthening friendships as well as communities.

She leads by example. Every week Layne coaches with Girls on the Run, an organization that helps young girls build confidence and life skills. As a board member of Women Innovators, she champions gender diversity in technology, and Willowview extends that work through networking events and professional development workshops that open doors for the next generation.

Partnerships with universities and non-profits complete the picture. Students and interns take on real responsibilities with guidance from senior mentors, non-profits receive pro bono support, and capstone projects regularly produce ideas with genuine potential to scale.

Scaling up without losing the plot

As Willowview expands, Layne is determined to protect the qualities that brought it this far. The structure stays flexible so the firm can adapt quickly, calculated risks and bold ideas are still welcomed, and an incubator-style environment keeps generating new business opportunities. Layne brings the same pioneering mindset that founded Willowview to helping others advance their own ventures.

Many founders fear growth will dilute the intimacy and responsiveness of the early days. Layne's answer is to scale deliberately, carrying authenticity and empathy into every new process, and making people decisions, from talent sourcing to decentralized oversight, that reproduce Willowview's supportive culture wherever it operates.

A life with room to breathe

For all the intensity of her career, Layne makes room for a well-rounded life. Her great outdoor passion is competitive horse racing with her horse, Atlas. When injuries sidelined her, she committed to rebuilding her strength until she could ride again, a lesson in grit her team has watched up close.

She speaks openly about lifelong health challenges and about the value of prevention, and she promotes a rhythm of challenge followed by rest. Colleagues notice that she pursues life with the same energy she brings to her responsibilities, and they feel free to do the same.

Home is a rural property where the daily routine of feeding animals and caring for the land clears her head after demanding weeks. That calm gives her perspective. Problems look different from a fence line than from a conference room, and stepping back helps her see the bigger picture when she returns to work.

The authenticity behind Willowview

Layne builds trust by telling the truth about her own path, including the injuries and setbacks. That honesty, together with an appetite for learning that never faded despite her academic success, makes her approachable to clients and colleagues alike.

It also attracts like-minded people to Willowview, who find a culture where living fully outside work is expected rather than tolerated. Clients feel understood because Layne leads with professionalism and shared humanity in equal measure.

For Layne Lewis, building a better way to work was never a side project. It is the mission, and Willowview is the proof that serious engineering and a balanced life can share the same blueprint. ■

THE CIO TABLE
THE
CIO TABLE
Your story, *in the next edition.*
THECIOTABLE.COM

THE
CIO TABLE

The CIO Table *Awards*

Recognition for decisions, not slogans. Entry is free, and every winner's citation says exactly why.

Technology leader	Finance leader	Transformation
Security leader	Healthcare leader	Rising leader



ENTRY IS FREE

THECIOTABLE.COM/AWARDS

THE
CIO TABLE

Read every edition, *page by page.*

The CIO Table magazine is free to read at theciotable.com. Join The Table Brief, our weekly email, to hear first when a new edition is out.



Subscribe free
theciotable.com/newsletter

theciotable.com



THE

CIO TABLE

Where leaders sit down to talk.

THECIOTABLE.COM