



Shape of things to come

Issue 1 - 2020

In a world of robotic process automation and AI, what is the future of the CFO?

After a century of progress for women it is becoming clear equality is not just a numbers game

A fundamental rethink of audit means the profession needs to reset its approach

Quarterly\_

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## Special report \_



**62**

### **AI by numbers**

*The future in an infographic*

**65**

### **Applied learning**

*Front-line tales of rolling out AI solutions*

**68**

### **Entrepreneur's eye**

*The tech start-up CEO predicting structural change in accountancy*

**70**

### **Think again**

*The job is changing, and so is how we define skill*

**72**

### **Risk exchange**

*AI can liberate, but it also brings new threats*

**74**

### **Security services**

*How to mitigate risk*

**76**

### **My way**

*Running an AI rollout*

# 58

## **The rise of artificial intelligence**

Our special report looks at how AI is set to change the way we work and the way we think about work, using interviews with practitioners, infographics and expert analysis to lead the debate on the future shape of business

## Technique \_

**80**

### **Cleaning up**

*Coping with the shifting shape of money laundering*

**82**

### **Hollywood and fine**

*Movie industry accountant Ged Nichols on his career highs*

**84**

### **Science fiction**

*Why everyone wants a piece of the data analytics scene*

**86**

### **All in the retail**

*Three rising stars on what accountancy brings to the sector*

**88**

### **Career coach**

*When is the right time to move jobs?*

**90**

### **The power of two**

*How mentoring works in practice*

**93**

### **ICYMI**

*ICAEW news roundup*

**95**

### **Technically speaking**

*IR35, leasing and trusts in the spotlight*

**98**

### **Boardroom blitz**

*How Emily Smith made waves in a male world*



# Doing the books that make the moving pictures

In his 35-year career, Ged Nichols has done it all. Now he is embarking on a new track with his own consultancy, *A Fresh Pair of Eyes*

## **How did you get to where you are now?**

The defining theme of my career is that I've always worked for companies that I had a passion for. The satisfaction I've had has come from being an accountant in great businesses such as British Airways, Disney and Fox. From the earliest days, more than the role itself it was always about being somewhere that I could identify with.

## **What launched you on your career path?**

When I left Deloitte, the first person to give me a job became my mentor in internal audit. Chris Agg, Head of Internal Audit at Abu Dhabi-based media and entertainment hub TwoFour54, hired me into Grand Metropolitan, now Diageo, and when he moved to British Airways, he took me with him.

## **Did you have any expectations about how your career would pan out?**

Absolutely not. I was a very reluctant accountant. When I entered accountancy, it was the qualification I wanted – the ACA is a stamp of quality. I didn't think I was going to enjoy it, but I was determined to use accountancy to work with brilliant organisations. Accountancy was more about communications and working with people than I'd realised. It opened more doors than I ever expected.

## **How did you move into entertainment?**

I asked myself what business I would love to be involved with given the choice, and at that time my passions lay in media. My goal became internal audit in the entertainment space. I was in New York, connected with the right people, and was offered an opportunity at Disney. After five years, that led to the role at Fox. I became head of internal audit at a major

Hollywood studio by being focused on networking – when an opportunity came up, I was on the radar.

## **Has it been everything you hoped for?**

Everything and more. No matter what audit we did at Fox, they were all interesting. Every part of the business operation was fascinating. Just as importantly, the people that worked in those businesses were great. My experience was that the entertainment industry is a happy one.

## **What was the most memorable moment of your career?**

There are so many. Sitting behind Princess Diana on a BA flight, she blessed me when I sneezed; flying on Concorde; walking Selena Gomez down the red carpet in Hollywood – twice; and helping to found Fox Pride.

## **What prompted your move into consultancy?**

When Disney took over Fox, it led to a lot of restructuring. Ultimately, I left Disney because I didn't get the head of audit job. The existing head of audit was a 26-year veteran; I was never going to get her job. Over the last eight years, my focus has changed. I've become passionate about working internationally, and exposure to different cultures. What excites me is seeing what success I can have in the open marketplace, working with various businesses on different challenges around the world.

## **What's the driving principle behind the consultancy you have set up?**

There's an opportunity for those who have worked within businesses, in finance, accounting or internal audit, to offer their skills to clients and provide an interesting alternative to the Big Four. As many of us have worked in industry, it gives us something different in flavour to the Big Four, but just as effective. I've built up a network of colleagues across a vast spectrum of financial roles, and am able to pull in those resources to offer clients with financial control challenges an alternative viewpoint.

## **Is running your own business liberating?**

Very much so. It's satisfying and fulfilling that I have complete flexibility to be creative, and determine my own approach to whatever challenge I'm facing. I've got the freedom to choose the projects I want to take on, and to fulfil them in the way I think is best suited to the client.

Ged Nichols was photographed in Los Angeles outside stage 10 of Fox Studios, with a scene from classic movie *The Seven Year Itch* providing the backdrop. Photographed by Philip Cheung