

By Krystal Scanlon

**The Drawdown (TDD): The industry is often criticised for being slow to adapt new technologies - do you think this is a fair criticism?**

*John Eggleston (JE):* I think it is fair to an extent. Financial services firms can be slow to change and PE is no exception. In my personal experience it remains commonplace for PE firms to rely on spreadsheets and many continue to deploy manual processes. I think the industry is starting to adapt now, partly due to more stringent regulatory reporting and client expectations which are increasing rapidly.

**TDD: You joined Pantheon in October after eight years at BGF. What were your reasons for moving?**

*JE:* My earlier career included several increasingly senior roles in corporate firms, spanning utilities, retail and financial services. From there, I was serving as a board member in a data business where we identified an opportunity in the market to create a new consumer credit reference agency from scratch. I was part of the founding team and we grew the business into an effective industry disruptor, before exiting for over \$1bn.

When I left Callcredit, I was part of an initial executive team building a new UK PE firm, BGF. It was an interesting role which spanned investment, internal technology and non-executive portfolio roles. Over eight years we grew the firm from an idea to nearly 300 company investments.

I was then introduced to Pantheon by a mutual contact and immediately hit it off with managing partner Paul Ward and COO Robin Bailey. From Pantheon's perspective, the firm had identified the need for a qualified, senior professional who combined an understanding of technology and data with a broad investment background, so it felt



CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER AT PANTHEON

**JOHN EGGLESTON,** discusses his approach to upgrading the firm's IT infrastructure, the importance of cybersecurity awareness training and why you should always start with data during tech transformations

like a natural fit for me. The role was also positioned at partner level, which was a convincing demonstration of Pantheon's commitment and strategic priority, whilst at the same time offering the latitude and appropriate influence to implement change.

**TDD: What have been your main areas of focus since joining?**

*JE:* My primary focus has been setting the technology and data strategy, which involved building out a detailed plan, getting both senior level and firm-wide support, then delivering value quickly. I've been looking at areas which either require stabilisation or additional resilience, together with options for enhancing cohesion and efficiency across Pantheon's technology architecture.

The strategy I have presented, which has been endorsed by our partnership board, places data excellence firmly at its core. My personal belief is that companies which are smartest with data will be the most successful PE firms of the future.

**TDD: What are the key challenges you have been faced with when implementing new systems or strategies at Pantheon?**

*JE:* With any firm it's important to understand the existing environment. Pantheon is a complex business and it was essential to understand the landscape properly to frame the strategy. Transitioning from existing ways of working to more efficient processes is as much about cultural change as it is about technology change.

For Pantheon, or any investor of scale, I think there is generally a lack of focus on data ownership and governance. One of the first roles I brought into the Pantheon team was a data governor.

**TDD: How involved are you with the funds and GPs**

**EGGLESTON BIO**

In addition to his corporate roles, John has also held a number of non-executive roles at the following companies since 2015:

- Recordsure (2015-17)
- Semafone (2015-19)
- PTS Consulting (2015-19)
- ACS Clothing Ltd (2016-18)
- Petrotechnics (2017-18)
- Virtual1 (2017-19)
- SaleCycle (2018-19)
- Fleetondemand Ltd (2018-19)

**you're invested with when it comes to tech?**

*JE:* GPs are generally pretty autonomous, but there is a large amount of data exchanged. In terms of sharing and using data, we track portfolio positions very closely, which enables us to gain insight into performance.

I'm regularly involved in client pitch processes; this is now a routine part of diligence either by our clients on us, or us on our downstream providers. There is also significant diligence around cyber controls, technology and data management. A few years ago, these tended to be check-box exercises, but are now fundamental and involve thorough interrogation.

**TDD: Cybersecurity continues to be a problem for PE - what's Pantheon's approach to security?**

*JE:* Cybersecurity presents a serious and increasing threat. Pantheon has always prioritised security and since I joined, we have further increased focus in this area. We have a number of platforms and controls from perimeter security to data integrity checking, in addition to checks which we carry out in conjunction with clients, company auditors and wider group businesses.

Covid-19 has forced companies around the world and across different industries to place

increased emphasis on remote working platforms to enable their people to keep in touch effectively, something which has also substantially raised security risk.

However security isn't just a technology issue and ensuring robust security can't be solved solely with technology solutions - it has to be a holistic focus on people, process and technology.

At Pantheon, we have global processes and governance around data handling, together with regular, mandatory cybersecurity awareness training, which is embedded into our risk management procedures. This includes training and awareness around specific issues like phishing. Cybersecurity training is crucial because technology can only do so much to protect a firm and its data. While we have robust systems in place, these require equally robust processes around data management and staff vigilance in order to be effective. A firm can have the best technology in place, but if a member of staff reveals their password or doesn't follow diligent processes, then data breaches can occur.

**TDD: What's your main advice to PE firms grappling with upgrading their tech infrastructure?**

*JE:* You must ensure you can foster robust senior buy-in to your change programme. In various companies in the past, I've seen programmes get paused, cancelled or never started due to a lack of shared vision and senior support.

I would also advise not to underestimate cultural change which is needed within any transition. People in a firm can be either a significant blocker or one of the greatest enablers, depending how well you manage the change and communicate it.

For tech transformation, I always start with the data, because it is the central asset, and beating heart, of most businesses. Once you understand it, you can then build out an application set. ♦

The TIME LINE

1999 - 2003  
**EURODIRECT DATABASE MARKETING**  
Board director

2000 - 2011  
**CALLCREDIT INFORMATION GROUP**  
Co-founding director, CIO

2011 - 2019  
**BGF**  
Head of tech investment, CTO, non-exec director and portfolio CTO

2019 - present  
**PANTHEON**  
Partner, global CTO