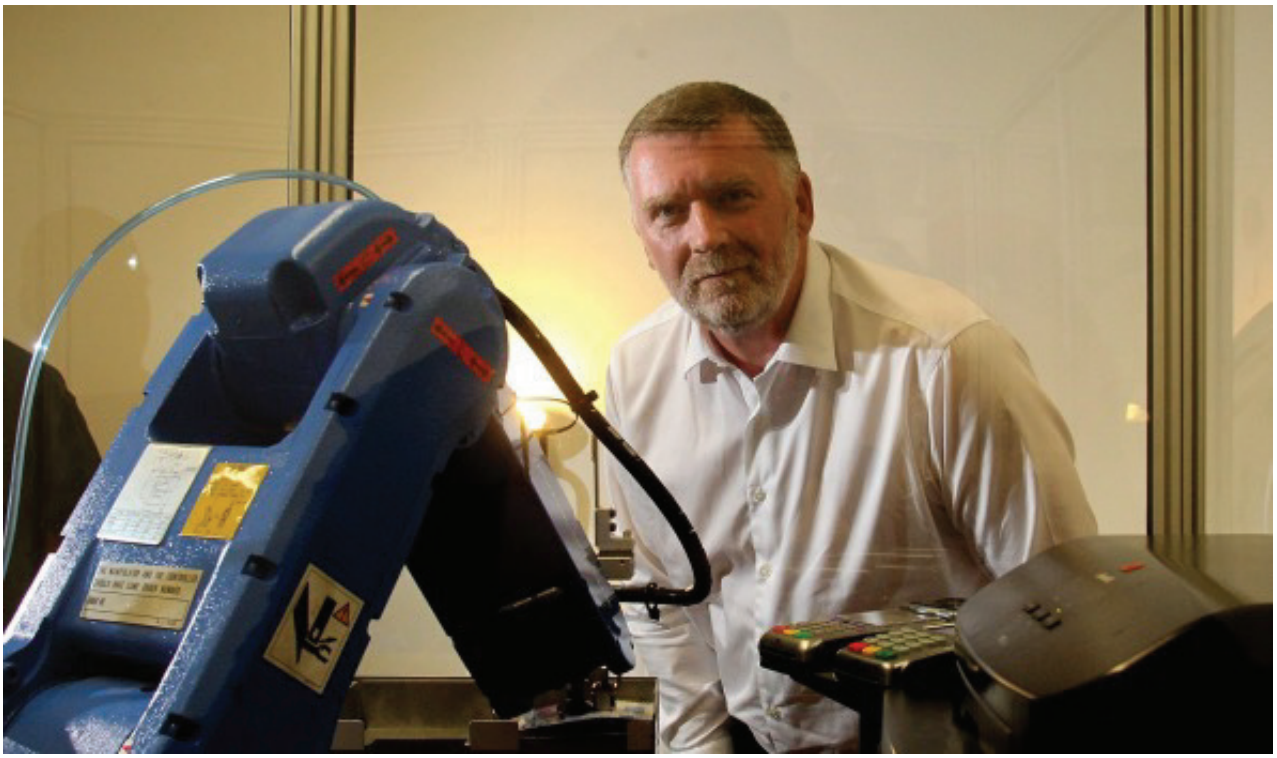
Feb 16 2016 at 12:00 AM | Updated Feb 16 2016 at 5:35 AM

# Westpac looks to blockchain and robots in fight for the future



Westpac Group CIO Dave Curran pictured with Tess' regression testing robot arm. *Ben Rushton*

by Beverley Head

A robot called Tess and an hour-long board presentation on blockchain are Westpac's latest weapons in the war against obsolescence.

The bank's chief information officer Dave Curran threw open the doors to its overhauled technology centre at Kogarah in Sydney last week, to showcase to staff and the board what the bank has achieved, and what the future might hold.

Tucked under the stairs, Harry Potter-style, is Westpac's concept "cave" hosting a range of emerging technologies that may or may not have an impact on banking.

It features a display wall that identifies trending topics among the bank's 34,400 Yammer users, a virtual reality room that supports human-centred design, gamification displays, drones that can deliver online purchases and wristbands capable of identifying people via their blood flow.

Westpac Group CIO Dave Curran at the bank's technology expo. *Ben Rushton*

## Understanding the blockchain

After moving their board meeting to Kogarah, and taking a tour of the cave, directors spent an hour being briefed by Curran on blockchain: "What it is, what does it mean and what we are doing."

"Blockchain is a technology that is clearly disruptive, but what it will be we don't know. We do know that $970 million has been spent on blockchain by fintechs," Curran said. Right now he likens blockchain to Napster – pioneering technology – not necessarily the end point.

The tech expo and board update is part of Curran's bid to ensure he and his team are recognised by the bank as "game-changing technologists".

But it's not all toys and what-ifs.

Tess (Test Enabling Super Simulator) developed in association with tech firm Infosys, is testing new systems and updates - making sure human interfaces such as ATMs, keyboards, note counters and the like work properly when a software change is rolled out.

## Robot revolution

It does in three days what previously took Westpac's human testers 30.

Curran said Tess allows more significant regression testing before introducing a system change.

Regression testing is a process of seeking out new bugs in software and finding where problems in systems may be worsening.

"Most system problems are change-related. This replaces manually intensive testing, and allows us to test further down," Curran said.

He said that the robot, only recently deployed, had paid for itself already, and would overcome testing issues which had in the past held up the rate of automation in the retail bank.

With 2016 earmarked by Curran as a "big delivery year" for Westpac, Tess will be busy.

Curran and his team are currently finalising the selection of the software platform underpinning Westpac's planned customer service hub that will integrate information from the Westpac group's multiple information platforms in a single location. An announcement is likely within three months.

Meanwhile the upgrade of its longstanding Hogan platform to Celeriti is within a year of completion. New customer services and more data analytics will also be rolled out as the customer service hub comes online.

But Curran stressed that to succeed, the bank would have to take a modern approach and look for ideas and expertise across a broad technology eco-system. This comprises its staff, traditional vendors – particularly Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services and IBM – as well as emerging fintech players, some of which Westpac has invested in through its Reinventure arm.

"Technology teams have to change the way they work. Gone are the days when you could rely on a vendor ... There are 7000 people I can bring to bear." Curran said.

And a robot called Tess.