

JULY 27, 2015

## The 2015 Tech 50: Racers to the Edge

The global financial technology elite sets itself apart by understanding the strategic and societal implications of high-tech advances and pushing innovation at Silicon Valley–like speed.

By Jeffrey Kutler



INTERCONTINENTAL EXCHANGE CEO JEFFREY SPRECHER (IMAGE CREDIT: SAM KERR)

information about money — financial services is, was and always will be a technology business. “Good information received in a timely fashion” defined sound banking, the late Citibank chairman Walter Wriston said more than 30 years ago.

But money, banking and capital markets have come a long way from what they were in Wriston’s time, or even a year ago, because technology is advancing so quickly and changing industry and society as it goes.

That is the day-to-day reality for the Tech 50, the visionaries and innovators on *Institutional Investor’s* annual ranking of financial technology leaders. What sets these executives apart goes beyond their considerable understanding of software applications and system performance as components of corporate strategy. These leaders think big about the global or macro implications of technology-driven change — from cloud computing and machine learning to emerging sensations like the [Apple Watch](#), [cryptocurrencies](#) and the [Internet of Things](#). They

relate such developments to their organizations' and customers' on-the-ground challenges and opportunities; set budget, investment and R&D priorities; and come up with solutions, to use the technological term of art.

And they put a premium on speed and agility. "It's all about speed to innovate," says [Robert Alexander](#) (No. 24), chief information officer of Capital One Financial Corp., which last year bought a leading user-experience design company to accelerate web and mobile app development.

Intercontinental Exchange chairman and CEO [Jeffrey Sprecher](#), repeating in the No. 1 position, brought his company from nowhere to the top of the global exchange world in part because, he says, "technology enabled us to scale quickly." It also can fail. ICE's three-and-a-half-hour outage on July 8 was only the latest to affect a major market platform — and demonstrate the importance of two other differentiating qualities: resiliency and recovery.

[Catherine Bessant](#) (No. 2), global technology and operations executive at Bank of America Corp., frets that the technology world at large is "moving at the speed of the consumer, not the speed of the enterprise." The answer? "The best and brightest talent." Bessant believes that "in conjunction with advanced-state thinking, financial services is magnetic for tech people." But that means competing against Apple, Google and other name brands. For Bloomberg, one of the biggest and best-regarded development shops in finance, "ability to find talent is the only constraint" to hiring more technologists, says global head of R&D [Vlad Kliatchko](#) (No. 6). Citigroup chief innovation officer [Deborah Hopkins](#) (No. 8) calls the speed of change "exponential" and "almost violent," and the necessary strategic response akin to a "lean start-up." She views her organization's "200 years of know-how" not as a liability but as something to be leveraged as new and "democratized" business models like the smart-phone economy and the blockchain present new opportunities.

The Tech 50 ranking was compiled by *Institutional Investor* editors and staff, with nominations and input from industry participants and experts. Four primary sets of attributes were evaluated: achievements and contributions over the course of a career; scope and complexity of responsibilities; influence and leadership inside and outside the organization; and pure technological innovation.

Of the 50 entries, 36 return from last year. The returnees' 2014 ranks are shown, and the rest are designated "PNR" (previously not ranked).

*The Tech 50 was compiled under the direction of Senior Contributing Editor [Jeffrey Kutler](#). Individual profiles were written by Kutler; Asia Bureau Chief [Allen T. Cheng](#); Editorial Research Assistant [Jess Delaney](#); Senior Writers [Frances Denmark](#), [Julie Segal](#) and [Aaron Timms](#); Associate Editor [Kaitlin Ugolik](#); International Editor [Tom Buerkle](#); and Editor [Michael Peltz](#). •*

The ICAP CEO jumps to No. 13 on this year's Tech 50 ranking.



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**Michael Spencer**

*Chief Executive Officer*

ICAP

Last year: 14

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There was never anything tentative about **Michael Spencer's** careerlong drive into the automated future of finance. He says that even 30 to 40 years ago he saw that leadership in financial services goes hand in hand with "technology enablement," which in turn is "essential for disruption and innovation." By the early 2000s he was in a position to act on those ideas, having created and climbed to

the top of the biggest interdealer brokerage, London-based ICAP. The Internet bubble had burst, but Spencer's vision of an industry transformed by electronic trading motivated a series of strategic bets — an early tone-setter being the \$240 million acquisition of fixed-income platform BrokerTec Global in 2003 — that he has never hedged. "We didn't cut back on investments in technology, even in hard times," says the 60-year-old CEO — and the recent postcrisis years of economic and regulatory uncertainty were hard on trading businesses. "We are always thinking long-term." Since 2007, ICAP has spent a total of £1.6 billion (\$2.3 billion) on technology. In the 12 months ended March 31, new-initiative investments in electronic markets, posttrade and information services rose by £1 million year-over-year, to £43 million. New-wave business lines, including EBS BrokerTec (combining fixed income and foreign exchange) and risk-focused Traiana and TriOptima, are generating three fourths of group profits, which were £229 million pretax in the last fiscal year. As far as ICAP has come in a decade, "we still have a long way to go," says Spencer. He uses Euclid Opportunities, a strategic incubation fund ICAP formed in 2011, as a lens on what's next in fintech. So pleased is he with portfolio holdings like OpenGamma (see Mas Nakachi, No. 48) and hedge fund analytics provider ENSO Financial that "we'd consider investing more, even at higher valuations."