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Bill Pollock: the world's longest serving CEO



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Bill Pollock had already been in business for 20 years before the first email was ever sent.

The 90-year-old founder of Drake International, a global human resourcing business he started in 1951 and launched in Melbourne in 1963, and mentor to one of Australia's richest men Jack Cowin, is still in business while email dominates almost every facet of modern executive life.

From pioneering psychometric assessments in the 1950s, to launching a pre-Zoom video software called PictureTalk in the 1990s, Mr Pollock has worked through one of the fastest periods of technological growth in human history.

This year, he is celebrating 70 years in business, and the extraordinary honour of being believed to be the world's longest serving chief executive. By comparison, the longest serving CEO in the S&P500 [is billionaire Warren Buffett](#) at 51 years.



Bill Pollock has been the CEO of Drake International for 70 years.

"In days gone by, I relied upon the postal service, telephones, telex and fax machines. Decisions were still made quickly but execution took a little longer," Mr Pollock tells BOSS, from his office in Monte Carlo, Monaco.



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"I am a living example of how technology has enabled me to have active and day-to-day executive oversight in over 20 different entities.

"Now I run numerous companies turning over hundreds of millions of dollars in different time zones by availing myself of the latest tools."



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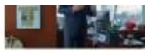
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Mr Pollock began his career selling bookkeeping and accounting machines from IBM and NCR in the early 1950s in Winnipeg Canada.

From his meetings, he saw that companies were over-staffing for peak working periods but losing productivity once the workload fell.

He and co-founder Jim Shore set up Office Overload, which not only provided inventory calculation, sales analysis and system installation, but began offering temporary staffing for busy periods.

"Companies often believe they can do everything themselves under the misguided view that it is more cost-effective," says Mr Pollock, of the business that evolved into Drake International.

"However these companies fail to realise that just like when you go to a medical general practitioner GP with an ailment, a specialist is often best qualified to treat serious conditions."

Selling flexible labour took off like wildfire, and for the next 70 years Bill Pollock expanded his empire to almost every continent on Earth, acquiring technology firms along the way.

Drake launched an office in Melbourne in 1963 and a few years later, [Mr Pollock met a young Jack Cowin](#), founder of Hungry Jack's and now chairman of Domino's Pizza.

Impressed by Mr Pollock's jet-set lifestyle and Monte Carlo apartment, Mr Cowin pitched his agricultural business idea and received a \$10,000 investment. That capital evolved into the billion-dollar Competitive Foods conglomerate, and the two men remain friends.

BOSS first met Mr Pollock at a Canadian-Australian trade forum in Sydney several years ago, where he and Mr Cowin were representing the integration of business between the two countries.

Mr Pollock, who has a deep fondness for Australia, says there is ample opportunity for the country to grow alongside the changing global superpowers.

"Australia's geopolitical reputation is excellent and per-capita is near the top of the leader-board," says Mr Pollock.

If [Australia continues to grow at its pre-COVID-19 rate](#) and makes the right investments in energy, education, health, defence and agriculture, the next century will see Australia rise to be on par with many of today's superpowers, climate change and geopolitical instability notwithstanding," says Mr Pollock.

I have not taken a day's vacation in the past five years. If you retire early, the odds are that you will die young.

— Bill Pollock

"If I were to volunteer some shorter term advice for Australia, it would be around making further investment in less carbon heavy baseload power generation."

While Mr Pollock agrees technology has changed people's lives beyond recognition, he insists working every day is the secret to a longer, more fulfilled life.

"Today's high performing executives have never been busier, managing a vastly larger workload than was previously possible," says Mr Pollock.

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"That said I have always believed in personally working eight days a week crammed into seven days.

"Technology is an enabler to get more done in less time, and we have found top performers use this extra time not to relax, but to accomplish more."



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A stickler for efficiency, Mr Pollock has long been drawn to the ways technology can eke out productivity gains for people and strip out bottlenecks and bureaucracy.

With COVID-19 throwing the world into chaos, Mr Pollock says managers must maintain connection online. Previously, he travelled extensively, visiting his teams in Australia, South Africa, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore, New Zealand, UK, United States and Canada.

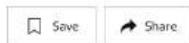
"Cohesion is maintained through clear messaging around objectives and corporate values, we measure and monitor and follow-up regularly," he says.

"This prevents complacency and misalignment and is critical to maintain high performance. Constant positive pressure keeps everyone on their toes."

A lifetime of calculated risks has generated Mr Pollock considerable wealth, but it's his interest in the future that keeps him firmly ensconced as Drake International's chief executive officer.

"Work every day of your life," he says. "It will keep you sharp and will extend your lifespan. I have not taken a day's vacation in the past five years. If you retire early, the odds are that you will die young."

Jessica Sier writes on technology, internet culture, cryptocurrencies and software from our Sydney newsroom. She has previously covered global capital markets and economics. *Connect with Jessica on [Twitter](#); Email Jessica at jessica.sier@ofr.com*



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