

Episode 144 | TDC's dragon in the basement (Carlos Moreno Alonso)
Released July 7, 2026

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Announcer: [00:29] This is "Telco in 20", a podcast that helps telco execs achieve a competitive advantage with AI and the public cloud. It is hosted by Danielle Rios, also known as DR. Today we're talking to Carlos Moreno Alonso, Chief Technology and Information Officer at TDC Brands.

Danielle Rios: [00:48] Hi guys, I'm DR. There's a mainframe sitting in the basement of almost every telco on the planet, decades old. COBOL code wrapped in hundreds of homemade applications that nobody fully understands anymore. It's the most expensive thing in your data center and the hardest to get off of. Migration takes years, four, five, sometimes more. By the time you finish, the technology landscape has changed twice. The previous CEO of Nuuday, which is now TDC Brands, the largest telco in Denmark, had the best line I've heard about this. He called it a dragon in the basement that needs constant feeding. My guest today is the guy hunting it. Carlos Moreno Alonso joined TDC Brands nine months ago as a chief technology and information officer. After working at Vodafone and Adamo, he's now tackling one of the oldest BSS estates in European telecom. We dig into why legacy migration always takes longer than you think, the part of every transformation that secretly consumes the timeline, and how AI can help slay that dragon.

[01:55] So let's take 20. Carlos Moreno Alonso is the chief technology and information officer at TDC Brands. Hi, Carlos. Welcome to "Telco in 20".

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [02:09] Hi, DR. I'm very happy to join your podcast.

Danielle Rios: [02:12] Yeah, I think we're going to have a great conversation about what's going on in your world. And you work for TDC Brands, formerly known as Nuuday. And so tell everyone about TDC Brands and what you guys are focused on.

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Carlos Moreno Alonso: [02:26] All right. TDC Brands is the largest telco in Denmark. We don't commercialize TDC brands outside the company. Our go-to market is splitting six different brands. The largest is YouSee, Relatel, eesy. Well, we have several. The group that manage all of those brands is called TDC Brands. And TDC, I think it's over a century the telco company within Denmark.

Danielle Rios: [02:49] Oh, wow.

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [02:49] It's been the incumbent for many, many years.

Danielle Rios: [02:52] So yeah, so you guys are up in Denmark and you were previously at Vodafone and Adamo. So nine months ago you joined TDC as CTIO. What's been your primary goal and what are you focused on in this new job?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [03:05] Well, my first focus was to try to stabilize. We are in the middle of a transformation and there was some instability in the consumer new platform. So that was the highest hot potato that I found when I joined. And this massive transformation always complex and generates some instability. It was expected, but we were above what we were considering acceptable. So that was my main concern in the beginning. And then also as usually, when you arrive to one of these positions, you need to understand the way you operate and the cost structure. And then after you're spending time more on strategic thinking and what's next and so on.

Danielle Rios: [03:42] Yeah. I mean, usually when you're a new leader in a big role, you're always looking for ways to have quick impact. Remind the people why they hired you and how good you are. So I totally understand that focus on finding something that's off track or not going as well as they expected to get that back on track.

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [03:57] Indeed.

Danielle Rios: [03:58] So the former CEO of Nuuday called the legacy IT systems, and I love this quote, "A dragon in the basement that still needs feeding." Explain that, why is it a dragon and why does it need constant feeding?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [04:12] Well, as I said, TDC Brands is a very old company. Unfortunately, we're still running very old stuff which we're trying to get rid of that is really heavy to maintain and complex

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to operate. And it's preventing us to do what our dreams are in many ways. And this is why we decide to get out of there. For the consumer side of the business, which is an important part of our business, we are almost completed. For the enterprise, it's still sitting in our old mainframe and all the standard hardware solutions and hundreds of very old applications. It's very heavy to maintain. That's the problem.

Danielle Rios: [04:49] Yeah. Is the dragon the mainframe?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [04:52] Yeah, indeed. The application is called Columbus.

Danielle Rios: [04:54] Is it called Columbus because it's from 1492?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [04:58] I think it was the same time that Columbus discovered America.

Danielle Rios: [05:03] Yes. (laughs)

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [05:03] I don't know. (laughs)

Danielle Rios: [05:03] That's how old it is. It's running COBOL, right?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [05:05] It's written in COBOL.

Danielle Rios: [05:07] I don't think this is unique to TDC brands and Nuuday.

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [05:11] Indeed.

Danielle Rios: [05:11] I do think there's telcos out there with mainframes running COBOL, but even older systems from the early '90s, like you said, that really slow you down from doing the things that you want to accomplish.

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [05:24] Indeed.

Danielle Rios: [05:24] And so it sounds like you guys have focused on the B2C side and that transformation. How long did you guys think that was going to take?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [05:32] We are completing by the end of the year. It's almost complete. We have migrated already something like 75% of the customers. All the software is developed and so on. So consumer is back on track. We feel very comfortable, and we are getting a very good setup. The output is extremely good in the

sense that we are full cloud, native, all BSS/OSS. And the output has been great for consumer. For the enterprise, we need to think twice before jumping to there. It's very expensive the way it was originally designed, so we thinking on some other ways.

Danielle Rios: [06:04] Yeah. And so how long did it take to move off of Columbus for the B2C side?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [06:08] It's taken four years and a half, I think.

Danielle Rios: [06:12] Yeah, I think that's something that CTIOs and telcos understand very much, but I don't know that everyone gets that these transformations are years long. We're in the age of AI where things are moving so quickly that you set up your project and what systems you're going to move to. In the course of five years, by the time you get done, the landscape's changed again and you have to go through another transformation. And especially with AI, it's only going faster. So that's quite a challenge I think the CIOs and CTOs and CTIOs like you are dealing with. And so a lot of telcos have dragons in the basement, things like Columbus in the form of mainframes and legacy systems. And so what are the strategies you've used that work to get off of these older systems? And is there any ideas on how to make it go faster?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [07:01] Yeah. When it comes to the B2C, as I said, even if it has been long, I think the output has been very much what we were looking for and we feel rewarded for that effort. It's truth, as I said, it was very intense for the company. On the B2B, the idea we have is you need to find a way to make this by pieces because it's so big and it's so complex and there are so many relevant customers. Also, we need to take into consideration the nature of the customer we serve too. So it's different analysis. Making a longer story short, we see two fundamental ways that are eventually complimentary. One end, we want to dismantle eight pieces surrounding the mainframe, which stays heavier, is still more complex, but they are not core to the Columbus itself. We believe there is some savings and good value for business in there because it's related to the sales process and observability and customer-oriented management.

[07:56] That's one angle. And then when it comes to Columbus, first thing we want to do is to lightweight this. One of the ways is to migrate Java. So the idea is to do a re-hosting, re-platforming, using AI to migrate out of the mainframe

ecosystem and getting something that is more workable after. That's something that is relatively common. Many companies has made it worldwide, and we plan to address shortly.

Danielle Rios: [08:21] Yeah. Is it just lift and shift like for like or you're using other vendors that help you build a clone, but in a more modern programming language like Java?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [08:30] Yeah, we were offering first to our mainframe. We thought they were best positioned to be honest. The truth is the complexity in this is more the interfaces that surround the Columbus. So it's very important to understand the experience of having done this many times before. We found a partner in this case, and we believe that is something they can do.

Danielle Rios: [08:52] So yeah, just to recap, there's systems around Columbus around the mainframe. So you first simplify that and modernize that, then you do re-platform of Columbus itself?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [09:03] Yeah. The idea is first, as I said, remove as much as we can trying to generate value on this first movement. And then in parallel try to lightweight as much as we can the mainframe. We believe this re-hosting strategy is the right one. And by doing so, the Java and the new infrastructure will enable us to develop further APIs which give us all the opportunities. Which ones we've take after we reach that point is still to be decided, but then it's a complete different setup.

Danielle Rios: [09:31] Yeah. What part of that migration project takes the longest? Is it mapping the meaning of the data in the original system to the new systems? Is it cleaning the data so that it migrates cleanly? Where is most of the time spent in a five-year project like this?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [09:54] Yeah, I think the data mapping is critically important. It takes really a lot of time, particularly when you are using this very old crappy system which don't necessarily were designed in the beginning with that mindset. Understanding how the data is built in, it's not easy at all. That is really the challenge.

Danielle Rios: [10:08] The data mapping. Well, AI can really accelerate transformation projects by helping teams to write either temporary solutions, migration scripts, checking the data for you. And so, can you explain a couple ways your team or your vendors are using AI to help you with this project?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [10:28] Well, we haven't yet started. We are about to start on that domain. The idea is that we will use massively AI to transform the code in Columbus to Java. That's the primary use. Then we will use it also for optimizing. I think it's going to be a massive planning for us also in the journey, to be honest. It's a year, a year and a half, more or less what we're having done. I'm very curious to see how would the team learn on that. Because I think there's a lot of good things that we can get out of there on AI for the future development also. That's the way we would plan to use it on the transformation, but of course there are many other ways today using AI.

Danielle Rios: [11:00] Yeah. Well, my company Totogi has gotten a lot of interest from people. Not necessarily picking Totogi as the target system because that's not really what we're focused on, but using our ontology, our AI to really help them with mapping the data, moving the data, migrating from a source system, even if it's a mainframe or an old system into something new. And a lot of people are really curious about that. There's a lot of vendors that make it difficult to move off of them who maybe even block you from doing this.

[11:32] And so they're like, "How do I get off when my vendor doesn't want to help?" And AI is really helping us to do this, and we're helping a lot of telcos around the world so that's super exciting. And so these are tough goals. These are really tough projects, but it's really exciting. There's a lot of opportunity in telco. Speaking of goals, the World Cup is going on and the USA, my country is one of the host countries that's in Canada and Mexico as well. It's in the Americas. And so you're Spanish, I'm American, both of our teams are in the knockout rounds. And so my question for you is who do you think will win the World Cup and who do you want to win the World Cup?

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [12:10] Well, I want Spain to win the World Cup, of course.

Danielle Rios: [12:12] Of course. (laughs)

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [12:15] In Europe, we say that football is a game that 11 plays against 11, and always the German wins. So in Germany it's a very, very strong team and they know how to win World Cup.

Danielle Rios: [12:29] Yeah.

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Carlos Moreno Alonso: [12:30] I don't know. They're doing well so far. We'll see. I think the World Cup is very interesting because there are so many African countries also playing very good football.

Danielle Rios: [12:37] Yes. Yeah, I think Cape Verde was a little bit surprising. It's been a wonderful World Cup. I think everyone thought it was going to be a disaster because we're not really a football country, but I think people have been excited about our stadiums where it's all over the country, not just in the typical cities, Dallas, Seattle. It's really exciting. Two teams that I love watching, United States never makes it to knockout. And then of course, I'm Mexican and the Mexico team I think could be surprising. So I'm hoping for Mexico.

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [13:07] So far it's very open. We'll see what happened in the second round.

Danielle Rios: [13:10] It'll be super exciting.

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [13:11] I wish you the best anyway.

Danielle Rios: [13:12] Yeah. Well, Carlos, this is a great conversation about the dragon in the basement and how you guys are tackling it and taking it down. And so thank you so much for coming onto the podcast.

Carlos Moreno Alonso: [13:22] Likewise, thank you so much for your kind invitation. Thank you, DR.

Danielle Rios: [13:26] Awesome. Stick around, we end each podcast with a "Telco in 20" takeaway. I've got two minutes to tell you something you need to know. Here's the part of my conversation with Carlos that should make every CTIO sit up and listen. I asked him which part of a five-year mainframe migration takes the longest. His answer, data mapping. Not the code rewrite, not the new platform, not the testing. It's understanding how data was structured decades ago by people who don't work there anymore in systems that were never designed to be migrated off in the first place. That's where months become years where transformations stall out, where the dragon destroys your timeline. And it's exactly what the Totogi Ontology was built to solve. The Totogi Ontology is an executable knowledge layer. It sits over your existing stack, not in place of it. It maps your telco into one learning loop shared

across every system you run today, your mainframe, your BSS, your network systems.

[14:32] The ontology compounds your intelligence. Every system you connect makes the next migration easier. Once your learning loop lives inside the ontology, you can retire legacy systems one at a time on your schedule, not your vendors. And this isn't theory. Totogi is already helping operators migrate off the hardest systems in telecom from COBOL mainframes to Amdocs. The systems your vendors built a moat around so you could never leave. This is how you slay the dragon without burning down the village. So before you sign up for another five-year transformation, ask a different question, what if the hard part could be done by AI in a fraction of the time? Let Totogi (trumpet sounds) show you how. DM me on LinkedIn or X @TelcoDR and we'll set up a time to talk. Until then, tune in to more "Telco in 20" episodes, like and follow, and leave us a five-star review.

[15:24] Don't forget to sign up for my killer email newsletter on TelcoDR.com, and check out our awesome YouTube channel and hit that subscribe button. Later nerds.