

PÉTER BRAUN (1936–2016)

“A man is only truly alive for as long as he works; afterwards comes fishing or drink, but that’s no longer the real thing.”

Péter Braun



After a long illness borne with great dignity, *Péter Braun*, the former deputy CEO of OTP Bank, chief advisor to the chairman/CEO at the credit institution, an external member of its board of directors and president of the Hungarian CIO Association, has passed away at the age of 80. Joining OTP Bank in 1993, he played a vital role almost to the end of his life in ensuring that the institution strengthened its market-leading position in the area of IT development. His death represents an irretrievable loss for the IT and banking professions alike.

Péter Braun was born in Budapest in 1936. He gained his degree in electrical engineering from the Technical University of Budapest, and subsequently worked for some 35 years at the Electrical Energy Research Institute. While still at the institute, he began to investigate the development of IT systems. Leaving in 1989 as a head of department, he then went on to put his experiences to use in the banking sector. At this time he was appointed managing director of the Commercial and Credit Bank (K&H Bank), where he oversaw the bank’s Computer Technology and Information Centre. In 1993, at the request of *Sándor Csányi*, he moved to OTP Bank, where he was deputy CEO until his retirement in 2001. His name is linked to the fundamental modernisation of OTP Bank’s IT systems. During his years spent at the credit institution, *Braun* created something of truly lasting value in information technology, recognising that the goal was to develop a system which is adapted to continual improvement and open to innovation. It is only with this that the organisation has been able to respond to successive fresh challenges, which are not only generated by competitors but which also derive directly from the bank’s customer-oriented approach. *Braun* did not look upon the various technological procedures as simply a mass of different transactions, but also recognised that these procedures constitute a coherent whole. He was occupied not only with the problems themselves, but also with the most efficient solutions. Under his guidance, for example, data

warehouse development became one of the bank's significant strengths through the joint efforts of the marketing and IT departments.

In an interview in 2013, *Braun* recalled the appearance of modern technologies as one of the most active and innovative periods in the bank's existence, a period he actively helped shape as deputy CEO: *"It was at this time that we introduced the big electronic systems and changed from a traditional bank of cardboard and linoleum, built on folders and notebooks, to one of Europe's most modern banks."*

During his work and in his statements, *Braun* always took pains to report and to praise the efforts and successes of his colleagues: *"This was a huge collective effort, every colleague making a massive sacrifice to successfully raise the bank from the back to the front of the class. This development is as true for international banking relations as it is for customer relationships."*

Braun's activity and professional statements alike were characterised by a structured, systematic way of thinking. He was most engaged with how to transform the various procedures into a whole rounded and efficient process. Of the milestones reached in the operation of OTP Bank, he said in the 2013 interview: *"These days the bank is essentially a big IT system driven by a huge steam engine, and this is what I tried to build. We had many interesting adventures, and had to carry out some psychological and moral changes alike. When we introduced the new account management system, some front-office employees were up in arms that someone had entered the accounts they previously handled only on paper, and so they no longer took responsibility for the accounts from that point on. This was a psychological barrier that had to be sensed and crossed. The second big step was the introduction of the card system, when customers also had to get used to the idea of a little piece of plastic carrying hundreds of thousands of forints. At that time we held various courses, used hostesses, and tried every way of introducing the new money handling method. Today we take it for granted, but it took quite a long time for this relatively alien process to become successfully ingrained in the minds of the Hungarian populace and to make them accept it. The next step was when even a card was no longer needed, when you could transfer, unlock or fix deposits by telephone. Again we sensed a psychological barrier at that time, regarding whether the system was sufficiently reliable or rapid..."*

"It is to the credit of OTP's staff that they successfully introduced and had these systems accepted in Hungary; these are what I regard as the real milestones. In the case of online banking, we had to create secure and convenient systems thanks to which all banking transactions today can be carried out from anywhere at any time using a number

of tools, even by telephone. The bank today is a part of life, and OTP endeavours to play a significant and positive role in this life, so that the bank can also be part of a family in the broader sense” – declared Braun in 2013.

Braun retained a professional dedication and passionate love for his work throughout his life, always looking for opportunities on which the bank could capitalise and better stand out among its competitors. “Whenever I travel abroad, it always makes people smile that the first thing I do is to take out a little money from the ATM. Partly it’s so that I have a little cash on me, and partly so I can see that the system is working; to this day I’m amazed by the speed, by the way data can cross the world in 5–10 seconds. These developments are scary for an older person, and this is something we also have to resolve through our educational activities. Essentially we’ve lost a generation, and we now need to bring them up to speed. We have to reach the point where everything and every piece of data which is not absolutely essential we shouldn’t be asking for, either in person or on paper.”

Braun still remained active in retirement. He continued to work at OTP as advisor to the chairman/CEO and as chairman of the bank’s IT management committee, and was also a member of the bank’s board of directors, as well as sitting for 22 years on the board of GIRO Rt. He was also voted onto the supervisory board of OTP Garancia Zrt.

Also taking on a public role, Braun was elected four times from 2009 as president of the Hungarian CIO Association (VISZ). At the head of the association he played an active role in ensuring that genuine industry experiences were incorporated into Hungary’s IT higher education curriculum, and it was also at his initiative that the VISZ camp for programmers was established. He taught for 11 years at Budapest University of Technology and Economics.

During his career Braun was a member of the leadership of several professional organisations, for example the presidium of the Intelligent Card Forum. He participated in the work of MTA SZTAKI, the professional committee charged with elaborating tasks in e-governance. He also played an active role in the operation of the Csányi Foundation supporting socially disadvantaged children of outstanding ability.

Besides being active in several fields of information technology, for many years Braun shared his experiences as a recognised expert in project management with the coming generations of leaders at conferences and in lectures. He always did so in an easily understandable and appealing style, at the same time observing the highest professional standards.

Those who knew him personally respected *Braun's* knowledge, professional expertise, constructive attitude, subordination to tasks and boundless kindness. An oft-quoted saying of his demonstrates his focus on solutions: "*Listing errors does not solve them.*"

We bid farewell, but *Péter Braun's* memory and working achievements remain with us as a legacy, providing an excellent basis for further development.

BIOGRAPHY

Gained electrical engineering degree from Technical University of Budapest.

1954–1989: employee of Electrical Energy Research Institute, head of department on departure

Managing director of K&H Bank Rt., at the bank's Computer Technology and Information Centre

Taught for 11 years at Budapest University of Technology and Economics

1992–2014: Giro board member

1993–2001: Deputy CEO for IT at OTP Bank until retirement in 2001

1997: OTP Bank board member

2001– Chief advisor to the chairman/CEO

2001–2014: chairman of IT Management Committee (IIB)

2003–2004: deputy CEO for IT at OTP Garancia

2004–2008: member of supervisory board of OTP Garancia

2012–2014: OTP Russia board member

2013– OTP Mobil supervisory board member

2009– president of Hungarian CIO Association (VISZ)

2013 member of supervisory board of OTP Mobil

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Photo: *Péter Kelenhegyi*, Computerworld