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80% of Fortune 500 companies use the technology provided by ServiceNow."

AT YOUR SERVICE

erviceNow is on a mission to make the world of work a better place for everyone. The US software behemoth has been an incredible

success since its formation as a company in 2004, and today, 80% of Fortune 500 companies use the technology provided by ServiceNow.

The front cover feature on March's edition of CNME, is with the affable Mark Ackerman, Area VP MEA, at ServiceNow.

In a brilliant interview, Ackerman provides our readers with a broad overview on the current state of play in the IT landscape, in terms of the challenges and opportunities that

In a wide-ranging discussion, Ackerman highlights the impact its new Utah release is going to have for users, the need for businesses to have greater digital resiliency — and how companies no longer have to choose between speed and innovation, but instead leveraging their Now platform can have both simultaneously.

March is Women's History Month, and we also celebrated

International Women's Day on March 8th.

To celebrate that we conducted a whole series of interviews with female leaders from the IT ecosystem across the region on tahawultech.com.

Two of those interviews, are featured in this month's edition of CNME.

Sirin Akrouk, Marketing Manager, MEA at Pure Storage, and Yasmine Afifi, Head of Legal for Public Sector, MENAT at Amazon Web Services, outlined the best practices they believe need to be adopted in order to level the playing field in the IT industry, not not only here in the Middle East, but

Despite the progress that has been made, just 25% of the IT workforce globally is female.

Afifi recalled how she overcame unconscious bias in a previous role, and documented the programs and initiatives AWS are championing to ensure they have a workplace that is inclusive and diverse.

Akrouk was also very candid in terms of some of the obstacles she has had to overcome during her career, but declared that women need to pursue their dreams regardless of what others may think, and said they need to rally against the status quo to achieve real change.

In this month's magazine there is also extensive coverage from our CIO Leadership Awards, which took place towards the end of last month.

We celebrated the IT leaders that have demonstrated their ability to spark change, and we also had a fascinating panel discussion with some of the industry's leading lights in an effort to better understand what 2023 is going to look like, in terms of the challenges and opportunities we're likely to

In addition to this, we spoke to Gregory Man and Jessica White from Bird & Bird to learn what sort of rules and regulations are needed for the Metaverse.

Vibhu Kapoor from Epicor highlights the capabilities of their Epicor Kinetic ERP offering, and Sahem Azzam from Orange Business, talks cognitive cities and the role the Metaverse will play in the cities of the future.

In addition to this, we also have an excellent piece with

Antoine Harb from Kingston Technology.

We hope you enjoy March's magazine, and we'll have full coverage from our Women in Tech Awards in April's edition of CNME.

Thank you. 🧽

Mark Forker Editor







A key message from our recent Women in Technology Forum and Awards was the fact that we are stronger together.

CPI Media Group and tahawultech.com would like to extend a massive thank you to ALL our sponsors for making such a special and necessary event happen.

We will be back bigger, better and bolder with your support next year.

Congratulations to all the winners!

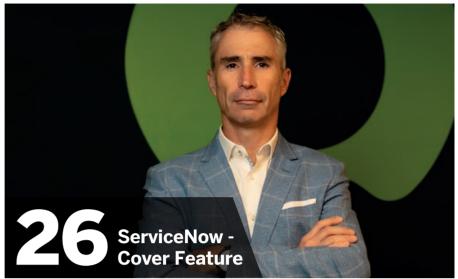


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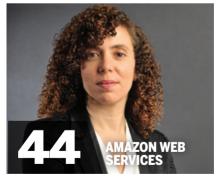
cnme













6 News

CNME rounds up the biggest regional and global developments in enterprise technology, which includes the news that ServiceNow has entered into an exciting new partnership with US operator AT&T, Mindware receives Microsoft Azure validation - and Alfa Romeo F1 team looks to expand its presence in Everdome.

- Gregory Man and Jessica White, from Bird & Bird, outline why they believe the regulatory environment in the UAE gives the country an advantage over other jurisdictions.
- Sahem Azzam, VP of Orange Business, MEAT, highlights the future of cognitive cities and the impact the Metaverse will have on the ICT ecosystem.
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- 40 Vibhu Kapoor, RVP, MEA at Epicor, said businesses need to stress test their 'readiness' before embarking on an ERP implementation.
- 44 Yasmine Afifi, Head of Legal for Public Sector, MENAT at Amazon Web Services, shares her views on what needs to be done to address gender inequalities in the IT industry across the region.

FOUNDER, CPI Dominic De Sousa (1959-2015)

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File Manager All-in-one | Compared to the com

200,000 new mobile banking Trojan installers discovered

In 2022, Kaspersky experts discovered nearly 200,000 new mobile banking Trojans, marking a two-fold increase from the previous year's figures. This alarming surge in the number of mobile banking Trojans is also the highest ever reported in the last six years. These

reported in the last six years. These and other findings are in Kaspersky's 'Mobile Threats in 2022' report.

"Despite the decline in overall malware installers, the continued growth of mobile banking Trojans is a clear indication that cybercriminals are focusing on financial gain. As our lives increasingly revolve around mobile devices, it's more important than ever for users to remain vigilant against mobile threats and take the necessary steps to protect themselves", comments Tatyana Shishkova, security expert at Kaspersky.



MDS Computers and Mint Group partner up to enhance their solution portfolio



Global IT consultancy, Mint Group,

and UAE's leading enterprise system integrator, MDS Computers (Part of MDS SI), today announced a strategic partnership aimed at extending the reach and enhancing the offerings of both companies.

"We are thrilled to partner with MDS Computers, a company with a reputation for delivering world-class IT solutions and services", said Yvonne Dias, Mint Group Chief Finance Officer. "This partnership will enable us to provide complimentary skillsets to those provided by MDS Computers, we are confident that together we can help organisations in the region to achieve their digital transformation goals".

"Mint Group is a respected and well-established IT consultancy with a strong presence in the global market", said Roger Kakhia, Executive Vice President of MDS Computers. "By partnering with Mint Group, we are



(L-R) Roger Kakhia, Executive Vice President of MDS Computers & Yvonne Dias, Mint Group Chief Finance Officer.

able to extend our reach and enhance our overall solution portfolio, and we are excited about the opportunities this partnership will bring to both companies and our customers. MDS Computers has been in the UAE market for four decades and has an excellent reach and relationship with its customers. This will really help to reinforce these relationships by offering best-in-class solutions to the enterprise market", concludes Roger.

Mindware earns prestigious Microsoft Azure validation

Mindware today announced it has

earned the Windows Server and SQL Server Migration to Microsoft Azure Specialisation, a validation of a solution partner's deep knowledge, extensive experience and expertise in migrating Windows Server and SQL Server-based workloads to Azure.

"The achievement of this Microsoft Azure Specialisation is a confirmation of our capabilities at Mindware to successfully plan and deliver complex cloud migration projects", said Silmi Khanfir, Director of Cloud and XaaS at Mindware. "Together with our partners and Microsoft, we are working to help customers transform their businesses, and we're delivering impactful, human-centred solutions to the market every day".



Silmi Khanfir, Director of Cloud and XaaS at Mindware.

ISACA UAE Chapter & Tahawultech.com host first edition of Infosec & Cybersecurity Congress

ISACA UAE Chapter & Tahawultech.

com hosted the first edition of the Infosec & Cybersecurity Congress at the Habtoor Grand Resort, Autograph Collection, JBR Dubai.

The event highlighted the rapid evolution of the cybersecurity landscape and its increasing complexities that leave organisations vulnerable and exposed to threat actors. It brought together CISOs, IT

professionals, security architects, policy makers and other key security officials to debate on the future of IT Information & cybersecurity. Are the current solutions and processes enough? How much security would companies wish to deploy, going forward? What skillsets would security professionals need to have, to deal with the most sophisticated threats?



ServiceNow partners with global telco to launch 5G and fibre networks solution

AT&T Inc. and ServiceNow today

announced a global telecom product to help communications service providers (CSPs) manage 5G and fibre network inventory. AT&T provided strategic design and technical guidance for the development of ServiceNow Telecom Network Inventory, which is built on the ServiceNow Platform and available for telcos globally today.

"Working with ServiceNow to develop Telecom Network Inventory was a great collaboration to create a tool that could help us address an industry-wide challenge", said Jon Summers, senior vice president of information technology and chief information officer, AT&T. "As we approach our

internal deployment, we also look forward to seeing how other operators around the globe might take advantage of it".

AT&T will provide ongoing strategic guidance as ServiceNow enhances Telecom Network Inventory, helping ensure the product provides modern, industry-leading solutions for the complex network needs of the telecom industry.





Mohammed Al Rais, CIO, Emirates National Oil Company.

ENOC transforms customer experience with Fortinet Secure SD-WAN

Fortinet, the global cybersecurity

leader driving the convergence of networking and security, today announced that Emirates National Oil Company Limited (ENOC), a wholly owned company of the Government of Dubai, has chosen Fortinet Secure SD-WAN to transform customer experience and increase operational efficiency.

Mohammed Al Rais, CIO, Emirates National Oil Company said, "We needed a faster, more resilient infrastructure with deeply embedded advanced security. We also needed to do this within budget and without increasing management complexity. There were several product combinations that might have met most of the technical feature requirements on our list, but only Fortinet had the deep integration to create a single, secure, and manageable SD-WAN infrastructure".

After evaluating a shortlist of potential suppliers, ENOC chose the Fortinet Secure SD-WAN solution based on the FortiGate Next-Generation Firewall (NGFW), to preserve the privacy of ENOC's private MPLS network, while enabling faster, lowercost internet, and direct cloud access at each of the 400+ remote sites. For ease of management, FortiManager was deployed to provide single-paneof-glass visibility and control over the entire infrastructure. With this, ENOC benefits from less complexity and lower total cost of ownership (TCO). FortiAnalyzer was added for its action-oriented analytics, and its drill-down reporting around web traffic, applications, users, and threats to ease the burden of regulatory compliance.



CPI Media Group and tahawultech.com

hosted the 2nd edition of the Women in Technology Forum and Awards at The Sofitel Hotels & Resort, Downtown Dubai.

Anita Joseph and Mark Forker moderated two fantastic panel discussions, that were really broad in terms of the insights and perspectives shared, but some recurring themes shone through, such as the need for greater education, the implementation of KPIs to really hold businesses to account, the need for some women to overcome imposter syndrome, and how women need to empower other women and support each other instead of competing against each other.

Kausar Syed, Group Publishing Director at CPI Media Group, said it was critically important to shine a light on the female leaders that are driving real change in the IT industry through their fearless leadership.

"We know that the IT industry still has a long way to go in terms of being a level playing field. However, we have to highlight the incredible women that serve as an inspiration to the next generation of female leaders in the industry across the region, to show that it is possible to get to the top. There is more to be done, but as we heard on the panel if we stick together and support each other then we can change the status quo. This is the 2nd edition of our Women in Technology Forum, and it was another incredible success. It is an event like no other in the industry, the energy, and enthusiasm was electric and on behalf of CPI Media Group and tahawultech.com, we want to sincerely thank everybody who made the event possible, and a big congratulations to ALL our winners".

His Excellency Saeed Al Tayer Opens Middle East Energy with focus on renewables



His Excellency Saeed Mohammed Al

Tayer, Managing Director and CEO of Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) officially inaugurated Middle East Energy 2023 today as more than 900 energy suppliers from across the globe started a three-day showcase of their latest innovations and new-tomarket technologies.

This year marks the 48th edition of Middle East Energy, the region's leading energy summit will explore the plans and policies set to shape the future energy outlook of the Middle East and educate attendees on the state of play of the sector. Running until March 9 at Dubai World Trade Centre, more than 35,000 energy professionals are expected to attend the event's three separate conventions: Strategic Conference, Intersolar Middle East, and Technical Seminars.

"We were honoured by His Excellency's visit to have a closer look at our energy and electricity product portfolio, which has the slogan of 'Investing in the Future' in line with the UAE's ambitious sustainable development goals", said Waseem Yafi, Marketing Communications Manager at Al Fanar, an electrical manufacturing company headquartered in Saudi Arabia and that has been exhibiting at Middle East Energy for more than a decade. Its pavilion this year, one of 19 spread across Dubai World Trade Centre, extends more than 600 metres.

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Zenith Technologies showcases technological prowess at World Police Summit

Celebrating 15 years of distinguished

engagement with its formidable commitment to the futuristic Dubai Police, Zenith Technologies showcases its latest technological prowess via its disruptor platform—the AI EagleEye Intelligent Patrol at World Police Summit. As a leading provider of Intelligent Security and Big Data, AI Correlated analytics, to Law Enforcement, Homeland Security and Governments across the Middle

East, Zenith is honoured to have underwritten a number of remarkable world's FIRST deployments with the forward thinking and reformist Dubai Police, since 2008.

Speaking about their long-term partnering with Dubai Police, Russell Hammad, Founder & CEO of Zenith Technologies, said, "We share Dubai Police's vision and passion for the latest in technological innovations. In fact, identifying the next big thing and



Russell Hammad, Founder & CEO of Zenith Technologies.

disrupter technologies is imprinted into Zenith's psyche". Hammad continued to impress upon the fact that the cornerstone of their affinity with Dubai Police has always been to make Dubai and the UAE autonomously safe and securely sufficient by employing the likes of Zenith's technology suite that is explicit in its real-time data delivery from its numerous city wide deployments, which lends to erase the crippling human error and biases that hinders timely and accurate decision making by police analysts, at times. Zenith has embraced the ethos and innovative mindset of Dubai Police since 2008, who have unequivocally embraced Zenith's disruptive vision in law enforcement. Zenith Technologies has been synonymous with a plethora of the technological advancements by Dubai Police, and we continue to do so by disrupting our own technologies with reiterations of further technology firsts in the Intelligent Patrol Policing. In the UAE, Zenith has had a very longstanding - 15 year celebrated engagement with Dubai Police, developing and deploying several global-technology firsts over that period".

Alfa Romeo FI team looks to expand presence in Everdome

Alfa Romeo F1 Team today announced

the continuation of their cooperation with Everdome, the Mars themed hyperrealistic metaverse experience project, as they continue to explore new synergies between sports and future technologies.

Commenting on the partnership, Alessandro Alunni Bravi, Alfa Romeo F1 Team Stake Representative said: ''We are delighted to continue our exciting collaboration with Everdome: the interest around the metaverse is



quickly rising, and their hyper-realistic approach in creating their metaverse platform fits closely with our ambitions to offer our fans new, immersive, and high-quality experiences, getting them closer to our team. Everdome plans to transform the way people consume sporting events while raising the bar for fan engagement; all of this will add a futuristic dynamic to the traditional motorsports experience for racing teams and fans alike, and we are thus looking forward to working together and unlock the full potential of our partnership I'm excited to see Everdome's platform live in the Formula One paddock for the first time, this weekend, and to see our team's world come to life in the metaverse as the season progresses".

BIRD & BIRD

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

cnme Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Gregory Man** and **Jessica**White from international law firm Bird & Bird, to learn more about the services they provide, how the regulatory environment in the UAE appeals to investors looking at disruptive trends such as NFTs and crypto assets – and the rules and regulations that are required to drive the new concept of the Metaverse across the region.



NME were delighted to be given the opportunity to speak to Gregory Man, partner at Bird & Bird and Jessica White, who is an associate at the legal firm.

The pair specialise in financial regulation for both traditional and digital asset types in the Middle East, and have a particular focus on technology, payments and the FinTech industry in the UAE.

In what was a candid and extremely insightful and informative exchange, the legal experts kickstarted the conversation by attempting to give our readers a better overview of what Bird & Bird does

According to Gregory Man, technology is firmly infused and embedded in the DNA of the legal firm.

"Bird & Bird prides itself on being one of the leading advisors to organisations being changed, or disrupted by technology an the digital world. We have a very straightforward focus, compared to a lot of other firms. For us technology really is firmly embedded in our DNA," said Man.

As aforementioned above, the pair have been tasked with the responsibility of leading the finance and financial regulation practice in the Middle East region, which encompasses the burgeoning FinTech space as well.

He said their focus on nascent technologies and new concepts such as the Metaverse was a 'natural progression' of the evolution of the services the company provides.

"We are one of the leading intellectual property firms in the world, and always have been – and stemming from that our focus on technology The digital world has been a natural progression for us. In Dubai, we're a much smaller and more focused firm than a

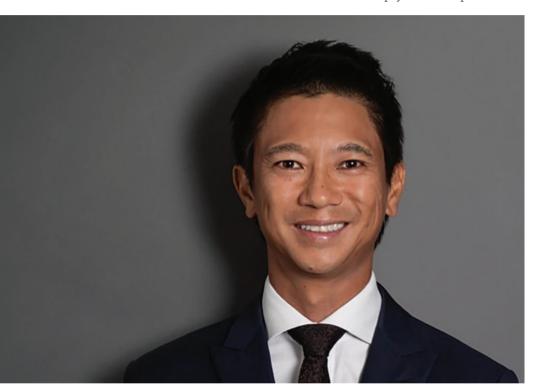
key priority for us. However, if you look at the way technology is pervading all areas of the economy then almost inevitably that has resulted in us advising a lot of other organisations across sectors, who are also looking to deal with things like payments. Our practice

There has been a huge upsurge in investments in cryptocurrency, virtual assets and NFTs globally, but following the high-profile FTX crisis, investor confidence has plunged.

However, White believes that the regulatory environment in the UAE is a huge reassuring factor for potential investors in digital assets like NFTs and cryptocurrency.

"When you look at investor confidence, one of the things they will consider is how regulated the marketplace is. I think that the breadth of regulations that are in place in the UAE gives the jurisdiction a great advantage. The DIFC launched the 2nd phase of their virtual asset regime last year, and those types of regimes help to build investor confidence. But of course, when you have big scandals like the collapse of FTX then it's only natural for investors to be wary and reluctant. The UAE is in a much better position than some other jurisdictions, where regulatory developments in this area are sometimes slower to develop," said White.

Man, briefly added that in terms of some of the clients he has dealt with in this space, the consensus among them was the industry as a whole will come out the other end stronger, and that more regulation is welcome.



lot of the larger firms and that gives us a distinct advantage," said Man.

In addition to this, Man revealed that the company does cover the entire Middle East region, but its main base was in Dubai..

Bird & Bird has a broad portfolio, but Man acknowledged that an important focus of Man and White's practice is financial regulation.

"Given the financial regulation aspect of what we do, the FinTech ecosystem is a has also naturally evolved into advising on NFTs, crypto and blockchain. When you consider Bird & Bird's client base of technology clients, then a lot of that work finds its way to us. The FinTech space is a big focus area for us, but I think the practice is a lot broader than that," said Man.

Died & Dies

Bird & Bird prides itself on being one of the leading advisors to organisations being changed, or disrupted by technology and the digital world."

"I think it's fair to say that you'll find people and businesses who have had their fingers burnt by crypto and NFTs, but of the players we advise, many of them are heavily invested in the technology and the market, and are here for the long run. The players that we advise are of the firm belief that the industry will emerge stronger and better at the end of it, and I think many of them welcome the fact that it may lead to more regulation - and I think what a lot of our clients and prospective clients like about the region is the fact that regulators in the UAE have really embraced the challenge," said Man.

White pointed to the FinTech Accelerator Programme launched by DIFC, as an example of what can be achieved with sensible and open regulation.

"The DFSA is a great example of an excellent regulator. They launched a progressive and practical FinTech Accelerator Programme, that served as a perfect illustration of a regulator that is looking to determine the new innovative technologies that are emerging, whilst considering if those new technologies are going to be beneficial for consumers, and if they would be in compliance with current regulations in a regulatory sandbox. If they do not meet the compliance requirements, then the regulator can review ways it could update regulations to reflect the current technology that's going to benefit consumers in the end. So I think that is a very different way to look at regulatory



relationships compared to other jurisdictions, who adopt a rigid stance of, if it's not in our rules then you can't do it. The FSRA in the ADGM is another similar example" said White.

We then moved the conversation on to the topic of the Metaverse, which has dominated the tech landscape over the last 12 months, and has been described as the future of the internet.

I think the initial challenge is going to be assessing which current regulations that apply in the real world are already fit for purpose in the Metaverse, and which ones aren't." However, in terms of the rules, regulations and frameworks that need to be decided in order to accelerate this concept into a reality, Man highlighted that the fact there was no clear definition on what the Metaverse is, makes it difficult to regulate.

"I think what everybody needs to bear in mind and consider with all these discussions around the Metaverse, is that there still isn't one clearly accepted definition of what the Metaverse is. People are talking about the concept in a way that would you make you think it is already out there, but it is still developing. I think there has been a greater development in terms of the idea of what it potentially will be, but there

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still isn't a clear definition, or a generally accepted consensus as to exactly what it is. Some of our clients have clear ideas as to where the potential lies, and what it could be, and I think the perception that it is in the hype phase, is probably a valid one. However, I do think there is so much interest in it primarily because of the huge potential around what the Metaverse could become," said Man.

White pointed to the Dubai Metaverse Strategy that was launched in 2022 which aims to turn Dubai into one of the world's top 10 metaverse economies as well as a global hub for the metaverse community, as a clear sign of the UAE's intent, and believes that the whole concept is becoming a little more tangible

due to the progress that is being made.

"The Dubai Metaverse strategy was what prompted us to include the metaverse as one of our Tech Predictions for 2023, and I think it is very interesting to see an initiative like that, and observe from afar the progress that has been made in that time. Now, I'd imagine there has been a lot more progress behind the scenes than has been published, which is quite typical with governments all over the world. However, when I sat back and had a think about the key markers, you can see there have been some definite steps forward including the Dubai Metaverse Assembly report, and I feel like the whole concept is becoming more tangible now in terms of what the overall goals are," said White.

White also revealed that the Government of Dubai Legal Affairs Department conducted a day of training for lawyers in the UAE in late 2022, about the legal regulation of the Metaverse.

"There were over 2,000 lawyers in attendance on the webinar to discuss the regulatory focus around the Metaverse, and to examine whether or not our current laws, or regulations are going to be fit for purpose, so it's definitely front of mind with the Dubai government. We've also seen the DIFC launch their Metaverse Accelerator Programme, and that is designed to attract leading global startups and provide them with an opportunity to build proof-of-concepts

for government and non-government institutions, and to pitch these to the programme sponsors. However, in the background, like I noted earlier with their FinTech Accelerator Programme, the DIFC have publicly stated that they will be drafting guidelines for the Metaverse, which I think will be directly informed from the discussions that they have obtained from the new players looking to enter the market here," said White.

In terms of the challenges that exists in regulating the Metaverse, both White and Man stated that it will be an ongoing process.

"I think the initial challenge is going to be assessing which current regulations that apply in the real world are already fit for purpose in the Metaverse, and which ones aren't. However, I don't think this is a question that initially anyone can answer, and instead will be an ongoing process. We can already see intellectual property and legal battles going on concerning the Metaverse, so that is going to make regulators reflect on how the courts will determine some of the disputes and whether that is appropriate as the Metaverse develops going forward. I don't think any regulator, whether it be in the UAE, or anywhere else in the world will want to recreate a wheel that already exists and is fit for purpose, so I think regulators will focus on that assessment process and looking at key areas of focus around things like privacy, digital identity and cybersecurity," concluded White.

ORANGE BUSINESS

REIMAGINING THE FUTURE

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Sahem Azzam**, Vice President, Middle East, Africa & Turkey at Orange Business – the Enterprise division of the Orange Group, to learn more about the company's vision for the Metaverse universe, the importance of stress-testing those use-cases – and the industry verticals he believes will truly benefit from this new virtual technology.

ahem Azzam joined
Orange Business in
June, 2019.
In a successful
career spanning almost two
decades in the ICT ecosystem,
Azzam has cultivated a stellar
reputation for being a fearless
and innovative leader.

During LEAP, which was held last February in Riyadh, Azzam presented the Orange Business vision for 'Metaverse Cities', which subsequently attracted huge interest onsite from participants at the conference.

To find out more about the Orange Business view of the Metaverse, CNME sat down with the regional VP.

In a candid exchange, Azzam began the conversation by giving the Orange Business definition of the Metaverse.

"Undoubtedly, there is a lot of hype around Metaverse today, and a lot of different definitions of what the Metaverse is going to be. We accept the definition of the metaverse as a realtime, digital, persistent and immersive space inhabited by

digital representation of people and things. Orange Business is only in the early stages of research and exploration on the metaverse. Our approach to understanding it is guided by our purpose. This will help us ensure we direct our focus towards a responsible metaverse. They are going to be virtual worlds that are extremely immersive, and each on a different scale in terms of interactivity. Users will be able to interact with the content of that virtual world, whether by engaging with a service, shopping or playing a game. However, it's also important to note that the immersive experiences in this virtual world will be largely based on real-life scenarios." said Azzam.

During LEAP, Azzam delivered a presentation entitled; - Imagining the future of cognitive cities: Digital twins, the metaverse, and modelling the future.

Azzam pointed out that currently the digital twin lacks immersion, and said this is where the Metaverse will bridge the gap. At LEAP he showcased two Orange Business usecases, one on education and the second on cognitive cities.

"The first block of the Metaverse is the digital twin. A digital twin is a digital representation of a realworld entity or system - a complete simulation of real-life scenarios. However, a digital twin is not immersive. This is where the Metaverse comes into play, paving the way to mixed reality experiences, based on existing augmented reality tools, such as digital twins. During LEAP, we demonstrated two use-cases of Metaverse universes, which were cognitive cities and education. Our cognitive city use-case concentrates on three key elements, which are; user experience, a reduction in operating costs, and revenue generation. These are critical components in making a use-case successful and sustainable," said Azzam.

"What we do at Orange Business is take a real-life



scenario and move it to a Metaverse universe virtually, before we commit significant investment and resources into the project. We have witnessed many businesses launch usecases that are not financially viable, inevitably leading to a huge drain on resources. Once the resources into the project are scaled back, this leads to poor customer experience, and we know that once this happens, then the service will be doomed to fail. We have seen that happen a lot recently." said Azzam.

Azzam feels this failure was

primarily down to relatively weak due diligence by businesses, which had simply not undertaken a rigorous testing process to determine whether end-users would pay for the service.

"Businesses have been rather guilty of high expectations for the Metaverse, and the success hasn't materialised. However, what you need to do is stress test the use-case you have for the Metaverse universe first and, if the interaction is good and you determine that people are willing to pay for the service, then that's the stage when you implement in a real-world scenario and invest in the project. The immersive experience is a testing ground for developing impactful innovation in the real world – new services, behaviours, and uses," said Azzam.

The Metaverse has been billed as the future of the internet, and a revolution of some sorts, however, Azzam believes that it will simply be an extension of the physical world, and said its success will very much be based on a hybrid model.

"I firmly believe the Metaverse universe will always be a hybrid model because it's human nature to want and seek that physical interaction. For example, if you take a look at the retail sector, many brands have made their shops virtual and interactive. Essentially, what that means is you can visit the store virtually, try on the clothes you like, and interact with the customer service agents within the Metaverse, buy the products and get them shipped seamlessly to your house. However, that's the shopping experience that I may want but others may still prefer to visit the physical retail store and enjoy that shopping experience.

I firmly believe the Metaverse universe will always be a hybrid model because it's in the human nature to want and seek that physical interaction."



That's why I believe the Metaverse will always be a hybrid model. It will act as an enabler for retailers to provide that virtual experience but won't completely replace the traditional way we shop for some products," said Azzam.

Azzam also highlighted how education will be another key industry vertical for the Metaverse.

"I believe another key usecase for the Metaverse universe will be in the industry vertical of Education. It can connect an entire global ecosystem of educators to share teaching practices with students all over the world, and again, the virtual and immersive element of the Metaverse/hybrid model will make this a hugely effective tool for teaching and learning. Today, education is often measured by grades, but are grades a true and accurate reflection of a student's potential and measurement of performance? I don't think it is. With a Metaverse universe, and the amount of information it can collect, educators will be able to learn a lot more about a student's performance and potential," said Azzam.

It has been well documented that in order to really accelerate

the Metaverse, it needs to be regulated properly, and Azzam said the regulation, policy and frameworks required for the Metaverse, are ultimately going to determine its adoption and success.

"Regulation around the Metaverse is going to be very important, especially in relation to data privacy. We know the data helps us make better decisions and gives us a better profile on each user that allows us to tailor the experience that caters

The unique aspect of Orange Business is the fact that we work as a network and digital integrator, building on our strengths in connectivity, cloud and cybersecurity."

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to their needs. However, we know that because there are no regulations in place, a lot of this sensitive data can't be used, which obviously limits the full potential of the Metaverse, so this is an area that needs to be addressed. Another challenge is focused on the safety of the Metaverse. How far can we go into accessing these environments without encountering real problems, so it is critical that we build regulations and protections within the Metaverse. Kids are going to want to enter the Metaverse, so we need to know that when they enter that space it is safe. The Metaverse as we know it has not matured fully yet

but there has been significant progress. There are still a lot of key components that have to develop to really make it a mature technology and accelerate its adoption in the public domain," said Azzam.

"The Metaverse and the 'Internet of the Future' is still being invented but will help enrich our personal and working lives. Most importantly, we aim to help develop an open, safe, ethical Metaverse that puts the user's needs first and is socially and environmentally responsible," he added.

Azzam concluded a wonderful conversation by highlighting what makes Orange Business such a unique company, and said the feedback from his presentation at LEAP, gave him huge confidence for the future.

"There was a tremendous response during and after my presentation, and a real hunger and appetite to find out more about our concept of reimagining cities. The unique aspect of Orange Business is the fact that we work as a network and digital integrator to address customers' business needs. Our differentiated approach is based on our next-generation connectivity solutions and leverages our ability to orchestrate networks, cloud, and cybersecurity components all together to lay the foundation for a secured, flexible, and virtualized platform. Critically, it addresses customers' business strategy combined with their infrastructure strategy.

"We work with different technology vendors, and we bring them together to select the best of breed for our customers to make sure that each solution fits their requirements that is in line with our use-cases. We don't push features, or certain products, we reassure the customer that the usecase they are looking for is exactly what they need. We have implemented smart cities and cognitive cities in the real world, so we know how to replicate these in the Metaverse, and we know how it should look and function. We are excited about what the future holds for us and the region," said Azzam.

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LEADING THE WAY

CPI Media Group and tahawultech.com hosted the CIO Leadership Awards 2023, which paid tribute to those that are leading the way in the IT industry, and helping their companies transform to meet the ever-growing demands of the digital economy.

MARCH 2023 www.tahawultech.com













































SERVICENOW

THE TIME IS 'NOW'

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Mark Ackerman**, Area VP MEA at ServiceNow, to find out more about the best practices businesses need to pursue to achieve digital resilience and transform their operational processes, the impact the latest Utah release of the Now Platform will have, and what differentiates the company from its rivals.

n 2024, ServiceNow will celebrate 20 years in business.

The success the US software company has enjoyed during that time has been nothing short of staggering.

Its mission statement as a service provider is to leverage the power of technology to make the world a better place for all of us — and its tagline is the 'world works with ServiceNow'.

It's hard to argue with that claim, especially when you consider that 80% of Fortune 500 companies use ServiceNow.

CNME spoke to Mark
Ackerman, Area VP MEA at
ServiceNow, in an effort to
find out how the company is
helping regional organisations
overcome operational
challenges and implement
organisational agility and
resilience in their business
transformation.

Ackerman joined ServiceNow

in 2015, and has played a key role in the US software behemoths growth across the Middle East & Africa over the last eight years.

Ackerman kickstarted the conversation by outlining the state of play in the marketplace when it comes to the challenges and opportunities with business transformation.

"It has become quite evident of late, that the technology strategy has now become the business strategy. That viewpoint has been backed up by reports commissioned by IDC, and Gartner, that show that around 50% of the budgets are going towards modernising and enabling companies to be much more agile. In today's climate, organisations don't want to have to choose between innovation and speed, or between a great experience, or growth, they want to have all those things simultaneously," said Ackerman.

Ackerman claimed that some

of the biggest challenges stem from the fact that traditionally organizations have had digital silos, where they have operational excellence within those silos. Ackerman used a regional telecommunication operator as an example of the need for transformation.

"I spoke to the CIO of a major telecommunications operator last week regarding their archaic call centre operations and he explained that currently, customer service agents have six screens that they have to look at in order to service a customer request. This is highly inefficient, not to mention that in all likelihood this will result in a poor customer experience. What the agent really needs is one workspace that collates information across IT, the core networks, and the business, and serves it up as actionable data. The overarching message we are getting from customers is that they need to move faster, and be more agile. They can't rip and replace, they have to create that golden thread across the entire organisation, so they can serve up data in a much quicker and efficient way," said Ackerman.

Ackerman acknowledged the challenges facing businesses that have legacy software, be it HR systems or CRM modules, and said it was clear that rip and replace wasn't an option.

"If we stick with the telco sector for a second, what we are seeing more of is in instead of having a CTO, and a CIO sitting separately, operators have created a CTIO, in an effort to give them better oversight on workflow

processes that sits across networks, engineering and IT. Telcos have spent so much time integrating and delivering solutions in the traditional 3, 4 and 5G networks, that it's very hard to rip and replace. ServiceNow has been innovating with telcos — like we recently did with AT&T to launch our Telecom Network Inventory solution — to start innovating at the core from an IT perspective, in an effort to help them create a structure where their service management workflows and service operations are modernised," said Ackerman.

Ackerman also disclosed that they have created a system of interaction that sits across new telco solutions, and then slowly but surely have started to decouple the old legacy solutions, and replace them with more modern workflows that sit over those.

"This same model also applies to businesses in any other sector. It takes a brave CIO to go in and say we're going for a full rip and replace of a legacy HR or CRM system for example. What we're seeing is that system of engagement with a cloud workflow that sits above the legacy systems and provides a more modern view - and that enables them to go in and start modernising those solutions underneath them to create the cloud-first workflows that businesses really need in order to drive efficiencies, productivity and more positive customer outcomes," said Ackerman.

Ackerman said that the same scenario facing customers is also being experienced from an



employee viewpoint.

The Area VP MEA at ServiceNow said that in today's current climate, employees, on average, globally are dealing with 24 different types of HR solutions.

"The CHRO is trying to elevate the experience from

an employee perspective, but when you look at the biggest balance sheet expense from a P&L standpoint, that's pretty much payroll. If you look at very large airlines, they may have 100,000 employees, but their top three expenses are fuel, the plane and the people

Organisations don't want to have to choose between innovation and speed, or between a great experience, or growth, they want to have all those things simultaneously."

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costs. Organisations like Dubai Airports are starting to ask the question of how do we take that persona and make them a lot more efficient, and make work flow through the organisation much quicker? The system they want is one where when there is an issue with payroll, or expenses, they can be redirected to one place," said Ackerman.

He added that another challenge from a persona perspective was partnerships and vendor supply-chain management.

"We know there has been a huge challenge around the global supply chain, and when you talk about ESG, the G governance — is extremely important. How do you manage the entire governance across the supply chain? There is a lot of information being captured in different systems and when you start looking at your operational resilience, how do you measure, capture and report on that in real-time? You have to accommodate vendors in terms of the way they work, and that needs to be in tandem with your organisation in an effort to be more seamless, and efficient to ultimately help them to reduce costs," said Ackerman.

According to Ackerman, every single government, public and private sector organisation is grappling with getting on top of their governance and operational resilience.

"We're seeing organisations that want to have their continuous compliance controls across all of their different workflows. Business continuity is a big priority should another pandemic take place god forbid, it's critical that the organisation can continue to function, so all of these different processes are now coming under scrutiny, and this has now become a board level discussion. Previously, we were speaking to CIOs about how we can work together and expand, but now we are speaking to COOs, and Chief Risk Officers about how we can help control these risk processes," said Ackerman.

Ackerman said that

ServiceNow are working very closely with organisations on their ESG programs to serve up the dashboards needed to help them understand what ESG looks like within an organisation.

"We are creating longterm programs, and are helping them from a project portfolio demand management perspective. We are taking all of the data from the different source systems, and are serving that up into analytics and dashboards, and then we utilise the AI capabilities within the platform to start pointing out the successes, and the areas they need to improve on," said Ackerman.

ServiceNow has recently announced a major platform expansion with the Now Platform Utah release.

Utah has been built to help organizations future– proof their businesses and drive outcomes faster in the face of continued economic uncertainty.

Ackerman believes it has allowed ServiceNow to become 'more relevant' to some industry verticals.

"Large organisations in manufacturing and transport have really increased their focus on health and safety, and they can now leverage the platform to help them around this area. This is a good example of how we have taken the platform, and become much more relevant to multiple industry verticals with a single upgrade," said Ackerman.

Ackerman also highlighted how there has been a constant barrage of risk events,





incidents and disruptions globally.

"At ServiceNow, what we are trying to do is help organisations navigate this increasing complexity by bringing that threat detection and response into a single workspace. We have been able to create the custom workflows, and the correct response from a security incident perspective into the platform, so we're not using bespoke IT processes," said Ackerman.

The ServiceNow executive also added that they have

attempted to get on top of operational risk and resilience, with the ServiceNow NEXT experience module.

"We provide an enterprise view of all the critical risk information like vulnerabilities, outages and failed controls. Now, if you're a company that has thousands of employees, then having the ability to serve up the most important operational resilience tasks to the highest level, and onto the CIO dashboard, is a very powerful capability to have. The look and feel have certainly changed a lot for Utah, and there is a lot more around experience for various agents and personas on the platform. We have also tried to brand and theme the platform better, so organisation can have a single look and feel for the entire organisation irrespective of ERP, CRM, or whichever solution they are working on," said Ackerman.

In terms of what differentiates ServiceNow from their market rivals, Ackerman said the fact they have never wavered from their single line of code and single database, was a key market differentiator for them.

"From the beginning, ServiceNow have always had a single line of code, single database. From my perspective, particularly for organisations that are worried about the potential complexity of managing integrations, this is really where they will see value from the Now Platform. We have stayed true to that single line of code, single database. For us, that's the power, and the silver bullet that differentiates us from our market rivals," concluded Ackerman, come

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The look and feel has certainly changed a lot for Utah, and there is a lot more around experience for various agents and personas on the platform."

PURE STORAGE

PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

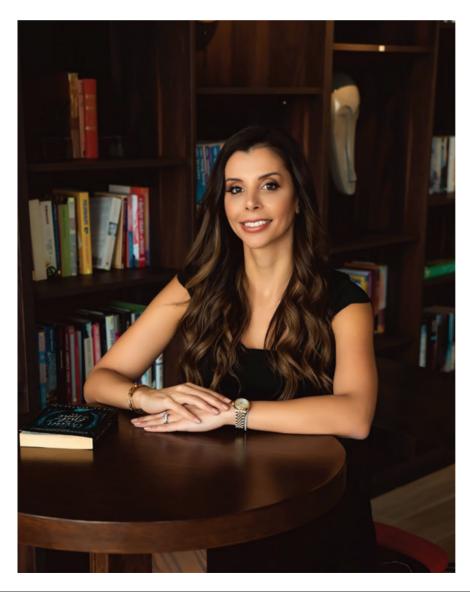
Sirin Akrouk, Marketing Manager, Middle East and Emerging Africa, at Pure Storage spoke to CNME Editor Mark Forker about her experiences working in IT, what needs to be done to address the glaring inequalities that still exist in the sector – and how the role of a marketeer has evolved in tandem with the development of disruptive new technologies.

the IT and technology industry remains a male-dominated environment. As someone that has enjoyed great success in the IT industry, what advice would you give to a young woman considering a career in IT – and can you outline to our readers some of the challenges you have had to navigate and face during your career?

In my career I've seen a couple of big challenges, firstly, overcoming negative stereotypes around women not understanding or excelling in technology.

I've seen companies develop programmes to attract talented women such as diversity and inclusion quotas, graduate programs targeting women, learning and development opportunities provided to women in the industry.

These can help dispel the myth that women aren't interested in tech and also encourage more women into tech companies.



Another challenge many women talk about is achieving work-life balance. I find the tech industry is amongst the best in offering measures to help achieve a good balance, especially for women.

Measures including working remotely, flexible working hours, focusing on performance rather than attendance, long maternity leaves, exceptional health benefits, extended leave programmes all helped me navigate challenges throughout my career.

In terms of advice I would give: every woman should pursue her dreams regardless of what others think. Self confidence is key and always strive to bring the best version of yourself to work.

Also, ensure that you surround yourself with people who support and appreciate you. Build allies. Seek mentors. Ask questions. Always be open to learning new things throughout your career.

Many businesses are guilty of talking a good game when it comes to levelling the playing field, and addressing the gender disparity that exists within their own organisations. We know that many of them come up short in terms of delivering tangible results. However, from your own perspective, what do you think businesses in the IT and tech sector can do to really promote greater inclusion and diversity within their organisations, and in the boardroom?

While there can always be room for improvement, my experience in the technology



sector has been a positive one. I have been lucky to enjoy many of the benefits the industry provides especially when it comes to being a mother.

I had the opportunity to take a six-month maternity leave for both of my children which was instrumental for their healthy development and my recovery. Programs like these do promote greater inclusion as they attract women into the industry regardless of which stage they are in life.

Another aspect which I recently experienced that promoted greater inclusion is the opportunity to join Pure Storage after a sabbatical. I took some time off to prioritise family and look after two small children.

While other industries might not have accepted this career gap or been judgmental, Pure Storage made their

In terms of the advice that I would give, every woman should pursue her dreams regardless of what others think." decision based on my previous experience, achievements and skill set without being concerned about my decision to take some time off to care for my family. It's an inclusive attitude.

I would like to see more women in top positions and not just because of quotas, but because of merit as I believe there are many qualified women that can make the cut.

Digital technologies have been credited by many analysts as significantly increasing gender equality and empowering women, especially amidst the backdrop of our 'work from anywhere' world. Do you believe that technology has really empowered women and provided them with greater opportunities in the IT industry, or do the age-old barriers facing women still exist despite the advent of disruptive tech?

Yes, tech has helped and I believe the tech industry has always been more advanced than others, even before the pandemic.

It is very much a resultoriented environment and women, just like men, have the chance to organise their time to suit their needs without jeopardising their deliverables at work.

Can you tell us more about your own roles and responsibilities as the Regional Marketing Manager for Pure Storage in the Middle East and Emerging Africa?

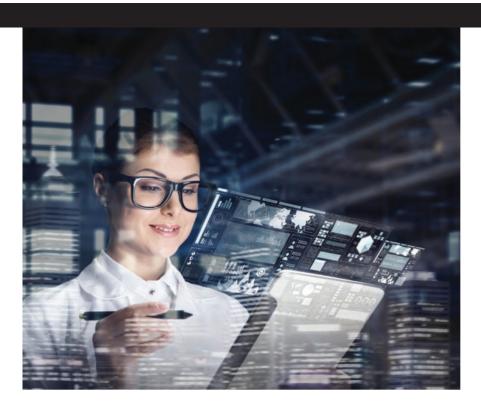
My role as a marketer is to bring unconventional marketing strategies in alignment with Sales and Channel teams to create brand awareness and increase overall pipeline for the Middle East and Emerging Africa region. Bringing together the entire customer and partner ecosystem to create marketing plans that help in achieving the desired results remains on top of my priorities. I look at different ways to achieve the highest ROI while maintaining high quality and positive customer experience.

How has the role of a marketeer evolved over the last 3–5 years? We have seen huge global brands leverage social media applications like TikTok and Instagram to promote their products to new demographics, so has the fundamentals of the job completely shifted, or do the traditional basic principles still apply in our fast–paced and volatile digital economy?

It is a mix of both.

Though B2B marketing tactics tend to be more conventional one cannot deny that the near future will be almost entirely digital.

Being present in some digital



platforms is essential for the company growth and building brand awareness.

My approach is to adopt Omni Channel Marketing to leverage both traditional and non-traditional tactics.

Pure Storage is having huge success, not only in the Middle East, but on a global scale, but how important is the role of marketing in elevating the company's products and message to those that they need their solutions and services?

As a marketer, I am a strong believer in the role that marketing plays in growing and sustaining a business.

Customers make decisions based on the awareness and education they receive about our products and services and the interaction they have with the brand.

The role of marketing becomes crucial to effectively communicate our unique offerings which lead our customers to make important investment decisions.

We have a wide range of products and services and marketing is essential to link each customer to the product or service that best suits their needs while ensuring a positive customer experience with the brand.

Another important role that marketing plays at Pure Storage is to build and maintain a strong strategic partner network.

We support our partners with co-marketing GTM plans and tools that enable them to sell our products and reach a wider audience.

I would like to see more women in top positions and not just because of quotas, but because of merit as I believe there are many qualified women that can make the cut."







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CIO PANEL DISCUSSION

AI IS THE ANSWER

CNME Editor Mark Forker moderated a panel discussion with some of the most prominent leaders from the IT industry during the CIO Leadership Awards, which were held at The Taj Exotica Resort & Spa last month, in an effort to find out what the major challenges and opportunities were within the IT ecosystem across the Middle East region.

he annual CIO
Leadership Awards
attracted some of
the biggest players
from the IT ecosystem across
the Middle East for a night of
celebration.

However, CNME Editor Mark Forker chaired a panel discussion entitled: *State of* Play: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities in the Middle East IT ecosystem.

He was joined on the panel by some of the most respected and revered IT leaders which included; Mario M. Veljovic, General Manager, VAD Technologies, Kinda Baydoun, Regional Manager of Channels, Distribution and Alliances, Middle East & CIS, at Veeam Software, Charbel Zreiby, Director, Channel Presales - META at Dell Technologies, and Dr. Jassim Haji, President, International Group of Artificial Intelligence.

Mario Veljovic, General

Manager at VAD Technologies, said it had become quite evident across the region that there was a huge issue in terms of skills, but said businesses could start to combat the issue by leveraging the capabilities of AI.

"In 2023, we're going to see more AI embedded into everything that we do. I think artificial intelligence is going to provide the solution to the major skills shortages that we currently see in the market," said Veljovic.

He added that there was a real lack of willingness to really embrace disruptive technologies.

"I think one of the biggest challenges that we are facing now, despite the fact we have the technical ability to find solutions to major issues, is the human mind and organisations are not prepared to embrace these technologies that are available now, and really put them to use," said Veljovic.

Kinda Baydoun, Regional Manager of Channels, Distribution and Alliances at Veeam Software, said that a major focus now for CIOs was delivering 'seamless experiences' in the digital economy.

I think artificial intelligence is going to provide the solution to the major skills shortages that we currently see in the market." "CIOs are looking at applications that are the most relevant for their organizations, in a bid to optimise the cost inside the organization, or to create better engagement and experiences for their customers," said Baydoun.

Baydoun echoed the sentiments expressed by Veljovic, by stating that automation was needed to address issues around talent and skills, adding that research has indicated that more and more of IT budgets are going to be invested in AI.

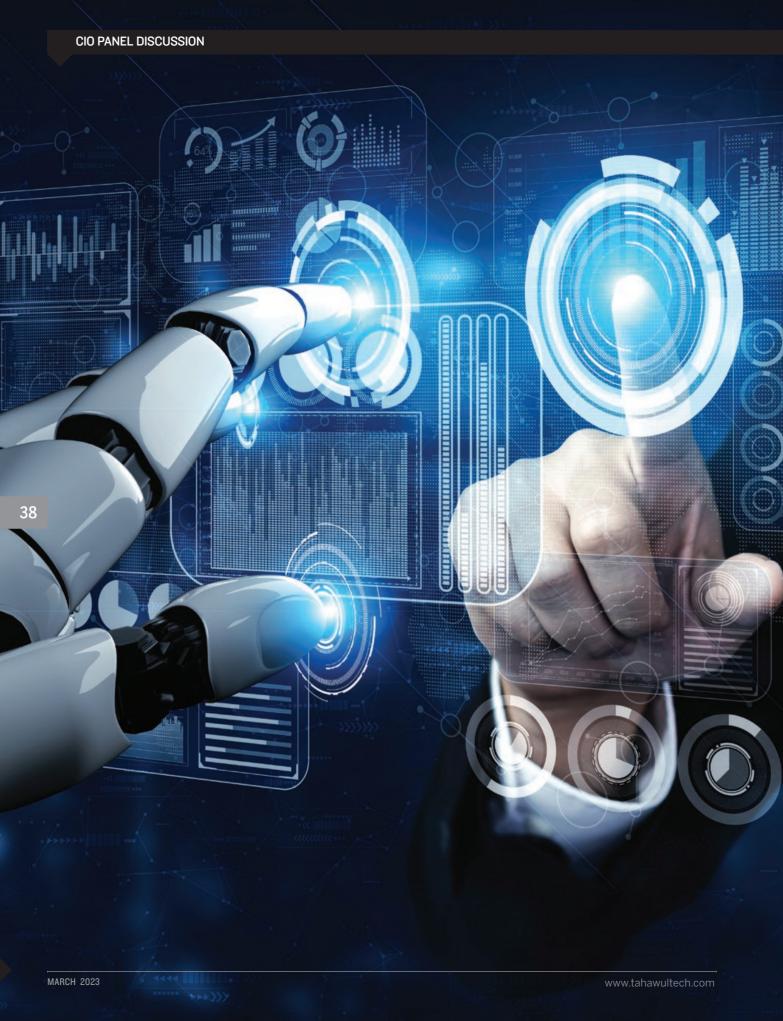
"Reports have shown that by 2025, 60% of IT budgets are going to be spent on automation, and by 2028, 30% of the IT companies will have autonomous processes operating inside their organization to resolve the skills and talent shortage that we have in the marketplace," said Baydoun.

Charbel Zreiby, Director, Channel Presales - META at Dell Technologies, believes that we are going to see more and more use-cases developed at the edge over the next 12 months.

"I really believe that over the next 12 months edge deployments is going to become increasingly popular across the region, because the current technology is enabling us to have more processing power at the edge, so we're going to see a lot of use-cases developed at the edge, and they are going to be fuelled by AI," said Zreiby.

Zreiby also added that in terms of the connectivity needed to fuel this new







Organisations and vendors are too slow to move towards AI, you simply cannot continue to defend yourself using traditional tools and processes against these attack agents, it's just not possible."

ecosystem, he pointed to the role of 5G networks as critical.

"In the current climate 5G is critically important for our connectivity, and the ability to go from core to cloud, to the edge is going to be supported by the backbone of 5G technology."

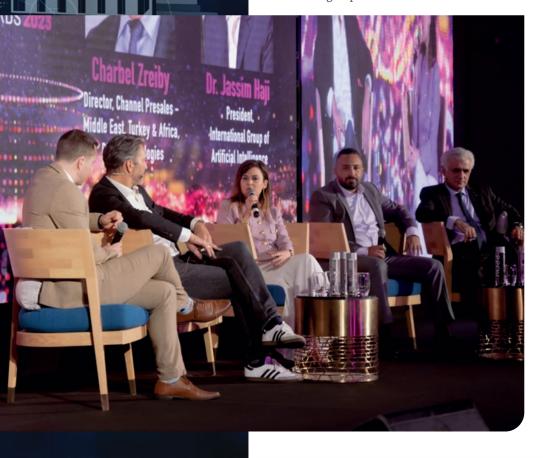
Dr. Jassim Haji, President, International Group of Artificial Intelligence focused on cybersecurity.

Cybersecurity attacks have grown exponentially over the last few years, and the devastating impacts caused by a breach can be the death knell for an organisation. The threat landscape is complex and nuanced, but Dr. Haji said quite bluntly that far too many businesses are 'too slow' to move towards AI.

"If you look at some of the most recent cyberattacks, they were prompted by Machine Learning and AI, not by humans. Organizations and vendors are too slow to move towards them, you simply cannot continue to defend yourself using traditional tools and processes against these attack agents, it's just not possible," said Haji.

Haji also highlighted that when implementing AI into cybersecurity, businesses and users have to be cognisant of the fact that the machine learning element infused in the solution has to constantly reprogram itself in an effort to be able to respond to new threat actors.

"When it comes to cybersecurity in AI, you have to remember that at the very heart of your algorithms is decision-making, it's the heart of AI. However, if you attack that decision-making then you take control of everything, so in this case the machine learning has to continuously reprogram itself to learn in a bid to adapt to new threats," said Haji.



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EPICOR

AREYOU READY TO MAKE THE MOVE?

Vibhu Kapoor, RVP for MEAI at Epicor, spoke to CNME Editor Mark Forker, about the processes that businesses need to follow to ensure they are 'ready' for ERP implementation, why manufacturers need to shift their operating models to the cloud, the capabilities of Epicor's ERP offering – and the significance of their new datacentre in the UAE.



ibhu Kapoor has been a prominent figure in the ERP industry for over 20 years, and he has had a front-row seat for the seismic changes that have occurred within the IT ecosystem across the Middle East region during the last two decades.

In a candid discussion

with CNME, Kapoor provided expert commentary and great insights into some of the challenges facing businesses looking to implement cloud ERP, and why many companies, especially manufacturers need to leverage the power of cloud technology to adapt to the changing market dynamics.

He began the conversation by highlighting the importance of developing and maintaining partnerships.

"Every customer has the right to choose the product, or the implementation provider that they believe are the right fit for their business model. However, from my 20 years of experience, I firmly believe that good partnerships deliver business confidence. When a customer is looking for an ERP, the relationship between a buyer and a seller should quickly manifest itself into a partnership, and this partnership should go all the way to the goal line stage," said Kapoor.

In terms of some of the challenges that businesses encounter when seeking to adopt cloud ERP, a prevalent issue for many has been the topic of customer readiness.

"Customer readiness is extremely important. We have



seen countless examples of customers thinking they are ready, but it becomes evident very quickly that they are not. So, even before they start the evaluation cycle of procuring an ERP, the change management internally should be done by the leadership team, who inform everyone that they are looking to evaluate a new ERP. It's important to note, change management is a continuous process, and it has to be ongoing from the moment they purchase the ERP, and when the implementation starts. When the implementation starts, they then should very quickly adopt a partnership model with the provider," said Kapoor.

Kapoor added that obviously picking the right product is absolutely critical to the success of the implementation.

He revealed that there are four key components that businesses need to focus on to ensure they achieve success with their ERP implementation.

"Customers need to choose the right product that is fit for their industry vertical, and if they are following these steps then they significantly reduce any pitfalls that they might encounter. In terms of what they need to do to select the right solution, there are four key things they need to focus on, and that is; look for the business specific features that they need, look for the industry specific features that they need, look at the long-term viability of the solution, and finally, interoperability," said Kapoor.

When asked what are the factors that determine when a business is 'ready' to adopt a cloud ERP, again

What we provide at Epicor is agility and resilience when you deploy our technologies."

Kapoor focused on the change management process.

"I think in terms of assessing customer readiness, it really is across multiple levels. The first stage is at the management and ownership level. When a company feels like they need an ERP, it's coming from the management at the top, but the change management that I talked about is required from the ground level, where they are traditionally used to doing things their own way, and they can be very resistant to change. The second stage is related to those who execute the objectives of the business on a daily basis. For example, CFOs and finance managers understand the challenges faced by staff doing daily entries, and are cognisant of the fact that they need a proper system, but the management in many cases are not ready to invest," said Kapoor.

Kapoor disclosed the second stage of customer readiness is a tougher one for companies like Epicor to overcome and solve.

"The second stage is harder to overcome for Epicor and other vendors, because it is probably not a qualified opportunity to go after. There needs to be more education and discussions on budgets and the actual pain points you're trying to resolve. The first one is an easier fix, because when we as vendors engage with the owners, we support them by providing them with access to the right data points, and we can conduct sessions in terms of the education needed. We try to make that journey as easy as possible for the mid-



management to adopt that ERP system," said Kapoor.

When asked what he believed was really driving manufacturers to shift their operations to the cloud, Kapoor said there were multiple factors at play.

"The first element for me, is the digital experience itself. Today, our digital experience falls mainly towards retail, or e-commerce. However, most industrial companies in the current climate are now focused on the timely delivery of products. Previously, someone would order an automobile, and wait five months to get it, but in this new experience economy that we live in and that is underpinned by digital experiences, this is no longer tolerated and consumers want fast delivery," said Kapoor.

He also added that manufacturers were being driven by the Amazon effect, and said manufacturers that aren't digital will simply not survive in the next digital decade.

"Whilst manufacturers need to deliver fast, they also need to maximize profits in the same way. There is a big demand on manufacturers from customers to offer a personalised customer experience, irrespective of the product, and this is driven by the 'Amazon' effect. Now, all of this is made possible by moving to the cloud, because it provides a digital experience. However, if you're running a siloed factory without being connected to the internet in a full blown way, then you simply cannot provide this experience, and won't survive in the ultracompetitive digital economy that we live in," said Kapoor.

According to Kapoor, one other key factor that is driving manufacturers shift to the

cloud, is labour shortage and retention.

"Labour shortage and retention is a huge issue, and the labour shortage globally is the highest it's been for 16 years. 3 out of 4 employers are all reporting difficulties in finding talent and retaining it. If you move your systems to the cloud then your heavy dependency on a large labour force to support the business is significantly reduced," said Kapoor.

Another challenge has been around the stability of global supply chains, which we know were triggered by the pandemic, but Kapoor said the challenges around the supply chain are still unfolding.

"Due to the issues with global supply chains, which are still unfolding, customers are now looking for near shore deployments, so they can avoid all the pitfalls, such as the barriers to entry by competition. However, as I said by moving to the cloud, the businesses have been able to decrease the time and expense it requires from their backend, and the heavy manufacturing operations on their IT departments. Businesses are now focusing towards dashboards, analytics and training, and it's clear to see that the issues around the supply chain globally have really pushed companies to move their systems to the cloud," said Kapoor.

In terms of the value proposition of Epicor Kinetic, Kapoor said its ability to provide ROI was a key distinguishing factor for the company.

"What is special about Epicor Kinetic, is the fact that it is purpose built, it's specific to industries such as manufacturing, we are fully available on the cloud, and we are easy to deploy. For me personally, and for Epicor as a whole, what we believe really distinguishes us from other ERPs, is undoubtedly the ROI that we provide," said Kapoor.

Kapoor then provided 10 key points on the unique capabilities of Epicor Kinetic, but for the purpose of this article we have focused on three of them. He began by highlighting the agility and resilience provided by Epicor Kinetic.

"What we provide at Epicor is agility and resilience when you deploy our technologies. Digital technologies help you identify challenges and opportunities, and our solutions come with

full analytics, and the BI solutions that we have embedded into our solutions also gives users greater insights, and ultimately makes your business much more agile, which you need in a marketplace that can be so volatile," said Kapoor.

Kapoor once again focused on the importance of ROI, and added that one of the main arguments for cloud computing is proven ROI.

"Our upfront costs are low, and our subscription is very predictable, and customers know over the next 3-5 years of their journey how much it is going to cost them. We never enter into a discussion with a customer unless we are able

rapidly with what exactly the customer needs and wants," said Kapoor.

We concluded a fantastic exchange by touching on Epicor's new datacentre, which is primed to open in the UAE in the next few months. Kapoor said the time was now perfect to launch the datacentre, and said it showed their unwavering commitment to their customer base across the Middle East region.

"We are really, really excited about the opening of our new datacentre in the UAE. In terms of why now, we believe that the timing is right on many fronts. Today, if you look at our entire customer base in the Middle East,

However, from my 20 years of ERP experience, I firmly believe that good partnerships deliver business confidence."

to tell them where exactly their expenses are going to get lower, and where they will get benefits," said Kapoor.

A recurring theme throughout this conversation has been the importance of delivering good experiences, and managing and delivering on customer expectations, again this is another key feature of Epicor Kinetic.

"We are providing solutions that allow customers to anticipate, adjust, and adapt to what their customer needs and expectations are. Today, customers expect a seamless experience when engaging with any company. If you are on an Epicor solution deployed in the cloud, then you have the ability to change and convert quite

40% of them have already migrated to the cloud. In addition to this, 80% of all our new customer base are choosing to be deployed inthe cloud, or the SaaS model. In an effort to better serve these customers we have decided to open our UAE datacentre. This is our commitment to our customers, and we are giving them what they want. We know that customers are migrating to the cloud, and they have datacentres outside the region, but our attitude is, here you go, Epicor is investing for you, for your business, and we want to better serve you moving forward and that's why we're opening this datacentre," concluded Kapoor.

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TACKLING UNCONSCIOUS

Yasmine Afifi, Head of Legal for Public Sector, MENAT at Amazon Web Services, tells CNME Editor Mark Forker how more training is needed to tackle unconscious bias, how AWS are committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace for all – and what are the best practices that businesses can implement to drive real change.

ou have enjoyed an excellent career thus far in both the oil & gas and technology sectors. However, it's fair to say that both industries are male dominated. Can you outline to our readers some of the challenges you have had to navigate around that perhaps some of your male peers would not have encountered?

Thank you for acknowledging my career achievements in both oil & gas and technology sectors. I have been fortunate to work with many supportive colleagues and mentors throughout my career.

There have been times when I have encountered challenges as a woman in these industries. For example, I have had to navigate situations where I was the only woman present, and had to confront the challenge of unconscious bias.

However, I have also found that there are many supportive

colleagues and allies who are working to promote diversity and inclusion in these industries, and I am optimistic about the progress we can continue to make towards creating more equitable and inclusive workplaces for all.

As mentioned above, the IT and technology sectors have traditionally been disproportionate when it comes to gender. Now, significant progress has been made across the Middle East, but more needs to be done. In your opinion, what are some of the best practices that businesses need to implement and adopt in a bid to really promote greater inclusion and

gender equality within their own organisations?

I believe that there are several best practices that businesses can implement to promote greater inclusion and gender equality within their organisations.

For example, at AWS, we prioritise diversity, equity, and inclusion as a core part of our culture and values. This includes setting clear goals and metrics for diversity and tracking progress towards those goals.

Also, businesses need to ensure that they implement fair and unbiased hiring practices, provide equal pay for equal work, offer flexible work arrangements, provide

Businesses need to invest in providing training to all employees to help them understand and address issues related to unconscious bias."

equal opportunities for women to grow into leadership roles, and being intentional about removing barriers that prevent women from advancing in their careers.

Also, implementing mentorship and sponsorship programs can provide invaluable support and networking opportunities for women.

Finally, businesses need to invest in providing training to all employees to help them understand and address issues related to unconscious bias. By implementing these best practices, businesses can create a more inclusive and equitable workplace where everyone can succeed.

Can you tell us about some of the programs and initiatives that AWS has championed and pioneered in their bid to bridge the gender disparity that exists in the technology sector?

AWS has implemented various programs and initiatives, such We Power Tech and AWS Amplify, which offers training, networking, and mentorship opportunities to underrepresented groups in technology, including women..

There is also AWS Educate that offers free cloud computing resources and training to educators and students and AWS re/Start, which provides free training and job placement support to unemployed or underemployed individuals.

In addition to these programs, AWS has launched the AWS GetIT program and competition to inspire 12–14-year-old students, particularly girls, to explore STEM career paths.

The fully funded program assists schools and educators in bringing tech role models to their classrooms, provides access to a curriculum that teaches fundamental skills, introduces cloud technology, and encourages the design of app concepts to address community issues.

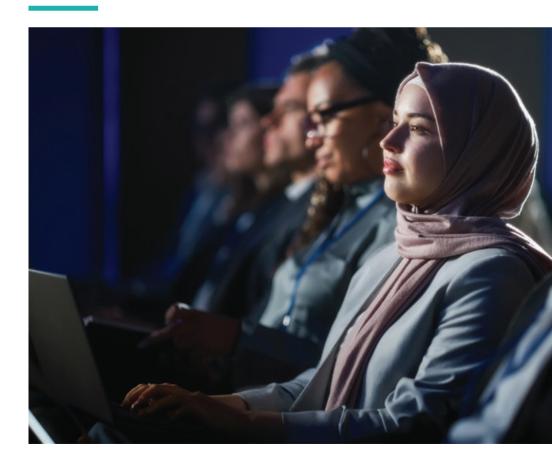
AWS also promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion through employee resource groups, unconscious bias training, and partnerships with organisations such as Girls in Tech and Girls Who Code.

These programs and initiatives demonstrate AWS's commitment to bridging the gender gap and promoting diversity in the technology industry.

Moreover, women lead some of Amazon's largest and most innovative business teams, and they have a positive impact on Amazon products and services.

Women are thriving in tech roles at Amazon Web Services, and they are building and supporting programs to help others. AWS

AWS prioritise diversity, equity, and inclusion as a core part of our culture and values."



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is proud to support these women and looks forward to continuing to champion diversity, equity, and inclusion in the technology industry.

Can you tell us about your own leadership style – and what characteristics you think are critical to be an effective leader? We know that an outdated stereotype directed at female leader is that they have too much empathy – and aren't ruthless enough. However, surely empathy should be seen as a positive trait – what are your feelings on empathetic leadership?

At Amazon, one of our newly added leadership principles is "Strive to be Earth's Best Employer", which recognises the need for all leaders to lead with empathy, have fun at work and make it easy for others to have fun.

As a woman in a leadership position at AWS, I believe that empathy is a critical component of effective leadership. A leader who can understand and connect with the needs and concerns of their team members is better equipped to build strong relationships and foster a positive and collaborative work environment.

Can you tell us how AWS are leveraging their knowledge, skills and resources to help women that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

AWS Disaster Response Program is one way that AWS is leveraging its knowledge, skills, and resources to help women who have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program is designed to provide rapid support during natural disasters and public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

AWS is committed to supporting women by leveraging its knowledge, skills, and resources to provide rapid support during public health emergencies, offering free access to remote work and learning environments, and providing training and certification opportunities to help women reskill and upskill in tech roles.

We know that companies need to change their culture and mindset to really achieve gender equality in the workplace and executive boardroom. However, some female leaders that I have spoken to during our Women in Tech series believe that too many accept the 'status quo' and comply with the unfair environment they find themselves working in. Do you think they need to take more responsibility to rail back against the injustices they face, or does it all fall on the organisation to change the way they operate?

I strongly believe that achieving gender equality and better representation of women in the workplace requires both organisations and individuals to take responsibility and work together.

While it is crucial for companies to change their culture and mindset to create a more inclusive and equitable environment, individuals must also speak up and advocate for themselves and their colleagues.

One aspect I appreciate about Amazon is the empowerment of its employees to bring about change through Amazon Affinity Groups.

These employee resource groups unite Amazon employees from various businesses and locations worldwide to pursue common goals. One such example is Women at Amazon, the largest affinity group, with over 80 chapters worldwide.

Women at Amazon is committed to attracting, developing, and retaining women in both technical and non-technical roles across all of Amazon's businesses. It is a community for employees interested in increasing gender diversity at Amazon.

Another affinity group,
Amazon Women in Engineering
(AWE), that has over 30
chapters at Amazon locations
globally. AWE provides
networking, training,
leadership, and community
building opportunities for
both employees and interns.
These chapters also engage
in community outreach to
encourage more young women
to enter STEM fields, such as
hosting Hour of Code events for
children.

These affinity groups demonstrate Amazon's commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. They provide a platform for employees to come together, share experiences, and drive meaningful change.

KINGSTON TECHNOLOGY

THE WORLD IN MOTION

Antoine Harb, Team Leader, Middle East at Kingston Technology has penned a thought leadership article on the nuances between Data at Rest versus Data in Motion, and has highlighted the need for encryption to protect sensitive information in our volatile digital economy.

here is no denying that the protection of digitally stored data is of utmost importance, whether the company is based in the healthcare industry, energy providers, financial institutions, automotive sectors, or any other sort of business in the industry.

And with the emerging threats of cyberattacks, companies are urged to take the necessary measures to protect different states of data and this includes "data at rest" and "data in motion". Before

deploying security measures, it's important to understand the difference between these two states of data.

Data in motion, also commonly known as data in transit, is basically the data that is transferred between two different locations or devices, whether it's within a private network, through the internet, or with the use of removable storage devices. The daily activities that occur within a company such as sending emails, and transferring data from your smartphone or







Malicious threats and hackers don't always

an office PC to cloud-based applications, etc., all fall under the data in motion category.

However, when it comes to cyber security, the data is vulnerable if it's not properly secured. The unprotected data can be captured and compromised by unauthorised users or malicious programs. This is where the importance of end-to-end encryption comes to play. By encrypting the files transmitted, the data is basically unreadable for cybercriminals.

Companies are advised to make use of industry-proven applications that use FIPScompliant encryption standards and employees should follow strict policies which include the use of only companyapproved apps on office systems and smartphones. Large organisations are also encouraged to add extra layers of security policies that define the type of data that can be accessed and sent over the network for each employee to prevent any misuse or theft of sensitive data.

While data in motion involves the information traveling between different locations, data at rest is basically digital information that is stored at a single location such as officeowned desktop or laptop SSDs, smartphone memory, or even archived in external backup drives or data servers.

A great example of data at rest relates to large organisations that often make secure backups of critical files such as spreadsheets, sales figures, project files, pitch ideas, employee salaries, and customer information on



servers. Companies can choose to have the servers on-premises or to use a secure cloud-based solution, depending on their infrastructures and resources available.

Many companies rely on solutions that offer the swift, smooth, and secure transition of operating systems while allowing localised back-up of user and company data.

For both data at rest and data in motion, it is always recommended to transfer the files or make backup copies with secure storage solutions that feature encrypted hardware. The Kingston IronKey Keypad 200 is an excellent and secure USB drive that offers FIPS 140-3 Level 3 (pending) certified military-grade security and XTS-AES 256-bit hardwarebased encryption. The device features a special physical keypad to enter the passphrase and unlock it before plugging it into any system, ensuring that

the data at rest remains secured.

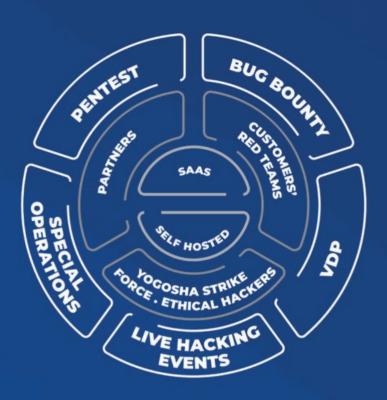
Keeping data safe is critical, especially the data that exists locally with your employees. Encrypted USBs can be very effective here, helping ensure that sensitive data can be stored and transferred as securely as possible.

Secure data backups are essential for any small and medium enterprise. Remember, malicious threats and hackers don't always want to steal your data, but sometimes use ransomware where the end-goal is to encrypt or erase it. Data recovery resilience is key.

While SSDs help to boost the performance of office desktops and laptops, it's recommended to use internal drives with robust security. The Kingston KC600 SATA SSD is the preferred choice here, featuring the Self-Encrypting Drive (SED) functionality and support for AES 256-bit encryption, TCG Opal 2.0, and eDrive. Companies can also consider using encrypted external SSD for data at rest. One such device is the Kingston IronKey Vault Privacy 80, a FIPS 197 certified and XTS-AES 256-bit encrypted external SSD that uses a TAA-compliant and CC EAL5+ certified secure microprocessor.

Whether employees of a company are working in a hybrid working environment, working from home, from a remote location, using a mobile device, or at the office premises itself, strong and proven encryption solutions for data should be adopted, and this applies to both data at rest and data in motion for small, medium and large-scale organisations.





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BBP

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