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MAKING THE RIGHT 'CHOICE'

Sid Bhatia, Area VP, and General Manager for META at Dataiku, explains how its LLM Mesh offering enables businesses to make the right 'choice' when it comes to building their own Gen AI applications.



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In February of 2023, Microsoft launched a new Al-powered version of Bing and Edge, it was the dawn of the Generative Al era, and I2 months on the technology and the noise around it is really starting to gather pace."

GEN AI REVOLUTION

In February of 2023, Microsoft launched a new AI-powered version of Bing and Edge, it was the dawn of the Generative AI era, and 12 months on the technology and the noise around it is really starting to gather pace.

That being said, with every new technology that emerges, there is always teething problems, and Gen AI is no different.

There's no doubting the vast potential the technology has to completely transform specific functions across multiple industries, and is designed to ultimately improve processes and efficiency, and reduce costs for businesses.

However, there are valid concerns around Gen AI when it comes to data privacy and security, and adoption has stagnated to a certain degree as business leaders are fearful of the consequences of getting it wrong when developing their own Gen AI applications.

The company on the front cover of February's edition of CNME is Dataiku, and the AI leader has a platform that can alleviate the challenges facing enterprises when it comes to Generative AI.

CNME spoke to Sid Bhatia, Area Vice-President and General Manager of META at Dataiku, who outlined how its LLM Mesh offering helps businesses overcome issues such as choice, cost and compliance.

"The LLM Mesh enables the efficient testing of different models during the design phase, allowing teams to choose the most suitable models for their applications. This decoupling ensures adaptability, facilitating changes even after the application is deployed," said Bhatia.

That's just a flavour of a brilliant discussion with the dynamic Bhatia, and he also touched on the use-cases presented by Gen AI in the enterprise space, and what measures and processes businesses need to implement to navigate challenges with data privacy, security and integration.

Our CIO Leadership Awards takes place on February 15th at Habtoor Palace Dubai LXR Hotels & Resort – and our panel discussion will focus on the challenges and opportunities presented by Generative AI.

We will have a number of distinguished IT leaders sharing their insights and views on the panel, such as Mario M. Veljovic from VAD Technologies, and Samer Seman from Pure Storage to name a few.

Full coverage from the awards and our panel discussion will be featured in March's edition of CNME.

Back to February's magazine, and we had a brilliant interview with Jonathan L. Hasson and Lara Varjabedian, co-founders of new social media application UBQT.

They are on a mission to enable people to reconnect in real life, and believe UBQT can put the social back into social media.

Below is an excerpt from Hasson from our interview.

"We believe that what we have is very disruptive in our humble opinion, and the app is designed for you to spend as little time as possible on it. We are very old school with our philosophy in terms of less screen time, and more life time."

In addition to this, Anastasios Peppas, Regional Director, Middle East, Turkey & Central Asia at Vertiv, outlines how their portfolio of solutions are empowering the next-generation of Datacentres.

Saud Al Akili, Head of Customer Support at stc Kuwait, details how the telecommunications operator has transformed its operational efficiency by leveraging solutions provided by ManageEngine.

Fady Richmany, Regional Vice President, SEEMEA at Commvault, tells CNME why they have shifted their focus towards the concept of cyber resilience – and Jason Sun, Co-Founder and CFO at XTransfer, explains why now is the right time for the Chinese cross-border payments platform to expand its services.

We also have a number of other excellent interviews and thought leadership features from Lenovo, Nutanix, Omnix International and GCG Enterprise Solutions, as well as coverage from the Dell Technologies Forum, and technical workshops hosted by GBM and Pure Storage.

Mark Forker Editor





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evision and Disney Star expand collaboration to bring the best of South Asian Entertainment

Viewers across MENA can look forward to a wave of high-quality entertainment as evision, the UAE's leading media and entertainment streaming service, and Disney Star, India's leading media and entertainment company, announced recently a strategic partnership.

NEWS

This partnership redefines the entertainment landscape in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), offering viewers access to unparalleled content library while making evision the most comprehensive destination for the region's entertainment needs.

Olivier Bramly, CEO, evision, said: "The strategic alliance with Disney Star expands our premium content and enhances the entertainment destination for audiences across MENA. This collaboration reaffirms our commitment to delivering the best in TV entertainment. evision enables the audiences across multiple platforms and services to experience the best of South Asian entertainment and Sports".

"We are thrilled to further extend

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(L-R) Olivier Bramly, CEO, evision, and Gurjeev Singh Kapoor, Head – Distribution & International, India, Disney Star.

the reach of our compelling and multi-lingual content portfolio in the MENA region through an enhanced collaboration with evision. The MENA region has shown great interest in our series and format shows, broadcasted on our leading TV channels across languages. In addition to our muchloved channel offerings, we are excited to introduce our most sought-after Hotstar Specials to viewers in the region. This collaboration with evision reflects our ongoing commitment to engaging with our audience and represents a significant stride in that direction", said Gurjeev Singh Kapoor, Head – Distribution & International, India, Disney Star.

Positive Technologies helps fix critical vulnerability for popular videoconferencing service Yealink



Yealink has thanked Positive

Technologies for discovering the critical vulnerability BDU:2024-

00482 in its Yealink Meeting Server videoconferencing system. Yealink is the world's number-one VoIP provider and one of the five biggest online conferencing vendors. Its products are used in 140 countries. The vendor was notified of the threat in line with the responsible disclosure policy and released a software patch .

The vulnerability is categorized as OS Command Injection (CWE-78) and allows injecting operating system commands. Attackers can leverage this type of flaws to gain access to OS password files, application source code, or completely compromise the web server. In 2023, Positive Technologies experts came across this type of vulnerability while doing security analysis and penetration testing in 5% of cases.

Extreme Networks introduces new cloudmanaged universal Wi-Fi 7 access point

Extreme Networks, Inc. recently

introduced two new solutions designed to help highly distributed enterprise organisations create improved network connectivity, security and application performance.

The AP5020 is a new Wi-Fi 7 Universal access point (AP) that operates on the 6 GHz spectrum and is designed to support high-bandwidth, latency-sensitive applications and IoT devices – creating a more effective way for enterprises to modernize and manage operations. The 4000 Series cloud-managed switches, the latest addition to Extreme's Universal portfolio, offer faster setup time by eliminating nearly all manual configurations. Paired with ExtremeCloud™ Universal ZTNA, these offer automated onboarding,



configuration and policy enforcement to strengthen security as organisations move to a Zero Trust architecture across their network.

"Extreme takes the power of cloud and AI to make secure connectivity simple. Enterprises are more distributed than ever and need the flexibility to add users, devices and applications across their environment without sacrificing time, security or performance. Our new solutions further expand the flexibility of our portfolio and work in concert with our Universal ZTNA solution for a frictionless user experience applied

> to hybrid work. AIOps in ExtremeCloud IQ leverages explainable ML to further save IT time and money. In the

Infinite Enterprise, we're making it easier than ever to manage, scale and secure the network to drive success", said Nabil Bukhari, Chief Technology and Product Officer and General Manager, Subscription Business at Extreme Networks.

StarLink aims for 40% cybersecurity market share in the MEA region

Starlink, an Infinigate Group company has announced its ambitious plans to achieve 40% of the MEA market share in 2024.

This will position StarLink as the leading distributor with the largest market share in cybersecurity across the Middle East and Africa accentuated by the superior technologies and delivery expertise compared to the competition.

Commenting on the 2023



achievements and roadmap for 2024, Nidal Othman, CEO – StarLink said, "The success of 2023 is behind us. It was a remarkable year with a YoY growth of 26%. As we look forward, we are close to achieving the 40% market share mark which will be a significant achievement and all our efforts would be towards realising this major milestone".

"The cybersecurity industry is growing at a fast pace and the factors driving this rapid growth is the demand for digital transformation due to the rising number of cyber-attacks. We bear the responsibility of guiding our customers in adapting to this evolving landscape in every step of the way, ensuring the security of their data and infrastructure", he added.

Genesis Cloud selects VAST Data Platform to lead a new generation of AI Initiatives



VAST Data, the AI data platform company, recently announced a strategic partnership with Genesis

Cloud, a leading Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) provider for GPUs and accelerators in the cloud.

Together, VAST and Genesis Cloud are poised to make AI and accelerated cloud computing more efficient, scalable and accessible to organisations across the globe.

"To complement Genesis Cloud's market-leading compute services, we

needed a world-class partner at the data layer that could withstand the rigors of data-intensive AI workloads across multiple geographies", said Dr. Stefan Schiefer, CEO at Genesis Cloud. "The VAST Data Platform was the obvious choice, bringing performance, scalability and simplicity paired with rich enterprise features and functionality. Throughout our assessment, we were incredibly impressed not just with VAST's capabilities and product roadmap, but also their enthusiasm around the opportunity for co-development on future solutions".

Everdome paves the way for innovation in brand experiences

Everdome, a leading innovator in

virtual experiences, proudly announces the public availability of the beta release of their groundbreaking product, Spaces.

Spaces is designed to empower brands to redefine their online presence and

engage with audiences in ways never before possible. Whether hosting virtual events, creating interactive showrooms, or crafting immersive brand experiences, Spaces is developing a 'Metaverse-asa-Service" suite of tools that redefine the boundaries of digital interaction.

believe that rather than a sudden web3 revolution. there will be a gradual evolution as the best of web2 merges with the greater freedom, transparency and power of web2. With Spaces, we play our part in the evolution - creating an easier onboarding to the metaverse for all types of creators, allowing individuals and brands alike to start redefining their narratives in

this new era of digital

interaction".

Commenting on the occasion,

Everdome CEO, Jeremy Lopez said,

"Spaces represents a significant

step towards making creation of

immersive digital experiences and

events accessible to everyone. We

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e& enterprise announces collaboration with Burjeel Holdings to advance telemedicine services

e& enterprise and Burjeel Holdings,

one of the leading healthcare services providers in the MENA region, recently announced two landmark collaborations aimed at redefining healthcare in the UAE and beyond.

These include the launch of a pioneering telemedicine services project and a strategic memorandum of understanding (MoU), both of which will revolutionise the realm of healthcare delivery.

Safeer Ahamed, Group COO of Burjeel Holdings, said: "Our partnership with e& enterprise is not just about bringing advanced technology into the healthcare sector; it's about transforming the way we deliver care to our patients. By integrating sophisticated telehealth and remote patient monitoring systems, we are

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set to enhance patient access, improve care quality, and streamline healthcare delivery. Our vision is to establish a patient-centric, technologyenabled healthcare model that not only sets new industry standards but also addresses crucial societal and environmental challenges. Through this venture, we aim to reduce carbon footprint and build a more sustainable and accessible healthcare future for the region".

From left to right: Shamsheer Vayalil, Founder and Chairman, Burjeel Holdings; Safeer Ahamed, Group COO of Burjeel Holdings; Salvador Anglada, CEO, e& enterprise; and Hatem Dowidar, Group CEO, e&.







IFS reports industry leading results with 33% software revenue growth for 2023



IFS, the global cloud enterprise

software company, recently announced its financial results for the full year ending December 31, 2023.

The company posted exceptional results with software revenue growth at 33 percent year-on-year and cloud revenue up 46 percent as new and existing customers accelerate the move to IFS Cloud, a market leading single Mark Moffat, CEO, IFS.

cloud platform, allowing customers to access the latest Industrial AI capabilities most critical to our focus industries. IFS is consistently recognized internationally as a market leader in FSM, EAM, ERP and ESM.

IFS CEO Mark Moffat commented: "This time last year we reported five years of strong consecutive doubledigit growth. I am hugely proud that the IFS team has continued this trend and also delivered an outstanding 2023. We will shortly reach a very significant landmark for IFS with \$1bn ARR representing a strong vote of trust from our customers". Moffat added: "Our core IFS value of being customer obsessed is paying off and with IFS.ai we are creating further productivity and automation opportunities for them while adding a critically important dimension to our proposition. We have delivered AI capabilities to our customers for a number of years now, and with IFS. ai we are driving AI across all our products effectively democratising AI for all of our customers' users". Moffat concluded: "2024 will be a continuation of our strategy to deliver industry specific and market leading capabilities in FSM, EAM, ERP & ESM which includes investing in M&A. For our customers, I am proud to say that IFS moves as one, creating value faster and delivering our best to our customers when it matters most, at the Moment of Service".

Metra Group announces VAP for GCC countries with Infra-AI platform company Astrikos.ai

Metra Group – a leading provider of information technologies and solutions in the region with a legacy of over four decades has recently entered an Agreement of Value–Added Partnership with Astrikos.ai

The emerging promising sector of infrastructure operations, smart cities, IoT enabled cognitive infrastructure area is globally estimated to be over 160 billion dollars market

and is expected to grow with a CAGR of over 10% year over year to cross 600 billion dollars by the year of 2032.

Dr. Chinmay Hegde – Founder and CEO of Astrikos.ai, who was present at



the occasion explained about how the global diaspora of cognitive intelligence with the power of Gen-AI is helping the smart cities to become smart and cognitive urban spaces enriched with disparate data hubs. He also cautioned on the risk of data and information overload and further explained about how Astrikos.ai platforms make sense of such large set of data and provide the pointed/condensed Generative-AI based decision support to the cities/ infra-administration to deliver the comprehensive value to the end beneficiaries/citizens, while complying with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Adib Rajji, VP Vendor Strategy and Business Development of Metra Group spoke about the emerging GCC market demands for Smart Cities and Smart Districts powered with urban analytics and city data cloud and stressed upon the need of technologies that can deliver the better liveability, environmental sustainability, safety, and security indices to the citizens/beneficiaries with cutting down operational lapses with effective machine generated recommendations.



FEBRUARY 2024

VERTIV

INTERVIEW

nastasios Peppas is widely-regarded as one of the most prominent thought-leaders in the datacentre ecosystem across the Middle East.

Peppas joined Vertiv in 2012, and during that time he has played a key role in establishing Vertiv as the go-to player in the datacentre space.

CNME managed to catch-

up with him recently to take a deeper dive into the trends that are driving new innovations within the datacentre sector, the pressure to reduce the environmental impact of

VERTIV HAS THE 'POWER'

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to Anastasios Peppas, Regional Director, Middle East, Turkey & Central Asia at Vertiv, to find out how their solution portfolio is empowering the next-generation of datacentres, the growing market demand to deliver environmentally-friendly datacentres - and the impact the acquisition of E&I has had in terms of solidifying Vertiv's position as a global leader in the datacentre industry.

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datacentres and the rationale behind the acquisition of Irish company E&I in 2021.

Peppas kickstarted the conversation by highlighting how the power capacity required for datacentres is expected to skyrocket over the next few years.

"There have been a number of comprehensive reports that are projecting that the worldwide growth of the power consumption needed for datacentres over the next 6 years is going to double. Forecasts are also predicting that the power capacity will grow from the 75 gigawatt that is typical today, to over 150 Gigawatt in the next few years. This clearly illustrates tremendous growth, but roughly 40% of these workloads will come from AI applications. Traditional



Anastasios Peppas



applications will also grow, but the biggest growth is expected to come from AI," said Peppas.

Peppas then moved the dial

of the conversation towards big industry players such as Google and Amazon Web Services, who have invested significantly in GPUs as reported by Omdia recently.

Omdia also recently reported that hyperscalers such as Google and Amazon Web Services are investing aggressively in GPUs. However, there is a fundamental difference between a CPU and a GPU. A CPU is a traditional microprocessor and consumes around 300-400 kilowatts, whereas a GPU consumes around 1 kilowatt. Now if you scale this up then that obviously makes a huge difference in the cooling requirements within a datacentre. GPUs are now used mostly to deal with AI applications, as AI is very compute-intensive, so in order to reject that heat you need specialised cooling systems, and here is where Vertiv comes in," said Peppas.

Peppas disclosed some of the capabilities provided by Vertiv's solution offering when it comes to highdensity systems.

"Obviously when you have a range of different applications then inevitably you will require different solutions, but Vertiv is equipped and ready to address all of it. Traditional high density aircooled systems in the range of 20-30 kilowatt can now

Vertiv has always been very strong inside the white space when it comes to cooling and power, but it did not have an offering when it comes to power distribution until the E+I acquisition."

INTERVIEW



be managed with modern containment systems that Vertiv offers in the cloud world. The next stage of rack density is the range of 40-50 kilowatt, which is liquid cooled, and then the next step beyond that, which we expect to be in the next 5-10 years will be in the range of 70-100 kilowatt per rack. However, we will continue to adapt and evolve our product portfolio to meet the changing demands of the marketplace," said Peppas.

Peppas also added that he believes that datacentres of the future will adopt a hybrid model, and that liquid cooled datacentres will be the norm.

"There are going to be datacentres in the future that will be hybrid, where parts of their systems are air-cooled, whilst other parts will be cooled by liquid solutions. Over the next 7-10 years liquid cooled datacentres may become the norm. A combination of liquid cooled systems together with our high-density UPS systems, which are extremely efficient can offer a complete end-toend solution for our clients, that ultimately enables them to be ready for the next generation of rack density, which is made up of GPUs," said Peppas.

Sustainability has now become a huge priority in the C-suite, and businesses across multiple industries are making concerted efforts to reduce their carbon footprint.

Datacentres are extremely energy intensive, but Vertiv is helping their clients become more efficient and reduce carbon footprint, highlighting for example how free cooling in the Middle East is possible.

"Every single product of Vertiv undergoes rigorous testing, and has been developed to drive efficiency, the guiding principle behind the innovation of all our products is efficiency. The cooling solutions that we provide are among the most efficient in the world, and they incorporate systems such as free cooling. Clients have asked me is free cooling possible in the Middle East? And my answer is always the same, which is of course it is, and we know this because we've done it. Now, granted we can't provide it all year round, but we can attain free cooling for 2-3 months a year in cities like Dubai, whilst in a place like Riyadh, we can probably achieve free cooling for 4 months a year, because it has a drier climate and is more elevated.



A combination of free cooling with very efficient cooling systems provides solutions to our clients that are extremely efficient and environmentally-friendly," said Peppas.

As Peppas pointed out the majority of the power consumption in a datacentre outside the IT requirement is cooling, and the more you can achieve savings with an efficient cooling system, then ultimately the more efficient and sustainable the entire datacentre becomes.

"In the Middle East, where we all know the climate is very hot, Vertiv has done it, and we will continue to offer the latest technologies in terms of energy efficiency. This is our focus, and our niche market, and we will continue to invest and specialise in

this area. Certain clients have included in their tender evaluations the calculations of what the environmental impact will be when selecting certain vendors. 20% of our clients in the Middle East are now looking for the environmental impact, but we see that demand growing exponentially over the next few years. When I first came to the region 11 years ago, nobody wanted to talk about the environmental impact of datacentres, everybody wanted a datacentre that was freezing, but the landscape has certainly changed now.. Customers are turning to Vertiv for highly efficient solutions that can help reduce their carbon footprint and become more sustainable." said Peppas.

In September 2021, Vertiv acquired E&I for \$1.8bn, in a deal that industry commentators have described as a 'gamechanger'.

Peppas explained the rationale behind the acquisition and its success.

"We are very proud of this acquisition as it perfectly complements what we are doing at Vertiv. The rationale behind the acquisition stemmed from the fact that E&I under the leadership of Philip have managed to build quite an in-depth worldwide access to hyper-scalers, and they did this by developing high-powered distribution systems. So, it was a natural fit for Vertiv to look out for a company like E&I, because that was missing from the Vertiv portfolio. Vertiv has always been very strong inside the white space when it comes to cooling and power, but it did not have an offering when it comes to power distribution," said Peppas.

In addition to this, Peppas outlined how datacentres were looking for a more inclusive and integrated approach, and that was another factor in Vertiv acquiring E&I.

"In the two years since the acquisition of E&I Engineering and PowerBar Gulf, Vertiv has expanded its global manufacturing footprint for switchgear, busbar and modular power solutions by opening new facilities and adding production to existing facilities, resulting in more than 1,000 additional employees through 2023. As a result of the acquisition, we can offer a complete and comprehensive datacentre offering from the transformer to the rack, and that includes all the power distribution systems and switchgear systems, and all these systems are highpowered and high-density equipment. In summary, E&I was a natural fit for us, and it has been a huge success for us thus far," said Peppas.

The air and liquid cooling solutions that we provide are among the most efficient in the world, and they incorporate systems such as free cooling."

STC KUWAIT

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Saud Al Akili**, Head of Customer Support at stc Kuwait, to find out how the telecommunications operator has transformed its operational efficiency by leveraging Manage Engine solutions.

ncepted in 2008, stc Kuwait is one of the top telecommunication operators in Kuwait. Over the years, it has grown to be a digital leader for mobile and internet services for both business-to-business and business-to-consumer companies.

stc provides innovative, reliable, and secure telecommunications services and platforms to its customers, aiding in the digital transformation in the region.

stc caters to a growing customer base of more than 2.4 million customers.

The company employs over 1,500 people who support operations across its offices, call centers, branches, and various other franchises in the country.

The stc workforce operates in various departments, such as technical support, customer service, and operations.

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to Saud Al Akili, to learn more about the business challenges facing stc Kuwait, prior to integrating solutions from ManageEngine into their existing workflows and processes.



Saud Al Akili

Business challenges

"When it comes to implementing IT infrastructure, there are several key business and technology challenges that large organizations like ours must address to ensure success. stc relies heavily on technology to deliver efficient and responsive customer support services. Therefore, allocating the necessary budget for its IT infrastructure was critical. One of the perennial challenges for the company is to ensure its IT infrastructure keeps up with the demands of the telecommunication market, as the technology used is always changing. For the customer support team, this means having an IT infrastructure that can adapt to changing customer needs and market dynamics," said Akili.

stc deals with sensitive customer information, making data security and compliance paramount.

Meeting these requirements without disrupting operations is a continuous challenge. This is why investing in the right tools for securing the data of the customers was seen as an essential business objective.

As stc Kuwait grew, it became more important for an effective ITSM system to be put in place to cater to the delivery of services more effectively and with less downtime."



Technology challenges

"Inside large enterprises like stc, the customer support landscape needs to be scalable and flexible to accommodate a growing volume of customer interactions. This requires the ability to expand resources and systems seamlessly. Yet management and integration of data across various systems and applications is an ongoing technical challenge. Keeping up with the latest technology trends and incorporating them into stc's IT infrastructure can be complex. Whether it is adopting AIdriven chatbots or integrating new communication channels, the challenge lies in ensuring that new technologies enhance support services without causing disruptions," said Akili.

Downtime in stc's customer support operations can be

detrimental. According to Akilil implementing robust disaster recovery and redundancy solutions is essential to maintain high availability.

Challenges of legacy and manual IT operations

"stc's IT support team relied on manual IT operations for tracking and managing support requests from the customers' end. "This can lead to disorganized and inefficient processes, making it challenging to prioritize and resolve issues in a timely manner. stc's support staff found it difficult to maintain a centralized repository of information related to varying ticket requests, including a lack of visibility over the status of ongoing support requests.

This often resulted in miscommunication between teams, as well as between the support staff and the customers, resulting in more delays and extended downtime," said Akili.

Akili added that without a proper knowledge base and self-service portal, the support staff and end users of stc Kuwait found it exceedingly difficult to access and share information for raised tickets.

The lack of SLAs for raised tickets often led to poor communication between users and the IT team, extended turnaround times, and slower issue resolution.

"In short, with no clear visibility on resource availability, workload distribution, and SLAs, user expectations were not being met. Moreover, the team's manual IT operations hampered their ability to scale up IT support operations effectively. As stc grew, it became more important for an effective ITSM system to be put in place to cater to the delivery of services more effectively and with less downtime. The need to redefine our IT infrastructure became another essential business objective for us," said Akili.

How ManageEngine scored over others

"After assessing different solutions, we decided to go ahead with ManageEngine's ITSM solution, ServiceDesk Plus, as we were confident that this would help streamline our workflows and deliver seamless customer service. For stc, the search for the right solution focused on three main areas: data, security, and compliance. It was important to ensure that the data of millions of its customers was accurate, secure, and readily accessible at all times, while standardizing and streamlining ITSM operations. ManageEngine surpassed its competition in multiple areas. These included affordability, ease of use, customization, integration capabilities, multi-channel support, comprehensive features, robust reporting, analytics, and strong customer service support," said Akili.

stc began leveraging ManageEngine products in 2020, working very closely with the company to create a roadmap to remain at the forefront of a rapidly evolving technology landscape.

The company chose a combination of ManageEngine solutions including ServiceDesk Plus.

"The ITSM solution significantly reduced the workload of our customer support. By placing a centralized ticketing system, it enhanced our ability to swiftly track and resolve issues, enabling early identification of issue trends and offering solutions to resolve similar issues in the future," said Akili.

ServiceDesk Plus also empowered stc end users to make use of an easily accessible self-service portal to log tickets. Seamless integration with other thirdparty applications and systems allowed for an optimized experience enhancing operational efficiency and data flow, completed by real-time, advanced analytics.

The ITSM solution has been a game-changer at stc Kuwait. It has led to:

- Five times faster delivery and response time for raised tickets.
- Automation of the ticketing system to enable workload visibility.
- Over 90% of tickets resolved within stated SLAs over the past year.

• Reduced turnaround time and issue resolution for end users.

Moving forward

Automation of manual IT operations has enabled stc to significantly reduce its operational costs.

With the rapid pace of delivery of services to its customers through the ITSM solution, the time-lag issue for resolving tickets has been largely covered.

"ManageEngine solutions have strengthened the efficiency of stc Kuwait's IT operations by highlighting key backlog elements that were slowing down processes. We are convinced by, and satisfied with, the overall results that we have achieved. This is a successful ITSM project; one we can claim as a benchmark in Kuwait," concluded Al Akili.

With the successful implementation of ServiceDesk Plus, stc has also invested in other ManageEngine products, such as OpManager Enterprise edition, Applications Manager, and Analytics Plus.

With the need to keep up with market demands as well as the evolving needs of its customers, stc has realized the benefit of investing in solutions that provide business process automation and the visibility for making informed, data-driven decisions.

Inside large enterprises like stc, the customer support landscape needs to be scalable and flexible to accommodate a growing volume of customer interactions."

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15th February 2024 Habtoor Palace Dubai LXR Hotels & Resort 6:30 PM onwards

CNME, the region's largest technology and IT B2B publication is delighted to announce the 16th edition of its CIO Leadership Awards.

Digital transformation is continuing to sweep across the Middle East, and the region's chief information officers have been tasked with the responsibility of orchestrating this transformation and put themselves at the core of their businesses decision-making.

The CIO Leadership Awards 2024 celebrates the thought-leaders, who are grabbing this opportunity with both hands, and who are constantly striving for new innovative practices designed to champion and pioneer change.



OMNIX INTERNATIONAL

A LITTLE LESS 'CONVERSATION'

Walid Gomaa, CEO at Omnix International, has said that conversational AI customer service leaders can train forward looking AI systems, and boost their brand's value in a competitive marketplace in an exclusive op-ed for CNME.

onversational AI is an area of artificial intelligence that can simulate human conversation.

It is enabled through Natural Language Processing that is focussed on improving how compute systems understand and process principal human languages. Other than Natural Language Processing, Conversational AI is enabled by foundation models and machine learning.

Conversational AI systems are trained on large amounts of data, such as text and speech. This data training helps the programmed systems to understand and



process human language. Integrated Conversational AI systems use this training data and programming models to interact with humans in a natural way.

The ability to respond in a human-like manner keeps improving over time, since the system keeps learning from positive and negative customer responses.

For an enterprise that invests in customer services, Conversational AI can reduce costs, increase productivity and efficiency.

By automating responses through trained virtual agents, enterprises can respond round the clock in a predictable manner without errors.

How it works?

The starting point for any engagement in conversational AI is Natural Language Processing. Natural Language Processing manages the language grammar of the back and forth responses.

It corrects spellings, identifies synonyms, and interprets the grammar being used. The most important role is to break down the

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conversation into words and sentences that can be understood by the resident learning that it has built up to date.

Once the Natural Language Processing step has been executed the next step is Deep Learning.

This is where Machine Learning models start working on the conversation and this is known as Natural Language Understanding.

While Natural Language Processing worked on the grammar and correctness of the language, Natural Language Understanding looks at the topic, context and intent of the specific conversation.

It looks for triggers for specific information being requested that may require extraction from other sources.

The most important requirement here is to remove misunderstanding and this is usually the point of failure in Conversational AI.

Once the incoming conversation has been received, translated and understood, the third step in Conversational AI is preparing the response to be sent back to the customer.

The most important part of this stage is personalization and customization. This is where Conversational AI outperforms traditional chatbot solutions.

The response at this stage since it has been understood and personalized can be both complex and simple answers depending on what the customer is querying.

This is again where



Walid Gomaa

Enhancing the learning

The key to success in Conversational AI is the ability to identify the right intent and requirement of the customer and provide the most suitable and personalized response for the customer.

While advancements in machine language, big data, structured and unstructured data frameworks, have helped to improve automated customer service engagements, a lot depends on training the data by a special breed of trainers.

In other words making the responses more humanlike, rather than machinelike. This requirement is cultivating a breed of AI trainers. Customer service agents with years of experience are adept at understanding the requirements of customers and providing them with the most suitable response.

Now using data models linked to Conversational AI those years of experience can be used to train the data on how to respond.

By investing their years of experience to build the models of detecting the right context and mapping them to the right response, Conversational AI can reach its potential over time.

Selected and trusted members from the customer service teams are upskilled into AI and data trainer job roles.

They work alongside virtual agents and have the responsibility of increasing the scale of automated engagement with customers, boosting the engagement of customers into automated self-service areas, decreasing the workload on front line customer executives, and increasing customer delight.

Finally, and most importantly, since enterprises have elevated their own executives to drive the automation of customer services, they are now responsible for the engagement of their brand with the customer through a new automated service channel.

For an enterprise that invests in customer services, Conversational AI can reduce costs, increase productivity and efficiency."

LENOVO

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF A CIO

Mohammed Hilili, General Manager, Intelligent Devices Group Gulf at Lenovo, has outlined the three major challenges facing CIOs in the current digital economy.

cross industries, as technology becomes more central to business operations, the role of a CIO is increasingly broad. From digital transformation to the carbon footprints of data centres, CIOs are responsible for an ever-growing set of workstreams.

This is backed up by Lenovo's Global Study of CIOs, which found that 84% of IT leaders believe they contribute to company success more than other C-suite leaders, and that nine out of ten believe that they are shouldering more responsibility than ever before. Lenovo's global study also found that many are also worried that investment in innovation will 'dry up', leaving them unable to achieve their many goals, with 83% concerned that they will be left with insufficient budget.

Mohammed Hilili, General Manager, Intelligent Devices Group Gulf, Lenovo, said, "CIOs are now expected to make decisions on everything from business reporting and data analytics to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The most recent discoveries from Lenovo's Global Study of CIOs indicate a growing weight of responsibilities on these leaders as their roles have become more critical to business success than ever before. As such, equipping CIOs with the right technologies will empower them to make more reliable and confident decisions in many of these areas and in turn, help companies run more efficiently and competitively."

There are three challenges CIOs are currently contending with. Investing in the right technology can help ease the burden and deal with some of the key issues they face, including the evolving workplace, artificial intelligence (AI) and sustainability.

Challenge #1: The digital workplace

Technology is woven into every part of the modern workplace, functioning like



a nervous system which joins together corporate strategy, operations, finance and innovation. This in turn loads more challenges onto CIOs, who are grappling with recruitment and retention (59%), managing a remote workforce (59%), and diversity, equity, and inclusion (55%). The technology environment is also changing, with employees now using two devices on average, combined with a sharp increase in 'bring your own device' usage.

For IT leaders, technology can help to bring simplicity to this shifting landscape. Optimising endpoints using one centralised platform helps to bring order to the chaos, this means that IT teams can focus on business-critical tasks, with end users enjoying a better experience, optimised by AI.

Meanwhile, 'as-a-service' models offer the flexibility and simplicity to empower teams with the technology they need, in a simple, scalable pay-as-you-go model. As-a-service models allow businesses to stay up to date with the latest and greatest technology, meaning that employees are never

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held back by older devices, and that less secure devices are not as likely to be used in the workplace. Lenovo's research found that as-aservice options were highly popular with CIOs, with 92% saving they would consider adding new offerings over the next two years. This provides them with the flexibility to deploy hardware and software with ease, eliminating bottlenecks and freeing up teams to innovate rapidly and supercharge business strategy.

Challenge #2: Building intelligence

The current boom in generative AI has sparked a level of excitement around technology not seen since the dawn of the smartphone era. For CIOs, this poses further challenges: there is high expectation for organisations to engage proactively with AI, and for the technology to deliver business results, fast. The demand to engage with this emerging technology is very real, with 43% of CIOs saying they felt 'urgent pressure' to deal with AI.

But it's not simply a case of buying solutions and sitting back and waiting for results: AI has to be used effectively. Edge computing technology helps to bring AI to the data source and will be hugely important for any organisations hoping to reap the benefits through cutting-edge applications such as virtual assistants, generative AI and computer vision. With edge computing, organisations can gain AI-powered insights right

where data is created, which can be immediately used to improve outcomes across store aisles, manufacturing floors, hospital rooms and service desks all over the world. Edge AI computing can also process thousands of data points in real-time to gain the insights required to make decisions. In customer service, for instance, it can analyse data to make live recommendations for personalised products and services, or identify issues before they become pain points, enhancing the overall experience.

Technology that delivers data centre-like computing to the edge will be crucial to delivering improved experiences in industries from tourism to retail, as well as improved emergency response and public safety.

Challenge #3: Maintaining sustainability

In previous decades, sustainability has not fallen within the traditional purview of IT leadership. But with increasing attention on the issues such as e-waste, and the emissions associated with data centres, thinking about environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues is yet another responsibility on the shoulders of today's CIOs.

With data centres responsible for up to 1.5% of global electricity use, according to the International Energy Agency, it's critical that CIOs engage with technologies such as water cooling to increase efficiency and reduce electricity demand. Modern workloads mean that older air cooling technologies now struggle to keep up while becoming very expensive. Liquid cooling technologies will be an important factor in responsible computing going forward, and will also enable the sustainable supercomputers which will be crucial to tackling the challenges of climate change.

Decision-makers in IT must also be bold and move beyond the 'make, use, destroy' of the linear economy to the 'design, use, return' approach of the circular economy. The world produces 50 million tonnes of e-waste every year, and just a fifth of this is recycled. Asset recovery services (ARS) will be key to this, helping to find the most efficient and clean ways to deal with hardware at the end of its service life, whether that's using the parts in manufacturing, refurbishing, reusing or environmentally friendly scrappage.

For CIOs grappling with the challenges of sustainability, the flexibility of 'device as a service' models, where devices are recycled or repurposed at the end of their service life, can also help switch to more efficient, environmentally friendly hardware without up-front capital outlay.

Meeting the challenge

"CIOs currently face challenges that would have been almost unimaginable 20 years ago, with responsibilities spanning everything from DE&I to ESG. Shouldering this increasing burden and being more central to an organisation's success than ever before, it's no wonder that it can feel like a lonely battle," Mohammed Hilili added. "Thankfully, choosing the right technologies can make the role easier and empower CIOs to innovate, making a real difference for the business as a whole." 🚥

UBQT

CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Jonathan L. Hasson** and **Lara Varjabedian**, the co-founders of new social media application UBQT, to learn more about the mission statement of the new company that claims its platform can truly 'reconnect' people by putting the 'social' back into social media.

THE FOUNDERS:

ara Varjabedian and Jonathan Hasson are the charismatic and dynamic entrepreneurs behind a new social media application called UBQT, that has been tipped to transform the way we connect with our network of people, be it friends, family, or business. Varjabedian spent 13 years in the corporate insurance industry, and worked across multiple business lines on several continents.

However, she got the entrepreneurial itch and joined a Hong-Kong digital health start-up in the London office. It quickly became Hong Kong's first unicorn, and eventually had an IPO on Nasdaq.

She then ventured into consultancy for InsurTech and Health-Tech start-ups, but over time she said she became 'industry agnostic' – and then through reconnecting with Hasson launched UBQT.

Hasson has also enjoyed a remarkable career in business, and he began his journey in Shanghai in 2000.

He was in the business of textiles, and sold the company in 2016, but in parallel with that entity he also had established a hospitality business in 2006.

That company provided bespoke experiences for inbound travellers in China, and was a huge success.

Hasson packed his bags and based himself in Brussels in 2017, where he began







Lara Varjabedian and Jonathan Hasson

investing in disruptive tech start-ups, but admitted that after a while he became bored, and wanted to get his 'hands dirty again'.

THE CONCEPT:

Hasson and Varjabedian have known each for over 30 years, and their paths have crossed several times, however, on a trip back to Brussels, he found out through mutual friends that Lara was also living and working in Dubai, it was here that the idea and concept of UBQT was born out of.

"Lara and I have very similar backgrounds having lived on a few different continents during our careers. Our paths crossed multiple times during the last 30 years, and we did reconnect here in Dubai, but it was completely coincidental. I moved to Dubai around 6 months after Lara did, and when I was visiting family and friends in Brussels during the first summer that my family and I had moved to the UAE, somebody

randomly said to me that Lara was also in Dubai. I was shocked, so the second I got back from Dubai I reached out to her, and to make an endlessly long story short we reconnected, and we thought how can we help other people avoid the same thing that happened us," said Hasson.

Hasson said that UBQT wants to serve as a 'digital companion'.

"Now we know that there are well-established social media apps on the market like Instagram and Facebook, and they all serve a purpose. However, we figured that there wasn't really an efficient digital companion that enables you to reconnect with people in real life, and in real-time, and that's exactly what UBQT does, but most importantly of all to know who is where, and when," said Hasson. Hasson then highlighted how the foundation of the application was built on three key functionalities, which are; near you now, near you soon, and catch me status.

"We focused on essentially three key functionalities, and the first one was who is 'near you now'. Now you could challenge us and say that there is not much originality there because Snapchat does it with maps, but we've taken a more private approach to it in the fact that you don't have the maps, so you don't have that element of voveurism. However, we think there is huge value in knowing that one of your friends is going to be in Abu Dhabi, you get a notification that he's going to be near to you soon, and that enables you to potentially catch up with them in-person. The next functionality is what we call 'near me soon', and by soon is anytime in the future, so it could be in an hour, a day, a week, a month, or even a year. There are no limitations, it all depends on you adding your trip, and then anyone that will be at the same location as you will be notified whether that person lives there, or whether that person is going there coincidentally at the same time as you," said Hasson.

One of the many criticisms levelled at applications like Facebook and Instagram is the addictive nature of them, and the fact that it

We are very old school with our philosophy in terms of less screen time, and more life time."



leads to a lot of screen time and endless scrolling, the third functionality of UBQT is designed to completely remove that.

"The third functionality is something that is very disruptive in our humble opinion, and the app is designed for you to spend as little time as possible on it. We are very old school with our philosophy in terms of less screen time, and more life time. The third functionality is what we have designed as a 'catch me status', which essentially simplifies spontaneous socialising, now what do we mean by that? Maybe tonight you want to grab a beer with your friend, or you want to go and watch a movie, you'll spend an endless amount of time exchanging WhatsApp messages, or whatever medium you use to communicate, but it becomes complex because you'll say 8pm tonight for Mission Impossible, but your friend will say, 'No let's go tomorrow and watch another

movie', and this back and forth goes on, so this becomes a status, it's not a discussion. 'I'll be at the cinema tomorrow at 8PM to watch Mission Impossible', and with one click your network can join you there, plain and simple, none of the noise, seamless and easy," said Hasson.

Varjabedian disclosed that UBQT are working on new features and are adding a whole universe of gamification later this year, and in 2025, will add a whole travel tech angle to the application, but stressed that the first phase of UBQT 1.0 was all reconnecting you with your contacts.

IN A BUBBLE

Varjabedian explained that the privacy element of the application was of key importance to them, and said that again unlike other applications, UBQT gave end-users full autonomy to shape and tailor an experience specific to what they want. We were very conscious of the privacy of the application. For example, if I am going to Abu Dhabi for a work trip in two weeks, when I add my trip to Abu Dhabi on UBQT, I can select the category that can see my trip. I can decide to select "everyone can see", select business category only, or decide to select only friends

One of the categories is called 'The Bubble, which is a category that I have created myself that is made up of my closest people, such as friends, family, and work colleagues – and they don't know that they are in my bubble. One of the key benefits of the UBQT is app is nobody knows what category they've been put in. Now if I was going to Abu Dhabi for 1 day, and for just one meeting then I wouldn't divulge that information, but if I'm going for a business lunch and would be happy to meet people from my business network before or after to make my day more efficient then I would definitely add my trip on UBQT," said Varjabedian. ¬

Varjabedian also highlighted the customisation aspect of their notifications, and provided an example of how effective the 'near to me' soon category can be.

In terms of the notifications, you'll receive a notification "Nisrin will be near you soon", but also on the homepage of the application you will see the 'near me soon' category and you can see the dates that your friend is going to be near you. We can customise the push notifications. Although the whole purpose of the app is to have it on, so you don't miss an opportunity to catch-up with your contacts, it is more like if you were deciding to put your calendar invites off. It would not make sense. For example, in the 'near me soon' category, I can see my friend from Hong Kong is coming to Dubai from January 31st to February 6th, so I can book a catch-up with him when it is convenient for us both. It's very seamless, there's no scrolling on an app, or sending endless messages, it's concise, and to the point. Today, my 1pm catch-up is with the brother of one of my best friends, who lives in Antwerp, but is on his way to Mumbai and is having a stopover in Dubai, so this morning I received a notification saying that "David is near you", so we arranged to meet, and that's a perfect illustration of a spontaneous catch-up," said Varjabedian.

Varjabedian also outlined the benefits provided by the 'catch me status' on UBQT.

"The catch me status is brilliant, so let's say you're going out for some drinks, then for example you can put your catch me status as 'Join me in McGettigan's JLT for some drinks to watch the football from 8-11pm', so you can also put the duration of how long you're going to be there for, and you're happy to extend it to everyone in your network if you wish, it's up to you who you want to see your catch me status, and then those who see your status can

click to join, and then you know they are going to come, but there's no pressure on anyone to come, you've just put an invitation out there casually to see if anyone wants to join you for a few drinks," said Varjabedian.

SHOW ME THE MONEY

In terms of monetising the application, Hasson said that UBQT are looking to avoid the traditional methods of monetisation pursued by other social media companies.

"We're looking at a premium model ideally, but what we would like to do is avoid all the noise that you have on some of the other platforms in terms of advertising, so we're staying away from that. However, we will have a very simple model where it will be quite inexpensive, so we're looking at positioning it as a cheaper than the average price of a Starbucks. Your monthly fee may be 5AED, which is nothing, but we have to monetize this, but we don't want to sell adverts. We didn't want to become fixated on the price point, and we know it is cheap, but ultimately what we are doing is reconnecting people, so we didn't want to just enable 'some people' to connect, we wanted to give everyone accessibility, and we think the price is fair for what we have to offer. I think when we add the other features

such as the gamification and the travel tech, we can then review the pricing model, and modestly increase the price, but it's always going to stay at a price that is very fairly priced," said Hasson.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Varjabedian concluded a brilliant and fascinating conversation by highlighting that for users to get the best possible experience out of the application, then they ultimately need to get their network to download the app.

"UBQT allows people to catch-up on their terms, but the reality is that the reason I've been using it so much of late is because I've got a lot of people connected to me, so when you download the application, you really need to bring your network with you in order for you to get the experience that we want to deliver in terms of really reconnecting people. We don't only need people to download the app, we need people to invite their friends, family, and business contacts to also download the app in order to build that ecosystem. Together, we can get people meeting more face-to-face, without the hassle of multiple messages, and trying to make busy schedules fit around each other, UBQT can really put the social back into social media," said Varjabedian.

We figured that there wasn't really an efficient digital companion that enables you to reconnect with people in real life, and in real-time, and that's exactly what **UBQT** does."



DATAIKU

MAKING THE RIGHT'CHOICE'

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to Sid Bhatia, Area VP & General Manager for META at Dataiku, in an effort to explore more about the impact of Generative AI in the enterprise space, the pitfalls organisations need to avoid when deploying the technology in terms of data privacy and compliance, the security challenges that need to be navigated when it comes to Gen AI – and the unique capabilities of Dataiku's LLM Mesh offering.

id Bhatia is seen as a visionary leader by many of his contemporaries across the IT landscape in the Midde East region.

In a distinguished career to date, the dynamic and charismatic Bhatia has held senior roles at companies such as IBM, GBM and Cloudera.

In his current role as the Area VP & General Manager he has been the driving force behind the meteoric success of Dataiku in the Middle East.

WHO ARE DATAIKU?

Dataiku was established in 2013 by current CEO Florian Douetteau, and are a unified, open-source, cloud-based data science platform designed for 'Everyday AI'.

In 2017, they secured their first customer in the Middle East, and in 2019, they established a permanent presence in the region with the establishment of their Dubai office. Sid Bhatia was tasked with the responsibility of promoting and driving Dataiku's mission statement, which is ultimately to 'democratise AI' for everyone – and he has delivered tenfold thus far.

Currently, Dataiku boasts 25 employees across the UAE and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and serves over 50 of the biggest data-driven enterprises in the META region.

Under Bhatia's leadership, Dataiku have fostered a thriving partner ecosystem that has contributed greatly to their market success.

GET ON THE CASE:

CNME were afforded an exclusive opportunity to speak to Bhatia for the front cover feature of February's

In order to ensure Gen AI compliance, organisations must establish strong data governance practices, which include data classification, access controls, and encryption."

edition of the magazine, and he kickstarted a fascinating exchange by highlighting some of the unique use-cases that can be created by Gen AI in the enterprise space.

"The technology has a wide range of applications in the business world, across all industries, and some of the use cases include product design, advertising, process efficiency and customer data. When it comes to product design for example, fashion designers can use generative AI applications to generate various new patterns and styles, which can then be used to create new and innovative products. In relation to advertising, Gen AI can be leveraged to create highquality content for marketing and advertising purposes. Marketing teams can use a generative AI model to create a series of videos showcasing their products, which can then be used in online and in social media campaigns to promote the company and its products. In terms of process efficiency, business processes such as supply chain management and logistics can be completely transformed with businesses using generative AI models to optimize delivery truck routing, which inevitably make delivery times faster and more efficient. Finally, in terms of customer data, businesses can extract deep insights from their datasets,



data

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such as user behavior, demand and sales trends. A retail business can use generative AI tools to analyze historical purchase data to identify trends and patterns, and this enables them to make better informed business decisions and strategies," said Bhatia.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY:

There are a lot of misconceptions when it comes to Gen AI, and one of them is that in the field of AI it is a place that operates in a sort of Wild West environment that is devoid of regulations, standards and ethical guidelines.

However, it's clear to see that the AI industry is moving progressively towards a framework of governance, ethical use and regulation.

That being said it is imperative that businesses engage in what the industry describes as 'Responsible AI' in order to avoid potential pitfalls that may occur if the technology is dispensed and used in the wrong way.

Bhatia highlighted how the issue of data privacy and the potential for biases are thorny topics that businesses must be cognizant of when adopting Gen AI applications.

"Generative AI, while offering numerous benefits in enterprise workflows, presents notable challenges and ethical concerns. One pressing issue is the potential for biases in generated content. These AI models can unintentionally perpetuate biases present in their training data, which might reinforce stereotypes and lead to ethical and legal dilemmas. Data privacy is another paramount concern. To operate effectively, generative AI often requires access to sensitive data. Ensuring stringent data security measures is imperative to guard against unauthorized access and data breaches, especially given the evolving landscape of data privacy regulations," said Bhatia.

Bhatia also outlined how businesses also needed to be aware of regulatory obstacles as different industries have specific regulations.

"Failure to adhere to regulations can result in legal repercussions. Human oversight is crucial to detect errors and ensure ethical alignment. Additionally, organisations need to grapple with the ethical implications of using generative AI in various contexts, including fair outcomes, unintended consequences, and its impact on the workforce. To address these concerns, a responsible AI approach with clear guidelines and ethical boundaries is essential for leveraging generative AI effectively in enterprise operations," said Bhatia.

GOOD GOVERNANCE:

There is no doubt that the adoption of Gen AI has been staggered somewhat, primarily because of concerns many business leaders will have in terms of not getting it right, and fearful of the repercussions that may follow.

However, Bhatia shared the necessary measures that can be put in place to solidify the security and ensure the compliance of generative AI.

He listed Data Governance, and Regular Auditing and Monitoring as two critical components in complying with rules and regulations around Gen AI.

"In order to ensure compliance, organisations must establish strong data governance practices, which include data classification, access controls, and encryption. This is a crucial step in protecting sensitive data used by generative AI systems. Frequent audits and monitoring of AI systems can help identify any security vulnerabilities and ensure compliance with industry regulations. This can involve tracking data usage, model behavior, and access patterns," said Bhatia.

Bhatia said three other key measures were Explainability and Interpretability, Adherence to Industry

The LLM Mesh alleviates challenges related to model choice and dependency by providing a flexible architecture that allows application builders to test and choose from various models without being hardwired to a specific service."



Standards, and Ethical AI Governance.

"Simply ensuring that AI models are explainable. This is essential for compliance in many industries. Being able to explain how decisions are made by generative AI systems might seem obvious but is usually easier said than done. This is why explainability must be top of mind when building models around generative AI. Depending on the industry, there may be specific standards and certifications (e.g., ISO 27001) that organisations must follow to ensure security and

compliance. Organisations must always be aware of any standards being set and/or modified in their industry. Finally, implementing ethical AI governance practices, such as establishing ethics committees and conducting ethical impact assessments. This can help organisations address compliance and ethical concerns in a more organised and regulated manner," said Bhatia.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

Interestingly, Bhatia highlighted that a major challenge for many organisations is the fact that they have too many choices when it comes to selecting the right model for them.

"Organisations need to mitigate challenges tied to the choice and dependency on specific models. Having a flexible architecture empowers application builders to test and select from diverse models without being rigidly tied to any particular service. This adaptability streamlines efficient testing during the design phase, eliminating costly dependencies in the production stage," said Bhatia.

As already aforementioned in the article, ethical use, bias mitigation, data privacy, security and interpretable AI models are all challenges facing businesses, but another is the integration challenge poised by Generative AI into existing processes and the need for continuous monitoring.

"The integration of Generative AI into existing systems and workflows poses challenges that demand careful planning and strategic implementation. Organisations should anticipate potential hurdles and navigate the integration process thoughtfully to minimise disruptions. Given the dynamic nature of Generative AI, ongoing monitoring and maintenance are indispensable. This proactive approach addresses evolving challenges, ensuring sustained optimal performance and relevance over time. Regular attention to maintenance is crucial

for long-term success in the ever-evolving landscape of Generative AI," said Bhatia.

CHOICE, COST AND COMPLIANCE:

As the pioneer of the LLM Mesh, Dataiku's platform plays a pivotal role in providing the necessary functionality to build and deploy Generative AI applications in enterprise environments.

These capabilities are seamlessly integrated into Dataiku's core functionalities, covering data connections, security, preparation, pipelines, data science, machine learning, ops, and governance.

With collaborative, multiprofile environments offering low- and no-code UIs along with full-code experiences, Dataiku empowers organizations to harness the potential of Generative AI effectively.

Bhatia outlined how Dataiku's LLM Mesh platform helps business overcome related to issues concerning choice, cost and compliance.

"The LLM Mesh alleviates challenges related to model choice and dependency by providing a flexible architecture that allows application builders to test and choose from various models without being hardwired to a specific service. This flexibility facilitates efficient testing during the design phase and avoids costly dependencies in production. Managing the costs associated with Large Language Models (LLMs) is

crucial, and the LLM Mesh addresses this by monitoring queries' cost, providing teams with insights to forecast expenses and make informed decisions about service usage. This prevents unexpected costs and ensures optimal performance. In addition to this, the LLM Mesh prioritises privacy, security, and compliance by evaluating requests for sensitive information and taking appropriate actions, such as redacting sensitive data or blocking requests. It helps organizations adhere to AI regulations, such as the EU AI Act, by ensuring transparency in technology usage and limiting risks to consumers," said Bhatia.

REAPING THE BENEFITS:

Bhatia concluded a brilliant conversation by outlining FIVE key benefits provided to businesses that adopt Dataiku's LLM Mesh.

The five key benefits are Decoupling Application from Service Layer, Enforcing a Secure Gateway, Security, Permissions and PII, Cost & Performance Control, Retrieval-Augmented Generation and Vector Databases.

"The LLM Mesh enables the efficient testing of different models during the design phase, allowing teams to choose the most suitable models for their applications. This decoupling ensures adaptability, facilitating changes even after the application is deployed. Following standard IT practices, the LLM Mesh acts as a secure API gateway, breaking down hard-coded dependencies. It provides a complete trail of queries, ensuring both performance management and security compliance, with a fully auditable log for accountability. Addressing privacy concerns, the LLM Mesh evaluates requests for sensitive information and takes actions, such as redaction or blocking, to protect against data leakage. The LLM Mesh monitors costs per query, allowing teams to forecast expenses and make informed decisions about service usage. It also monitors round-trip performance for LLM services, diagnosing issues and optimizing service selection based on application needs and SLAs. Finally, the LLM Mesh includes components like Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG) and Vector Stores, offering a standard way to infuse internal company knowledge into LLM responses. It provides integration with Vector Stores and implements the RAG pattern seamlessly," said Bhatia. 🚥

The integration of Generative AI into existing systems and workflows poses challenges that demand careful planning and strategic implementation." PURE STORAGE

"OUR MISSION IS TO HELP INNOVATORS BUILD A BETTER WORLD WITH DATA" - PURE STORAGE

CNME Editor Mark Forker was in attendance at a technical workshop hosted by **Pure Storage**, in which they reiterated their commitment to empowering innovators to build a better world with data.



ure Storage, in partnership with RedHat, Cisco and Intel, hosted the workshop at Al Habtoor Palace Dubai LXR Hotels and Resort on January 17th. The title of the workshop was **Data Driven Success: Unleashing the Power of**

Information of Business Excellence.

Attendees were treated to a series of brilliant indepth presentations from the leadership team at Pure Storage, Cisco and RedHat, which covered a diverse range of topics within the current IT ecosystem.

Amjad Boka, Senior Systems Engineer at Pure Storage, delivered a presentation that focused on their Flash Array product portfolio.

During a fascinating presentation he stressed how the solutions provided by Pure Storage were enabling organizations

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to modernize their data services.

"Pure delivers modern data services to empower organizations to realize a fully automated, asa-service next-gen data layer across multi-cloud for both traditional and modern applications while increasing insight for data driven decision making," said Boka.

Sherif Saba, Field Solutions Architect at Pure Storage, outlined the capabilities of its Flash Blade offering, which is designed to fuel digital transformation with datadriven insights.

Hassan Koura, Partner Technical Manager at Pure Storage, focused on their Evergreen subscription portfolio, which gives users unrivalled choice and flexibility in terms of how they consume and purchase storage. Mazen Al Jundi, Solutions Architect – Data Center and Cybersecurity at Cisco, then delivered a deep dive presentation on the need for businesses to simplify their AI infrastructure and operations by deploying flash stack converged infrastructure

Moshin Khan, Senior Enterprise Solutions Architect at RedHat, highlighted the need for enterprises to capitalise on the advantage of adopting a hybrid cloud model.

Mohammad Makadmeh, Senior Cloud Native Architect, EMEA Portworx, by Pure

Pure delivers modern data services to empower organizations to realize a fully automated, as-a-service nextgen data layer across multi-cloud for both traditional and modern applications while increasing insight for data driven decision making."

Storage, spoke about how Portworx can uncomplicate data on Kubernetes which only serves to boost developers productivity in the new digital economy we live in.

However, the general consensus of the entire workshop was the unwavering commitment from Pure Storage and its partners to help their clients extract the value they need from their data to build a better world for everyone.

We will have comprehensive coverage from the workshop in February's edition of CNME.

GBM & CISCO

RESHAPE YOUR DIGITAL WORKSPACE

As part of their commitment to providing customers with cutting-edge solutions and staying at the forefront of technological advancements, **GBM & Cisco** invited participants to an in-depth technical workshop on Modernizing Digital Workspace and Al-based Customer Experience in January.

he workshop was designed to provide valuable insights into the latest advancements in digital workspace technologies, with a focus on integrating artificial intelligence, enhancing security measures, ensuring seamless manageability, and promoting sustainability.

The event opened with a keynote speech by Hani Nofal the General Manager & Head of Technology at GBM entitled "Reshaping the future Digital Workspace using AI". This speech gave an overview of the evolution in digital workspaces from Pre-COVID to Post-COVID and explored how "Good enough" simply isn't good enough when it comes to providing a hybrid workspace environment in today's world. Nofal also opined that the four key

workspace technology drivers responsible for modernising the user experience were security, sustainability, artificial intelligence, and manageability. He concluded his speech by reiterating that to make hybrid workspaces viable, "great businesses must manage people, spaces, and technologies with improved efficiency".

Next to take the stage was Fabien Habbouche, Collaboration Business Lead, Cisco, to discuss "Reimagining work with the Webex Suite". The Webex platform has identified three key pillars that hold up and support hybrid work on an industry-wide level. These being Artificial Intelligence, Integration/Interoperability and Security/Manageability. "The AI-powered Webex Platform seeks to strengthen these elements via Realtime Media Models (RMM) that analyses and improves audio, video, and gestures to rebuild the poor resolution and substandard audio that plagues the modern landscape of hybrid work". Built into a single app for all your collaboration needs, the Webex Suite aims to be the one-stop-stop for improving and managing the realities of hybrid work.

Following this Gawie Herholdt, Collaboration Solution Architect, CISCO, spoke to those in attendance about how they could "Reimagine the workplace with CISCO Endpoints". The aim behind these AI-powered collaboration devices is to make it feel like there is no distance between your business' hybrid teams. "Being video-enabled requires more than just a

The aim behind these AI-powered collaboration devices is to make it feel like there is no distance between your business' hybrid teams."



camera and a monitor", said Herholdt. "By utilising an AI-powered room system our models can detect and count the people in the room, our facial recognition model can put a name to the faces of those sitting in a meeting room and it can even remove all background noise leaving you with crisp and clear audio". He concluded by reminding the audience that "a seamless, unrivalled user experience creates empowered & productive employees".

After a brief intermission, George Gharios, MEA Contact Centre Business Lead, Cisco, began his presentation on Reimaging Customer Experiences with the Webex contact centre. "A digital first approach to customer engagement is the best way to be proactive and deliver the outcomes you want to your customers", Gharios outlined. "With Webex you can tackle the three great customer engagement needs by providing your users with resolutions, relevance and rapport".

Next Massimiliano Picchi the Global VP Sales at Imagicle took a moment to explore how the Imagicle



One Suite will help to support Cisco Collaboration Solutions. "The Imagicle UCX Suite, available from the Cloud and in mixed environments, is a stateof-the-art application suite, including UC apps and Contact Centre capabilities with Omnichannel Conversational AI solutions, plus features covering the growing demand for Compliance - Risk Management. It's ideal for mid-market and enterprise customers, and it grants the flexibility, security and innovation needed in the new hybrid and more digital world, simplifying deployment, integrations, administration, and usage for any Cisco Collaboration environment".

To end the presentations Mansoor Jamil, Regional Digital Workspace Consultant, GBM, and Shahzad Ather, Digital

Workspace Pre-Sales Specialist, GBM took to the stage to outline a few digital workspace transformation case studies. These included an in-depth look at the Webex Meeting Suite and the requirements and challenges that it needed to overcome in order to provide an adequate solution for a local law & order maintenance agency. In another example *Webex* Calling was applied to local education & retail groups with on-premises PSTN connectivity implemented to address the issue of decentralized management across these organisations. In the final instance, a converged platform was supplied to a financial institution to help centralise the management of all endpoints in accordance with the requirements of multiple different business units within the organisation.

The event also presented a unique opportunity to connect with industry professionals, share experiences, and build valuable relationships through the demo experience and open discussion section after the speeches had concluded.

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CISCO OBSERVABILITY

RESPONDING TO DEMAND

James Harvey, CTO Advisor EMEA at Cisco Observability, discusses how brands need to understand that consumers' expectations of the total application experience have increased over the past two years.

onsumers now use applications and digital services across almost every part of their lives. Whether shopping, connecting with friends or enjoying entertainment, people's first port of call is generally an application. The ease, speed and convenience of digital services mean they have found a permanent and cherished place in the lives of billions of people worldwide.

However, in the two years since the pandemic sparked a dramatic spike in the adoption of applications and digital services, there has been a significant swing in people's attitudes. Focus has shifted from quantity to quality when it comes to application use. As consumers across the Emirates, and the globe for that matter, have increasingly been exposed to the exceptional digital experiences being provided by the world's most innovative companies, their expectations have soared. They've become far more sophisticated in their use of applications and incredibly



discerning about the digital services they use. Latest research from Cisco, The App Attention Index 2023: Beware the Application Generation, 71% of UAE consumers state their expectations for digital experiences are far higher now than they were two years ago. And 74% claim they now only want to use the very best applications and digital services, and expect an exceptional digital experience as standard.



OPINION

The evolution of the "total application experience"

Regional consumer demand for a total application experience is not a new phenomenon. The App Attention Index 2021 found consumers were ultimately looking for digital services that were reliable, simple, secure, and convenient. But two years on, consumer opinions on what makes the total application experience have moved on. People are searching for a broader range of qualities and features that combine to create a seamless digital experience that stands out from the competition.

Of course, people still want the 'basics' to be done well. Reliability, security, speed and ease of use are viewed as the foundations. But global consumers are now looking for much more — they want digital experiences to be intuitive (42%), meaningful (37%) and personalized to their needs and preferences (34%).

EXCELLENT !!

Failing to meet consumers' expectations can have severe consequences

This shift in consumer attitudes has profound implications for

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BEST QUALITY

PERFE



organizations in all industries. People are rejecting brands whose digital services fall below the grade. They're actively looking to limit the number of digital services they are using, and 79% of consumers claim they're now giving more thought to the applications they install on their devices.

Overall, a staggering 80% of consumers in the UAE have stopped using or deleted applications from their devices as a result of performance issues over the last 12 months and, on average, people have deleted more than five applications. Reactions to bad digital experiences are strengthening and consumers are making it their mission to punish brands who fail to deliver the total application experience they demand.

Application observability is the foundation for brands to deliver the total application experience

Alarmingly, given their complete lack of tolerance for bad digital experiences, almost all (97%) of UAE consumers report they have experienced performance issues when using applications over the past 12 months. At the very moment consumer expectations for applications are soaring, so too are instances of poor digital experiences. Application owners must tackle this challenge head on, or it could soon be their digital services and applications that are being jettisoned.

Of course, managing application availability, performance and security is becoming more difficult. Rapid adoption of cloud native technologies has left organizations with an increasingly complex and fragmented application landscape. IT teams often don't have visibility into cloud native technologies and no clear line of sight for applications whose components are running across hybrid environments. Due to this, it is incredibly difficult for them to identify and resolve issues before end user experience is negatively affected.

Application observability is essential because it generates full and unified visibility across both cloud native and on-premises environments. This enables IT teams to rapidly detect issues and understand their root causes. What's more, application data can be correlated with business metrics, allowing IT teams to identify and prioritize those issues which pose the biggest threat to digital experience.

Brands need to understand that consumers' expectations of the total application experience have increased over the past two years, and more than ever they are putting a premium on quality over quantity. The bar for digital experience has been raised and application owners must urgently respond.

Customers have been exposed to exceptional digital experiences by the world's most innovative companies, and their expectations have soared."

COMMVAULT

TIME TO GET SERIOUS

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Fady Richmany**, Regional Vice President, SEEMEA at Commvault, to find out why they have shifted their focus towards the concept of cyber resilience, how they are leveraging their portfolio of products to tackle ongoing cyberthreats – and what we can expect to see from Commvault over the next 12 months.

hy has Commvault decided to make the shift to cyber resilience?

Through extensive market research, analysing trends and conducting lots of customer meetings, we have made the decision to make a shift to a cyber resilience strategy that will better address the needs of our global customer base.

But to better understand why we've made this strategic shift; we need to first understand what we mean by true cyber resilience.

Through speaking with our customers, we know that IT and Security teams are working more closely to better withstand ransomware attacks and cyber threats.

This synergy within organizations has been a long time coming, and what they're working together to achieve is complete preparedness and resilience to withstand attacks of all shapes and sizes, across any workload.



Our message to our customers and partners remains the same; we protect our customers data in a difficult world, it's just that the way we do this is evolving and shifting. If you're serious about protecting your company's data, then you're serious about cyber resilience.

How does Commvault Cloud address growing customer concerns with cyber threats? As cyber threats continue to plague enterprises globally, we're also excited about Commvault Cloud. This is our new cyber resilience platform that is solving really hard problems for customers, enabling them to protect, secure, and rapidly recover if and when they are attacked.

Our strategy over the last 18 months has been to simplify everything we can for our customers.

Cyber has changed the game and we continue to innovate to keep our customers resilient.

Commvault helps customers take the extra, necessary steps to go on the offensive, and ensure that data is recoverable when a customer is breached. If the bad actors get in, which they often will, rapid recovery is key.

What can we expect from Commvault in 2024 and beyond?

If you're serious about protecting your company's data, then you're serious about cyber resilience."



We've been in the business of protecting businesses data for a long time now, and we understand that the best way to address evolving customer needs is to continually innovate.

Cyber criminals will not rest in finding new and elaborate ways to infiltrate your systems, so we need to stay one step ahead.

As we have done with Commvault Cloud, artificial intelligence is a growing trend that bad actors are using to their advantage to hack into your systems, so we have taken the proactive approach to fight AI, with AI through Commvault Cloud's comprehensive coverage. As well as this, we are excited to be going to market with renewed energy and urgency to offer our support for all organisations in the emerging markets for defending against ransomware and cyber threats.

We are excellently placed to help you with all of your data protection needs, so keep an eye out for some big things coming from Commvault in 2024 as we continue to innovate and evolve to protect your prized assets.

Do you have any expansion plans for your region?

I'm privileged to work within such a great organisation along with such a great team where we continue to meet and exceed all our customers' needs across my region.

As a result, we have seen an increase in demand that has opened up the possibility of expansion, and we are working to address growing customer demand not just in my region but globally as well.

Already in 2024, we are seeing the need to keep increasing the investment and doubling down on the market opportunity in front of us.

There truly isn't a better time to grow and evolve our business and continue to support our customers and partners in the emerging markets.

GCG ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS

AT YOUR SERVICE

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Hassan Allahham** - Service Director, GCG Enterprise Solutions, who took the opportunity to layout the foreseeable horizon that GCG envisions, both in terms of its expansion plans, as well as the impact its strategic shift to offer a full spectrum of Managed IT services to their client will have across the industry.

oday, with greater competitive forces shaping an increasingly demanding commercial landscape, GCG is gearing up to make steady strides and diversify its service offering.

In doing so, GCG is undergoing a strategic expansion, elevating its established stance as one of the region's most established Managed Print Services (MPS) providers, to becoming the preferred Managed IT Services partner for the region's burgeoning SME community.

With 18 years of leadership experience within the region, out of which 14 have been devoted to supporting the growth and success of

GCG, Hassan is an accomplished tech innovator, who has played a pivotal role in strengthening GCG's capabilities, as well as its reputation for delivering a definitive business edge to its growing list of clients:

Can you please tell us more about how GCG is expanding its service offering?

At GCG, our new strategic initiative is aimed at offering a full spectrum of Managed IT Services to our clients. This major step forward is fully aligned with our ongoing drive for embracing greater innovation to satisfy our customers' needs.

You could say that perpetual growth and expansion has always been part and parcel of our DNA.

Traditionally, we have served as a leading force within the Managed Print Services sector, while taking on a limited scope of IT projects and services as well, to develop our vast legacy of success over the last few decades.

Our enhanced offering will witness us going full force to serve the growing business needs of our clients, delivering an unmatched and integrated approach towards cuttingedge developments and technological advancements focused on cloud services, IT infrastructure services, helpdesk support services, system maintenance & repair, as well as IT outsourcing services.

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What are the reasons behind the strategic shift?

Having served the print services sector across the UAE and Oman since 1982, we have a very unique understanding of our clients' business needs. This coupled with how quickly the world around us is evolving compelled us to do more to meet their future needs and aspirations.

Leveraging our unrivalled reach and portfolio to extend our service capabilities came as a very natural and organic decision, as we have the service process streamlined, and our platform is optimized for seamless delivery.

What is GCG's unique value proposition compared to other market players?

The SME market needs an experienced partner that can deliver enterprise-grade, AI driven services, without the burden of the typical costs associated with enterprise level services providers.

What truly sets GCG apart is that with the new additional scope of services, and our expansion into the IT Services domain, we are now positioned as an unmatched partner, that can uniquely deliver low-cost and highly efficient IT services.

Smaller-scale SMEs can finally reap the rewards of being served by large scale capabilities and tools.

There is a world of difference between application providers and an enterprise-grade IT services provider. Our integrated approach covers all solutions and is not far

At GCG, our new strategic initiative is aimed at offering a full spectrum of Managed IT Services to our clients."



from the Managed Services methodology.

Enterprise level services will be delivered exclusively to the SME market at a reasonable price.

What in your view are your customers' ambitions, and what impact can GCG's new service offerings create?

The SME sector's reliance on technology has aways been high, but looking ahead it will grow exponentially. This is also a highly costaware and cost-sensitive segment where the need for greater efficiencies and competitiveness is crucial.

With GCG's expanding services portfolio – we are poised to deliver greater accessibility than ever before to brand-agnostic, tailer-made solutions, which will meet our client's exacting requirements for enterprise-grade service packages.

What truly sets GCG apart is that with the new additional scope of services, and our expansion into the IT Services domain."

What are the exact expansion plans, and how well are those expansion plans progressing?

We commenced on this drive with a great deal of enthusiasm and the market's response has been very promising. Exploring our growth potential together with our existing clients has led to greater collaboration and strengthened our existing partnerships, while opening us up to new ones as well.

Within this context, we will continue to supplement our portfolio of best-ofbreed global principals and partners to deliver cuttingedge services.

Internally, and from a resource allocation perspective, GCG's staff headcount is steadily growing, and we are anticipating a growth rate of 10-15% for FY 2024 vs. 2023.

Naturally, our recruitment efforts will be centered on bringing together a robust and highly responsive team of specialists focused on cloud, cyber security, and IT infrastructure.

This will only add to our existing presence, where for every 10 square kilometers of populated space within the UAE, there's a GCG field engineer currently deployed and on the job.

NUTANIX

FACING A DILEMMA

Mohammad Wahba, Director, Systems Engineering – Middle East at Nutanix, has penned an exclusive op-ed which examines the cost dilemma facing some enterprises when it comes to the world of hybrid multi-cloud.

s organisations are driven towards digital transformation strategies and as they modernize legacy applications to achieve business agility, it is clear that hybrid cloud environments is the way forward.

However, with a mix of private and public clouds, expanding across multiple cloud service providers, they face the daunting task of maintaining visibility and control over cloud costs. Manually tracking and analyzing cloud usage across different accounts and services is a time-consuming and error-prone process that can lead to cost overruns and hidden inefficiencies.

Effective multi-cloud cost governance requires a unified approach that aggregates and analyzes data from all cloud providers, providing a comprehensive view of cloud spending.

This visibility enables organizations to identify underutilized resources,



optimize pricing strategies, and enforce cost policies across their entire multicloud environment.

The Power of Automation in Multi-Cloud Cost Management

Automation is a gamechanger for multi-cloud cost management. By automating routine tasks, such as resource provisioning, scaling, and cost analysis, organizations can free up their IT teams to focus on strategic initiatives and innovation.

Automation also helps to ensure consistency and compliance with cloud policies, reducing the risk of errors and non-compliance issues.

We define key pillars of automation that serves the multi-cloud cost management and governance as following:

- Resource provisioning automation: Automate the creation and provisioning of apps/ data, ensuring costeffectiveness and consistency across environments.
- Cost monitoring and alerting: Employ automated monitoring tools to track cloud spending, identify anomalies, and generate alerts for potential cost overruns or noncompliant usage.
- Cost optimization
 recommendations:
 Implement AI-powered
 tools to analyze cloud
 usage patterns and
 recommend cost-saving
 strategies, such as
 switching to more cost effective instance types
 or optimizing storage
 allocation.

Nutanix, an established leader in hybrid multicloud computing assists organizations with its unique offering for **'FinOps-as-**



a-Service'. The company provides enterprises with a unique offering for multicloud cost management & governance assuring:

- One-click visibility
- Control Cloud Sprawl
- Automated insights

Nutanix's leadership in the field of cloud cost management comes with new innovations emerging to address the challenges of multi-cloud environments.

 AI-powered cost forecasting: AI algorithms can be used

to predict future cloud spending based on historical usage patterns and market trends, enabling proactive cost management and budgeting.

- **Cloud cost anomaly detection:** Machine learning techniques can identify anomalies in cloud usage patterns, such as spikes in resource consumption or unexpected account activity, helping to uncover potential issues before they lead to significant costs.
- **Granular cost allocation:** Tools are emerging that enable organizations to

allocate cloud costs to specific business units or projects, providing greater visibility into cost drivers and enabling more granular cost optimization.

In summary, Nutanix FinOps-as-a-Service helps organizations achieve optimum hybrid multicloud cost control with a complete offering that combines bestin-class cloud consumption analytics with awardwinning Professional Services. cms

Nutanix's leadership in the field of cloud cost management comes with new innovations emerging to address the challenges of multi-cloud environments."

DELL TECHNOLOGIES

ACCELERATING IDEAS INTO INNOVATION

Anita Joseph caught up with **Eyad Baddar**, Presales Manager – Gulf & UAE at Dell Technologies, to learn more about the company's ISG portfolio and the top technology trends driving the region.



an you provide an overview of Dell's ISG strategy? At Dell Technologies, our mission is to drive human progress, and we aspire to be the essential infrastructure company spanning from edge to core to cloud. Our focus is on accelerating ideas into innovations, centered around five main areas: multicloud, edge, cybersecurity, workforce transformation, and the integration of AI into these transformative realms. We collaborate closely with our customers to facilitate seamless transitions between these domains.

What innovations and enhancements can we expect from Dell's ISG portfolio? In the realm of multi-cloud, Dell Technologies has been

pioneering efforts for nearly a decade. Recognizing the limitations of a singular cloud provider, we advocate a cloud-smart strategy, encouraging the use of multiple clouds to meet diverse service requirements. Recently, we introduced the Apex Cloud Platforms, providing customers with a "cloud to ground" capability. This extends to Azure, Red Hat, and soon, VMware, offering bespoke experiences with cloud-like capabilities within their data centers, ensuring control, SLA adherence, and optimal performance.

What are the top technology trends driving the region, particularly in AI and multicloud?

AI remains a focal point, encompassing machine learning, deep learning, and generative AI. Dell Technologies aims to make emerging technologies enterprise-ready by aligning them with existing operating



models. Standardizing processes is key to deploying these technologies effectively over the long term. Additionally, we see a surge in the adoption of multi-cloud strategies, with customers understanding the need to leverage various cloud providers to achieve optimal results.

How is Dell helping customers harness the power of AI, and what are your plans in this regard?

Dell Technologies supports customers in harnessing AI power by providing cuttingedge technology solutions, including GPU processing with NVIDIA and Intel. While technology acquisition is crucial, we understand that implementation poses the real challenge. We address this by fostering partnerships with trusted AI companies and service delivery partners, ensuring a comprehensive approach that includes technology, people, and processes. Our

goal is to guide customers from the initial AI adoption phase to a mature state, digitally transforming their businesses.

Tell us about Dell Apex and what organizations in the UAE can expect from Dell in 2024?

Dell Apex originated as a tool to offer a cloud-like experience within data centers. It has proven successful globally, and in the UAE, we've deployed this model effectively. Expanding the Apex portfolio beyond financial models, we are building a comprehensive platform around Apex Cloud Platforms. This extends to APIs for Azure, Red Hat, and the upcoming VMware offering. The aim is to provide customers with a consistent experience, akin to running

workloads in the cloud but with control over their data and the ability to leverage multiple cloud platforms cost-effectively.

Can you provide some insights into the Dell Technologies Forum which concluded recently?

The Dell Technologies Forum is a global event held in various cities, including the UAE. This event provides a platform for customer engagement and activation, featuring panel discussions, leadership insights, and dedicated sessions on technology topics such as multi-cloud, cybersecurity, workforce transformation, and modern data infrastructure. This year, we introduced a Developer Corner, focusing on the evolving landscape of cloudnative technologies and engaging with partners like GitLab to delve into these topics.

Dell Technologies is committed to simplifying security landscapes through collaborations with 30 different companies to build a zero-trust architecture. This framework, based on the US Department of Defense architecture, aims to ensure customers globally and locally can implement scalable, secure environments aligned with evolving security requirements. cms

At Dell Technologies, our mission is to drive human progress, and we aspire to be the essential infrastructure company spanning from edge to core to cloud."

XTRANSFER

THE X-FACTOR

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Jason Sun**, Co-Founder and Chief Financial Officer at XTransfer, a Chinese-based cross-border payments company to find out the main factors behind its phenomenal success in China, its plans for international expansion – and what differentiates the company from other market players.

ason Sun has enjoyed a distinguished career to date in financial services. He began his career with Ernst & Young, and has worked for multinational behemoths such as KPMG and Alipay, before joining XTransfer as their CFO in 2018.

Sun was in the UAE for a number of trade shows that were being held in Dubai in January as part of the company's efforts to expand their operations on an international scale.

Sun agreed to speak to CNME Editor Mark Forker to explain how XTransfer plans to disrupt the B2B payment space.

Sun revealed that XTransfer was borne out of the fact that it became too expensive for banks to serve the needs of SMEs operating in exports.

"XTransfer was founded in 2017, and our primary business model is to provide cross-border financial services to globally trading companies. Over the past 6 years we mainly served Chinese exporters, predominantly SMEs. Over the past decade global anti-money laundering legislation has become more robust, so large bank corporationsno longer provided these services to SMEs. They deviated away from SMEs because for the bank to comply with the AML regulation they have to review each transaction, and that's generally a manual process, and it's costly. It essentially wasn't worth it for the big banking players because the revenue generated by the SMEs was low, but the cost to review the transaction was high, so they opted not to serve SMEs, and that's where we identified a gap in the market," said Sun.

What really separated XTransfer from the likes of Alipay, who are the financial arm of Alibaba, was their ability to provide an AML check automatically on almost every transaction leading to much lower operation costs.

"Alipay typically serve the needs of individuals, whereas we focused on businesses, so that's the main differentiator between us and Alipay. Our business model basically means that we connect to two parties, one is global banking, and the other is the SME. We're essentially a payment platform, where we can do the AML check to businesses on behalf of the bank, and a lot of our major partners are international financial institutions such as DBS Bank, Deutsche Bank and JP Morgan and Chase. We're the No.1 player in this industry in China, as banks were desperate to serve SMEs, but it didn't make economic sense for them, until we came along and work with them to serve SMEs. We now serve more than 400,000

At the beginning of our journey the perception was that B2B cross-border payments for SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) was very difficult because the risk was very high, so as the cost, but after a few years we proved that not only could it be done, but it could be done seamlessly."



enterprises across China," said Sun.

After so much success in China, Sun believes that it's time for XTransfer to go global.

"We felt it was a natural time for us to expand our operations globally, the financial infrastructure that is in place worldwide is very similar from continent-tocontinent, and Hong Kong is a global financial centre and we can serve companies from all over the world. The UAE is undoubtedly one of our target markets, and we see huge potential here and we're excited to be here to promote and elevate the services that we can provide. We just felt that we had so many Chinese clients, and for cross-border trade there is two parties, one element is the seller, and the other is the buyer, and so many companies do business with China because China is their supplier, and we use Chinese exporters to leverage these global companies. For example, it's highly likely that businesses in Dubai import goods from China, so we can serve as the middle man between these companies and the seller in China, and the transaction can be instantaneous where the money arrives into your account in one second, for free, and it's safe. It's essentially a B2B version of PayPal," said Sun.

Sun disclosed that when XTransfer first started out they were the only company providing the services that they do, but as the old saying goes success breeds success,



and it wasn't long before others were attempting to replicate what XTransfer do.

"When we started out in 2017, we were the only company in the marketplace, but in China there is a 2-stop industry, one is B2B payment and the other is B2C. In B₂C, Chinese exporters use Amazon, or eBay etc., and the transaction is safe because these are companies with great credibility and reputations, and the movement of money between the Amazon platform and mainland China is low-risk, and it's easy to handle. However, in the B2B space it's much more complicated because there is no platform, no Amazon, so B2B is essentially conducted offline. At the beginning of our journey the perception was that B2B cross-border payments for SMEs was very difficult because the risk was very high, so as the cost, but after a few years we proved that not only could it be done, but it could be done

seamlessly. Once we proved we had a successful model then other businesses which were previously engaged in B2C payment tried to replicate what we are doing, and have entered into our business," said Sun.

There are a few major players in the space, but we are still the market leader in China, and are confident that we have can have success globally," said Sun.

In terms of what really differentiates XTransfer from its market rivals, Sun pointed to a number of factors.

"Our ability to do the AML checks gives us a huge market advantage. In addition having been in business since 2017, we have accumulated a lot of data, and that enables us to do the automation much more efficiently and quickly than others. Another big advantage for us is that the fact that we have established a huge customer base, and now we're thinking about global expansion. We also have a very good sales capability and we have over 1,000 sales

professionals and they have really been the engine behind the phenomenal growth of the XTransfer business across the Chinese marketplace. At the end of the day, we provide a top-class service. In the B2B space you have the verify the transactions, and as we said in the past it has been a challenge, but the way we go about our business is fast, efficient and effective. Our ability to deliver a first-class customer experience has also been a central component in our success and we have a customer-first mindset," said Sun.

Sun concluded a brilliant conversation by documenting their plans for expansion in the UAE and across the Middle East.

"The Middle East and African marketplaces are not as mature as Europe and North America, so they represent huge opportunities for us. We've engaged in a marketing campaign now across the region, and we're having success in terms of prospective leads because of the services we provide, and the success we have had in China. We will open an office very soon and plan to apply financial license here in the UAE. We will establish a local team and start the sales operation from there, in order to be what we are which is customer-first, and build and develop the customer base you need to see clients face-to-face. We're confident we can replicate our success in China here in the UAE, and all over the Middle East," said Sun. 🚥



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