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RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

OSSAMA EL SAMADONI, GENERAL MANAGER -
GBM DUBAI, TELLS CNME HOW THE TECHNOLOGY
LEADER HAS BUILT AN 'ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK'
INSTEAD OF A SOLUTION-SPECIFIC ONE AS PART
OF THEIR EFFORTS TO DELIVER EXCEPTIONAL
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES.

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DIRECTOR OF SEARCH
AND ADVERTISING

HITACHI VANTARA
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EDITORIAL

THE CUSTOMER ALWAYS KNOW BEST

In the fast-paced world of technology and the current digital economy we live in, everything is constantly evolving.

However, despite the many changes that we have witnessed over the years, some things remain constant, and stand the test of time.

One of those constants is the old adage that the 'customer always knows best'.

In our ultra-competitive digital world that is now defined and underpinned by e-commerce, businesses are trying to gain an advantage by building loyalty programs that are designed to create brand loyalty, which in turn results in greater user acquisition.

We know that in order to create these seamless customer experiences the role of technology is fundamental.

The central theme of our front cover interview with GBM Dubai is all about CX.

On the front cover of the July-Aug edition of CNME, we sat down with Ossama El Samadoni, General Manager of GBM Dubai, to find out the role they are playing in driving exceptional CX for their end-users.

GBM are one of the most recognisable and respectable technology companies in the Middle East, particularly in the UAE, where they have over 35 years of experience.

El Samadoni has enjoyed a remarkable career in IT, and he assumed the responsibility of General Manager at GBM in August 2022.

In a candid interview, he explained how the company is building a framework based on engagement rather than one that is solution-specific.

He also stressed that the reality of CX now in the digital world, is that the customers now dictate how they want to be served.

"In the current climate, customers are mandating how organisations should reach them, it's not the other way about anymore. Businesses need to go to the engagement space of the customer and serve them on whatever social media applications those customers want to interact with them on. You have to serve the customer on their terms, not yours," said El Samadoni.

It's a great interview, and you can check it out in its entirety on pages 26-33.

We have lots of other top-quality interviews in the July-Aug combined issue of CNME, and one of those was with Claire Maslen, Programme Director for Commerce and Payments at Mobile Ecosystem Forum.

She reiterated the need for greater reliability when it comes to mobile payments, stressing that the infrastructure driven by connectivity cannot be overlooked, whilst she also provided us with an overview on the rise of social commerce.

Maslen also said that digital wallets need to leverage the capabilities of AI and become much more intelligent.

"At the moment, if you think about the digital wallets that we all use such as Apple Pay, Google Pay, and Samsung Pay, they are just your mobile device pretending to be a card, it's not really adding much value to you," said Maslen.

CNME Deputy Editor Daniel Shepherd spoke to Hitachi Vantara to learn why they believed the time was perfect for them to expand their regional operations, whilst he was also in Riyadh for IFS Connect, where he caught up with IFS CTO Vijay Jaswal to learn how the company was focused on 'unlocking business value' for their customers.

We also have some excellent interviews with VFS Global, Yandex, CODE81 and HP Poly, whilst we also have superb thought leadership commentariat from Veeam and Alteryx.

Stay tuned for September's magazine, which will be packed with fresh insights and perspectives from the tech community as we look forward to GITEX in October.

Enjoy the rest summer!☺

Mark Forker
Editor

Businesses need to go to the engagement space of the customer and serve them on whatever social media applications those customers want to interact with them on. You have to serve the customer on their terms, not yours."

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6 News

CNME rounds up the biggest regional and global developments in enterprise technology, which includes the news that AI is paving the way for 'greener logistics' according to DHL, CNS Middle East enters into a strategic partnership with Cube.ms - and Huawei showcases 5G advanced and AI integration at MWC Shanghai.

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AI is paving the way for greener logistics

Sustainability is a critical priority in the Middle East today, aligned with regional initiatives such as The UAE's Net Zero 2050 Strategy and Saudi Vision 2030 that emphasise reducing carbon emissions and promoting environmentally friendly practices. In this context, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a game-changer in transforming the logistics sector into a greener industry.



Tobias Maier, CEO Middle East and Africa, Saloodo! & CFO Middle East and Africa, DHL, shares insights on AI-powered sustainability and reducing carbon footprints in the logistics industry in the Middle East.

The logistics sector is a pillar of economic diversification, facilitating the movement of goods and supporting various industries in the region. However, the environmental impact of logistics, particularly in terms of carbon emissions and fuel consumption, is significant. Sustainable logistics practices will help achieve Net Zero

ambitions of GCC nations. DHL is committed to integrating sustainability into its operations, supporting the region's broader environmental goals.

AI's role in predictive maintenance has had critical impact in promoting sustainability within the logistics industry. By continuously analysing data from vehicle sensors, AI can predict when maintenance

is needed, preventing breakdowns and reducing downtime. This proactive approach ensures vehicles are always in optimal condition, which extends their lifespan and improves fuel efficiency.

Keeping customers informed through advanced chatbots and personalised experiences enhances their experience. AI-powered virtual assistants

understand customer intent, providing accurate and timely solutions. Machine learning improves customs clearance processes, ensuring faster and more efficient international shipping – in turn, contributing to customer retention and mutual growth.

As the Middle East continues its journey toward sustainable economic growth, the logistics industry must play a pivotal role in mitigating environmental impacts. AI technology offers a powerful tool for achieving this goal, enabling optimised routing, reduced fuel consumption, and predictive maintenance. DHL's proactive approach to integrating AI into its logistics operations demonstrates a commitment to sustainability that aligns with regional initiatives like The UAE's Net Zero 2050 Strategy and Saudi Vision 2030. By embracing AI, DHL is not only enhancing its operational efficiency but also paving the way for a greener, more sustainable future for the logistics industry in the Middle East.

CNS Middle East enters into strategic partnership with Cube.ms

As the latest addition to CNS Middle East's portfolio, the collaboration marks a significant milestone in the evolution of digital project management solutions, as the new tie-up delivers unparalleled capabilities and transparency in streamlining design, project and asset management of construction projects, with the flexibility of leveraging a private or regional/on premises cloud server.

Asef Sleiman, General Manager at CNS Middle East expressed his excitement on the potential of the partnership and stated that "The partnership is aimed at enabling streamlined project management, as users can create digital twins with up-to-date replicas of physical assets, integrating design, construction, and operational data, enabling better decision-making and



CNS Middle East recently announced their appointment as the Exclusive Middle East Distributor for Cube.ms - a cloud-based platform, swiftly revolutionising the management of building and infrastructure projects.

risk management. CUBE.ms aptly solves the information geo-fencing requirement of local enterprises, through hosting on regional data centres. We are delighted to have

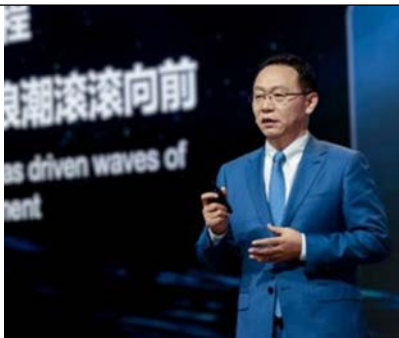
Cube.ms join CNS Middle East's portfolio of premium digital Engineering Solutions and look forward to building on our market success together".

Huawei showcases 5G-advanced and AI Integration at MWC Shanghai 2024

Huawei made a significant impact at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) Shanghai 2024, highlighting its advancements in 5G-Advanced (5G-A) technology and artificial intelligence (AI) integration.

Under the theme "Advancing the Intelligent World," the company presented a comprehensive vision for the future of mobile networks and services.

The year 2024 marks the commercial launch of 5G-A, with leading operators in the Middle East already deploying 5G-A networks. Huawei showcased its latest products and solutions supporting both 5G-A deployment and AI devices



David Wang, Executive Director, Huawei.

required for the mobile AI era.

Huawei's Executive Director David Wang emphasised how 5G-A and AI devices will be key to making intelligent

services ubiquitous, transforming human-machine interaction, content production, and mobile devices. Wang noted that the number of global 5G users has exceeded 1.8 billion, with many operators seeing the first wave of benefits. The company highlighted that nearly 20 mobile phone models currently support multi-carrier aggregation, with some activating the feature by default. Multiple operators in the Middle East and China have started deploying 5G-A three-carrier component (3CC) aggregation networks at scale, targeting 5 Gbit/s downlink rates.

Sennheiser TeamConnect Bars now certified for Microsoft Teams

Sennheiser recently announced that its TeamConnect Bars (TC Bars) are now Certified for Microsoft Teams. This certification enables Microsoft Teams users to experience hybrid meetings that combine high-quality Sennheiser audio with 4K Ultra HD video, marking a significant step in unified communications.

"We are so pleased that our TeamConnect Bars have joined the other members of our TeamConnect Family to become Certified for Microsoft Teams", said Charlie Jones,



Sennheiser's Global Alliance and Partnership Manager. "Certification for Teams has become essential for our meeting solutions, as we consistently receive feedback on the benefits our customers experience using our products in Microsoft Teams Rooms.

The new TeamConnect Bars represent another robust Sennheiser solution, delivering clear audio, and for the first time, video, to Teams meetings".

"As we continue to recognise the essential role of audio clarity in today's dynamic meeting environments, we are pleased to welcome Sennheiser's TeamConnect Bars into the Microsoft Teams ecosystem", said Albert Kooiman, Senior Director, Microsoft Teams Partner Engineering and Certification at Microsoft. "Sennheiser's nearly 80-year legacy in high-quality audio continues with the TeamConnect Bar, seamlessly integrating with Microsoft Teams to enhance meeting experiences".

Tenable study finds 68% of Saudi Arabian organisations plan to use Generative AI

Despite this surge in adoption, the study also reveals a worrying trend, as only 17% of organisations demonstrate high confidence in effectively implementing GenAI technologies.

The study reveals a sense of hopeful anticipation



David Cummins, Senior VP of EMEA at Tenable.

among security leaders regarding the capacity of GenAI to enhance security measures. Nevertheless, it also accentuates the intricate nature of the path towards AI integration, as organisations navigate the delicate balance between

innovation and potential risks.

An aspect of concern highlighted by the study is the perception of GenAI as a greater security threat than an opportunity among 41% of organisations. This sentiment reflects widespread apprehension regarding cybersecurity risks associated with GenAI implementation. Additionally, internal misuse of GenAI emerges as a prominent concern, with 50% of respondents expressing worry about potential misuse within their organisations.

NTT DATA sets new standard for sports fan engagement with data insights at The I52nd Open

NTT DATA, a global digital business and IT services leader, announced recently it will be transforming the fan experience at The 152nd Open being played from 14th to 21st July at Royal Troon.

Fans will benefit from real-time data and intelligence as well as state-of-the-art live video and data displays on



Mona Charif, Global CMO, NTT DATA Inc.

the iconic NTT DATA Wall. Fans will also get to experience GenAI-powered Digital Human technology, and engage with ShotView, a digital twin

technology platform. These advancements are underpinned by a transformative Private 5G network, ensuring these complex technologies are connected with the fastest, most resilient and secure network available, with cloud technologies taken to the edge.

"NTT DATA is revolutionising the fan experience, on and off the course, at The Open with cutting-edge technology," says Mona Charif, Global CMO, NTT DATA Inc. "In partnership with The R&A, we are catalysing change by applying our sports and entertainment expertise and integrating our latest advancements in technology. From 5G technology to digital analytics, we're enabling deeper, more dynamic insights into every aspect of the game. Our innovative partnership will have a lasting impact, not just on transforming the fan experience, but on the planet. We're pioneering new methods to provide sustainability information and interactive experiences, setting new standards for how sports can engage, inform, and inspire audiences worldwide".

Fortinet Report draws connection between cybersecurity breaches and skills shortages

Fortinet, a cybersecurity specialist in driving the convergence of networking and security, recently released its 2024 Global Cybersecurity Skills Gap Report, which highlights ongoing challenges related to the cybersecurity skills shortage impacting organisations around the globe.

The study also included large organisations from the UAE. "The findings from our 2024 Cybersecurity Skills Gap Report highlight a critical issue facing organisations in the United Arab Emirates", says Alain Penel, VP – Middle East, Turkey and CIS, at Fortinet. "Close to 58% of IT decision-makers cited the lack of training and upskilling opportunities as being their biggest challenge. This underscores the urgent need for enhanced



Alain Penel, VP – Middle East, Turkey and CIS, at Fortinet.

cybersecurity training and certification programs, as 94% of our respondents said they were ready to pay to get their employees cybersecurity certified. It is also encouraging to see that 92% of IT decision-makers actively women into security roles, while 74% had plans to introduce diversity goals over the next

2-3 years. Fortinet is committed to supporting organisations to build a resilient cybersecurity posture by providing comprehensive training and certification programs through our pledge to train 1 million people in cyber by 2026. We aim to empower professionals with the necessary skills to protect against evolving cyber threats and secure their organisations effectively".

AVEVA announced InTouch Unlimited software capabilities

AVEVA recently announced updated capabilities and commercial models for their award-winning InTouch Unlimited HMI/SCADA software.

New features, optimised commercial models, and pricing make it easier for end users, original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), and systems integrators (SIs) to develop and scale HMI/SCADA applications from edge-to-cloud, with the ability to incorporate analytics and CONNECT, AVEVA's industrial intelligence platform.

InTouch continues to be an innovation leader in HMI/SCADA since the technology's inception over



Doug Warren, AVEVA's Senior Vice President, Monitoring & Control Business.

three decades ago. AVEVA is committed to delivering products that make it easy to evaluate our software portfolio, develop tailored solutions, and scale to meet growing business needs. Doug Warren, AVEVA's Senior Vice President, Monitoring & Control Business, emphasises this user-focused approach.

"AVEVA InTouch Unlimited provides unprecedented value for our system integration partners", says Warren. "This new offer, coupled with our focus on technical enablement through the Heroes HQ forum and bite sized video-based training content, makes choosing AVEVA HMI/SCADA products easier than ever".

Samsung unveils new wearable device described as the 'pinnacle' of unintrusive health technology

The accessory was promoted as the first “unintrusive” health tech of its kind, designed to support a week of battery life in a single charge and allow “around-the-clock” health monitoring.

Its sensors are built to track sleeping patterns and daily activities, resulting in algorithms that can provide detailed and personalised health information including an energy index, heart rate data and respiratory analysis.

Galaxy Ring is made of titanium and is available in gold, silver and black for £399. On top of the accessory, Samsung also introduced the latest versions of its wearables: the Galaxy Watch7; Galaxy Watch Ultra and the Galaxy Buds3 Pro.



South Korean technology conglomerate Samsung has launched a new wearable device that the company has described as the 'pinnacle' of unintrusive health technology in the form of its new Galaxy Ring product.

FOLDED

Samsung also unveiled a duo of new foldable smartphones: the Galaxy Z Fold6 and Galaxy Z Flip6. The former flaunts a 7.6-inch main screen, a 6.3-inch HD front cover screen and packs a range of improved AI features

including a productivity assistant and a chatbot accessible on some Google apps, powered by Gemini.

It comes with a 10-megapixel self-portrait camera and 4-megapixel under display camera, on top of a rear triple camera system. Galaxy Z Fold6 runs on Qualcomm's Snapdragon 8 Gen 3 chipset for Galaxy and a 4400MAH battery.

As for Galaxy Z Flip6, it sports a slimmer form factor with a 6.7-inch main screen and a 3.4-inch super AMOLED FlexWindow display, which provides access to AI functions including tailored text messages and Samsung Health features without unfolding the device. The handset also comes with new AI-powered imaging solutions. It has a 4000MAH battery. It is priced at £1,049.

Google Cloud on mission to accelerate digital transformation in Kuwait



Google Cloud announced the opening of its new offices in Kuwait licensed by Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) at an event attended by His Excellency Mr. Omar Saud Al-Omar, Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Communication Affairs.



This expansion further signifies Google Cloud's commitment to supporting Kuwait's national digital transformation journey, including the modernization of government services and the advancement of economic development.

“Opening Google Cloud offices in Kuwait is yet another step to meet the demand for our services and expertise in Kuwait to support the New Kuwait Vision 2035 vision which aims to transform the country into a digital society and diversify its economy.

The Google Cloud offices in Kuwait will serve as a hub for collaboration and innovation, bringing together experts from across Google Cloud to work closely with their customers and partners.

Abdul Rahman Al Thehaiban, Managing Director of Google Cloud in the Middle East, Turkey and Africa said at the event: “Opening Google Cloud offices in Kuwait is yet another step to meet the demand for our services and expertise in Kuwait to support the New Kuwait Vision 2035 vision which aims to transform the country into a digital society and diversify its economy. We are working with the government of Kuwait towards digitizing citizen services and increasing the productivity of government employees, in addition to participating in the implementation of several digital transformation initiatives in healthcare, education, disaster recovery, and smart living.”

Mobile Ecosystem Forum

AI IN YOUR WALLET

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down with **Claire Maslen**, Programme Director for Commerce and Payments, at the Mobile Ecosystem Forum, to find out more about the need for greater reliability when it comes to mobile payments, the rise of social commerce, why digital wallets need to become more intelligent – and the impact Central Bank Digital Currencies will have on the global financial ecosystem.

Claire Maslen has enjoyed a distinguished career in mobile, payments and commerce, one which at this juncture has spanned over 30 years.

She has held executive roles at blue-chip technology and telecom behemoths such as Cisco and O2 (Telefónica UK).

More recently, she has worked for Consult Hyperion and Samsung.

She has also recently swapped the UK for the UAE, and has just been appointed as the new Programme Director for Commerce and Payments at Mobile Ecosystem Forum.

The Mobile Ecosystem Forum (MEF) is a global trade body that was established in 2000, and as the self-proclaimed voice of the mobile ecosystem, it focuses on cross-industry best practices, anti-fraud and monetisation.

CNME managed to secure an exclusive interview with Maslen in an effort to better



determine what the future of mobile payments is going to look like, and there are few better qualified and positioned to give us a broader overview of the payments landscape.

Maslen kickstarted the conversation by outlining why she believes that the payments industry can take a lot of learning from the mobile sector, and also highlighted the need for telecom companies not to take their eye off the ball when it comes to infrastructure.

“I recently wrote a thought leadership piece that focused primarily on the importance of infrastructure and all the pipes and plumbing around the payments’ ecosystem, and that is something that we can’t forget, it is absolutely crucial. I believe that’s where the payments industry can take a lot of learning from the mobile industry. Payments are so intrinsic to all of us, and the differentiator is going to be around the availability of connectivity because payments are becoming more





pervasive in everything that we do,” said Maslen.

She outlines how in the very near future she envisages a scenario where we can go through a train, or bus station without having to interact with anyone.

“Take for example, a potential ticketing scenario, we have made the move from paper tickets, to card-based tickets, and now we have mobile tickets, but it still relies on us interacting. If you think about the technology that is coming along, and

as 5G expands, and we get into 6G and as things like ultra-wideband come along those are core mobile technology pieces, which will really facilitate seamless transactions. So, you could in the future quite easily walk in and out of a train station

without having to interact at all,” said Maslen.

Maslen outlined her beliefs that the infrastructure required for the connectivity to facilitate payments seamlessly needs to be viewed as a critical utility, just like electricity and water, echoing



At the moment, if you think about the digital wallets that we all use such as Apple Pay, Google Pay, and Samsung Pay, they are just your mobile device pretending to be a card, it's not really adding much value to you.”

the viewpoint of many people who believe access to the internet should be a basic human right.

“There’s no doubt that regulators have shed a light on how critical the infrastructure is recently. In the UK, we have seen outages of retail networks, and a couple of years ago, one of the major card scheme networks went down for an afternoon, now was that as a result of an implementation issue, or is it just the sheer scale of pushing everyone through to digital payments. The mobile payments movement has happened very quickly, but the infrastructure has to be part of our critical utilities like electricity and water, so if we are moving all payments to digital then the underlying infrastructure has to support it,” said Maslen.

The conversation then moved towards the role of digital wallets in our life, which has now become a staple part of our day-to-day experience, it has replaced the traditional physical wallet, but Maslen believes in its current format that it adds little to no value.

“At the moment, if you think about the digital wallets that we all use such as Apple Pay, Google Pay, and Samsung Pay, they are just your mobile device pretending to be a card, it’s not really adding much value to you. I believe that the real value will emerge when the wallets start to do some of that intelligence for you, such as pointing you in the right direction to use a particular card product at a particular merchant, or it might nudge

you to highlight how some of your spending patterns that have changed. Undoubtedly, there is a massive potential with digital wallets that we are yet to tap into,” said Maslen.

AI is everywhere at the minute, and is transforming every single major industry vertical from manufacturing to healthcare.

Unsurprisingly, Maslen believes AI will be the critical component in making our digital wallets much more intelligent in the future, and believes a company like her former employers Samsung have a huge opportunity to tap into the huge opportunities that exist in the payments space.

“Samsung have launched a number of new products that have AI infused into them. If you look at Samsung as a case study, they’ve got the handsets, the hardware and the wallet, but they need to build out those relationships that sit in the wallet. They need to work with different banks and different retailers to really fill that wallet up. Samsung have their own store, and have their consumer electronic products, and their white goods, so you could easily envisage a future where you go into a retail store and purchase a TV and you get a warranty, but why would that warranty

not be delivered straight to your wallet? In the future you should be able to go to your digital wallet as it will have all your credentials and all the information you need, because receipts and warranties are a pain point for consumers. I think some of these brands that have multiple touch points with consumers can really start to exploit that, and use the wallet with more intelligence sat in it,” said Maslen.

Maslen spent a huge part of her career with O2 (Telefónica UK), and knows the industry inside out. Many telecommunication providers have been lambasted in some quarters for a perceived lack of innovation.

However, as Maslen pointed out it is not as straight forward as that.

“There are a lot of complexities facing mobile operators. Ultimately, they are huge trading organisations that get criticised if they take their eye off the ball from a connectivity perspective, and if they don’t invest in innovation then they also get criticised, and they are all resource constrained, so there is always that tension. I know from my experience at O2 Telefónica UK that they tried on multiple occasions to create internal innovation hubs, they attempted to acquire companies that



Payments are so intrinsic to all of us, and the differentiator is going to be around the availability of connectivity because payments are becoming more pervasive in everything that we do.”

could deliver some of that innovation for them, so there's always that tussle. However, in any innovation cycle the simple fact of the matter is that you can't get away from that core enablement and core connectivity. They are core communications utilities, and they have to get that bit right before they do anything else," stressed Maslen.

There has been a lot of discussion of late around Central Bank Digital Currency.

Maslen says that the bones of contention around it from a consumer perspective are valid, but said banks are increasing their focus on the new concept.

"From a digital currency perspective everyone talks about the crypto market, but what we are talking about here in relation to Central Bank Digital Currency is very different. These will be currencies that are linked and provided by the Central Banks in the different regions. When we think about how valid they are from a consumer perspective there is a whole debate about it. I would say that the obvious benefits for Central Bank Digital Currency is in the flow of money. It gives users the ability to move money really quickly, and there is that transparency in being able to see a transaction leave and pass through one Central Bank to the next. From a treasury and banking viewpoint consumers perhaps don't have to worry too much about it just yet, but I think the banks are all focusing in on it because they see an opportunity around that speed

of transaction, being able to move money quickly and probably quite cheaply too, so there will be an economic benefit for all the banks to be able to move money quickly," said Maslen.

The final part of our conversation was on the rise of social commerce, which can have many different meanings and definitions, but as Maslen explained can provide great insight and visibility into the spending habits and behaviours of consumers.

"I think it's always good to set a bit of context around a topic, and when it comes to social commerce and I think it's always worth to look at it from a macro trend in terms of what people are doing and their behaviours. We know that millennials are very tribal, and they are very influenced by their groups and they form these tribes. They'll take advice from a social influencer for example, so to me that's the backdrop from a behavioural perspective. Social commerce is being able to interact through any of the social media platforms and be able to conduct a transaction. For example, I'm looking at a girl on TikTok, she's doing a dance and she's wearing a great pair of trainers, so I want to buy those trainers. That's a classic click through where you go straight to the merchant and buy those trainers. That's a social commerce transaction," said Maslen.

However, Maslen highlighted how there are also seeing a huge increase in fraud in these types of social transactions, not necessarily

through TikTok, but across all social media platforms.

She believes that marketplaces need to do more to verify merchants in order to reduce the volume of cybercrime when it comes to social commerce.

"One of the reasons for that is I can be whoever I want on the internet, nobody knows who I am, or what I am. I can be pretend to be someone, and I think in creating a fake account, and especially now when you think about the opportunities that exist around Deep Fakes. I don't have a clue who I am interacting with on these platforms and that could impact me from a payment perspective, because I could quite innocently click to pay on a transaction that has been created using Deep Fake technology, and the transaction is fraudulent, so there are pitfalls. There are two potential answers to this problem, and one of them is the role of marketplaces, so if I enter into a marketplace as a seller and I am verified then that gives the consumer and buyer the confidence that they are dealing with a real entity. Secondly, if you look at your physical wallet now it probably has your personal information on them, so those wallets are actually as much about identity as they are about payments. So, in summary, I think digital wallets will play into social commerce transactions in the future in terms of being able to identify both sides of the transaction," concluded Maslen. **enme**

PROCESS AND PROTECT

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Rocío Ávila**, General Manager Legal, & Data Protection (CIIP/E) at VFS Global, to find out more about their data protection procedures amidst a constantly evolving digital economy, the importance of a stable, but agile privacy framework – and the challenges and opportunities presented by artificial intelligence when it comes to data processing and protection.

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The world we live in continues to constantly evolve at rapid pace, and the primary catalyst behind these transformative changes is technology.

The digital economy is underpinned by technology and innovation, and it fuels almost every single interaction we have either inside, or outside of the workplace.

However, when it comes to the underlying infrastructure that facilitates this digital economy, many questions and challenges remain, and some of the most prominent of these are related to privacy and data protection.

Artificial Intelligence is the future, and the democratisation of AI through large public LLMs such as ChatGPT have propelled AI to new heights.

However, there are valid concerns over data privacy and security when it comes to Generative AI.

VFS Global is the world's

largest outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions worldwide.

Like many organisations during the digital revolution, they have been forced to transform their operations – and it is imperative for them to be agile in order to meet the demands of a marketplace that continues to change face.

CNME sat down with Rocío Ávila, General Manager Legal, & Data Protection (CIIP/E) at VFS Global for a broad-ranging interview that examined many different topics.

Ávila began the conversation by discussing some of the data protection procedures they have in place, and highlighted the importance of its privacy framework.

“In the current climate we know there are many challenges facing all organisations and we are all trying to navigate that,

and we have seen a huge increase in cybercrime on a global scale. It goes without saying that not only for us at VFS Global, but for all organisations, data protection is absolutely pivotal. Our focus is not only in terms of how we can continue to better protect our data, but also around proactively exploring and embracing new technologies to help us manage our data in a more compliant and responsible manner. We have a strong privacy program and framework, and that really serves as the backbone in terms of how we process and manage all the data that we are entrusted with at VFS Global,” said Ávila.

VFS Global works primarily with government entities, and the requirements from each government entity from location to location can obviously be quite varied, with this in mind, Ávila elaborated more on why the data privacy framework



they have established is so important to them.

“We have very strict policies, procedures, and guidelines that help us navigate through the different compliances that are required within each different government that we work with when it comes to the personal data that we are handling. Obviously, at VFS Global, we process data on behalf of different government clients, and that essentially makes us a data processor. It’s important for us to understand what the expectations are from the government client that we work on behalf of, but at the same time to be compliant with the law of the land in

which we operate. That’s why the privacy framework we have is so important for us to ensure we meet the compliance requirements from region to region,” said Ávila.

Ávila also disclosed that VFS Global follow the requirements of the ISO certification 27001, adding that in the case of 27001 they are certified as a data processor, and a data controller.

Ávila then spoke of the emphasis the company places

on training and awareness programs.

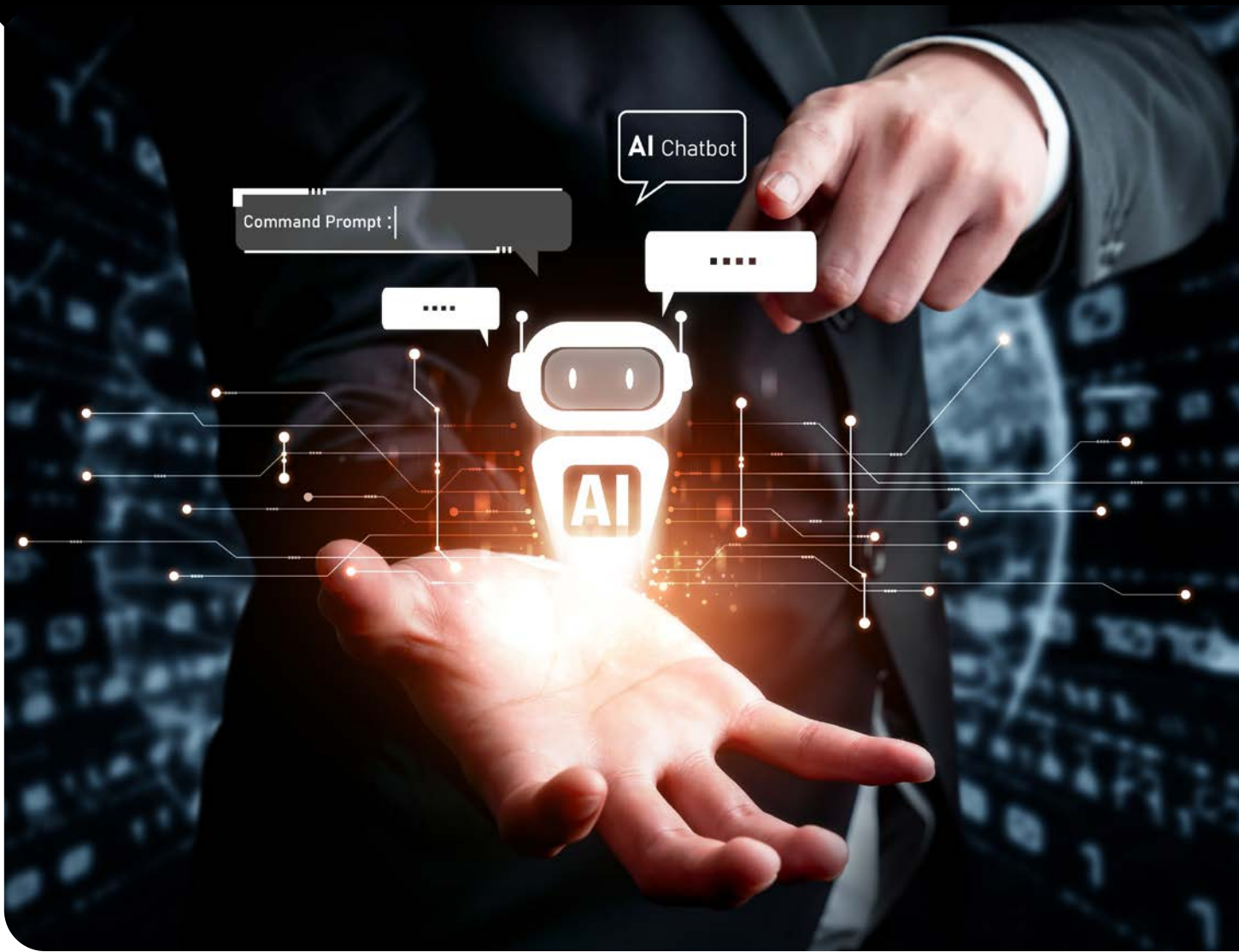
“We have got lots of security measures in place, but if our staff is not trained adequately then it means nothing at the end of the day. We have a strong training program in place that is related to privacy and data protection, and our main focus is GDPR, but not only GDPR. However, GDPR is one of the most stringent policies globally when it comes to how you can process data. The training programs we rollout are part of the onboarding process of new employees, and we also conduct refresher programs consistently throughout the year, so training and learning is embedded into the culture of VFS Global,” said Ávila.

The Data Protection Officer at VFS Global believes that many companies tend to focus only on how they process the data of their customers, but she argued that it is equally as important to focus on how you process the data of your own employees.

“We are an international company, and we are present in so many different countries, and with that comes various different regulations and rules in terms of what you can and can’t do with that data.



The new AI Act that was passed by the European Union in March of the year, and that will soon be adopted as EU Law really gives us a much clearer view of what the expectations are.”



So, it is incumbent on us to be proactive in terms of enhancing the awareness and knowledge on the rights of our employees as a data subject, not just when they are processing data on behalf of our government clients. It's important that we equip them with the skills to detect and protect the data they are processing. It is critical that adopt a mindset that enables them to always be vigilant in case something happens in the backend that is not in line with the policies and procedures that we have in place," said Ávila.

As aforementioned above,

it is critical for businesses to be agile in the current climate, especially in this era of artificial intelligence.

As Ávila explains the program VFS Global designed is both flexible and agile.

"From a privacy perspective, it is critical to have a program that is both robust, but also flexible to meet the agility that will be required as technology continues to evolve. It is also important to have a stable framework that doesn't need to be changed every six months to a year, but instead can be reviewed regularly, and if it needs to be tweaked,

or updated then the changes can be applied," said Ávila.

As a global entity that operates in countries all over the world, compliance can be complex, as certain rules in one location will be obsolete in another.

Ávila outlines how VFS Global use technology to help them to keep on top of changing rules and regulations when it comes to compliance.

"As a global organisation, we have people sitting all over the world in different locations and they have differing expertise across the privacy spectrum. We use

different types of technology and software in order to enable us to stay on top of everything that is happening within the privacy domain. For example, if there is a new privacy law passed by a country, or a new bill is being discussed in parliament then it's critical that we have visibility on that. Internally, we then discuss the potential repercussions that law may have on our existing privacy programs, and look at ways in which we will be able to align our procedures, and practices to meet the compliance of any new laws passed," said Ávila.

Generative AI has dominated the tech landscape since the introduction of ChatGPT by Open AI in November 2022.

Undoubtedly, Gen AI presents a plethora of opportunities, but again, businesses and technology leaders need to be measured when adopting AI, because there is still grey areas in relation to privacy and security around data.

Ávila conceded that most Data Protection Officers were relatively conservative when it comes to new disruptive technology, but stressed that the caution they adopt should not be confused for a reluctance to embrace new technologies.

However, she admitted that the introduction of the AI Act that was passed by the European Union in March 2024, provides greater clarity on how the technology can be dispensed.

"I think it's fair to say


that as Data Protection Officers we tend to adopt a very conservative approach towards technology. We like to take a step back from all the noise, take a deep breath, and then analyse what the next best step forward for us is. The new AI Act that was passed by the European Union in March of the year, and that will soon be adopted as EU Law really gives us a much clearer view of what the expectations are. From a personal point of view, I always want to determine what the real impact will be from a data subject perspective. We have witnessed the introduction of Chatbots across so many different organisations, and it can be very helpful, so it's not a matter of not embracing technology, on the contrary we want to embrace technology, but in a manner that is always compliant and does not negatively impact the data rights of our users. The less invasive the better for us, and if it enhances the services and experiences that we provide to our end-users then we will adopt it, but only after it has been passed our stringent assessment and meets our requirements," said Ávila.

As highlighted throughout our conversation, when it comes to AI, big questions

marks remain and there is plenty of cynicism in certain quarters regarding data privacy.

Many feel that due to the rapid evolution of Gen AI, and in the subsequent rush to commercialise Gen AI many businesses may take shortcuts, and in some cases have the cart pulling the horse, and that lack of due diligence puts users at risk.

Ávila said that for them transparency is critical for them as an organisation, describing it as a fundamental part of their make-up.

"In terms of the challenges, when it comes to AI you have to be transparent, and transparency is critical for us, and is firmly embedded in our DNA as an organisation. The most challenging point for all organisations at this juncture is the fact that everybody has an opinion on AI, good or bad, and there is a scramble to deploy the technology. However, it is important to reinforce that we are the very start of this journey, and enterprises need to make sure that when you deploy the technology it is right fit for their organisation. I'm going to be an interested observer of its evolution over the next 12 months, and I think we'll have a clearer picture on things by the end of 2024," said Ávila. 



Our focus is not only in terms of how we can continue to better protect our data, but also around proactively exploring and embracing new technologies to help us manage our data in a more compliant and responsible manner."

Hitachi Vantara

THE TIME IS NOW

CNME Deputy Editor Daniel Shepherd sat down with **Sanjay Naithani**, General Manager, MEP at Hitachi Vantara to discuss their extensive brand portfolio, why he feels that now was the perfect time for the company to expand their regional operations - and the vast potential of Generative AI.



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Can you provide our readers with more information on why Hitachi Vantara believes that 'now' is the perfect time for the company to expand their operations by investing in the Middle East region?

We are aware that the Middle East's digital economy alone is projected to grow more than four-fold to around US\$780 billion by 2030, a rate of change that significantly outpaces the global average.

KSA's Vision 2030 serves as a blueprint for one of the most ambitious national transformations; NEOM and several GIGA Projects have already been launched in the kingdom.

Similarly, the UAE is

progressing with its 'We The UAE 2031' vision. Sustainable energy is a key focus for Hitachi in developing solutions; Hitachi iQ represents our offering in the AI space, as we strive to build better solutions for tomorrow.

This exponential growth in strategic areas is driving Hitachi Vantara to align, reinvest, and further demonstrate our commitment to the Middle East region.

Hitachi is a global brand that is synonymous with the manufacturing of industrial machinery. However, can you tell our readers more about the broad portfolio of solutions being provided by Hitachi Vantara?

While Hitachi is recognised for industrial machinery, Hitachi Vantara focuses on a wide range of data-driven digital solutions and services.

Through expertise in data storage, infrastructure systems, AI, and hybrid cloud management, we help customers build the foundation for sustainable business growth.

Our recent developments are expanding our strong storage capabilities into the broader hybrid cloud and data management space, with an emerging portfolio of hybrid cloud products, platforms, and solutions.

Our latest innovation, Hitachi Virtual Storage Platform One, represents a single data platform that integrates hybrid cloud capabilities across structured and unstructured data, supporting block, file, cloud, and object storage.

Additionally, we're leveraging strategic partnerships to enhance our AI capabilities. In March, we announced a collaboration with NVIDIA to introduce Hitachi iQ, a suite of AI solutions designed to achieve precise business outcomes by integrating industry-specific



capabilities into our AI framework.

In terms of the Middle East marketplace, what sector will the Hitachi Vantara brand be primarily targeting, and what do you believe is the 'value ad' you can deliver that differentiates you from your market rivals?

Hitachi Vantara targets the hybrid cloud and data management sector. We differentiate ourselves through strong storage capabilities and emerging portfolio in hybrid cloud products and solutions enabled by generative AI.

This allows us to offer comprehensive data solutions

that optimise efficiency and enhance sustainability, setting us apart from competitors in the market.

It seems every other day there is a major data breach as a direct result of cyberattacks. Amidst this current backdrop, from your perspective what do organisations need to do to better protect their data as we continue to move

towards a fully-fledged digital economy and how can Hitachi Vantara assist in accelerating this?

Organisations should prioritise implementing effective, AI-driven data management solutions that offer comprehensive visibility into their data across hybrid cloud environments.

This includes robust infrastructure and metadata management capabilities



Organisations should prioritise implementing effective, AI-driven data management solutions that offer comprehensive visibility into their data across hybrid cloud environments.”



to detect and respond to threats effectively. Hitachi Vantara can assist by offering solutions like Virtual Storage Platform One, which enables unified cloud observability and scalable data management across multi-cloud infrastructures.

This helps organisations maintain control over their data while adapting to the complexities of modern IT environments, thereby enhancing security and operational efficiency.

Gen AI is everywhere, and it is dominating the global technology ecosystem. But the hype at this point has not translated into use-cases. Where do you see

the major use-cases, and what role can Gen AI play in helping the UAE become a global leader in AI?

Major use-cases for Generative AI include enhancing user experiences, optimising operational efficiency, and driving innovation across various industries.

Technologies like Hitachi iQ tailor AI solutions to specific industry needs, driving targeted outcomes and supporting initiatives like helping the UAE's global leader ambitions.



We differentiate ourselves through strong storage capabilities and emerging portfolio in hybrid cloud products and solutions enabled by generative AI.”

Sustainability is now a major KPI for every CEO, but some companies are still guilty of playing lip service to it. The same can't be accused of Hitachi Vantara, who have been praised for their commitment to reducing their carbon footprint. Can you tell us more about your sustainability strategy?

Hitachi Vantara is committed to reducing its carbon footprint through innovative data centre solutions and energy-efficient technologies.

Achieving Carbon Neutrality

in Scope 1 and 2 emissions by FY2030 and promoting diversity in leadership underscore our environment and social responsibility.

For example, Hitachi Vantara remains the only storage vendor that has achieved Carbon Footprint of Products (CFP) certification* of their flash storage offerings and is often considered as offering the world's most sustainable storage.

Hitachi Vantara's Virtual Storage Platform One Block, for example, incorporates "Dynamic Carbon Reduction" technology to reduce energy usage by switching CPUs to eco-mode during low activity, and features an automated compression

switching process that shifts from inline data reduction to post processing, significantly lowering energy consumption and decreasing CO2 emissions by up to 30-40%, thereby optimising storage efficiency and overall energy use.

Can you provide our readers with more information regarding Sphere in Las Vegas?

Hitachi Vantara's advanced software powers Sphere's revolutionary 160,000 square-foot interior LED display and the world's largest 580,000 square-foot exterior LED screen (Exosphere), setting new standards for immersive entertainment experiences.

Leveraging Hitachi

Vantara's robust technology, Sphere achieves seamless streaming of high-resolution, original content with unparalleled speed, reliability, and minimal latency.

This technology not only enhances in-venue experiences but also extends the reach of Sphere's captivating content globally, making waves of social media platforms.

Dennis Frank, VP, Strategic Partners & Alliances EMEA, Hitachi Vantara, concluded by adding:

"Hitachi Vantara's goal to further invest and grow AI and hybrid cloud offerings perfectly aligns with the region's digitalisation plan and strategic IT initiatives. The SMB and commercial space are where we see the most opportunities to drive channel business, helping companies address the challenges of exponential data growth and availability issues.

Hitachi Vantara and its sister organisations have worked with companies over the world creating smart cities with supporting infrastructures, including the NEOM project in Saudi Arabia. Sustainability is in our DNA, along with our mission to contribute to business and society through innovative solutions. As the Middle East continues its digital transformation, Hitachi Vantara is the obvious partner to support future-proof data management, and we're very excited to support them in their vision." 



HP Poly

REDEFINING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH WORK

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Bob Aoun**, Director of Sales at HP Poly, to learn more about some of the most interesting findings from their Work Relationship Index, how AI can reimagine and redefine the way we work – and how their portfolio of solutions, services and products are empowering people in the ‘work from anywhere’ world.

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HP's Work Relationship Index is a comprehensive body of work. It has shown that globally we now have a strained workforce with employees reporting heightened expectations. What is your view on this and the fact that many business leaders feel the time has come for us to redefine our relationship with work?

The findings from the Work Relationship Index (WRI) echo a growing sentiment among workers globally. The modern workforce is facing heightened expectations from workers, driven by factors such as technological advancements, changing societal norms and evolving workplace culture.

Workers today often seek more flexibility, purpose and meaning in their work, alongside opportunities for growth.

Leaders recognizing

the need to redefine the relationship with work is a positive step forward. One way to achieve this is through satisfying the demand for device flexibility in this modern way of remote working.

As reflected through the WRI, only 25% of knowledge workers are confident that their company will implement the right technology to support hybrid work.

Therefore, at HP Poly, we prioritize collaboration tools and connectivity, ensuring compatibility with various communication platforms.

More crucially, we are constantly aiming to boost productivity and job satisfaction in the new hybrid way of working. Through our Poly device offerings, we integrate top-notch audio and video solutions into our PCs, facilitating seamless communication for both in-office and remote employees.

For the hybrid office, our combined HP and Poly products of video and collaboration devices deliver the world's most comprehensive set of commercial video conferencing devices for hybrid work.

It also emerged that AI will be a gamechanger in terms of 'reimagining' work. Can you better explain to our readers the role you see AI playing in terms of reimagining work, and what that workplace will look like?

We have now rapidly entered a moment when technology is moving at the speed of imagination and creativity has no constraints.

According to the WRI, 55% of workers believe that AI will open new opportunities to enjoy work and make their jobs easier, however, they require the right AI tools and technology to succeed.



At HP Poly, we have demonstrated leadership in AI and machine learning technologies by seamlessly integrating them into audio and video solutions.

This integration has resulted in the introduction of features such as noise reduction, voice enhancement, face detection, meeting analytics, and AI-driven cameras, all aimed at enhancing the clarity and quality of video calls.

In addition to these innovations, on a broader level, HP is also collaborating with NVIDIA, becoming one of the first companies to deliver dedicated workstation solutions powered by the

NVIDIA AI Enterprise software platform.

This venture is poised to establish a new benchmark for the most advanced AI workstation globally, simplifying the process of creating and customizing private AI models.

Was there any other finding that emerged from HP's Work Relationship Index that shocked, or surprised you?
HP continuously strives to be



In today's digital age, the shift towards hybrid work has become more than just a trend – it is a fundamental change in how businesses operate.”

at the forefront of the new era of work. Hybrid work is here to stay, and employers are tasked with creating powerful employee experiences and enabling collaboration between teams working anywhere in the world.

However, amidst it all, it is crucial that businesses do not place the satisfaction and happiness of workers as second priority.

Key to this is helping workers to establish a healthy relationship with work in today's hybrid work landscape.

Amongst the illuminating findings from HP's WRI revolve around the factors that contribute to a healthy relationship.

The first factor is **fulfilment** – today's workers seek purpose and empowerment, yet only 29% experience these consistently. To adapt to evolving workforce expectations, businesses must prioritize employment fulfilment through increased voice and agency.

The second factor is **leadership** – workers value leaders who demonstrate empathy and emotional intelligence, with 70% of workers sharing that it is essential for leaders to display these qualities.

The third factor is **people-centricity** – only 25% of workers consistently feel



valued and respected, and fewer are experiencing the flexibility, autonomy and work-life balance they seek. To address this, leaders should place their teams at the center of decision-making.

Next, is workspace – two-thirds of workers desire a seamless and flexible working environment across multiple locations. One more factor is tools – 70% of workers shared that it is important to have access to technology that allows everybody to be seen and heard regardless of where they are.

Last but not least is skills – only 31% of desk-based workers feel confident in their

technical skills, emphasizing the need for training and support.

Can you outline to our readers how businesses that use the right Poly tools can create seamless working experiences from anywhere, anytime?

In today's digital age, the shift towards hybrid work has become more than just a trend – it is a fundamental change in how businesses operate. Virtual teams are now the backbone of many companies, going beyond geographical boundaries to harness talent from around the world.

More than just ensuring that the right Poly tools are

utilized, businesses need to make sure that these tools are integrated with popular collaboration platforms, making the seamless working experience for workers a reality.

HP Poly has launched the Poly Lens App for Microsoft Teams Rooms on Windows, an exciting solution that streamlines device management and boosts end-user experience.

We also introduced two flexible Poly Studio Base Room Kits for Microsoft Teams Rooms on Windows, and an array of newly certified devices for Microsoft Teams, strengthening our dedication to improving collaboration,



irrespective of your workplace location.

HP hardware components, including webcams, microphones, and speakers, are all designed for compatibility with the requirements of major collaboration tools, providing high-quality audio and video capabilities.

What are the flagship Poly solutions and services that are transforming the way employees work remotely?

How are these solutions and services embracing meeting equity now that hybrid / remote working has become a norm?

At HP Poly, we believe the future is hybrid flexibility,

which delivers the best of the home and the office to workers everywhere.

Through unified communications solutions, we offer audio and video conferencing tools, headsets, and collaboration software, enabling effective communication for remote and in-office workers, fostering collaboration.

We also offer high-quality audio and video

with products, ensuring communication clarity and reducing meeting disruption. For instance, our HP Poly Lens software provides data-driven insights on workspace and meeting room usage.

HP Poly products contribute to flexible connectivity, supporting wireless, Bluetooth, and USB connections. This enables easy device switching, so that workers can adapt to various work environments.

Furthermore, HP Poly offers communication tools that integrate with popular platforms like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Google Workspace, ensuring seamless collaboration regardless of employees' locations.

Not only that, but we also provide remote device management, ensuring smooth operation and minimal downtime for hybrid workers.

Ultimately, HP Poly's goal is to ensure that everyone, whether physically present or dialling in remotely, feels seen and heard during meetings.

Our software layer, integrated with the hardware, facilitates effective communication, ensuring that our portfolio of solutions delivers equal experiences no matter where employees work from – that everyone is both seen and heard clearly during meetings. enms



The modern workforce is facing heightened expectations from workers, driven by factors such as technological advancements, changing societal norms and evolving workplace culture.”

GBM

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RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down with **Ossama El Samadoni**, General Manager, GBM Dubai, to learn more about the company's unique approach to rethinking what is required to deliver seamless customer experiences in the new digital era, the challenges and opportunities presented by the advent of Gen AI in the CX space – and how their Customer Service Framework is enhancing operational efficiency and significantly reducing costs for the public sector organisations that implement it.

Ossama El Samadoni is one of the most respected and revered technology thought leaders in the Middle East.

He started his professional journey as an engineer with IBM in the early 90s, and has enjoyed a remarkable career to date in the 30+ years that have since passed.

El Samadoni has worked for some of the biggest technology companies in the world such as Dell Technologies, Oracle, HP, and NetApp.

He spent the best part of a decade at Dell Technologies, where he held a number of senior executive positions, and it was there where he came to real prominence as a technology leader.

He left Dell in 2021, and joined G42 for 12 months, before he took over as the General Manager of GBM Dubai, in August 2022.

CNME managed to secure an exclusive interview with the charismatic Egyptian, in

an effort to learn more about how GBM has continued to stay relevant and evolve, and the direction the company is heading under his tutelage and guidance.

He kickstarted the conversation by highlighting the evolution that has occurred across the CX space over the decades.

"GBM has been in the business for almost 35 years, and during that time we have seen so much evolution and change across the industry. We have also seen the development of what we now call CX (customer experience). In the old days, the name of the game was customer support, and that based on a face-to-face engagement

between a customer support agent sitting in an office and a customer coming to visit them. From a public sector perspective, it was a very heavy documentation and workflow driven type of engagement between the customer and the public sector organisation. It then transitioned into the contact centre space, and then moved into the backward integration of applications to support workflow and other elements," said El Samadoni.

El Samadoni stressed that times have changed, and referenced an article he recently published on LinkedIn, which examined the move from systems of records to systems of engagement.



Businesses need to go to the engagement space of the customer and serve them on whatever social media applications those customers want to interact with them on. You have to serve the customer on their terms, not yours."

“In the current climate, customers are mandating how organisations should reach them, it’s not the other way about anymore. Businesses need to go to the engagement space of the customer and serve them on whatever social media applications those customers want to interact with them on. You have to serve the customer on their terms, not yours,” said El Samadoni.

El Samadoni also pointed out that the creation of Customer Happiness Centre really held public sector organisations to account in terms of ensuring they delivered good customer experiences.

“The UAE created the concept of the Customer Happiness Centres, and they are all about ensuring the customer is happy, and that became a key objective for them, rather than just a throwaway catchphrase with no real meaning behind it. Digital transformation on the CX part of the public sector in particular became a continuum rather than a separate function of the contact, connect, or delivery channel functions. When the banks wanted to do compliance they conducted a ‘know your customer’ survey, and we know that was a very painful process, but in the public sector in order to serve their customers well they needed to have a comprehensive 360 degree view of their customers,” said El Samadoni.

El Samadoni revealed that GBM looked at what a CX

solution should encompass in terms of functionality in order to build a real solid foundation to drive CX.

“One of the most critical components underpinning all of this is the need to build a data foundation in order to have that 360-degree view on the customers to harness the engagements, and look at whatever non-public sector information about the customers is available that can help tune up the services that are being offered by the organisations. The connection between backend and frontend integration into the business process in the old days was done by writing code, a very hard linked code between what is happening on the frontend, and what needs to happen on the backend. With the evolution of both it actually created an extra dimension of complexity, which resulted in the connection between the frontend and the backend becoming a loose connection, rather than a hard one. Expanding the customer transactions and feedback beyond organisation boundaries is critical, businesses need to go to the space of the customer and determine whether or not they are delivering the services that the customer actually wants, and if they are doing a good job or not,” said El Samadoni.

According to the General Manager of GBM Dubai, multichannel engagement has become a real necessity instead of a nice to have in the current climate.

“Understanding the characteristics and functionality of each organisation makes every different project in CX a unique one, and again that can add to the complexity in terms of where each organisation is in terms of the maturity curve, and what their objective are. In the end, it’s all about determining the art of the possible and establishing what can we do to enhance the customer experience across the board. In order to achieve this successfully, you need to invest time in creating a robust framework that will guide you in terms of integrating the myriad of tools, applications and technologies that you need to make sure everything works seamlessly and in tandem with each other,” said El Samadoni.

El Samadoni then moved the dial of conversation to highlight the five key areas that GBM is focusing on.

“In terms of our approach at GBM, we are focused on five key areas, and one of those areas is modernising infrastructure for proper digital excellence and experience. We can achieve



CX is one of the areas that actually impacts the culture of transformation on the organisation and has a higher impact than a normal digital transformation journey.”



this through multi-cloud hybrid engagement for the integration on open APIs and streaming integration, and to determine what the digital footprint of the customer really is. Secondly, it is critical to make everything data-driven. Essentially, what I mean when I say data-driven is enabling organisations to collect data and have access to it regardless of which engagement space they are in, and that multichannel engagement allows them to do the required analysis to identify what is the next best action that needs to be taken. In addition to this, you also need to look at another dimension which is the integration and automation of the business because you

have a backend function that you need to integrate with a frontend function, and it's not easy to do, and as I said earlier it is all loose. As a result, building trust and security can present challenges because you're opening up beyond your organisation, and you're dealing with a customer in a different engagement space," said El Samadoni.

Interestingly, the General Manager of GBM Dubai, also highlighted that during a CX transformation the entire culture of the organisation is changed as a result.

"CX is one of the areas that actually impacts the culture of transformation on the organisation and has a higher impact than a normal digital transformation journey. With digital transformation you can throw it back at the IT team, but in customer experience everybody is a constituent and everybody is a stakeholder during a typical CX implementation. If you don't create a collaboration platform in terms of communication, project identification, and project objectives then the project will encounter huge challenges and obstacles," said El Samadoni.

When pressed on whether there was resistance from some public sector organisations to transform their CX offering, El

Samadoni said there wasn't resistance, but stressed that with CX becoming an important KPI, that inevitably created pressure, and pressure can sometimes lead to mistakes.

"The transformation of the CX space was a seismic change because it changed the mindset and forced people to think about what actually does the customer want. The pressure that we see on top government management, and public sector officials in the UAE comes from the evaluation of how well each organisation is serving their constituents and customers, and so you can only imagine that the pressure is high. However, when the pressure is heightened people can take shortcuts and look for quick results, and don't do the due diligence on what building blocks they need to implement in order for these results to happen. At GBM, this is the role we are playing with the customers, and we stress to them that it is a journey, it's not one single project implementation. We adopt a consultative approach with the customer, and we agree on the typical phases of the project, and what is the expected return of each one of the phases, and by doing that, we can ensure that it is an ever-evolving platform, and again this is why it



We looked at building a framework of reference for how we engage with our customers. It is an engagement framework rather than a solution-specific framework."



is so important to have a framework of reference,” said El Samadoni.

El Samadoni briefly touched in the architectural framework GBM has established.

“Inside GBM, we have constructed an architectural reference for what CX is all about, it has multiple components, and some of them are mandatory like the foundation, whilst some of them are functional specific. Essentially, depending on what the customer will do the architecture will either grow, or the architecture will contract, or contract with a clear roadmap of growth based on the maturity of the backend, and the maturity execution of the stakeholder,” said El Samadoni.

GBM has developed a Customer Success Services Framework (CSF) that is underpinned by six core service practices.

El Samadoni went into greater detail on what each practice stood for, and said the thinking behind the new framework was to move away from a solution-specific framework to a direct engagement one.

“We looked at building a framework of reference for how we engage with our customers. It is an engagement framework rather than a solution-specific framework. We deliberately made it as general as possible to make sure we are covering all the critical success factors when we are dealing with the implementation of a digital transformation project with our customers. This approach

ensures that the technology deployments remain within the objectives of what the customer wants. We have observed that when you have a lot of constituents and stakeholders with a customer there can be a lot of pull, because everybody is trying to pull the project towards their own domain, or specific department within their organisation. We know that some technical people within some organisations simply love to implement new technologies all the time, but what you need to do is effectively deliver business outcomes to the customer,” said El Samadoni.

El Samadoni said that the

the requirements that we now have. One of the very important things to highlight is we start the adoption of the new systems alongside the professional services at the same time. Adoption and change management happen at the very start of the implementation process simultaneously. We discovered that if you don’t engage the ultimate user of the systems early in the project then you create a process of alienation. Adoption and change management simply must happen at the same time of the professional services,” said El Samadoni.

Following that phase of the project, El Samadoni



This commitment to ongoing development ensures GBM remains a trusted partner for businesses across the Middle East, enabling them to thrive in an ever-evolving technological landscape.”

first thing GBM wanted to do was sit down with their customers and define and identify whether or not they had a good business use-case or not.

“We needed to firstly determine what does the project serve, is it building something, what is the return on that, are they any challenges to overcome to do that, and these are just some of the questions that we need to address at the very beginning of a project. That is what we call the consulting phase, and once we agree on what the project is all about then we proceed to the designing and implementation of the solution based on

revealed that the team at GBM then move into the operations, maintenance and support elements of the implementation process.

“After this has all been done, we then commence with the operations side of the process. We push our people who are engaged in the deployment to go and work hand-in-hand and manage the day-to-day operations for the customer to identify what the implementation bottlenecks are, and again to ensure optimal performance. We then unplug ourselves from the operational part and we go into the maintenance and support phase of the project. There is

an advisory function that is working 24/7 on the entire project. So, in summary, consulting, professional services, adoption, change management, operations, maintenance and support are the six pillars of the CSF framework. When we implement the CSF properly, we have seen customers increase ROI, reduce costs, enhance user experience, improving operational efficiency and establish a competitive advantage over their market rivals,” said El Samadoni.

Since Open AI released ChatGPT in November, 2022, the democratisation of AI became a reality.

Generative AI has been dominated the tech landscape ever since, and companies are scrambling to adopt Gen AI and integrate the technology into their daily operations.

El Samadoni shared his thought on Gen AI, and shared some of the positive impacts it is delivering for organisations across the UAE.

“AI can help you determine what I call the ‘next best action’. For example, say you launch a service on a website and you infuse AI into it, and you notice that a user has picked up a certain service then you can analyse their behaviour using NLP that is backed up by LLMs to learn exactly what it is they want to do, and you can guide them to the right form, and the right data that they need to write on the form, and that is what we call perception management. That’s a small example of



what Gen AI and LLMs can do for you, everything in the public sector is about unstructured data, user-driven data, documentation, and a large myriad of policies and procedures to govern what you can do with AI. NLP and multi-lingual capabilities of AI becomes a challenge because this is where LLM can take part, and we have witnessed in the UAE the emergence of Arabic LLMs. If we look at AI as an infusion through the CX then we can see a lot of positive impacts. Take for example the chatbot, you need to add additional components to the chatbot, which is what I call domain specific data. You

are receiving a model that is LLM enabled, but the LLM is based on publicly available data. However, the data needs to be domain infused and domain enabled,” said El Samadoni.

According to El Samadoni, another hugely important component in enhancing CX is leveraging the capabilities of analytics and Gen AI summarization capabilities.

“There is no one size fits all when it comes to CX. There are elements that need to be fed into a connectivity, integration, or automation platform for things to work. We work closely with Gartner and have had a number of conversations with them on

AI, and we have seen that a very effective solution is the Gen AI summarisation capabilities, because again as the public sector is so documentation heavy, availing of a tool to give a constituent, or a customer a rundown on what these policies and procedures are all about by analysing a document is a powerful tool. There is innovation happening within AI by an hourly basis, and at GBM, we are continuing to expand and innovate on our own AI capabilities to ensure that we can deliver an exceptional customer experience,” said El Samadoni.

The opportunities presented by Gen AI is endless, however, there have been many valid concerns raised in relation to data privacy and security when it comes to Open AI and Generative AI, and El Samadoni conceded that there are challenges and questions left to be answered in this respect.

“There is no doubting the fact that there is immense potential when using AI and Generative AI, and when it comes to Gen AI you can’t really build the model because it’s going to be a massive investment in terms of infrastructure such as computing power, so what you need to do is build a multi-model architecture, and design models that are close to the use-case you’re trying to implement with AI. However, that by definition opens up the doors and creates an environment


in which the organisation has to deal with external infrastructure on the cloud. Three things come to mind when you do this, and the first of that is security. Access security technologies and SASE technologies in the security space is becoming very prominent because it deals with security on the edge outside your own premise, and outside your own perimeter of security. In addition to this, another challenge is the level of understanding and maturity in relation to what AI can do and what AI should not be doing. You need to use AI responsibly and deploy it in a way that can support the system, whilst ensuring you’re not selecting a business model out of bias. It is imperative that you have comprehensive data to prevent hallucinations and skewed guidance,” said El Samadoni.

El Samadoni also spoke of the importance of nurturing talent to harness the capabilities of AI, and spoke about the AI Squad created by GBM.

“The culture and the language are a challenge because AI talks to us in their own language, so it incumbent on us to learn the AI language. We are all waiting patiently now for rules and regulations to govern AI practices. However, I think the most important dimension of all is talent. Finding the right talent that can understand the AI language, and tune up the customer is critical. It has been proven again and again

that a lack of collaboration can be a big risk on any implementation of AI. At GBM, we have harnessed all the capabilities of AI, and we created what we call the AI Squad. The AI Squad is not working on the limitations of each country, but instead, we are working across countries to identify what are the best practices for us to adopt and implement,” said El Samadoni.

El Samadoni concluded a wonderful conversation by saying that the primary factor in the longevity and sustained success of GBM over 35 years has been the people.

“In terms of what differentiates us, I would sum this up in one word: our people. We are constantly at the forefront of technological advancements. GBM actively explores and integrates emerging technologies like AI and cloud computing into our solutions, keeping our clients ahead of the curve. While technology is crucial, GBM recognizes the importance of human relationships. Our team of experienced consultants works closely with clients to understand their unique needs, challenges, and vision. We continuously invest in our people, technology, and infrastructure. This commitment to ongoing development ensures GBM remains a trusted partner for businesses across the Middle East, enabling them to thrive in an ever-evolving technological landscape,” concluded El Samadoni. 

A person wearing a white cleanroom suit with a large circular visor and blue gloves, standing against a light blue background.

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Alteryx

GET RID OF YOUR DATA DEBT

Digvijay Lamba, Chief Technology Officer at Alteryx, has penned a thought leadership article for the combined July-August edition of CNME, that takes a closer look at the challenges associated with cloud data integration.

Let's face it: Most enterprises are nowhere close to a simple, fully cloud-native, modernized data stack. And it won't ever be that way, as technologies change new systems with their own data silos continuously introduced.

In fact, a recent survey revealed that 30% of companies use legacy technologies to manage their data, with 90% of companies relying on outdated data stacks, which lack scalability and have inflexible architectures.



This often silos data, preventing enterprises from reaping the benefits of their data technology investments and impeding users' access to critical information that can help drive business decisions.

That's where cloud data integration comes in. It consolidates data from disparate locations — from on-prem to cloud and beyond — into a single, accessible view for everyone. Without it, IT administrators will need to sift through each system separately for data management and maintenance, which could lead to more inconsistencies and security risks.

As the UAE continues its rapid digital transformation, enterprises across sectors are increasingly adopting cloud solutions.

Cloud data integration stands at the forefront of this movement, offering a streamlined approach that enhances data accessibility and operational efficiency, key components in the nation's strategy to become a leading digital economy

Like any technology, the full potential of cloud data integration is unleashed only when strategically executed. So, what does a successful strategy look like? Here is my take.

KNOW WHERE YOUR DATA IS

Any cloud data integration strategy must start with knowing where all your data is located. While there are different schools of thought on where data should reside,



the truth is not all data is created equal.

The beauty of cloud data integration is that not all data needs to be in the cloud, nor does it all need to be on premises. For example, a hybrid strategy is attractive to enterprises that want to transition some of their workloads to the cloud but also to retain control over sensitive data within their own infrastructure.

It is also important for every data worker to know about and have access to the data they care about.

Making data easy to discover with one click access for every employee is the biggest multiplier to an organization's ability to be data driven.

GET RID OF YOUR DATA DEBT

The next step is to eliminate data debt — where an organization fails to manage data quality, negatively impacting costs and productivity. Any data-driven technology will only be as successful as the quality of the data it's utilizing.



Eliminating copies and providing more direct control over data to business functions can significantly reduce an organization's data debt."



If data is collected manually from siloed sources via spreadsheets, there is bound to be a breakdown in data quality due to human errors, lack of transparency, and inconsistency — making business decision-making slow, painful, and ineffective.

With modern technologies, it has become easier than ever to provide increased controlled access to the source data via easy-to-use tools without proliferating copies of modified and hard to synchronize data. Eliminating these copies and providing more direct control over data to business functions can significantly reduce an organization's data debt.

IMPROVE DATA QUALITY

The success of any cloud data integration strategy

lies in its data preparation, including the processes of data cleansing, mapping, and transformation. No matter where data is hosted — on the cloud, on-premises, or in a hybrid environment — it still needs to be wrangled, cleansed, and structured into a unified platform. Organizations need to select a data preparation tool that reduces the time and resources usually poured into the process.

Allowing domain experts that sit on business teams to use modern easy to use tools can democratize this work and allow increased ownership.

These business teams can then partner with central data teams to create and use shared data assets that

are high quality, governed and avoid duplication.

Together this can create a balance of democratized use of data while maintaining consistency and high quality across the data assets in the organization.

LEAD THE CHANGE

Data is a powerful engine of business innovation. This isn't to say cloud data integration is the solution to a company's data woes.

However, it is a key piece of building an enterprise-wide culture of data literacy that encourages every department — from marketing and finance to HR and IT — to easily access and use data for business processes and decision-making across the company. **enme**

IFS

PRODUCTIVITY, PREDICTABILITY, AGILITY

CNME Deputy Editor Daniel Shepherd, caught up with **Vijay Jaswal**, CTO APJ-MEA at IFS, during their IFS Connect Middle East event in Riyadh, to find out more about the meaning behind the central theme of their event, which was all about 'unlocking business value'.

Tell us about the IFS Connect Middle East central theme - 'Unlock Business Value: Productivity, Predictability and Agility'

It is our flagship customer event as we have many customers in the Middle East spread across Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

We are going to have a lot of our customers speaking around these themes and how they have improved their productivity, predictability and agility.

It is very important for us to hear from our customers and understand their experiences with IFS technology. Secondly, our partner ecosystem will be there. This is the second flagship event we are holding in the Middle East as last year it was present in Dubai.

We plan to showcase all our capabilities around ensuring our customers operate in the most efficient and productive manner



possible using our solutions. This is all centred around connecting people, assets and services together.

Tell us about IFS' commitment to helping organisations resolve their productivity, predictability and agility issues, and 'unlock business value with Cloud and AI'

This Connect event, we are going to showcase the launch of our new IFS Cloud version launching in May, 24R1.

With this version comes a lot of innovations specifically around AI.

Secondly, we've always focused around six core vertical industries; aerospace & defence, manufacturing, telcos, utilities, natural resources, engineering construction and any other service-based industry.

When it comes to the AI side of things there are a lot of enhancements this year and user productivity is a key one for us. By using the technology of Artificial Intelligence, we are launching the IFS co-pilot this year in the May release.

For example, in the past if the user is stuck with something they would have to go away and investigate documents and manuals which takes a lot of time.

Now with IFS co-pilot the user can just type in a question if they are stuck at any part of the process and



the co-pilot will produce an answer and a source within a split second.

There are multiple sources for this process; user documentation, technical documentation and our online community forums. Through co-pilot we are powering up user efficiency so that they can spend time on more productive work rather than mundane admin tasks.

From an asset productivity perspective there are a lot of ways in which we are using AI. In anomaly detection, IFS considers assets such as a machine in a production line, or an engine in an aircraft and ensures that they are all functioning properly thus preventing added costs or inefficiencies.

By implementing anomaly detection and IoT sensors we know what an assets' normal operating range is and if it ever goes below that we can start sending out warnings before the asset goes down to pre-emptively solve the problem.

IFS.ai is an industrial AI which enables organisations to contextualise outcomes and goes beyond co-piloting. How does this work?

From an industrial AI perspective, we only serve six verticals and each one is different. The aviation industry has different requirements to the manufacturing industry.

The way we contextualise these differences is by working with our customers to come up with AI use cases that we bring into our product set and distribute.

For the 24R1 release we have a lot of manufacturing capabilities around scheduling, forecasting and estimation for product and raw material. What we are doing is catering to each to each vertical and creating



When it comes to the AI side of things there are a lot of enhancements this year and user productivity is a key one for us."

use cases that pertain to that vertical in collaboration with our customers.

We plan to do more vertical releases throughout the year as we release twice a year, once in May and once in October.

The next global customer event is going to be called Unleashed and will be held in the US, which will allow our customers to showcase how they are using AI within their industries.

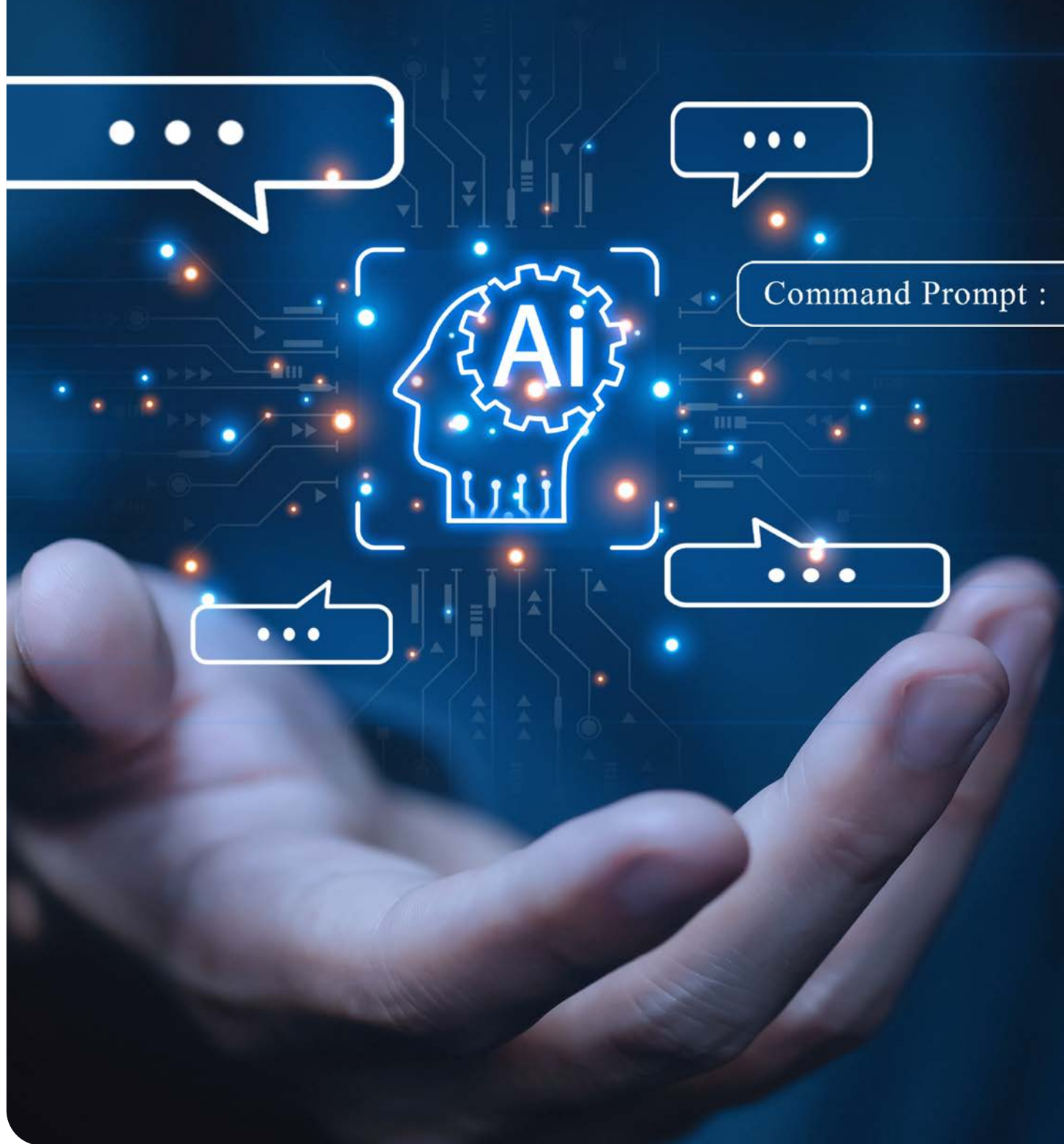
How is IFS Cloud breaking down data and functional silos in IFS core industries?

IFS Cloud has surpassed three years since its release, what we did three years ago at IFS is totally re-architect our products.

IFS Cloud is basically one product, within it you have all the capabilities around asset management, fuel service management and ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning). We provide customers with only the elements that they need such as asset management and it is completely possible for them to add functions later such as fuel service management.

Basically, it ensures future proofing as you can start small and move big as all the capabilities are contained within one product. This unity also makes reporting on this information easier because you are not integrating to multiple different backend systems.

The key benefit here is that it allows you to record and analyse data across your whole ecosystem.



Command Prompt :



From an industrial AI perspective, we only serve six verticals and each one is different. The aviation industry has different requirements to the manufacturing industry.”

How is IFS helping to manage the critical need for efficient resource allocation, cost management and sustainability in industries?

This is an area where we have been experts for several years. Scheduling and optimisation are often a pain point for engineers within telco organisations. Our technology enables us to narrow down the response time for engineers within this scenario.

For example, if an engineer is late our system can look around for the next nearby engineer to pre-empt these issues. One of IFS' straplines is 'We ensure our customers deliver the moment of service to their customers'.

How will IFS be the go-to platform for reporting trends and KPIs?

Sustainability is on everybody's agenda now, if you look at various organisation's annual reports, they all have ESG and sustainability as part of their strategic objectives moving forwards.

We already have a lot of in-built capabilities within our platform reporting on sustainability e.g. emissions, carbon footprint and recycling.

Another example of verticalized contextual AI is re-manufacturing or the circular economy. In this instance a manufacturer's

old escalators can be refurbished and resold which results in overall energy savings of up to 80%.

In terms of deducing what the carbon footprint is and what the money savings were, all of this comes together within our corporate ESG dashboard.


This dashboard not only takes data from the IFS system, but it can also grab data other systems such a vehicle fleet management system that also measures carbon emissions to collate them in one place.

Do you have any final thoughts you wish to share with our readers?

IFS has been around since the 80s, that's nearly four decades of working with customers and our industry knowledge is key.

For example, when my team of consultants speak to an airline, they use the vocabulary that the airline company understands. This process establishes trust and a lot of confidence in our solutions as many of our industry experts were once employed by the industry verticals that we support.

We have many customers from across the years that talk at events such as Connect & Unleashed about their solutions, benefits and value that they've gained from us.

These two elements help a lot of our prospects to make the decision to come and use IFS' technology. 

Veeam

CYBER GAMES

Gil Bega, CISO at Veeam, has written an exclusive op-ed for the combined July-August edition of CNME, which examines how cybercriminals are going to use global sporting events like the forthcoming Olympics in Paris to target unsuspecting sports fans.

What's your Olympics-watching style? Embracing the warm glow of seeing humanity come together in peace and harmony?

Maybe it's marveling at the sporting excellence on display from apparently superhuman competitors? Perhaps you spend the entire time with the vague feeling that you should be getting up and moving more.

I go through each one of these multiple times throughout the games, but I also have one other thought in the back of my mind that maybe isn't so typical – just how massive the task the cybersecurity teams responsible for the games have on their hands.

This thought isn't just the product of a slightly paranoid mind from years of working in cybersecurity; it comes from the unfortunate reality of any major world event in the digital age.

To put my potential paranoia in context, the last summer Olympics, which took place in Tokyo, experienced 450 million attempted attacks, and it's predicted that the Paris Olympics will see ten times the amount of attacks as Tokyo, potentially making it the most attacked games ever.



THE OLYMPICS AS A TARGET

You may be asking why the Olympics are such a target. There are several reasons. Firstly, the eyes of the world are on the event, making it a prime target for bad guys, including activists, state actors, and cybercriminals.

Another reason is the sheer

scale of the IT infrastructure that must be in place to run an event like this and the relatively short time that the organizers had to put it all in place.

Considering that there are anticipated to be more than 10,000 participants, millions of visitors, and billions of viewers across the globe,



It's predicted that the Paris Olympics will see ten times the amount of attacks as Tokyo, potentially making it the most attacked games ever."

the potential for an Olympic cyber disaster is considerable.

We saw a successful attack disrupt the opening ceremony of the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics. The attack affected their data centers and shut off the Wi-Fi in the stadium and every gate system in every Olympic building.

It also shut down the digital ticketing function and broke the official Olympics app. Running the events without these essential functions would be problematic.

The IT team worked through the night and was able to recover operations in time before the first event, but it was a close call.

The good news is that the team responsible for the Paris

Olympics has taken the threat incredibly seriously.

Working closely with the French Agency for National Security (ANSSI), they've carried out a wide-ranging program to protect the games, including extensive system hardening, war gaming, pen testing, and a bug bounty program to reward ethical hackers who find vulnerabilities in their systems.

The security operations center for the games will also operate from a top-secret location.

THE OLYMPICS AS A LURE

The games themselves are likely not just to be a target but also a lure in upcoming phishing and fraud attempts.

If there is one thing we know, cybercriminals capitalize on world events in their schemes.

Be looking for too-good-to-be-true offers, prizes, or promises that use the Olympics as a lure. And while the games have taken a step into the digital frontier recently, don't trust every Olympic app out there.

Ensure you only download those supported by the official Olympic committee or sponsors.

Hopefully, with all the cyber threats in the open, we can turn our attention to the athleticism on the fields, in the water, and on the courts. Which country are you rooting for in this year's games? **cnn**



Yandex

OPTIMISE THE PROCESS

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Dmitry Masyuk**, Director of Search and Advertising Technologies Business Group, at Yandex, in an effort to find out more about how the company has established itself as one of the most diversified technology companies in the world, the impact its game-changing Yandex YaFSDP is having in terms of optimising the training process of Large Language Models – and its unwavering commitment to the developer community across the Middle East.

Dmitry Masyuk has enjoyed a remarkable career in the field of IT, technology and telecommunications.

He started as a developer at Netcracker, before transitioning away from a developer role and moving into management and IT consulting roles.

Masyuk has worked for Deloitte, McKinsey and A.T. Kearney, and has worked on key projects in Southeast Asia, Europe and the United States.

In 2018, he joined Yandex Taxi, and in 2020, he became the CEO of Yandex Eats. Under his leadership Yandex Eats became one of the first commercially successful food tech services in the world.

In 2023, he assumed responsibility for Search and Advertising at Yandex.

CNME managed to secure an exclusive interview with Masyuk, and he began the conversation by providing a brief overview of the company.

“I would characterise Yandex as one of the most



diversified technology companies in the world. We are the market leader in our region in four key domains. The first domain we are focused in, is actually the area in which I manage, and that is the largest business

vertical we have in terms of revenue and profit, and that is Informational Services, such as search engine, navigation and advertising services. The second domain is related to transactional services, and again, we are a market leader here in Russia for ride-hailing services and e-commerce. The third domain is content streaming, and the fourth is B2B technology, and the classic example here is cloud services,” said Masyuk.

As Masyuk explains, the company began as a search engine business around 25 years ago, and is one of the few companies in the world that has a greater market share than Google in the search engine space in its home region.

“In terms of search, people here in Russia can freely use Google and Yandex, but we’re bigger than Google here with 65% of the market. That is a testament to us as a technology leader,” said Masyuk.

Since the advent of ChatGPT by Open AI in November 2022, there has been a democratisation of AI across the board. It has become mainstream.

Masyuk described the relatively recent phenomenon of ChatGPT as a 'renaissance' in artificial intelligence.

"I would describe what has happened over the last couple of years as a renaissance in artificial intelligence and machine learning through the advent of ChatGPT 3.5 by Open AI. The miracle from my perspective comes from the fact that these models are trained and specifically designed to be able to support a very natural dialogue with the user, and it has undoubtedly democratised AI. Fundamentally, language and text are the most effective and efficient means of transferring information between people, and when I say text and language, I'm really referring to software developers, they use language, and fundamentally they use text to explain to a machine what they want it to do," said Masyuk.

However, according to Masyuk, the challenge now lies in the fact that the machine learning models that are used have been trained on terabytes of data, which was never done before.

"All these models are essentially trained on a huge volume of existing data on openly available media and forums, but in order to process all this vast data you need thousands of GPUs, and the cost to do this is

excessive, you're talking millions of dollars as a starting point. For the largest and leading technology players then you're talking in the region of billions of dollars in terms of the pure cost of training models. In addition to the training costs, the duration of the training process is another factor. Typically, modern LLMs are trained for several months, so you're talking anywhere from 2-5 months of uninterrupted GPUs running, which inevitably just leads to astronomical costs," said Masyuk.

Yandex, which develops and trains its own LLMs, has created a solution to the problem through its new technology entitled Yandex YaFSDP that can optimise the training process by 26%.

Masyuk explains in greater detail what YaFSDP is, and how it is a gamechanger for the machine learning community from a fiscal point of view.

"Yandex YaFSDP is a technology that drastically speeds up the process of training these LLM models. One of the most popular LLMs, which is available on an open-source basis, is Llama3, which has been developed by Meta. If you take a 70 billion parameter model, which is a sort of mid-to-large size model, the deployment of

our YaFSDP can optimise the training process by 26%. That is hugely significant, now granted, we're not the only company attempting to optimise the process, but these results are outstanding and unrivaled in the market. As a result, we have seen huge interest from the machine learning community since we outsourced the Yandex YaFSDP, and it's freely available on GitHub. In summary, with the major challenge being the cost of training these models, the fact that we can optimise the process by 26% is a gamechanger for companies from an economic perspective," said Masyuk.

Interestingly, Masyuk also said that despite this potential competitive advantage, he wants to foster an ecosystem in which he can help his rivals get up to speed in order to accelerate the training process on a much bigger scale across the board. Enter open-source.

"As aforementioned earlier in our conversation, when you train the models then you need thousands of GPUs and that's costly, but during the training process each GPU contains memory, and you need to constantly synchronise the learning process between the GPUs. What we did that gave ourselves an advantage over our market rivals was in



We have seen huge interest from the machine learning community since we outsourced the Yandex YaFSDP, and it's freely available on GitHub."

relation to the approach that we adopted. We optimised the processes and protocols of communicating between those GPUs, and I think what also differentiates us is our desire in this particular field to open source it. However, despite the fact we've stolen a march on our competitors, and we could keep it as our competitive advantage, we actually want others within this ecosystem to be able to help speed up the process of the training models," said Masyuk.

Masyuk then moved the dial of the conversation towards their relationship with the developer community in the Middle East, and highlighted the intricacies and sensitivities that are at play culturally across the region.

"We do believe that one of the biggest challenges in AI and LLMs specifically is to maintain its relevance for local communities. What we see through the limitation of current models and technology is how hard it is in terms of the models understanding the local intricacies and sensitivities, and this is even true for the large hyper-scalers such as Microsoft. It goes without saying that Western culture is clearly different to Eastern cultures, but specifically what I am talking about is that for a single model it is hard to keep all the historical aspects and local language in-store, and it's hard to be specific about how people think and what they are used to in the region," said Masyuk.

Masyuk conceded that in

terms of scale Yandex is not in a position to compete with tech behemoths like Google or Microsoft, however, he does believe that their ability to provide a very tailored and niche offering to customers is another key differentiator for the company.

"It isn't easy for us to compete with Microsoft and Google in terms of scale. However, we believe that our models are the best in terms of how specific we can be. For example, we are expanding our models to Kazakhstan, and our models are much, much better at understanding the local specifics and culture. We are seeing that companies within our geographic location are seeing huge opportunities within our models. In the Middle East, there are a number of entities trying to create their own LLMs, generally to train them for specific scenarios, which are not universal, and much more specialised. Yandex YaFSDP is essentially trying to help the local ML communities across the region to create their own LLMs, that are much more relevant to their own local audience and local businesses. We have open-sourced AQLM, which is another technology that allows you to run inference on LLMs on the GPUs that have less memory, and we have created that technology in conjunction with a number of Western Universities. In summary, our fundamental goal is to diversify AI globally to empower local engineering communities to create their own specific solutions," said Masyuk.

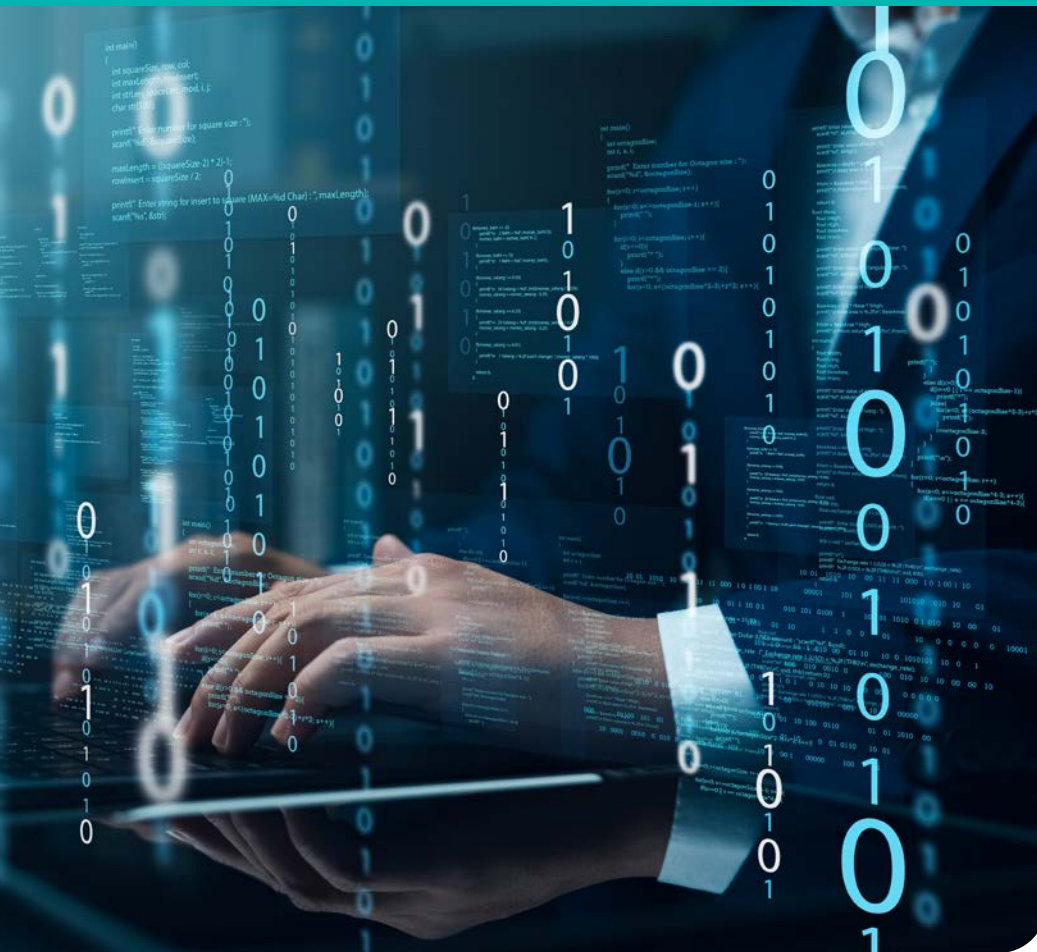
A new concept that has emerged in the LLM space is that of RAG (Retrieval Augmented Generation).

Masyuk believes it is a hugely significant concept and provided some more context around the demand for Retrieval Augmented Generation.

"RAG is another exciting technology dimension, and there has been a lot of discussion on its potential impact. LLMs have amazing power, but it's also important to highlight that there are several technological limitations within LLMs. It's not a question of their maturity, but instead how do LLMs fundamentally work? Hallucinations is something that many users have experienced when interacting with LLMs. Essentially, what that means is it fantasizes about something it doesn't know specifically. The model is trained to approximate the textual data it has seen before, but when you ask the model for something really specific, which it fundamentally can't store. As I mentioned earlier, the models are trained on terabytes of data, but the output is typically gigabytes of data. Fundamentally, the model doesn't know all the specifics, but it tries to approximate the reality and it hallucinates," said Masyuk.

Masyuk added that the second challenge facing developers is the fact that LLMs are a static file.

"Hallucinations is the first challenge, the second challenge is the fact that



LLMs are a static file, that you can store on your hard drive. However, if something happened an hour ago it just doesn't know a thing about it. Those two challenges can be breached with this RAG concept. It's not a specific technology, it's just a concept. The unique capabilities of RAG are the combination of the unbelievable power of reasoning capabilities of a LLM and some external source of information. You basically feed something from an external database which can be a search engine. You can create a LLM with RAG, which allows generally trained models to answer specific questions within a particular domain using that external database. This enables a process in which you can feed very specific

data into the LLM, which was generalised during the training process," said Masyuk.

"There are several different factors that differentiate us from our market competition. Everyone talks about the economy of scale, and it would be great to be huge because you have more resources, but as I say to my employees all the time, every zero in terms of the number of employees you have, and every zero in your target audience creates challenges in terms of how quickly you can create and develop things. Yandex is smaller, but that

allows us to be quicker. Secondly, we can also tailor our approach to be much more relevant to the markets that we are operating in. For example, what we do better is that when we explore Kazakhstan, that's a higher priority for us than whatever global player is also operating there, and that's just natural, it's not because the global player is bad, it just can't deliver the boutique hands-on customer-centric approach we can. Recently, for instance, we launched Kazakh-speaking Neuro, an AI-powered search product that brings a completely new experience to a mass audience free of charge."

Masyuk concluded an exchange by reiterating that what really makes them stand out from the crowd is their ability to attract and retain talent at Yandex.

What we are really trying to do is nourish talent. In 14 out of the last 20 years of the ICPC (International Collegiate Programming Contest) local teams have won the competition, and that is something we are contributing to. We have a lot of initiatives that support young talent, and coding is a universal language, so we promote it globally. Talent is the fundamental factor in our longevity and success," concluded Masyuk. [GTCN](#)



Yandex YaFSDP is a technology that drastically speeds up the process of training these LLM models."

CODE81

CODE, CREATE, CULTIVATE

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Nader Paslar**, General Manager at CODE81, the new player in the AI space that operates under the umbrella of the fabled Ghobash Group, to find out how the company will leverage its expertise in AI to help Dubai achieve the goals and objectives of its Universal Blueprint for AI - and how its mantra is Code, Create and Cultivate can foster an environment in which innovation flourishes.

The mantra of CODE81 is Code, Create and Cultivate. However, for our readers, can you elaborate more on the mission statement of CODE81, and what the primary factors were behind the inception of the company last year?

At CODE81, our mission is to drive technological innovation and digital transformation across various industries by leveraging the power of coding, creativity, and cultivation of ideas.

Our inception was driven by the vision to fill a critical gap in the market: providing comprehensive, cutting-edge technology solutions that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of our clients. By emphasizing 'Code, Create, Cultivate,' we aim to inspire a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, helping businesses navigate and thrive in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

CODE81 will serve as the technology arm of

Ghobash Group, who has spent 50 years driving innovation and economic development across the UAE. That instantly gives you huge credibility in the marketplace, but can you tell us more about the solutions and services that you provide?

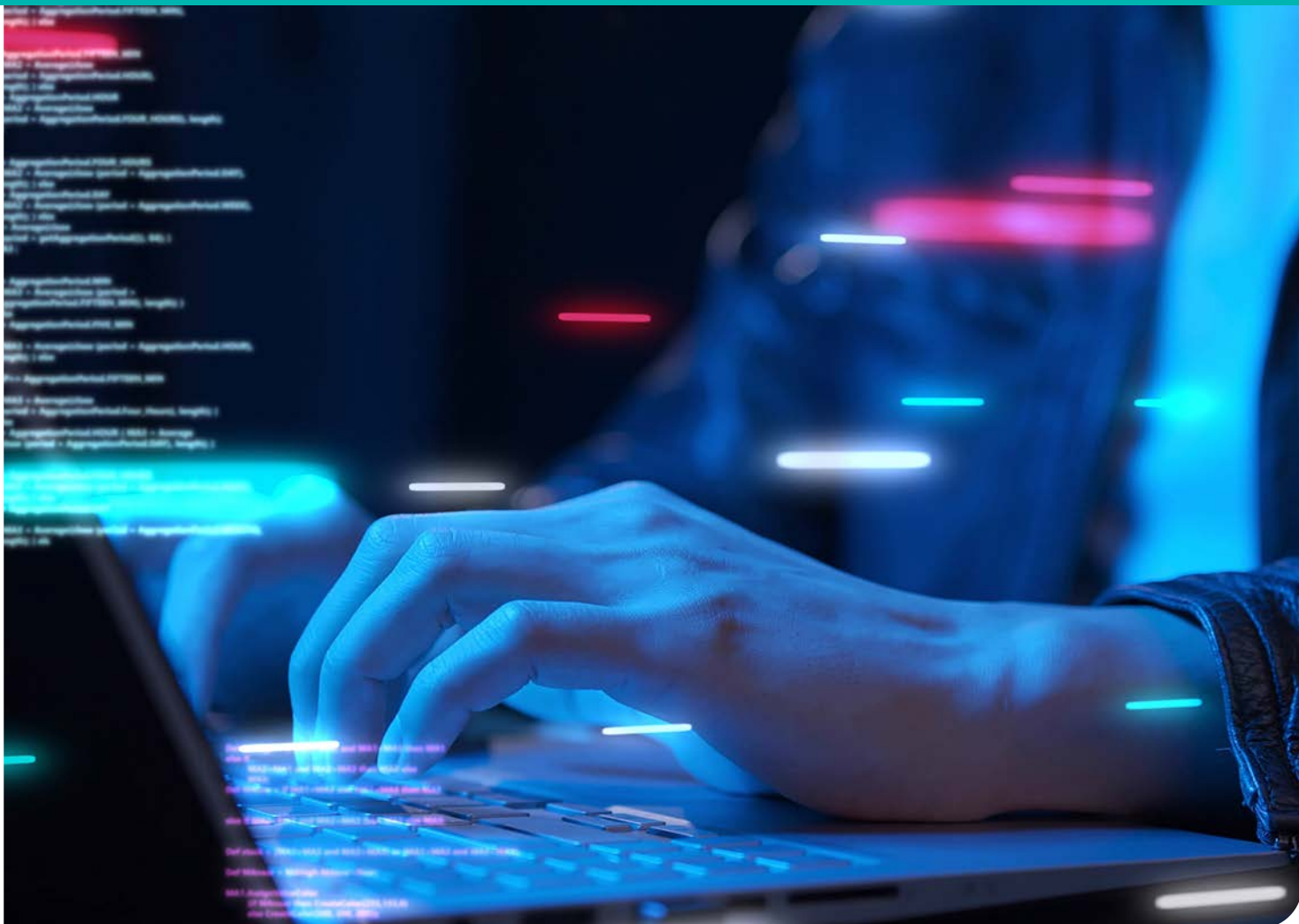
Indeed, being part of the Ghobash Group enhances our credibility and strengthens our market

position. CODE81 offers a wide range of solutions and services, including custom software development, low code application solutions, data analytics, AI and machine learning solutions, automation and cloud modernization.

We also provide digital transformation consulting, helping businesses to modernize their operations and improve efficiency. Ultimately, our goal is to deliver end-to-end technology solutions that drive tangible business outcomes for our clients.

Data Analytics, AI, and Machine Learning are key areas of focus for CODE81. However, it's fair to say that many enterprises are still trying to figure out the best way they can harness AI, and another factor for many is that AI is not cheap. What are the biggest challenges you're helping your clients overcome when it comes to Data Analytics, AI, and Machine Learning?





The biggest challenges our clients face with AI and machine learning are understanding the potential of these technologies, integrating them into existing systems, and managing the costs associated with implementation.

At CODE81, we help clients overcome these challenges by providing clear, actionable insights and strategies for AI adoption. We offer scalable solutions that can grow with the business, ensuring that investments in AI and machine learning deliver maximum ROI.

Finally, we focus on training and support to ensure that our clients'

teams are equipped to leverage these technologies effectively.

In terms of industry verticals, is there any in particular that CODE81 is specifically targeting, or is your best-in-class digital transformation products and solutions tailored for all industries?

While our solutions are versatile and can be applied

across various industries, we have identified key verticals where our expertise can make a significant impact.

These include healthcare, finance, retail, and the public sector. In these sectors, we have developed specialized solutions that address industry-specific challenges and drive innovation. However, our team is adept at customizing our offerings to meet the unique needs of any



By emphasizing 'Code, Create, Cultivate,' we aim to inspire a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, helping businesses navigate and thrive in the rapidly evolving digital landscape."



industry, ensuring that every client benefits from our best-in-class digital transformation products and solutions.

The IT and technology sector is a saturated marketplace and highly competitive.

What is it that ultimately differentiates CODE81 from your market rivals, and what will make you a disruptive force in the market?

We combine deep technical expertise with a strong understanding of business processes, enabling us to deliver solutions that not only meet technological needs but also drive business growth.

Our emphasis on innovation, customer-centric solutions, and continuous improvement ensures that we stay ahead of

market trends and deliver value to our clients.

Additionally, our strong backing by the Ghobash Group provides us with the resources and credibility to take bold steps and lead the market in new directions.

The Dubai Government has just launched the Dubai Universal Blueprint for AI program, designed to position Dubai as a global leader in AI. One of the remits of the program is for every single government entity to appoint a dedicated CEO for AI. What role do you envisage CODE81 playing in helping the Dubai government achieve the goals of their ambitious program?

CODE81 is well-positioned to play a pivotal role in the Dubai

Universal Blueprint for AI program. Our expertise in AI and machine learning, combined with our experience in digital transformation, makes us an ideal partner for government entities looking to harness the power of AI.

We can assist in developing and implementing AI strategies, providing training and support for AI CEOs, and delivering customized AI solutions that address specific governmental needs.

By working closely with the Dubai Government, we aim to contribute to the city's vision of becoming a global leader in AI, driving innovation and improving public services through advanced technologies. **enme**

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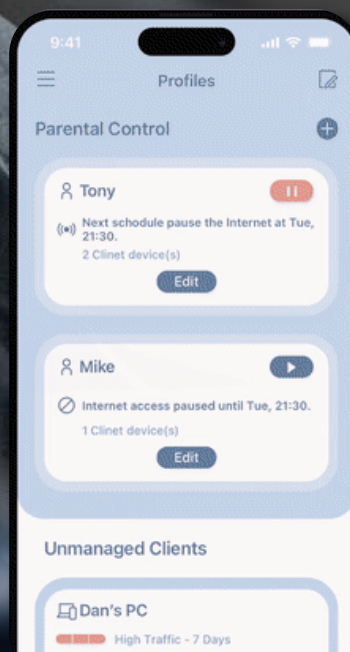
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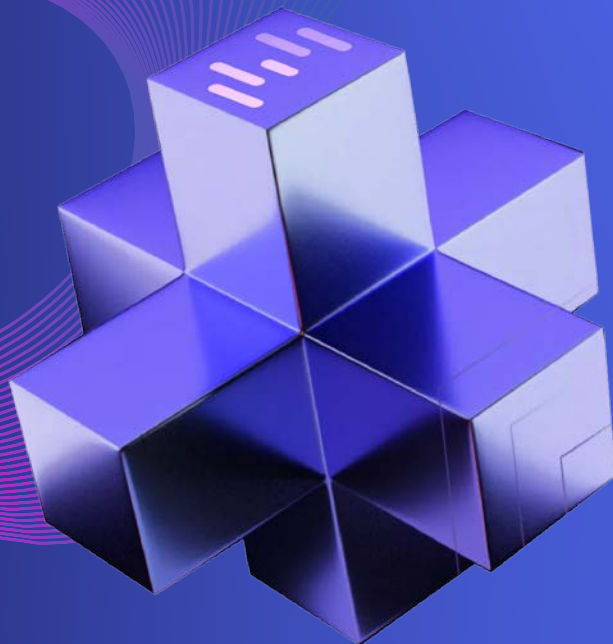
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