cnme

The $14 Billion Bet
Reshaping Global Connectivity

Jacob Chacko outlines their bold move to unite **HPE Aruba Networking** and **Juniper Networks** – and what it means for the future of networking.

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FUTURE ENTERPRISE AWARDS 2025

13th OCTOBER 2025 | **Palace Downtown, Dubai** | **6:00 PM onwards**

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The **Future Enterprise Awards**, hosted by **CPI Media Group** and **tahawultech.com** is one of the most iconic technology events in the IT industry across the Middle East region.

The fact that the Future Enterprise Awards are so iconic is primarily due to their incredible longevity, this year's edition will mark the 20th edition of the coveted technology awards.

One other indelible factor in the historic success of the Future Enterprise Awards is the fact that the event is always held on **Day 1 of GITEX Global**.

As the digital landscape continues to evolve at incredible speed, recognizing and celebrating innovation is more important than ever.

The Future Enterprise Awards 2025 will pay tribute to the fearless leaders, visionaries and companies that are championing change through cutting-edge technologies that are completely reshaping and transforming the digital future we live in.

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> **The marriage between HPE and Juniper can unlock doors in the thriving datacentre space, and in service provider networking.**

THE PERFECT FIT

The combined August-September edition of CNME is here, and I hope you'll agree that it was worth the wait!

As always, the magazine contains first-class interviews with some of the best technology and business leaders in the industry.

A big part of the technology landscape is acquisitions; and we know that it's part and parcel of the game.

However, we also are aware that many acquisitions don't work, and many companies struggle to absorb the business they have just acquired.

The topic of acquisitions is under the microscope in this magazine, and in my editorial letter.

Why might you ask?

Well, it's quite simple, our front cover interview is with Jacob Chacko, Regional Director, Middle East and Africa, at HPE Aruba Networking.

In July 2025, HPE officially completed the acquisition of Juniper Networks for $14bn, and Chacko explains to us what it all means in terms of the future of networking.

It is an acquisition that from the outside just makes sense.

But as Chacko articulates, the deal goes way beyond solidifying HPE's standing as a global leader when it comes to networking.

The marriage between HPE and Juniper can unlock doors in the thriving datacentre space, and in service provider networking.

He said it was HPE's mission and vision to make networking truly 'AI-native'.

"AI is not only transforming industries but also the very networks that power them. At HPE, our vision is to make networking truly cloud-native and AI-driven — self learning, self-optimising, and predictive," said Chacko.

It is a great insight into all the different dynamics of the deal, and what impact it will have on the entire industry.

Remaining on the topic of acquisitions, when Cisco acquired Splunk in March 2024, the fanatical base of Splunk users were left fearing that the merger would ruin Splunk.

However, 18 months into this relationship, it's not hubris to say that it looks like a perfect match.

I was on the ground at .conf25 in Boston, at the beginning of September, and you couldn't help but feel that Cisco Splunk is building something special.

Kamal Hathi's appointment as General Manager of Splunk, was an incredibly shrewd appointment, and he stressed how they were committed to helping their community of users to fight fire with fire, calling AI a wildfire.

It is also very difficult not to be impressed by Cisco's Jeetu Patel anytime he takes to the stage, and it feels like only a matter of time before he will be anointed as their next CEO.

I'm not being disrespectful towards Chuck Robbins, it's just evident that Patel has a clear vision of where Cisco needs to get to.

In his keynote, he said that we must unlock the value of machine data to fuel the AI era – and he said that they will continue to invest in Splunk, and flourish that brand.

Moving away from acquisitions, there are also a lot of other great interviews for you to get your teeth into.

Luis Rodrigues, Chief Product Officer at Lab49, said that the company was formed in 2002, to bring a bit of Silicon Valley to Wall Street.

He warned against the glaring biases that exist with current LLM's on the market and stressed the need for businesses to establish clear business outcomes when investing in AI.

Rahil Ghaffar is no stranger to regular readers of CNME, but since we last spoke to him, he has left the cybersecurity sphere and has decided to start a new business called Agentyne.

The AI company is designed to empower sales professionals with BDR tasks in the enterprise space.

We also have excellent interviews with RetailGPT, Planview, V-FlowTech, Nexthink, Atiom and Raqmiyat.

Enjoy the combined issue of the August-September edition of CNME. 😊

Mark Forker
Editor

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Apple cautions against mobile sector reforms

Apple is reportedly in disagreement with UK authorities and are allegedly threatening a slower deployment of future upgrades if the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) advances reforms of the mobile sector.

BBC News reported Apple warned the UK could experience delays in the deployment of fresh features and upgrades if the CMA follows the example of the European Union (EU) by pressing for more open mobile markets.

The CMA is concerned by the dominance of Apple and Google in areas including their marketplaces, OSes and native apps.

Apple separately issued a statement, on 27th August, emphasising the various protections offered on its iPhone models including encryption, preventing stolen devices or their parts from being activated, biometric security functions and a host of app-related guards.

Macrumors noted the introduction of the Apple Intelligence AI feature in Europe was delayed to ensure compliance with data protection laws.

Apple recently won a fight with the UK government over a demand to offer a backdoor into encrypted information on its devices.

Anthropic claims its tech has been "weaponised" by hackers

Anthropic, an American AI company, recently announced that its technology has been "weaponised" by hackers and used to carry out sophisticated cyber attacks.

Anthropic, which makes the chatbot Claude, says its tools were used by hackers "to commit large-scale theft and extortion of personal data". The firm said its AI was used to help write code which carried out cyber-attacks, while in another case, North Korean scammers used Claude to fraudulently get remote jobs at top US companies.

Anthropic says it was able to disrupt the threat actors and has reported the cases to the authorities along with improving its detection tools.

It said the hackers "used AI to what we believe is an unprecedented degree". They used Claude to "make both tactical and strategic decisions, such as deciding which data to exfiltrate, and how to craft psychologically targeted extortion demands". It even suggested ransom amounts for the victims.

Grok gets agentic coding upgrade

xAI has revealed its first agentic coding model, Grok Code Fast 1. This path looks to put the AI developer in the path of major players like OpenAI and Microsoft in an effort to expand their footprint.

xAI positioned its latest release as a "speedy and economical" model, stating it is optimised for responsiveness and real-world developer workflows.

It is designed to handle tasks ranging from codebase analysis to bug fixes and supports common programming languages Python, Java, TypeScript, Rust and C++.

The Musk-owned AI player explained the model's strength "lies in delivering strong performance in an economical, compact form factor, making it a versatile choice for tackling common coding tasks quickly and cost-effectively".

Zuckerberg made White House visit prior to recent tariff threat

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO, Meta, reportedly met with U.S. President Donald Trump to discuss the threat of digital market taxes against U.S. companies.

Following this meeting Trump proceeded to threaten tariffs on nations which do not remove such legislation against American companies.

Bloomberg reported on 28 August that Zuckerberg met with Trump in recent weeks to talk about the threat of countries attacking US players by instituting digital rules and taxes against them.

The news agency reported the majority of Meta Platforms' revenue comes from advertising on social media platforms Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp.

Digital market rules are designed to tax technology companies' revenue on a per country basis.

On Tuesday 26 August, Trump vowed to "impose substantial additional Tariffs on that Country's Exports to the USA" in a post on his Truth Social platform.

Without naming the countries he deemed guilty of discriminating against US companies, he also threatened to put export restrictions on "highly protected" technology and chips to those nations.

A number of countries have digital service and market regulations in place including those in the European Union and the UK.

"Mark Zuckerberg visited the White House last week to discuss Meta's domestic infrastructure investments and advancing American tech leadership abroad", a Meta representative told Mobile World Live.

U.S. removes TSMC's ability to freely ship supplies to China

The U.S. government reportedly revoked authorisation for Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) to ship chip supplies to China. This news comes amidst escalating export controls by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump.

Bloomberg reported government officials told the chipmaker its validated end-user (VEU) authorisation for its Nanjing, China site will be revoked on 31 December.

"While we are evaluating the situation and taking appropriate measures, including communicating with the U.S. government, we remain fully committed to ensuring the uninterrupted operation of TSMC Nanjing," TSMC said in a statement to Bloomberg.

Bloomberg noted TSMC's manufacturing footprint in China is relatively small compared to Samsung and SK Hynix.

The news agency explained the move from blanket authorisations for chipmakers to individual approvals could lead to uncertainty over when the permits are actually granted.

South Korea wants to keep pace with U.S. and China tech initiatives

The South Korean government has reportedly increased the budget for an investment fund related to AI, semiconductors and other tech by an additional KRW50 trillion ($35 billion), as it seeks to keep pace with the US and China.

The Korea Herald reported the nation's President Lee Jae Myung revealed at an event hosted in Seoul, on 10 September, the so-called Nation Growth Fund had been increased to KRW150 trillion from KRW100 trillion. The investment is to be spread over the next five years.

The government hopes the investment, which will be used to grow the country's AI, semiconductors, biotechnology, defence, robotics and green mobility sectors, will create up to KRW125 trillion worth of added value to South Korea's economy.

Apparently, Lee did not pull any punches in expressing the importance of investment in technology, stating South Korea was "engaged in a war without gun smoke".

"Major countries like the United States and China are ramping up their state support to strategic industries backed by cutting-edge technologies", he said.

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Japan records record smartphone

Smartphone brands Apple and Samsung saw a boost in their share of the Japanese market in Q2 2025. According to data from Counterpoint Research, this increase registered as an 11 per cent year-on-year growth.

The market posted a second consecutive quarter of double-digit growth.

Counterpoint expects competition to intensify in H2 with growth likely to slow due to higher prices, longer replacement cycles and increasing demand for used handsets. On the positive side, NTT Docomo's planned 3G network shutdown is expected to generate temporary replacement demand.

Apple's market share jumped 9 percentage points to 49 per cent, with shipments rising 38 per cent.

Google retained second place with 12 per cent growth and an 11 per cent share. Samsung's share rose to 10 per cent from 7 per cent, after a 60 per cent gain in shipments.

A potential breakthrough in US-China TikTok discussions

The ongoing discussions regarding the future of TikTok's American operations may soon draw to a conclusion, as U.S. President Donald Trump is expecting to finalise its fate during a call with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Trump posted on his Truth Social network that trade talks between the countries "went very well", adding that a deal was reached involving "a 'certain' company that young people in our country very much wanted to save". He added that he would speak with Xi on Friday and described the US-China relationship as "very strong."

According to the Financial Times (FT), treasury secretary Scott Bessent, who led the US delegation in Madrid, told reporters that a framework deal with TikTok had been reached. He reportedly confirmed the plan involves transferring TikTok to US-controlled ownership, adding" "I'm not going to get ahead of the leaders' call on Friday. We have a framework. They'll have to confirm the deal".

Moving to US ownership would address the Trump administration's long-standing national security concerns while allowing the short-video app to continue operating in the country. The update comes after US commerce secretary Howard Lutnick issued a warning in July that TikTok could be blocked across the country unless China agreed to transfer control, including the platform's algorithm, to a US owner.

The US government has repeatedly delayed its deadline for ByteDance, TikTok's parent company, to divest its US operations or face a nationwide ban. Since January, the deadline has been postponed three times, with the latest set for Wednesday. US trade representative Jamieson Greer said a further extension might be required to finalise Monday's agreement but indicated that no additional extensions are planned, FT reported.

Since Trump's renewed agenda to save TikTok, a host of tech players including Perplexity AI, Amazon and Microsoft have reportedly proposed bids to acquire its US operations.

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Nvidia accused of violating anti-monopoly law

An preliminary investigation by China's State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) has determined that Nvidia violated the country's anti-monopoly law. These findings could serve to further complicate the company's business operations in China amid the ongoing trade talks in Madrid.

A statement by SAMR claimed Nvidia violated the country's anti-monopoly law related to its acquisition of Mellanox Technologies in 2020. The agency stated it decided to conduct a further investigation into the Mellanox deal in accordance with the law.

Reuters reported US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent stated the timing of SAMR's finding may also have been an attempt to gain leverage during the trade discussions between the US and China which could include discussions on chip exports.

The news site explained the preliminary ruling also may have been in retaliation for the administration of US President Donald Trump putting 23 China-based companies on a trade blacklist last week.

Due to China's antitrust law, the news site reported companies can be hit with fines of between 1 per cent and 10 per cent of their annual sales from the year prior.

Chinese flying cars crash at air show rehearsal

Two flying cars, manufactured by a subsidiary of the Xpeng AeroHT company, crashed into each other at a rehearsal for an air show in China which was meant to be a showcase for the technology. The vehicles collided in mid-air, with one catching fire during landing, the company said in a statement to Reuters.

The company said people at the scene were safe, but CNN reported one person was injured in the crash, citing an anonymous company employee.

The rehearsals were for the Changchun Air Show, set to start later this week in north-east China. BBC News has contacted Xpeng for comment.

Footage on Chinese social media site Weibo appeared to show a flaming vehicle on the ground which was being attended to by fire engines.

One vehicle "sustained fuselage damage and caught fire upon landing," Xpeng AeroHT said in a statement to CNN. "All personnel at the scene are safe, and local authorities have completed on-site emergency measures in an orderly manner," it added.

The electric flying cars take off and land vertically, and the company is hoping to sell them for around $300,000 (£220,000) each.

Nexthink

WHAT'S COMING 'NEXT'

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Ahmed Seleem**, VP, META at Nexthink, to learn more about how the AI-native company is empowering employees through the unique capabilities of its DEX platform, how it is tackling the issue of legacy for businesses across the region - and what trends does he see emerging in our ever-evolving work from anywhere world.

Ahmed Seleem has firmly established himself as a prominent sales leader in the technology industry across the Middle East ecosystem.

Seleem began his career at global telecommunications provider Orange Business Services, before joining Nexthink as a Senior Presales Consultant in 2011.

In the 14 years that have elapsed since he joined Nexthink, Seleem has mirrored the trajectory and growth of the company on a professional level, and is now the Vice-President of the Middle East, Turkey and Africa.

There are few better placed to articulate the journey of Nexthink over the last 15 years than Seleem, and that's where our conversation started, at the beginning.

Seleem said that the company has undergone several transformations since it was formed in 2004.

"Nexthink was born out of AI research in Switzerland back in 2004, and we're very proud that we are an AI-native

company. Fast-forward 20 years from the inception of the company, and everyone in the world is talking about AI, and are looking at ways in which they can harness the capabilities and potential of AI. We are pioneers in AI, but it's fair to say that the company has undergone different cycles

of innovations and phases throughout its existence. However, under the leadership of our CEO Pedro Bados, we have now firmly established our identity as a company that is a market leader in digital employee experience," said Seleem.

Seleem said that the foundations of the company were steeped in AI research that was focused acutely on security and behaviour analytics.

However, as a company that has been customer-centric from the start, Seleem outlined how they broadened their perspective towards following consultations with their customers.

"As much as we are pioneers and thought leaders, we also align our vision to our partners and customers. In the early days, many believed that because our technology is employee centric, our business proposition could be very valuable in areas like IT service management, digital transformation and cost

optimisation. Our evolution as a company was always influenced by conversations with our customers, we hear them, align our visions and we act on it," said Seleem.

Seleem also highlighted that the shift from an on-prem to a SaaS model over the last few years also influenced their strategy.

"There has been a myriad of technology companies that have made that transition from on-prem to a software-as-a-service (SaaS) model and that unlocked a lot of hyper growth in new features and capabilities of the products, and Nexthink was one of the first companies in that domain to focus on a SaaS model and that also provided us with the opportunity to embed AI into our product portfolio and continue to grow," said Seleem.

Seleem said that when he was hired in 2011, the company was very much still in the start-up phase.

"When I joined the company it was an ambitious start-up, the revenue was less than $10m globally, and we had a team of about 20 employees. My job was to build the footprint of Nexthink in the Middle East marketplace. However, what really encouraged me to join was when I met the "Nexthinkers" team, I felt the energy and eagerness to build and grow the company, there was a buzz and a real drive to all the conversations we were

having, and there was a clear vision and direction. It made you want to be part of it, and you believed from the offset that this was a company really going somewhere and I wanted to be a part of that. And now, almost 15 years later, helping more than a thousand global organization improve their Digital Employee Experience, we have generated hundreds of millions in revenue, and have a global workforce of over one thousand employees, but I'm still as motivated as I was back in 2011, to continue to drive our momentum and growth across the Middle East region," said Seleem.

A key component in the success of Nexthink is their DEX (Digital Experience Experience) platform, but what exactly is it, and why is it important?

"At its core, the DEX platform is all about employee empowerment. It is designed to empower and enable employees to perform at a high-level every single day. We want our users to enjoy a frictionless experience, and I think it's fair to say that on a global scale the digital workplace is as important as the physical one. I believe that if the business applications are slow and the systems are unreliable and employee experiences are inconsistent in the digital workplace, then this will inevitably result in a

Under the leadership of our CEO Pedro Bados, we have now firmly established our identity as a company that is a market leader in digital employee experience."

decline in productivity, morale and lead to business outcomes suffering," said Seleem.

Seleem acknowledged that the term Digital Employee Experience can take on many different meanings, but said that in our current work from anywhere world, where hybrid work is a key component, companies need to deliver frictionless experiences for their digital workforce in order to retain top talent.

"We have invested hugely in the digital experience of employees, and we give IT departments and the management within those divisions visibility and access to real-time insights and information into their experiences. These insights can flag any issues or problems that may occur and that enables IT departments to proactively respond in real-time before they start to disrupt the employees daily tasks. The issues can vary, but the most common problems are with devices such as desktops and laptops and other devices, or applications that are running slow. Our DEX platform circumvents issues that arise before they become problematic because we provide the visibility which detects and flags problems," said Seleem.

Seleem added that the business model of DEX is subscription based, and outlined how with the help of its ecosystem of partners and managed service providers helped them build bespoke use-cases in multiple domains such as healthcare, finance, telco and enterprise.

"The DEX service itself is subscription based, but it is very much a journey that we go on with each and every business that we work with. We work across many different industry verticals, but I could use an example in healthcare to highlight the impact that we can make for our customers. There are a lot of common issues across the board when it comes to the way nurses are using their equipment from specific locations, and if these devices are not performing in the way they should be then it can in some cases be life-threatening. However, what we did was examine all these common challenges, compare the equivalency of the challenges facing healthcare practitioners and then leverage our partner ecosystem, who have real industry knowledge to use our Nexthink Infinity platform to build use-cases and automated remediation scenarios to ensure these challenges are alleviated," said Seleem.

Seleem acknowledged that the issue around legacy has been one of the biggest challenges that organisations have faced in the Middle East region, but that one of the key success factors in DEX, was its ability to overcome the issue of legacy with its ease of integration and implementation.

"We know that many organisations have had to undergo digital transformation in a bid to keep pace with compliance, infrastructure-readiness, and customer demands, but so many have struggled because the platforms that they operate their systems on have become so outdated and archaic. What we do at Nexthink is keep these traditional services up and running, and we try to bridge that gap as much as possible, even if a specific vendor doesn't support this platform anymore. We do a benchmark to see what the normal behaviour is and what we should expect to get from this business application, and any deviation in the behaviour will be detected by our AI capability. We can then remediate these issues immediately," said Seleem.

Nexthink acquired digital adoption company AppLearn in January 2024, and Seleem pointed to its significance in terms of tackling the legacy issue on a broader scale.

"The acquisition of AppLearn last year was hugely significant for us, and it is now called Nexthink Adopt. It has helped us massively with legacy customers. We help their employees migrate from the old platform to the new one. We help them with the assessment, the capacity planning and then during their digital transformation

At its core, the DEX platform is all about employee empowerment. It is designed to empower and enable employees to perform at a high-level every single day."

we can guide users on how to effectively use the new platform. We don't want them to get stuck in a specific phase, because if you lose your top talent through them not being able to adopt new platforms, and becoming frustrated, then that inevitably is going to really hurt your business, so again you have to deliver those seamless and frictionless digital experiences," said Seleem.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic the way the world works has changed profoundly.

We now live in a work from anywhere world, where hybrid work is now the norm, although we are increasingly seeing more and more organisations enforce a back to the office policy, with JP Morgan being a high-profile example of that.

The factors for that vary, but there are concerns over the structure of hybrid

work, and the inefficiencies that exist across many organisations due to the unstructured nature of it.

However, thanks to companies like Nexthink and the technologies they are providing, they are enabling businesses to provide a digital workplace that mirrors what a physical one delivers.

But as we know, AI is radically transforming industries at scale, and remote working will not be immune to that, and Seleem stressed the need for organisations to be agile.

"The key to all the changes happening, not just in relation to remote working, but in general to technology shifts is the ability to adapt. I think the companies that survived economic challenges during the pandemic demonstrated that ability to adapt. I believe it is incumbent on IT departments to have that dynamism and agility that is required to transform as we continue to encounter profound changes in the way businesses operate in this era of AI. If you're not adaptable, and are resistant to change, then your business will fail," said Seleem.

Seleem then shared an announcement for a new product release that helps organizations address the AI adoption challenge; "At Nexthink, we are proud to introduce AI Drive: a first-of-its-kind business solution designed to help IT leaders measure, benchmark, and accelerate AI adoption across the enterprise. AI Drive doesn't just surface metrics.

It reveals the why behind them. Privacy-aware analytics highlight how teams are using AI, whether for everyday tasks like summarizing emails or complex research projects that save hours of productivity"

Seleem concluded a brilliant interview by highlighting some of the changes he has seen in remote working over the last 18 months.

"There has been a lot of trends emerging in relation to remote working, and investment in collaboration solutions and workspace technology has ramped up, but one of the biggest shifts that I have seen over the last 12-18 months has been that of large multinational organisations enforcing a return to office policy, and the option of hybrid work is no longer an option for them. They are back in the office 5 days a week, but other large players are doubling-down on their hybrid approach, so it all depends on the nature of your business. A big challenge for many companies has been that of culture, and trying to impart that culture to a new employee onboarded remotely, for some businesses the intimacy of communication between employees is critical to their business, whereas for others that isn't as important. There isn't a one-size fits all, but our mission at Nexthink is to help IT departments cope with the strategy and direction of the organisation. The important thing is to always keep the employee at heart, that is critical, and that is what we do better than anyone else in the marketplace," said Seleem.

RetailGPT

RETAIL THERAPY

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down with **Sadique Ahmed**, CEO of Pathfinder and Founder of RetailGPT, to find out how their AI-powered platform is converting malls into digital marketplaces, empowering retailers and equipping smaller stores with the tools to compete with industry titans such as Amazon and Noon.

Sadique Ahmed has been the dynamic driving force behind the global success of Pathfinder.

Pathfinder has undergone several iterations since it was first established in 2000, and during those 25 years it has emerged as a market leader in 'retail intelligence'.

Pathfinder initially worked with retailers in the UK, and worked with customers across the entire retail spectrum from apparel, food, groceries and lifestyle.

Ahmed has witnessed the evolution of the retail sector, but with consumer expectations and demands now ever-evolving, businesses have to 'personalise' in order to stay relevant in the current climate.

RetailGPT is an AI system designed to revolutionize retail operations by offering personalized shopping experiences and automated customer service.

Ahmed kickstarted the conversation by highlighting the fact that their primary customers where those in retail real-estate.

"Over the years at Pathfinder, we have witnessed profound change and transformation, but the emergence of e-commerce really was seismic, as it enabled retailers to really scale their businesses online. We were working closely with retail real-estate, and when I say retail real-estate, I'm referencing brick-and-mortar stores. Shopping centres, airports and the high-street retailers were all customers that we were very hands-on with. One of the biggest challenges we were solving for retail landlords that were operating in the airport and shopping centre space was revenue assurance," said Ahmed.

As Ahmed explained, retailers don't give a fixed rent, but instead provide landlords with a percentage of their turnover.

"There was never any automation that existed that provided transparency on what the retailer sells and what he reports to the landlord as to what he has sold. We developed a real-time platform where if a someone went to Starbucks and bought a coffee, then I would have that data with me. So, I do that on behalf of the

> **RetailGPT democratised the entire marketplace, we provided a plug-and-play to a store to sign up and pay a subscription to the platform, and then the entire technology stacks became available to them."**

landlords to actually capture the entire sales transactions that are happening in every single till in both the shopping centre and airport. That led us to a very big revolution, and nobody imagine that we would create that type of platform, and initially it was an almost impossible task of integrating over 500 brands across 200 hundred shopping centres, and we were all of a sudden sitting on an ocean of unstructured data," said Ahmed.

However, as Ahmed pointed out, the entire integration process was a painstakingly slow one.

"It took us 14 years to have 10,000 retailers on our platform. So, we asked ourselves a couple of questions. The first one was, how do we scale from 10,000 to a million, and how do we do that without it taking a complete lifetime to do it? We also asked ourselves how can we continue to add more value to help retailers continue to grow, because these brick-and-mortar stores were being hurt by the meteoric rise of e-commerce, so we knew we had to rethink our value proposition," said Ahmed.

Ahmed stated that it was clear that brands had a real appetite to grow and diversify their business, but a number of factors were slowing their growth journey.

"It was clear that brands wanted to expand, but it was evident that they were not growing at the pace they were supposed to, and primarily it was due to the fact that too many channels opened up. The omnichannel era was born, and then that was accelerated further by the rise of e-commerce, so a combination of both these factors put pressure on brick-and-mortar stores. So, the question of how do we help these retailers really led us to create RetailGPT," said Ahmed.

Ahmed said Pathfinder engaged in extensive research and spoke to each of their customers to find out their pain points, and it quickly emerged, they were all suffering from the same issue.

They didn't know who their customers were, and they wanted to know how they could increase their non-GLA revenue.

"We spoke to the brands in the malls and shopping centres, and they admitted they didn't know who their customers were. Hundreds and hundreds of people were coming into their outlets daily, but they didn't know who they were, why they were coming, or what they wanted. It was a complete disconnect between the footfall into the store versus the actual business taking place. We had to help them to digitally transform the shopping centre into a marketplace, and create extra non-GLA revenue into the mall. Non-GLA revenue is a mouth-watering for our customers because you essentially get money for free. How do I increase

my non-GLA revenue was the question being asked by those businesses in the mall, and they wanted to know the answer, and because they have a share of revenue with every single retailer in the mall, they really wanted the retailers to do well," said Ahmed.

One of the major challenges facing retailers was the fact that they were relying on footfall, plus as Ahmed points out the retailer also has to try and attract that consumer as soon as he sets foot in the mall, and convert that consumer into a customer.

"The question I was asking was how can we increase the footfall for these retailers, and how can we improve conversion? It took us 7 years to build and develop RetailGPT, we didn't rush the innovation of the platform. Now, the question your readers want to know is what exactly does RetailGPT do for the retailers. RetailGPT transforms the mall into a digital marketplace. It enables the brick-and-mortar store to have a digital version as well, which means that the consumer can buy online from the exact same store that he would visit in the mall, but crucially with the digital version now enabled the retailers get to know who the consumers are, and this really is key. The visibility is crucial for retailers and it's going to drive business, and overall, the mall is going to see an upside curve in the whole journey of revenue," said Ahmed.

Ahmed also highlighted

how RetailGPT's platform enables malls to expand their digital offering, by allowing brands that can't access physical space in a mall, to be part of the online platform.

"Let's take the Mall of Emirates as an example, and let's say they have around 400 outlets. There is always a huge list of around 250-300 of outlets who want to have an allocation of stores inside the mall, and these are big name international brands that are not present in the UAE yet. They want to have prime space, but there's no space for them physically. However, thanks to our platform consumers suddenly have access to an additional 250 international brands, who are now selling their merchandise on the mall's digital marketplace. So, as a consumer then I'm delighted because I'm coming to the mall, but I'm also digitally-engaged, and I can now buy products from international brands that are not physically here in the UAE," said Ahmed.

As Ahmed points out, the system also allows these international brands to test the water, and see if their products and merchandise

resonates with the marketplace before making any future investment into a physical store.

"The platform provides a huge opportunity to the brands to leverage the UAE marketplace and reach the consumer, whilst at the same time it gives the mall visibility on which of the 250 brands are actually performing well in terms of generating revenue. If the mall can see that 10 brands are resonating very positively with consumers in the UAE, when space becomes available they can go to those businesses and let them know that they can now establish a physical store in the mall. Those brands that perform get the space allocation. At the end of the day, if a brand performs well then the mall gets more money from assured turnover rent. Malls don't want to give that premium space to a brand, that may be huge elsewhere, but for one reason or another it just doesn't strike a chord with the marketplace here in the UAE. They would lose time and money, so our platform digitally-onboarding brands allows the malls to see how

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We spoke to the brands in the malls and shopping centres, and they admitted they didn't know who their customers were. Hundreds and hundreds of people were coming into their outlets daily, but they didn't know who they were, why they were coming, or what they wanted. It was a complete disconnect between the footfall into the store versus the actual business taking place."

they perform. It also protects brands from making a huge investment into a physical store that doesn't make money for them. That's just one of the many powerful capabilities of RetailGPT," said Ahmed.

Ahmed said that their platform was democratising the marketplace and was equipping businesses with the tools to fight back.

"There was a monopoly on the market, you had players like Amazon and Noon that provided convenience and speed of delivery as an option. Neighbourhood stores couldn't compete with that and it requires a lot of technology and enablement for those type of neighbourhood boutiques and stores to be able to do that. RetailGPT democratised the entire marketplace, we made it easy like a plug-and-play for a store to sign up and pay a subscription to the platform, and the entire technology stacks becomes available to them. That enables these stores to compete equally with the biggest players in the market head-on offering their merchandise with the same convenience, benefits and speed. You're creating a social impact by doing this and you're helping these bricks-and-mortar stores to keep pace with changing consumer behaviour and give the same level of convenience at a very affordable cost, and that is democratising the market," said Ahmed.

Ahmed emphasised that whilst they are in the business of democratising and using their technology to empower businesses, he reminded me that they don't create the technology driving RetailGPT.

"We don't create technology, we use technology. We use AI, we don't create AI. Every time that AI improves then I deploy it immediately because my offering gets better. We have competition when it comes to e-commerce, but when it comes to what we are doing with the physical retailers and creating those digital marketplace for them and international brands, we are the outlier. We are totally unique," said Ahmed.

Ahmed concluded a fascinating and candid exchange by revealing the number of retailers he wants on their platform by 2030, and the growing demand that exists for their platform.

"By 2030, we want 3 million retailers on our platform and around 50 million users globally. We have an advantage in the market because of our domain experience and the journey we have been on for the last 10-15 years. We literally lived at the mall and lived with those retailers, so we had an intrinsic understanding of their problems. We knew their pain points and what they were craving, and we knew how we could turn things around for them. It didn't happen overnight for us where we had a eureka moment, and decided we have an idea, let's do it. It was a journey of learning that led us to the inception of RetailGPT," said Ahmed.

Lab49

CLEAR OUTCOME WILL LEAD TO INCOME

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Luis Rodrigues**, Chief Product Officer and Regional Head of Lab49, in which he highlighted the issue of biases in LLMs, the need for clear outcomes to be established when investing in AI – and why businesses need to view AI agents as interns.

Luis Rodrigues has been spearheading digital transformation programs across the financial services, telecoms and government sectors during his illustrious career to date.

In June 2024, he was appointed as the Chief Product Officer and Regional Head of Lab49.

Lab49 was established in the United States back in 2002, in an effort to bring Silicon Valley solutions much closer to Wall Street.

Lab49 presents itself as a specialist consultancy that designs and develops bespoke and innovative technology solutions in partnership with key players in financial markets across the world.

Lab49 outlines in its mission statement that it doesn't sell technology, but instead sells competitive advantage.

As aforementioned above, Rodrigues has enjoyed a hugely distinguished career.

What makes Rodrigues so unique as a business leader stems from the fact that not only does he have a deep technical understanding of technology, but he also has experience in building companies from scratch.

That blend of engineering and entrepreneurship experience and know-how is a potent combination.

Rodrigues has been at Lab49 for just over a year, and he's been handed the remit of driving their growth across the Middle East region.

However, he was quick to point out that Lab49 has extensive experience in driving digital transformation in the finance space.

"Lab49 was founded in 2002, and the objective of the founders at the time was to bring Silicon Valley thinking and innovation to Wall Street. The company has been at the forefront of digital innovation over the last two decades in the financial services space in the United States. Lab49, part of the ION Group, has played a hands-on role in all stages of digital transformation across the finance space. That has meant different things at different junctures. A few years ago,

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AI Agents

predicting it was the future, but they didn't know what it really was. AI is revolutionary, but many people discussing AI don't understand the technology or its limitations. Many businesses use these buzzwords associated with AI, but they cannot convert these buzzwords into business value, and that's a big challenge," said Rodrigues.

Rodrigues believes Lab49 can help business leaders bridge the AI knowledge gap.

"I've been working with AI since the early 00s, and I did a Master's in AI back then. We've got the knowledge and expertise at Lab49 to help organizations in understanding AI. We work closely with businesses to build a strategy tailored to their business model. There is naturally an education process involved; in many ways, it is an education on how you deliver business outcomes. Some businesses are guilty of doing AI just for the sake of it, or because they think they should be doing it, because everyone else is. They need to determine a clear business outcome when investing in AI. Take cloud computing, for example. You don't move to the cloud because you have to; you move to the cloud because you want to reduce costs and enhance your operational efficiency. It's the same with AI, you need to invest in AI

cloud transformation was the driving force behind the industry; now, everyone is focused on AI. Today, transformation means AI," said Rodrigues.

A prevalent issue that has surfaced across the board when it comes to AI has been determining concrete use-cases that deliver tangible outcomes.

Pressure from boardroom level has seen many enterprises invest aggressively into AI, but without a clear and coherent strategy, many businesses have put the cart before the horse when it comes to AI, and have failed as a result.

This is a big bugbear for

Rodrigues and the lack of knowledge around AI is something that he frequently writes about.

"This is a huge issue, and it is something that I write quite extensively about, and I use my platform on LinkedIn to try and highlight it. Back in the day, everyone was talking about cloud transformation, but many didn't know what it was. A few years ago, everybody was talking about the Metaverse, with people

Lab49 was founded in 2002, and the objective of the founders at the time was to bring Silicon Valley thinking and innovation to Wall Street."

for very specific use-cases that enable your business to optimise costs, enhance productivity and deliver more value long-term," said Rodrigues.

There has been a lot written about the need for strong regulations when it comes to AI, with some believing it is a pandora's box when it comes to ethics and privacy.

The general consensus is that robust frameworks are needed.

Rodrigues believes that the UAE is well-positioned to become a global leader in AI, because of the mindset and vision set out by those at the very top of the government pyramid.

"I attended an AI summit early this year in Madinat Jumeriah, and one of the UAE leaders made a very interesting observation that struck a chord with me. He said that in the UAE, they always want to build the biggest building, or be the best, but they are acutely aware of the fact that they might not always achieve their goals, but what they do as a result of their ambitions is set a vision. And that's a big advantage this region has compared to where I'm from in Europe. There are more and more companies coming to the UAE to try things, and the investment in the region is increasing all the time, and I think when you talk about putting AI into use-cases, then there is no better place in the world to do it than the UAE," said Rodrigues.

The UAE is not known for its red-tape and bureaucracy, and that fosters an environment that allows innovation and entrepreneurship to flourish.

However, some critics believe that when it comes to AI having that lax approach when experimenting with AI can lead to the technology not being used ethically, or responsibly.

Rodrigues admitted that in the sphere of financial services regulation is a must, and highlighted the issues pertaining to biases when it comes to AI technology.

"We have to be very careful when using AI in financial services, and regulation is absolutely essential. If you look at all the models we have today, there are biases, because the vast majority of them have been developed in the Western world. There are Chinese models on the marketplace, and we also have a few Arabic models, but it's fair to say that they are probably not at the same level as some of the most well-known models that are readily available in the market. These models have different languages,

> **Many businesses use these buzzwords associated with AI, but they cannot convert these buzzwords into business value, and that's a big challenge."**

and with that, they have a different way of seeing the world. Language is culture, and with that comes biases into the way that particular model operates, and this worries me greatly, and is why regulation is non-negotiable. The issue of bias has to be addressed, and we need to be very careful when developing these systems," said Rodrigues.

Rodrigues said that when it comes to AI into financial services, accountability and trust is huge.

Are we going to hold an AI Agent responsible if something happens our money?

"If I put money in the bank, I trust that institution to manage my money. They might charge me a fee, but my money won't disappear. However, the question for technologists is, in an agentic world, what happens if these AI agents invest my money into the wrong thing? If I'm dealing with a human, then I can talk to them directly or even speak to them face-to-face. In an agentic world, we don't have that" said Rodrigues.

Rodrigues believes financial institutions using AI agents should adopt the same approach as they would with an intern, or a new hire into the organisation.

"We need to be realistic and recognise that agentic AI isn't magic, and that it's not going to work perfectly for everything. It works extremely well in contained aspects of the business. What I always tell my clients is, 'Think of the AI agent as an intern that has just graduated from college. ' Those coming out of university are typically very sharp, but they don't have business knowledge, and don't know the market. What you tend to do is give them an SOP (standard operating procedure) of what to do, and that person will go and execute that task. You wouldn't tell that same intern, 'Here are 10 different tools, now go and perform some tasks for me. ' So, it's important to consider that when you build an agent, they need to be very contained in a very specific use-case that drives value for the business," said Rodrigues.

Rodrigues concluded a brilliant conversation by documenting and highlighting some of the factors that differentiate Lab49 from other players in the financial services space, which we know is an ultra-competitive.

Rodrigues started by highlighting his own expertise.

"You'll hear a lot of people at conferences claiming that they are at the forefront of AI; at the end of the day, unless you work at OpenAI or Google, we're all just users of AI. Some of us understand it more than others. I understand it because I have a Master's in it, and have been familiar with the technology for the last 20 years, so I can help more than most. Lab49 is a digitally native financial services company; we specialize in financial services and partner with some of the world's largest financial institutions. We have clients that we have trusted us for the past 10-15 years. We excel at strategy, and because we know the industry so intrinsically, we understand the need, and then we build the solution to address that need. We are also honest with our clients. If it's going to take us six months to build something, then we say it'll take us six months. We don't overpromise and underdeliver. Digital innovation is in the DNA of the company; we assist our clients, and ultimately, we deliver what our clients need to improve their business. At the end of the day, it's a results business, and Lab49's objective is to deliver value for our customers," said Rodrigues. ⬛

Atiom

ON THE FRONTLINE

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down with **Matt Spriegel**, Co-Founder and CEO of Atiom, to find out more about the company's inception, the positive and transformative impact the AI-powered platform is having on frontline workers in hospitality – and the opportunities emerging within the hospitality and aviation sectors across the Middle East region.

Matt Spriegel is a US tech entrepreneur, that is currently the Co-Founder and CEO of Atiom.

Atoim is a technological behavioural change platform that has established itself as a transformative force in the world of frontline team engagement, learning and performance.

Atiom was formed in 2017, and under the visionary leadership and direction of Spriegel, the company has gone from strength-to-strength and now has a solid market footprint across 5 continents.

The AI-driven platform is designed to help organisations to leverage the power of AI to ultimately enhance guest experiences, whilst at the same time increase employee productivity.

CNME managed to secure an exclusive interview with Spriegel to find out more about the company, the success it has had, and it's plans for future growth, particularly in the Middle East marketplace.

However, the conversation began by us going back to the very start and determining what where the driving factors that led to the inception of Atiom.

The beginning of Atiom can be traced all the way back to when a youthful and exuberant Spriegel, who has always had an appetite for travel, deciding to go to China following the completion of his third-level education from Allegheny College.

"After I graduated from college about 19 years ago, I got a one-way ticket to China. I went there to learn Mandarin, but I was a lazy student, so I wanted to find out what was the easiest way to do this. I initially used some Open Course Ware MIT, and some Anki flash cards, which is an open-source flashcard application. Every day I'd spend about 5-10 minutes trying to teach myself Chinese, and I repeated this exercise for the best part of 12 months," said Spriegel.

The self-learning adopted by Spriegel was effective, and it resulted in him getting a job at a large multinational company that was based in Shanghai.

He was one of only two foreign sales reps working for the company, and with

Atiom is a behavioural change technology that is designed to create positive habits for the forgotten workforce of frontline staff in a bid to help them become happier, smarter and more productive at work."

a degree in Economics and Philosophy, he felt a little bit under-qualified and out of his depth in his new role.

"They certainly threw me in at the deep end, as I was tasked with the responsibility of selling medicine to Chinese healthcare professionals. I did the job long enough to reach the conclusion that healthcare was not my vocation in life. I then moved across to the agency side for a few years, and part of that job meant we had to spend 8 hours a day for 8 days in-a-row listening to a teacher speaking Chinese off PowerPoint slides. The teachers looked like they were going to pass out, and it was intense on us as students, and it became obvious to me that the system was broken," said Spriegel.

This slow, archaic and gruelling learning experience ultimately led to Spriegel to search for new ways that could transform the methods and approach taken when learning a new language in the context of a business setting.

His search for a solution would create the first building blocks in the foundation of Atiom.

"As I said it was clearly a broken system. They gave us 500 PowerPoint slides to review two days before our training commenced. What I proceeded to do was map it all out on Mind Maps and turn it into flash cards. Now, I was by no means exceptional at my job, and I was lost in translation most of the time, but it gave me enough knowledge to do my job. However, the entire experience really planted the seed for Atiom. I wanted to formalise a way where I could take these bite-sized frameworks that I used to learn Chinese and apply it into the corporate world. I reached out to people I knew at companies like L'Oreal and Nike, and they said they received the same type of linguistic classroom training, and then it really dawned on me that there was a huge opportunity here," said Spriegel.

Spriegel highlighted the impact of its first product and said the primary objective of its technology was to empower employees that he described as 'forgotten'.

"We took 1,000 SOPs from a hotel, and we'd upload them into our system and create these bite-sized training modules with a gamification

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overlay. The gamification and bite-sized frameworks is still at the core of what we do, but we have now evolved to a full suite of products, and we've got quality assurance. Atiom is a behavioural change technology that is designed to create positive habits for the forgotten workforce of frontline staff in a bid to help them become happier, smarter and more productive at work. We believe that we can bridge the gap that exists between HQ, regional offices and the frontlines, because we know that frontline workers do not receive the same level of love that white collar and front-desk workers receive," said Spriegel.

The business approach that has been adopted by Spriegel and his executive leadership team has been phenomenally successful to date, with Atiom now operating in 70 countries.

Some of Atiom's clients include major global hotel groups such as Accor, IHG and Minor.

"We work with about 2,500 hotels, and the hospitality sector is undoubtedly our key focus area. We also work with Compass Group, and two months ago we launched with Etihad Airways. They want their cabin crew to deliver the same level of customer service as five-star employees. The aviation sector does appear to be the next big industry vertical that we are going to be entering, but hotels are our bread and butter," said Spriegel.

Spriegel was keen to stress that Atiom does a lot more than just training – and emphasised why they call what they do behavioural change technology.

"When we go in now to work with businesses, we'll do a complete diagnosis using our auditing tool. We will determine where the service gaps are across all the different departments, whether it's in relation to cleanliness, housekeeping, breakfast service or the front desk, we need to know where the gaps are. And, then we take that diagnosis and we build playbooks, which is not just training. It's a holistic approach to drive performance. Training is still in many ways at the core of what we do, but it isn't everything that we do," said Spriegel.

Like all startups, Atiom needed a 'big break' and that came in the form of its ongoing partnership with French hospitality behemoth Accor, who have over 5,000 hotels in 110 countries worldwide.

"When it came to selling the platform, it was difficult initially as we were selling to individual properties and general managers. However, we made our big breakthrough by on-boarding Accor as a client. We sold to their regional hub in Asia, that was based out of Singapore, and they put us in 350 hotels across six countries. They brought us to the Pacific, and then China where we started Atiom, and then into the Middle East. Once we got Accor, there was a domino effect and 3 months later we signed a deal with IHG, and then six months ago we signed with Minor Group, who are headquartered in Thailand, but covers all of Asia and the Middle East," said Spriegel.

Spriegel added that the approach adopted by Atiom was very customer-centric once a client is onboarded on their platform.

"We're not just giving them the technology and saying to them good luck. We have customer success' teams that meet with the teams every

> **There are many key differentiators that help us standout from the crowd, but I'd say the No.1 is our gamification frameworks. Our CTO is incredible, and we call him the gamification guru because he makes safety and compliance training fun."**

single week to discuss best practices and examine what's going well and what's not going well. We don't just say 'here's the technology, here is the cost and we'll check-in with you again in 12 months for renewal' – that's not the way we operate. The customer centricity that we deliver is another factor in the success and scale that we have enjoyed thus far," said Spriegel.

It is evidently clear that the technology provided by Atiom has bridged the gap that has traditionally existed between frontline workers and management, who often felt isolated and unappreciated.

However, with employee experience now high across the board in the chain of hotels where Atiom are present, it has rather naturally driven customer experiences to go in an upward trajectory.

"We are always increasing our training hours, but our customer success team will identify business cases. So, for example if we are with an operations team then we will be focusing on how we increase guest services and guest experience scores. If it's with the commercial team then we will be looking at new loyalty sign-ups, or upselling. We have several case studies where we have helped double our upselling and loyalty sign-ups. We also have a case study where after just 3 months we have seen an increase of 5% in guest services and guest scores. These are metrics that we are integrating more in real-time with the clients. We haven't lost a hotel in 6 years because they see that impact,

and the tools and features are not the selling point. The selling point is us telling them that we can help them drive loyalty, drive service and drive upselling – and that's what the business side of the organization is interested in, and that's why we usually try to sell to the business side, rather than the HR training and development side, because they too tend to be more generalists," said Spriegel.

The level of investment across the Middle East over the last number of years has been incredible.

However, the sheer scale of investment in the KSA is unprecedented.

The country wants to be a global leader in technology and diversify its economy in a bid to reduce its dependency on oil.

A big part of its economic reforms is making the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia a tourist hotspot, as a result there is a scramble to build hotels at scale across the country.

"You can see with the mega projects underway across the Middle East that there is this race to open as many hotels as possible, but you need skilled people in those seats. There are a lot of people who haven't worked in hospitality, so you need to get upskilled and up to speed quickly. If a new hotel opens, and you've got 5 reviews and one of them is a bad review then you're already working off the back foot, so there is no room for error. I think the investment and the infrastructure are in the KSA, but I do think the people are still relying on what I would

describe traditional methods, such as pen and paper, face-to-face and learning management systems to try and get the staff up to speed. However, unless they have access to something everyday where they can search for information, do quizzes, engage in peer-to-peer support, knowledge checks and performance checks then you simply can't do it fast enough," said Spriegel.

Spriegel believes there are many key differentiators that give Atiom the edge in the competitive market that they operate in.

"There are many key differentiators that help us standout from the crowd, but I'd say the No.1 is our gamification frameworks. If you look at cross-learning management systems, their content-first platforms, whereas we are tech-first. Our CTO is incredible, and we call him the gamification guru because he makes safety and compliance training fun. The other element in our success would be our holistic approach to performance. You can't just rely on 30-minute videos and some Q&A checking boxes, you need to reinforce the behaviour, and that's where Atiom is very strong in my view. My favourite tool is peer-to-peer recognition because it takes 5 minutes to set-up, and people love to be recognized, and they love to recognize others. It helps them, it helps staff, and it shows everyone what good behaviour looks like," said Spriegel.

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THE $14 BILLION BET RESHAPING GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down for an exclusive interview with Jacob Chacko, Regional Director, Middle East and Africa at HPE Networking, in an effort to better understand how their acquisition of Juniper Networks for $14bn can help them unlock new opportunities in the burgeoning datacentre space across the UAE, how it can also help them become a global force in service provider networking - and what role he envisages AI playing in transforming the future of networking.

One of the many benefits of my job as Editor of CNME, is the opportunity to speak to some of the most prominent technology leaders from across the Middle East, APAC, Europe and United States.

Unsurprisingly, they share many of the same traits that are required to be a successful business leader in the ultra-competitive world of IT.

Resilience. Leadership. Dedication. Commitment. Vision. Passion.

All those characteristics could be used to describe Jacob Chacko.

However, unlike some of his contemporaries, Chacko has the uncanny ability to perfectly articulate the key messaging that HPE really wants to convey to the public.

He peels back the layers of a story to reveal what it all means in the grand scheme of things, and that is a rare skill in the cut and thrust world of technology.

It is one of the many reason that I always relish the opportunity to get to speak to Chacko, because I always feel informed after our conversations, and the excitement and passion he has for HPE Networking really is palpable.

HPE's acquisition of Juniper Networks for $14bn officially closed in July of this year, after being formally announced in January 2024. It is a game-changing deal for the industry with the promise of increased innovation for customers and partners.

Yes, the deal to buy Juniper will copper-fasten HPE's position in networking, but as Chacko explains, it will allow them to meet growing customer demands in areas like enterprise campus, datacentres and service provider networking.

"The acquisition of Juniper Networks significantly broadens our ability to address customer needs

> **The acquisition of Juniper Networks significantly broadens our ability to address customer needs across the entire networking spectrum."**

across the entire networking spectrum. HPE has long been a leader in secure, AI-powered enterprise campus and branch networking, while Juniper brings deep expertise in datacentre and service provider networking. Together, we can deliver a unified portfolio that spans from edge to cloud, helping customers to modernise their networks, improve automation and assurance through AI, and scale securely to meet the rising demands of digital transformation," said Chacko.

It is very common that when mega acquisition deals are brokered, quite naturally, it can take quite a while to absorb the new entity into the existing business structure, and often customers can be impacted.

HPE is renowned for its customer-centric approach, and Chacko doubled down that one of the primary factors in the acquisition is to provide them with the ability to provide an even better customer experience.

"Our customers are increasingly looking for simplicity, automation, and security in their networking environments, whether in the campus, datacentre, or across service provider networks. By combining HPE's strength in the enterprise edge with Juniper's leadership in AI-driven datacentre and carrier-grade networking, we can now provide a complete, end-to-end offering. This means customers in the MEA region can accelerate their cloud adoption, gain deeper visibility into network performance, and future-proof their infrastructure with technologies designed to scale," said Chacko.

Chacko highlighted that across the Middle East, and especially in countries like the UAE, KSA and Qatar, the sheer scale of investment in digital transformation is unprecedented on a global scale but stressed that the network is key foundation in any digital strategy.

"For customers across the Middle East and Africa, the network is the backbone of their digital strategies — from powering smart campuses to enabling hyperscale datacentres and next-generation service provider networks. The integration of Juniper's innovation into the new HPE Networking portfolio gives us a much stronger proposition. We can now address every segment of the market with AI-driven solutions, advanced security, and cloud-native capabilities. This allows us to better support enterprises and service providers in the region as they expand, innovate, and compete on a global scale," said Chacko.

Datacentres are being viewed as the key foundation in the AI infrastructure that is needed to drive the digital future.

However, what I wanted to know was how can HPE leverage the acquisition of Juniper to open and unlock new opportunities in the burgeoning datacentre space.

He reiterated that by embedding Juniper's strength in high-performance gave HPE Networking a great springboard to capitalise on the opportunities emerging in AI-datacentres.

"AI is redefining the datacentre, and the acquisition of Juniper positions HPE to lead in this transformation. By combining HPE's compute and storage leadership with Juniper's strengths in high-performance, AI-driven networking, we can deliver datacentre solutions that are built for the scale, automation, and agility required to power the next wave of AI workloads. This creates unprecedented opportunities for our customers to modernise their infrastructure and unlock new levels of performance and efficiency."

Chacko outlined that another key differentiator for HPE was the trust that it can deliver to both current and prospective partners looking to build AI-infrastructure.

"The datacentre has become the epicentre of AI

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By combining HPE's strength in the enterprise edge with Juniper's leadership in AI-driven datacentre and carrier-grade networking, we can now provide a complete, end-to-end offering."

innovation, and customers are looking for trusted partners who can help them design, build, and operate AI-ready infrastructure. With Juniper, HPE is now uniquely positioned to provide end-to-end datacentre solutions — from servers and storage to intelligent, automated networking. This not only accelerates time-to-value for customers but also allows us to serve the fast-growing AI and cloud markets across the Middle East and Africa with even greater impact," said Chacko.

Chacko also added that he believed the acquisition of Juniper allowed them to be more 'strategic' when dealing with governments and service providers.

"In the MEA region, we're seeing unprecedented investment in AI-ready datacentres — from hyper-scalers to national digital transformation programs. The integration of Juniper's advanced datacentre networking into HPE's portfolio opens new opportunities for us to support this growth with highly scalable, AI-driven infrastructure solutions. It allows us to partner more strategically with enterprises, governments, and service providers to build the digital foundations that will fuel innovation, economic diversification, and competitiveness in the years ahead," said Chacko.

There have been many analysts that believe that the Juniper acquisition will also strengthen HPE's hand when it comes to service provider networking, given Juniper's rich legacy with the telecommunications industry.

Chacko highlighted the intense pressure that service providers are being saddled with when it comes to delivering high-performance and lower latency, but again, he believes that Juniper's storied and fabled history in service provider networking gives HPE the ability to tackle this issue head-on for service providers.

"Juniper has a deep heritage in service provider networking, with decades of innovation in carrier-grade routing, automation, and security. By bringing this into HPE, we significantly strengthen our capabilities in serving the world's leading telecom and service providers. This synergy allows us to offer a comprehensive, AI-native portfolio — spanning the campus, datacentre, and carrier networks — positioning HPE as a true global force in end-to-end networking. Service providers are under immense pressure to deliver higher performance, lower latency, and greater automation, all while managing costs. Juniper's legacy in telecommunications, combined with HPE's leadership in hybrid cloud and edge-to-cloud architectures, means we can now deliver the agility, scalability, and intelligence that service providers demand. This empowers them to accelerate 5G, AI, and cloud services, and ultimately deliver more value to their customers," said Chacko.

Chacko also added that the evolving and heightened expectations of a young population was also placing service providers under strain but emphasised how their edge-to-cloud strategy gave service providers more choice.

"In the Middle East and Africa, service providers are investing heavily in 5G and digital infrastructure to meet the demands of a rapidly growing, young, and connected population. By integrating Juniper's carrier-grade expertise with HPE's edge-to-cloud strategy, we can better support regional operators as they expand their networks, modernize services, and unlock new revenue streams. This makes HPE a stronger and more relevant partner for the telco industry, both globally and here in MEA," said Chacko.

The rise of Generative AI and Agentic AI are completely reshaping and reimaging every major industry vertical on a global scale.

> **AI is not only transforming industries but also the very networks that power them. At HPE, our vision is to make networking truly cloud-native and AI-driven — self-learning, self-optimising, and predictive."**

However, AI also has the power to transform networking, and Chacko laid out what HPE's approach to AI-enabled networking solutions and their vision for AI's role in networking infrastructure.

He reinforced the commitment HPE has made to making networking truly AI-native.

"AI is not only transforming industries but also the very networks that power them. At HPE, our vision is to make networking truly AI-native — self-learning, self-optimising, and predictive. Through the combination of HPE's secure edge-to-cloud networking and Juniper's AI-driven automation and assurance, we are building infrastructure that can anticipate issues before they occur, adapt in real time, and deliver a consistently seamless digital experience. We see AI as the nervous system of tomorrow's networks, enabling agility, resilience, and intelligence at every layer," said Chacko.

Chacko again touched on the importance of customer-centricity and declared that HPE wants to equip their customers with smarter networks, that significantly reduces overheads and complexity.

"Our customers don't just want faster networks they want smarter networks that can scale with AI-driven business models. HPE's approach is to embed AI into every part of the networking lifecycle — from simplifying deployment and automating operations to proactively identifying and resolving performance bottlenecks. This reduces complexity, lowers costs, and delivers higher reliability. With AI, networking becomes a true enabler of innovation rather than a constraint. In the Middle East and Africa, organizations are embracing AI to drive national transformation strategies, smart cities, and digital economies. Networking is the foundation of this shift. Our AI-enabled networking solutions are designed to provide the intelligence, automation, and security needed to support these ambitious initiatives. By combining global innovation with local execution, we can help customers in the region harness the full potential of AI to transform both their networks and their industries," said Chacko.

Chacko believes that some of the key messaging around this historic deal with Juniper Networks has been lost and caught in all the noise that typically happens with an acquisition of this magnitude.

When pressed on what was the primary message, he wanted our readers to take from the merger, he said that their AI-native portfolio is 'unmatched' in the market.

"The message is simple: with the acquisition of Juniper, HPE is making a bold statement that we are committed to being a global leader in networking. By bringing together HPE Aruba Networking strengths at the enterprise edge with Juniper's expertise in datacentre and service provider networking, we now offer an unmatched, AI-native portfolio that spans the entire spectrum — from edge to cloud to core. This positions us, and our customers, for the next decade of digital innovation. What this acquisition means for customers is choice, simplicity, and innovation. They will benefit from a unified approach that delivers AI-driven automation, secure connectivity, and cloud-native agility across every part of their network. Our future direction is about empowering customers to accelerate their digital strategies with confidence, knowing they have a partner that can scale with them at every stage," said Chacko.

He concluded and brought the curtain down on another wonderfully engaging, entertaining and informative interview, by reinforcing the viewpoint that the acquisition was 'unlocking opportunity'.

"For us in the Middle East and Africa, the clear message is that HPE is doubling down on helping this region build the digital foundations of the future to drive growth, competitiveness, and innovation. With Juniper Networks, we are now in a stronger position than ever to support enterprises, governments, and service providers with secure end-to-end networking solutions that are purpose-built with AI and for AI. This acquisition is about unlocking opportunity — globally and here in MEA," said Chacko. ⬛

Agentyne

LET ME TALK TO YOUR 'AGENT'

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down for an exclusive interview with **Rahil Ghaffar**, Co-Founder of Agentyne, a start-up company founded in 2024, that deploys AI agents across enterprise workflows.

Rahil Ghaffar, Co-Founder of Agentyne, believes the tools and technologies produced by his company can empower sales professionals in the enterprise space across the US and Canada.

Agentyne specialises in data, voice and security, and believes its technology can empower sales professionals in competitive marketplaces like the United States and Canada with the tools they need to help them engage every prospect promptly.

Ghaffar needs no introduction to our readers and is one of the most respected cybersecurity professionals in the Middle East.

He has enjoyed a decorated career to date, and has previously worked for cybersecurity leaders such as Virsec, Whiteswan Identity Security and Palo Alto Networks.

However, in October 2024, his entrepreneurial streak came to the fore when he decided to cofound Agentyne with Nethra Anand, and 10 months on, CNME sat down with Ghaffar to find out how the start-up company has performed since entering the market.

Every startup has an origin story. What sparked the idea for Agentyne, and how has the journey evolved since its inception?

Agentyne was born from a direct observation: countless businesses, especially those rapidly scaling or targeting competitive markets like the US and Canada, were losing significant revenue due to slow or inconsistent follow-up on valuable inbound leads.

We saw skilled sales teams bogged down by the sheer volume, unable to engage every prospect promptly.

The spark was the conviction that AI could revolutionise this critical top-of-funnel process.

Our journey began with creating an intelligent voice agent specifically for BDR tasks. It has since evolved into developing a comprehensive solution focused on not just making calls, but on delivering hyper-personalised engagement, automating complex workflows, and providing actionable insights. Our evolution is driven by one goal: empowering businesses to capture every opportunity and scale their success efficiently.

With the GCC region's strong focus on digital transformation and customer-centric growth, how does Agentyne BDR specifically help businesses in this market scale their sales outreach and improve customer engagement, particularly when targeting expansion into competitive arenas like the US and Canadian markets where managing a surge in digital inbound inquiries is key?

Agentyne BDR is a strategic enabler for GCC businesses targeting North American expansion.

We directly address the challenge of managing

"

Our journey began with creating an intelligent voice agent specifically for BDR tasks."

with sophisticated Natural Language Understanding (NLU) for fluid, multi-turn dialogues.

Crucially, real-time sentiment analysis allows our AI to gauge prospect emotions and dynamically adapt its tone and responses.

This, combined with dynamic scripting informed by pre-call data, ensures each conversation is contextually relevant and engaging, moving far beyond robotic interactions to create genuine connections – vital for any market, including discerning audiences in the US and Canada.

Our system continuously learns, ensuring interactions become even more refined over time.

What core technologies or models power Agentyne's sentiment analysis and contextual lead qualification?
Agentyne's sentiment analysis and contextual lead qualification are driven by robust machine learning models and advanced NLU. Our sentiment analysis engine interprets both vocal tones and lexical cues for a deep understanding of prospect emotions.

For contextual lead qualification, our NLU models, which can be enhanced by platforms like Google Cloud's Vertex AI, dissect conversations to extract key entities, intent, and qualifying information.

The AI BDR intelligently navigates qualification frameworks, efficiently gathering critical data, especially vital when

high-volume inbound leads from these markets by providing immediate AI-driven engagement, ensuring no opportunity is lost due to time-zone differences or human bandwidth. This rapid response is critical for conversion in the US and Canada.

Our solution allows GCC companies to establish a significant, cost-effective outreach presence, scale efficiently without proportionally increasing local headcount, and operate optimally across various business hours globally.

Agentyne empowers them

to turn the complexities of international lead management into a streamlined engine for growth and superior customer engagement.

How does Agentyne BDR ensure its voice interactions remain both natural and emotionally intelligent in real-time conversations?
Agentyne BDR delivers exceptionally natural and emotionally intelligent voice interactions by combining advanced AI. We utilise state-of-the-art, human-like Text-to-Speech and Speech-to-Text, coupled

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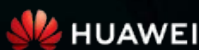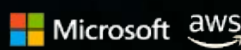
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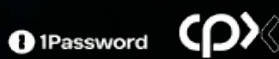
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processing high-volume leads from major markets. This outcome-driven approach ensures sales teams receive prioritised, contextually understood leads ready for focused engagement.

How does Agentyne maintain accuracy and privacy while syncing with CRM platforms in real time?

Accuracy and privacy are paramount in our upcoming deep CRM integrations. We'll use secure OAuth 2.0 for permission-based access to platforms like Salesforce and Zoho, adhering to strict API best practices and data minimisation principles.

Our focus is on real-time or near real-time synchronization to ensure our AI BDR engages leads with the freshest information – crucial for immediate inbound follow-up – and that CRMs are instantly updated.

All data is encrypted in transit and at rest. With client-controlled field mapping and a design mindful of global data privacy regulations, including those relevant for North American operations, we ensure data integrity and support our clients' compliance.

What sets your voice-first AI apart from other AI calling or virtual assistant solutions currently on the market?

Agentyne BDR is a specialised strategic sales tool, not a generic assistant. Our key differentiator is enabling businesses to effectively penetrate and scale in demanding markets like the USA and Canada through rapid and intelligent inbound lead engagement.

While others make calls, our AI automates the core BDR workflow – from immediate, personalised outreach to action-based lead categorization and follow-up triggers.

It's built to turn high-volume North American inbound interest into qualified opportunities by ensuring no lead is missed due to human bandwidth or time-zone constraints. This focus on tangible sales outcomes and market expansion provides a distinct competitive edge.

What types of customers or teams have seen the most success using Agentyne BDR during the pilot phase?

Our pilot phase has shown remarkable success with teams whose growth hinges on efficiently converting leads. Particularly, businesses spearheading US & Canadian market entry or expansion have found great value.

These are companies leveraging Agentyne to manage high velocity inbound leads from North America gaining a crucial foothold by ensuring immediate 24/7 capable follow-up which is absolutely critical for conversion in those competitive arenas.

We've also seen significant success with organisations handling high-volume global inbound leads where teams overwhelmed by their digital marketing success use Agentyne to guarantee prompt personalized first touches which in turn significantly boosts their MQL-to-SQL rates.

Furthermore teams focused on optimizing BDR efficiency are seeing benefits as businesses are freeing their human BDRs from repetitive top-of-funnel tasks allowing them to focus on high-value interactions with AI-warmed leads. Really the common thread across all these successful pilots is how they're leveraging Agentyne to transform the challenge of timely scalable lead engagement into a significant sales advantage. ⌐nme

Agentyne's sentiment analysis and contextual lead qualification are driven by robust machine learning models and advanced NLU."

Planview

CONNECTED WORK

Razat Gaurav, CEO of Planview, spoke to CNME Editor Mark Forker, about the bold course of direction he is setting in relation to strategic portfolio management and digital product development, that he believes will position the company as a trusted partner for global enterprises and innovators across the Middle East.

US-headquartered, Planview is reshaping how organisations connect strategy with execution, with a mission to empower leaders to deliver projects and products seamlessly in a world defined by constant change.

For Razat Gaurav, Chief Executive Officer and Member of the Board of Directors at Planview, this mission has found a natural extension in the Middle East, with the company's newly opened regional headquarters in the UAE.

"Our mission is to build the digital future of connected work. We work with over 3,000 customers and 3.1 million users globally across industries, helping organisations transform how they plan and deliver projects and product initiatives. The Middle East region stood out for us because transformations are happening here at a turbocharged pace," said Razat.

Even before setting up a local presence, the global brand had strong inbound interest and was already supporting major customers like Emirates Airlines through their European teams.

Razat has over 25 years of experience in enterprise software, with a proven track record of driving innovation-based growth and scaling up technology businesses.

He is a trusted advisor to leading global executives, boards, and investors on topics related to digital transformation and supply chain initiatives.

"My supply chain background taught me that everything is interconnected. Using principles like Eli Goldratt's Theory of Constraints, I learned to identify bottlenecks and unlock efficiencies—principles we now apply at Planview to organisational work and transformation. This experience also gave me a global perspective on resilience and growth, which I bring into how we help enterprises structure their transformation journeys today," said Razat.

STRATEGY TO EXECUTION
Strategy to execution remains a recurring theme at Planview, and Razat mentioned Planview Copilot, an AI-powered assistant designed to transform work management by enhancing productivity and improving decision-making across enterprises.

Leaders in the region are highly ambitious and aspirational, but

With more than 35 customers across the Middle East, we felt this was the right time to establish a presence, strengthen relationships, and double down on opportunities in the region."

billion worth of planned and delivered initiatives, combined with advanced LLMs from partners like Anthropic, AWS, and OpenAI. This helps the brand to build intelligent, persona-based agents—whether for a CIO, PMO Head and Strategy Leaders —that support decision-making, automate workflows, and eventually take on repetitive tasks. This AI-driven approach significantly reduces risk, increases productivity, and ensures seamless execution.

THREE VECTORS

Connected platforms are becoming the backbone of modern enterprises, and what helps Planview differentiate itself is based on its vision, which is anchored on three vectors.

First, connecting strategic aspirations of leadership to execution on the ground, and second, bridging handoffs from ideation through planning and delivery to outcomes. And third, supporting both projects and products—whether waterfall-style projects with start and end dates, or agile, iterative product initiatives.

"We don't dictate a single way of working; instead, our platform supports all approaches within one connected work graph, strengthened by AI. This makes us uniquely positioned to integrate strategy, portfolio management, and product development across stakeholders," said Razat, who Goldman Sachs recognised as one

operationalising those ambitions requires a clear connection between strategy and execution. "Our platform provides that link by aligning leadership priorities with

work done across different organisational layers. AI now plays a crucial role here," said Razat.

Planview Copilot leverages data from over $400

of the 100 Most Intriguing Entrepreneurs of 2020, and by The Software Report as one of the Top 50 SaaS CEOs in the world in 2023.

Razat has also been selected to be a member of the CNBC and Wall Street Journal CEO Councils and is a Member of the Board of Directors for SPS Commerce.

"My leadership ethos is simple: employee success plus customer success equals business success. We live this daily by embedding core values into hiring, recognition, promotions, and retention. We maintain a flat culture—my "Slack door" is always open, and I commit to responding to employees within 24 hours. This transparency, combined with a passion for innovation and customer value, allows us to scale while staying true to our mission of building the digital future of connected work," said Razat.

With rapid digital transformation in the region, leaders today face challenges in aligning execution with vision while dealing with constant change — technological, regulatory, business model, or geopolitical.

Change is exponential, not linear, and many organisations struggle with inertia.

Razat said: "Transformation must become a lifestyle change, not a one-off project. Our platform helps organisations build this 'muscle for change' by aligning incentives, breaking silos, embedding frameworks like Objectives and Key Results(OKRs), and providing data-driven insights. This enables leaders to make decisions based on outcomes, not hierarchy or loudest voices. For the Middle East, where transformation is accelerating, this muscle is critical."

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION
Planview has helped enterprises make faster, more confident decisions based on its data-driven approach.

The brand worked with a global bank investing over $1 billion in technology to restructure and deliver portfolio initiatives that improved digital offerings and accelerated product launches. Using the flow velocity framework, the bank increased efficiency by 25–30%.

Another example Razat shared is a high-tech consumer electronics company with hundreds of millions invested in R&D.

"We enabled scenario planning for portfolio allocation across physical and software products, helping them gain significant efficiencies. In both cases, we

Our mission is to build the digital future of connected work. We work with over 3,000 customers and 3.1 million users globally across industries, helping organisations transform how they plan and deliver projects and product initiatives."

brought together projects, resources, and financials into a single, agile framework that aligned decisions with outcomes," adds Razat.

The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle East countries are ramping up innovation and Planview is committed to make its presence in the region.

Razat, said: "The UAE is diverse in industries and includes both private enterprises and government-led initiatives. We're aligning our go-to-market strategy with key sectors such as aviation, retail, banking, and public sector. Our work with Emirates Airlines is a great example—helping them allocate resources effectively and deliver digital initiatives with impact. We see similar opportunities across industries, especially as governments focus on digital transformation, data residency, and smart services."

MIDDLE EAST REMAINS A GROWTH DRIVER

The Middle East is accelerating into a future shaped by ambitious projects and investments.

Planview is positioning itself as a strategic partner to ensure those ambitions become reality.

Razat closed with a clear commitment: "The region is experiencing an unprecedented wave of projects and investments, and we aim to ensure those are executed efficiently, aligned with strategic outcomes."

From strategy to execution, from AI-driven insights to cultural transparency, Razat is steering Planview towards redefining how global enterprises embrace change and build the digital future of connected work. The brand is currently gearing up for its launch event in October.

"We already have a strong customer base in the region, but now we're focused on scaling with them and expanding our presence further. We've mobilised a UAE-based team and are working closely with partners like AWS, Accenture, and EY to support implementation and change management. The region is experiencing an unprecedented wave of projects and investments, and we aim to ensure those are executed efficiently and aligned with strategic outcomes. Our goal is for the Middle East to become a significant part of Planview's global business footprint," concluded Razat. cnme

Raqmiyat

DIGITAL ENABLEMENT

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down for an exclusive interview with **Georgio Khachan**, Vice-President – Banking and Finance Solutions at Raqmiyat, where he reiterated that his vision for the company was to become a strategic partner and 'digital enabler' for financial institutions looking to embrace digital transformation across the GCC.

Georgio, you've recently taken the helm at Raqmiyat Banking & Finance Solutions—how would you describe your vision for the company's role in shaping the future of digital banking and payments?

My vision is for Raqmiyat to be a strategic partner and digital enabler for banks and financial institutions across the GCC.

We already support more than 50 banks with critical systems, and the next step is to take this strong base forward with innovation that delivers further value and keeps banks competitive in a fast –changing market.

I want us to help banks cut costs with automation and AI, enhance customer journeys, and create new revenue streams through innovative digital banking solutions.

We'll achieve this by strengthening our own product portfolio while also working closely with leading global technology providers, so clients benefit from both local expertise and the latest innovations.

Raqmiyat has already made a strong mark in enabling digital transformation in the banking sector. How do you plan to build on that legacy and expand the company's impact under your leadership?

Raqmiyat has built a strong legacy in the UAE by delivering banking systems like Instant Payments, Cheque Clearing, Wage Protection, Direct Debit, and Fund Transfer. My role now is to take that foundation and translate it into the next stage of growth.

That means moving from being a trusted systems provider to becoming a strategic partner for banks in their digital journey. We're doing this in three ways:

· Introducing new platforms like Open Finance and Payment Orchestration, which enable banks to open ecosystems, streamline payment flows, and create new revenue opportunities.
· Scaling partnerships with global and regional providers, so clients get the latest innovations while relying on our local expertise.
· Expanding into the wider GCC, where demand for advanced payment and digital banking solutions is growing rapidly.
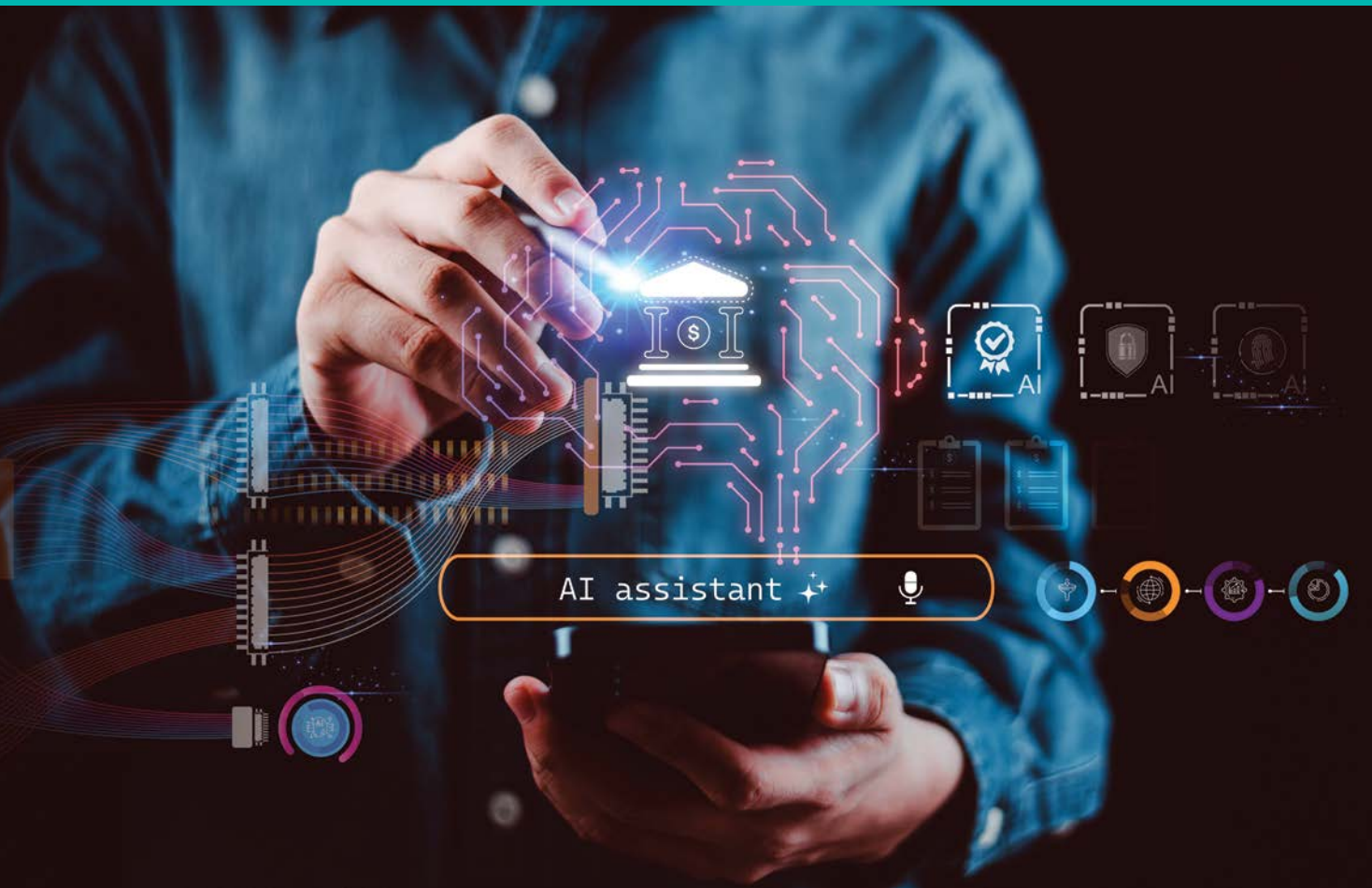
We'll extend Raqmiyat's impact beyond its strong UAE base and position the company as a regional leader in digital banking innovation.

The financial services sector is evolving rapidly. What do you see as the most pressing challenges banks, PSPs, and financial institutions face today, and how is Raqmiyat addressing them?
The three biggest challenges are: staying compliant with evolving regulations, meeting customer demand for seamless banking experiences, and managing costs while modernizing legacy infrastructure.

At Raqmiyat, our platforms are compliant by design and aligned with central bank mandates, so banks can move quickly without regulatory risk.

We also provide modular solutions that integrate into existing systems with minimal disruption and take advantage of the latest technologies.

And because cost is always a concern, we design every solution to deliver strong ROI – whether through automation to cut manual work, cloud-native deployments to reduce infrastructure spend, or efficient implementation to speed up results.

How is Raqmiyat leveraging emerging technologies such as AI, blockchain, or real-time payments to enhance digital banking experiences?
We're embedding AI into real banking use cases through our in-house data transformation vertical.

This covers data management, cloud, business

My vision is for Raqmiyat to be a strategic partner and digital enabler for banks and financial institutions across the GCC. We already support more than 50 banks with critical systems, and the next step is to take this strong base forward with innovation that delivers further value."

intelligence, and advanced analytics like AI, GenAI, and data science.

This allows us to deliver predictive insights that help banks manage risk and improve efficiency, while also enabling AI models that automate processes and personalize services.

On the payments side, our IP products — like Cheque Clearing and the Instant Payment engine integrated with the UAE Central Bank — use AI to forecast transaction volumes, predict customer churn, and detect anomalies before they cause disruption.

That delivers a smoother customer experience in real time.

We're also piloting blockchain in cross-border payments, where it can improve transparency, reduce costs, and speed up settlement.

These technologies are helping banks open their ecosystems and deliver

new digital experiences that provide real value to customers.

Banks and PSPs are under constant pressure to deliver seamless, secure, and innovative experiences to their customers. How does Raqmiyat help them strike that balance?

Seamlessness, security, and innovation don't always move in the same direction.

Innovation can bring risk. Security can slow down the journey. Making things seamless can sometimes weaken controls.

At Raqmiyat, we help clients balance by bringing together the right mix of products and expertise.

· We design solutions with compliance and security built in from the start. So, innovation never comes at the cost of regulation.
· We use AI and predictive analytics to keep digital journeys smooth. We

improve efficiency and manage risk quietly in the background.
· We work with leading partners in payments, observability, data transformation, customer engagement, loyalty, and others. So, clients can adopt the latest innovations with confidence.
· And we guide them through clear, phased roadmaps.

This way, our clients don't have to choose between being seamless, secure, or innovative. They can achieve all three in a sustainable, future-ready way.

Trust and security are critical in digital finance. What measures does Raqmiyat take to ensure solutions are not only innovative but also resilient and secure?

For us, security is built into the way we design and deliver solutions. It's never an afterthought.

Our platforms are built to always be reliable and available. We also put clear governance in place around data, privacy, monitoring, and recovery, so banks can demonstrate trust and compliance to regulators and customers.

We only work with trusted global partners, so every solution we deliver is proven, safe, and future ready.

That way, when clients adopt innovation through us, they know it's backed by the resilience and trust their customers expect.

VFlowTech

GO WITH THE FLOW

CNME Editor Mark Forker, sat down with **Avishek Kumar**, CEO and co-founder of Singaporean-based deep tech company VFlowTech, to learn about the company's expansion plans in the Middle East, and how its unique rugged, rigorous and innovative battery technology can meet the renewable energy demands and decarbonisation targets across the region.

Avishek Kumar, CEO and co-founder of Singaporean-based deep tech company VFlowTech, believes their technology can address surging renewable energy demand in the Middle East.

Avishek Kumar, is the CEO and co-founder of deep tech company VFlowTech.

VFlowTech was established in 2018 and is headquartered in Singapore.

The company is on a mission to reinvent long duration energy storage with innovative technologies designed to develop affordable and scalable vanadium redox flow batteries.

Under Kumar's fearless leadership and drive the company has enjoyed huge market success in Singapore, and now the plan is to replicate that success in the UAE, and across the Middle East region.

The United Arab Emirates is undoubtedly leading the region's clean energy

transition, whilst Saudi Arabia has also made no secret around its ambitions to decarbonise.

However, with grid instability on the rise, a surge in demand for infrastructure like AI-driven datacentres, which is energy intensive, achieving these decarbonisation targets is challenging.

VFlowTech enters the Middle East region off the back of a successful $20.5m funding round.

Kumar kickstarted the conversation by highlighting the impact VFlowTech has had in Singapore.

"I have a PhD in solar, and the fact of the matter is when solar became cheap, it became unsustainable, and it was evident that you needed batteries. We developed our technology in Singapore, and Singapore is our primary market. We've been able to successfully deploy our batteries in key use-cases – and we're powering Singapore 24/7 with our battery technology,

> **One of the key advantages of our battery is that it can work in incredibly harsh and humid climates."**

enabling really long durations and sowing a commercial fibre application on the grid," said Kumar.

Kumar added that the company has a factory in India, and they are engaged in key projects in both the

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mining and utility industries.

Kumar highlighted that the ability of the battery to work in inclement weather conditions is a key market differentiator for them.

"One of the key advantages of our battery is that it can work in incredibly harsh and humid climates. Our battery can operate up to 55-degree ambient, which is a key USP for us as a technology player. Now, anyone that has been following the Middle East marketplace will be aware that the region has seen an unprecedented deployment of renewable energy. Saudi Arabia has announced its ambition to go net-zero, so the deployment of renewable energy is only going to soar and the demand is there. There is an abundance of solar energy, so you will need a lot of batteries, and there has been a big play into lithium-ion technology, but lithium-ion technology has its limitations. You need proper air-conditioning and cooling, so in a harsh climate like the Middle East, lithium-ion technology is limited," said Kumar.

Kumar was quick to point out that VFlowTech has already enjoyed success in the Middle East marketplace.

"Last year, we entered into a partnership with a prominent local company that is looking to provide innovative energy storage solutions in desalination plants, and as we speak, we have our first battery in the KSA. A leading utility in the Middle East has put up a tender for flow batteries, and

that is something that we are looking to participate in as well. We are happy that we have anchored many early opportunities in the Middle East," said Kumar.

The conversation then shifted towards the industry verticals VFlowTech is targeting across the Middle East, and outside of renewable energy, utilities and net zero steel are both going to be a key area of focus for the company.

"There are 2-3 key industry verticals for us, but undoubtedly one of them is utilities, and utilities are going to need larger batteries. There have been a number of tenders put out for solar plus batteries which indicates growing demand. We are also looking at net zero steel and steel manufacturing and that's a market where there is growing potential to have solar plus batteries deliver net zero power, so we believe

Vanadium redox flow batteries are extremely safe and there is no risk of fire. One other key differentiator for us is performance. Lithium-ion is a good technology, but when it's working in hot and inclement climate conditions then the performance plummets."

there are a lot of opportunities in the steel manufacturing industry," said Kumar.

The UAE Stargate project has been designed to help the country become a global leader in AI.

However, the sheer volume and scale of infrastructure required to power that project is off the scale, but again the datacentre space offers another opportunity for the battery technology produced by VFlowTech.

"We can deliver net zero power to datacentres, and again, this is a space we're focusing on. Saudi Arabia's NEOM project is being built up, but with NEOM there is a huge economy of clean energy, which will require batteries, and our batteries can deliver long-duration cycles. Our batteries can charge in the daytime when there's an abundance of sun, anywhere from 8-10 hours, and then can be charged for 10-12 hours which makes the technology much more suitable for scale," said Kumar.

Kumar added that they have plans to scale manufacturing locally using vanadium.

"We use vanadium, and vanadium is found in petroleum waste, and as we know the Middle East is rich in crude oil. We're also exploring opportunities to partner with a number of local refineries, where we can use the petroleum Sinder to see if there is any vanadium content that we can recover, and that will make localisation possible as the demand rises," said Kumar.

Kumar then highlighted a number of key differentiators that he believes makes vanadium redox flow batteries a much better option that lithium-ion batteries.

"There are multiple factors that contribute to vanadium redox flow batteries outperforming lithium-ion. Typically, a renewable energy plant has a lifetime of 25-30 years, and the lifetime cycle of flow batteries is also 30 years. Vanadium co-exists very effectively with renewable energy. From a safety perspective, there is a fire risk with lithium-ion batteries, and particularly when the temperature gets high the performance degrades significantly. Vanadium redox flow batteries are extremely safe, there is no risk of fire. One other key differentiator for us is performance. Lithium-ion is a good technology, but when it's working in hot and inclement climate conditions then the performance plummets. Ultimately, lithium-ion is not suitable for the Middle East region because of the climate here, it is made possible through advanced cooling technologies, but our technology does not need that advanced cooling technology. In addition to this, 99% of the low component that we use is easily recyclable, and the Middle East doesn't have a lot of lithium, so their local manufacturing content can be high vanadium, so these are all key enablers that make flow batteries more suitable for the Middle East marketplace," said Kumar.

Kumar said the company has engaged in talks with some major players in the energy sector in the Middle East, but explained that with a new technology there always has to be the proof-of-concept phase – but outlined his plans over the next 12 months for their market expansion in the Middle East.

"We have entered into early discussions with a few large independent power producers (IPP) in the region, but these are huge, huge players in the energy industry, so for a new relatively new market entrant like us, we have to work on pilots and proof-of-concepts to put our best foot forward. We have been working with smaller players in Saudi Arabia, and as I mentioned earlier, a prominent utility company has put out tenders for flow batteries, which indicates that they are evaluating technologies. Our approach this year in relation to the Middle East will be to establish an office, somewhere in either Saudi Arabia, or Dubai, build a pipeline, and generally, be much more active in the market. Our initial focus is to first streamline manufacturing because we are a technology leader in this space, and we need to create a supply chain and evolve as a manufacturing company. This year, we are all about execution and once we open an office we can build a pipeline, and when the pipeline is built, we'll explore manufacturing in the Middle East," said Kumar. ⬛

Cisco Splunk

FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE

CNME Editor Mark Forker attended .conf25 in Boston, where the future direction of Cisco Splunk was mapped out from keynotes delivered by **Kamal Hathi**, SVP and GM at Splunk, and **Jeetu Patel**, President and Chief Product Officer at Cisco. Hathi described AI as a wildfire – but said Splunk was committed to providing their users with the tools to fight fire with fire.

Kamal Hathi, SVP and General Manager of Splunk, kicked off his keynote by saying as an industry we are only scratching the surface of what's possible with AI, and doubled down on his view that the community of Splunk users will be the key drivers in the new AI era.

Hathi started his keynote by acknowledging that the evolution of AI has increased complexity across the board.

"Look there is no doubt that all the complexity that comes with AI is making our jobs a lot harder, but it is helping us to do much more, and in all reality, we are only scratching the surface of the problems that AI can help us to solve. At Splunk, we want our community of users to

be at the forefront of the AI revolution. Everything in the world is changing, and I mean everything, and we as a company are transforming for you," said Hathi.

Hathi joined Splunk in October 2024 and said that he loves going to the office every day because of the excitement of AI has reenergised the entire team.

"Every single day that I go into work, I can feel this energy and buzz. Those that have been at Splunk from the beginning said this is exactly what it was like at the beginning, and when there was that seismic shift to the cloud. They are feeling this energy and drive again in this new AI evolution," said Hathi.

Hathi described AI has a wildfire but stressed how Splunk were empowering their users with tools and products to fight fire with fire.

He also said that the .conf user community would drive the new AI era.

"At the end of the day, the people in this room know how to unlock machine data, it is what you do. I'll sheepishly admit that I'm a big superhero fan, and I'm a romantic, so anytime time there is a profound technological shift, I believe a superhero will step in. The shift to the cloud wouldn't have happened without the Splunk community, and you will do the same for the AI era," said Hathi.

Hathi reemphasised how Splunk is trying to unleash the power of AI for its

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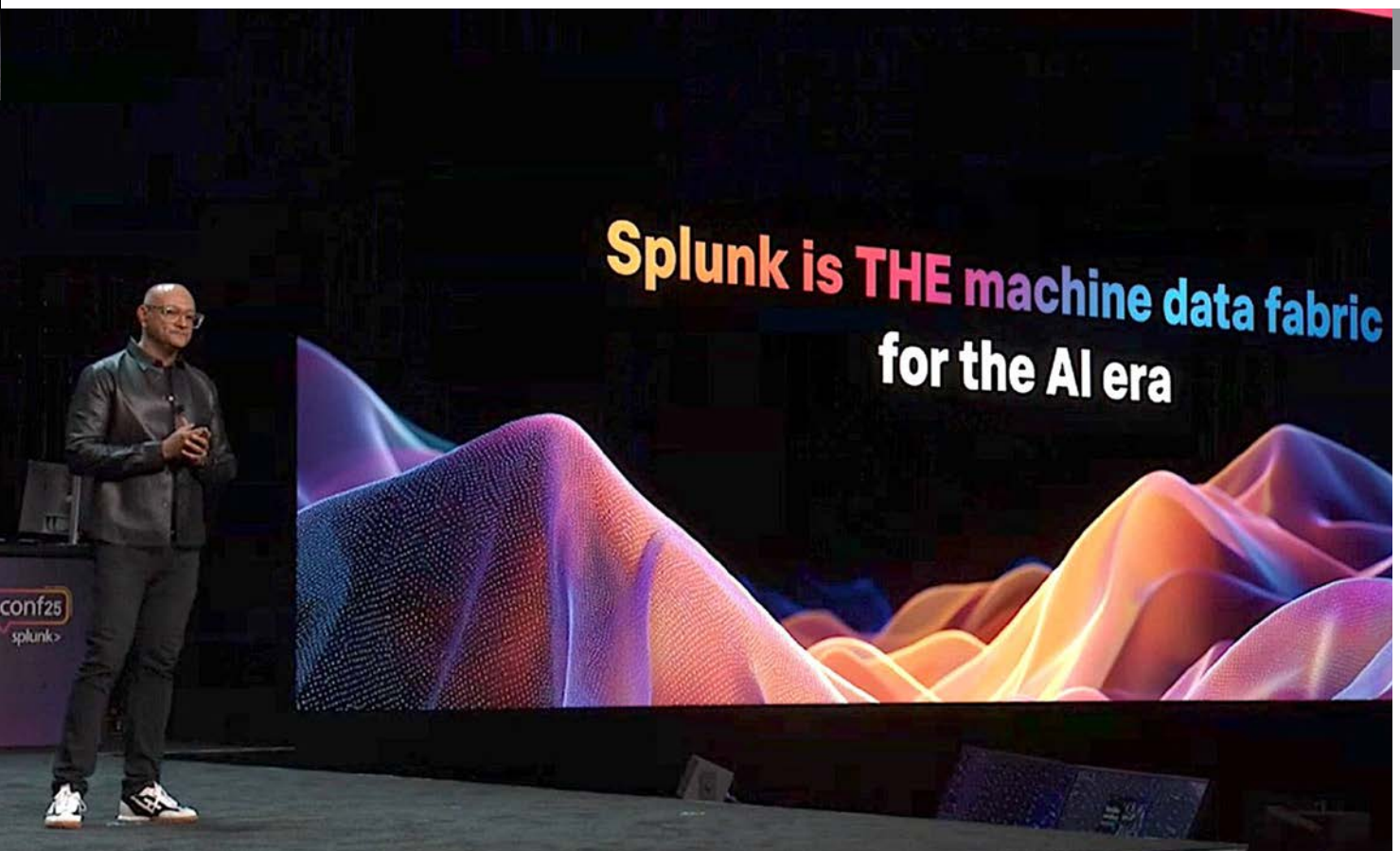
customers and acknowledged that in the current climate the data being generated is now on a ludicrous scale.

"Slunk has always been a Big Data Company, but the data being generated now, is no longer big, it's on a ludicrous scale. But this is what we are great at. We can provide our users with the tools they need to deal with the data, regardless of the complexity or the scale, we bring it all together for you. We want to unleash the power of AI to make sense out of these massive amounts of data, and ultimately there is no one size fits all approach to AI. There is no magic box of AI, you need AI that works for you," said Hathi.

He was then joined on stage by Tom Gillis, SVP and General Manager of Infrastructure and Security at Cisco.

He highlighted how their Cisco Data Fabric solution will be able to ingest those ludicrous amounts of data that are being generated.

"The AI revolution is not hype. Our world is fundamentally changing. If you try to ingest ludicrous amounts of data into a single data repository then it's not going to work. The idea behind Cisco Data Fabric is to take that Data Lake and break it into Data Ponds and then Data Puddles. It's a new architecture and we are putting intelligence into the fabric of the network," said Gillis.

During his keynote

presentation on Day 1 of .conf25 in Boston, Jeetu Patel, President and Chief Product Officer at Cisco said that the time was night to unlock the value of machine data to fuel the AI era.

Patel delivered a typically energetic keynote, where he praised the .conf community as the 'secret sauce' for Cisco Splunk.

He said that the new AI era we are now immersed in was going to profoundly change our society.

"The message from all of you last year was quite emphatic and clear, and it was Cisco, do not screw up Splunk, but that was a low bar. We are going to make it

> **AI will make our world of 8 billion people feel like one with the capacity of 80 billion."**

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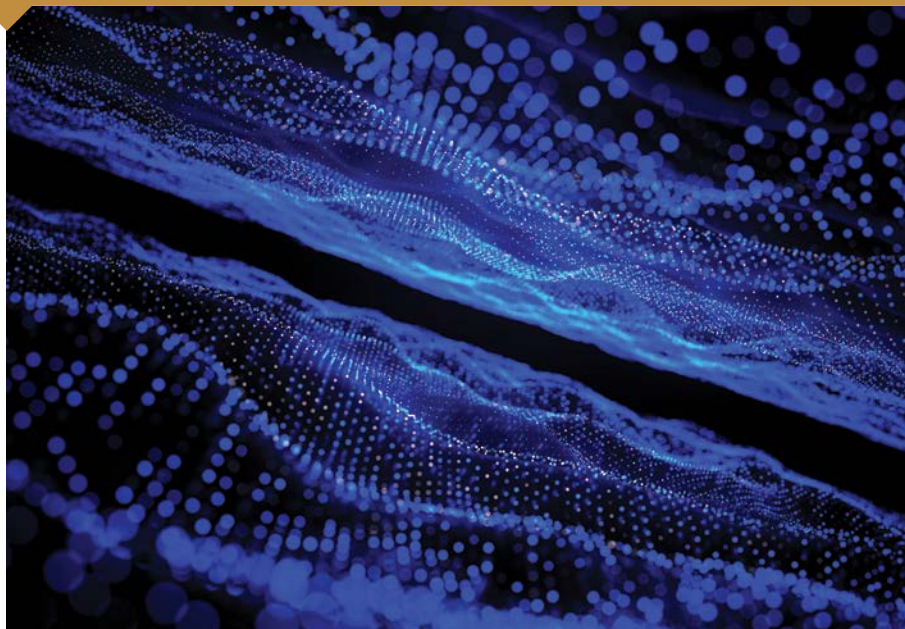
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epic. I think it's important to stress that we are in next evolution of AI, but what does that mean. The first era was all about Chatbots, then about 3 years ago ChatGPT emerged, and it was great for humans to be able to talk to AI, but now we have augmented agents now performing tasks for us autonomously. As a result, AI will make our world of 8 billion people feel like one with the capacity of 80 billion," said Patel.

Patel stated that the new AI era would result in massive implications when it came to technology architecture and highlighted the 3 impediments that Cisco and Splunk are going to tackle 'head-on' to drive AI.

"I believe there are 3 major impediments that will hold us back, and they are infrastructure constraint, we don't have enough power, compute or networking. There is going to be a trust deficit, because if you don't have full visibility then you can't trust the system, and then there's the data gap.

Data is the essential fuel for AI. I think when it comes to human-generated data to train AI models we have done a pretty good job, but we haven't done a good job when it comes to machine-generated data, but it is a massively untapped opportunity, and we need a machine data platform for the AI era. We are meeting these challenges head-on, and our promise to you is this, Cisco will be the critical infrastructure for the AI era," said Patel.

Patel made some major announcements, which included the news that users will now be able to ingest Cisco firewalls into Splunk for FREE, and he stressed how Splunk was incredibly strategic for Cisco.

"Over the last 18 months, Cisco and Splunk have worked really well together to ensure that there is a great harmony between the products, and the telemetry is being integrated into Splunk. We need to deliver the right level of visibility and trust, and observability for the entire stack. The future of the SOC is going to be agentic, but we also need to have the

ability to secure AI itself," said Patel.

Patel also praised the legacy of leadership that Splunk has demonstrated since its inception and announced the launch of its Cisco Data Fabric.

"Splunk has always been a leader, and it will be the machine data fabric for the AI era, but we all know that we must unlock the value of machine data to fuel AI, and that is why we're launching our brand-new concept Cisco Data Fabric. Our Cisco Data Fabric operates at ludicrous scale and enables users to unlock their proprietary data for AI, and unify experiences for humans and agents," said Patel.

Patel also announced the expansion of their federated search through the form of a new partnership with Snowflake, the Alpha of that will be available in February 2026.

He concluded a brilliant keynote by announcing their Time Series Foundational Model, Machine Data Lake, and AI Canvas in Splunk.

"Our Time Series Foundational Model will be optimised for machine data, that is accurate and scalable, and adaptable to your domain. Our Machine Data Lake is a turnkey solution that is optimised for AI training, and will be secured and governed, but what will you be able to do with this you ask? You can create your own machine GPT, at a scale that was never possible before and done completely in natural language," said Patel.

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Toshiba

PRESERVING THE WORLD'S DATA

Sandhya D'Mello, Technology Editor, CPI Media Group sat down with the Toshiba's executive leadership team to discuss how pioneering new technologies, a strong channel ecosystem, and a focus on reducing cost per terabyte has positioned the company as a catalyst for digital progress in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and the wider MENA region.

With 150 years of legacy and a strong focus on sustainability, Toshiba accelerates growth in the UAE and Saudi Arabia by delivering reliable, high-capacity, and energy-efficient storage solutions.

The Middle East and Africa are advancing ambitious digital transformation agendas, and the demand for reliable, energy-efficient, and high-capacity storage is accelerating in parallel. Toshiba, with 150 years of corporate history and five decades of leadership in the storage business, is positioning itself to support this growth with a comprehensive portfolio spanning personal storage (including NAS), surveillance solutions, and enterprise-class capacity for cloud data centres and hyperscalers.

Commitment to sustainability, reliability, and long-term partnerships defines the company's regional strategy. Senior executives – Peter Lieberwirth, President of Toshiba Electronics Europe GmbH; Larry Martinez-Palomo, Vice President and Head of EMEA Storage Products Division; Daisuke Hara, General ManagerAssistant Vice President, EMEA Storage Products Business Marketing Division; and Jeff Briggs, General Manager – Distribution Sales, EMEA Storage Products Division — discussed their vision for the company in a conversation with Sandhya D'Mello, Technology Editor, CPI Media Group.

Peter Lieberwirth, President of Toshiba Electronics Europe GmbH, emphasises that Saudi Arabia and the UAE are setting the pace for digital growth in the region, and Toshiba's role is to act as a catalyst in this transformation through flexibility, openness, and enduring partnerships.

The company's 150-year corporate history and more than 50 years of storage expertise form the foundation of this vision, rooted in addressing society's evolving challenges – from the first electric bulbs in Japan to today's imperative of managing vast volumes of data efficiently and sustainably.

Reliability and quality remain Toshiba's top priorities, with sustainability embedded in the design of products that minimise replacement
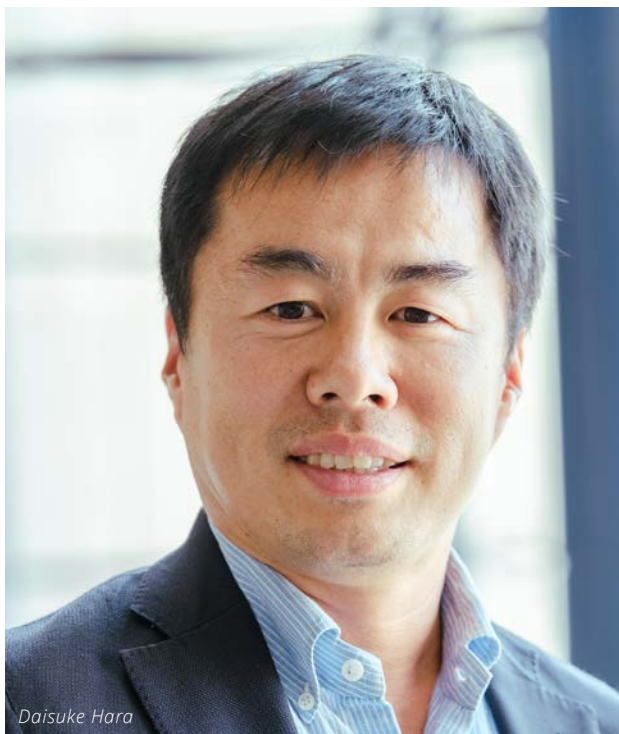
Our vision is to make it possible for humanity to preserve and utilise data efficiently, while reducing energy consumption. Storage must deliver the highest capacities with the lowest power usage."

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Peter Lieberwirth

Larry Martinez-Palomo

Daisuke Hara

Jeff Briggs

needs and reduce energy consumption. This approach is reflected in the company's roadmap towards delivering drives of 30–40 terabytes, advancing beyond the current 24TB models to meet the demands of big data and AI-driven innovation.

Lieberwirth points out that the MEA region, with its ambitious population and robust investments, represents a dynamic growth opportunity for Toshiba's storage business. He also highlights the UAE's digital-first strategy as a benchmark for progress,

describing it as a bold and necessary move that will drive development across sectors and set the tone for future growth.

"The MEA region is very dynamic, with a young, ambitious population and significant investments driving growth. This creates

excellent opportunities for us to expand our storage business and contribute to the region's digital transformation. The UAE has set the right tone. The young, competitive population will fuel strong growth and development, and the digital-first vision will drive progress across all sectors," said Lieberwirth.

Building on this vision, Larry Martinez-Palomo, Vice President and Head of Toshiba's EMEA Storage Products Division, explains that the company's mission is clear: "We preserve the world's data." He highlights how this strategy is executed across four key segments – personal storage, where external hard drives and NAS systems serve home and small business users; surveillance storage, with specialised drives created in partnership with camera and recorder manufacturers; and enterprise storage, delivered through collaborations with hyperscale data centres, global system vendors, and local integrators. Affordability is another cornerstone of the approach, as Martinez-Palomo stresses: "Each generation reduces cost per terabyte. Compared with SSDs, HDDs still provide the most cost-effective solution for large-scale storage."

In an increasingly standardised and competitive market, Toshiba sets itself apart by combining innovation with value-added services. "Differentiation is challenging, but we aim to lead through innovation," he notes, pointing to the company's external drive compatible across PC, Mac,

iOS, and Android as a unique example. He also emphasises the importance of long-term support for partners, adding: "We add value through services such as our HDD Innovation Lab in Düsseldorf, where partners and data centres can remotely test compatibility and reliability of configurations."

Regional success is also built on a strong channel ecosystem, something Jeff Briggs, General Manager – Distribution Sales, EMEA Storage Products Division, SPD, views as a cornerstone of Toshiba's growth. "Distribution is central—we remain 100% indirect for our channel business. We prioritise strong relationships with distributors, embedding our mission 'Committed to people, committed to the future,'" he explains.

The handover of MEA operations to TOSH NXT TECH Ventures has strengthened this approach, ensuring continuity and stability in local markets. "Their strong local knowledge ensures we remain close to customers, while European support services like our HDD Innovation Lab and marketing add further value," he adds.

Looking ahead, Briggs highlights a robust roadmap, pointing to near-term advancements in 30TB HDDs powered by HAMR technology. "Coupled with our customer-

focused approach and strong distributor relationships, we are confident of gaining share in enterprise and AI-driven storage," he affirms.

Technology innovation remains equally critical, with Daisuke Hara, General Manager, Assistant Vice President, of EMEA Storage Products Business Marketing, emphasising how Toshiba is aligning its portfolio with MEA priorities. "We are about to launch some new products for the surveillance market designed for higher durability and enterprise-class reliability, aligned with regional smart city initiatives and government projects," he explains.

Hara also notes how AI is transforming Toshiba's operations internally: "AI shortens development cycles and improves manufacturing by detecting failures early. This reduces waste and enhances energy efficiency in our production processes." With the rapid pace of development in markets such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, surveillance storage is becoming indispensable.

"Surveillance storage is critical in supporting smart city and government initiatives. We are focusing on growth in markets like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, where demand for secure, reliable storage is rising rapidly," Hara concludes.

> **Distribution is central—we remain 100% indirect for our channel business. We prioritise strong relationships with distributors, embedding our mission 'Committed to people, committed to the future'.”**

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