## computer news middle east

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## GLOBAL EXPERTISE DELIVERED LOCALLY

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH IGNACIO RUIZ DE EGUILAZ, MANAGING DIRECTOR AT GLOBAL IT LEADER SEIDOR MENA INJAZAT'S VP OF DIGITAL BUSINESS

PANASONIC'S HEAD OF SYSTEMS AND SOLUTIONS, MIDDLE EAST

PRESIDENT OF THE AL SOCIETY BAHRAIN





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### EDITORIAL



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On February 9th, the United Arab Emirates became the first Arab country and only the fifth country ever to reach Mars."

## OUT OF THIS WORLD

he journey the UAE has undertaken over the last 50 years has been quite remarkable, but in the year of their Golden Jubilee, the success of its Emirates Mars Mission really is astonishing.

On February 9th, the United Arab Emirates became the first Arab country and only the fifth country ever to reach Mars, and only the second country to successfully enter Mars' orbit on its first try.

The achievement has given UAE citizens a phenomenal sense of pride and has now made the country a major player in the global space race. To be able to pull off such a feat despite being relatively in its infancy as a nation is truly out of this world.

In this combined issue of CNME, we have got some fantastic interviews and op-eds.

On the front cover story, we spoke to Ignacio Ruiz de Eguilaz, Managing Director at global IT leader Seidor MENA, to learn what role the company has played in the Middle East IT ecosystem since entering the region back in 2021.

The company has acted as a catalyst for digital transformation over the years and said one of its key differentiators was the fact it challenged its customers to do better.

We also secured a brilliant interview with Sam Blatteis, CEO of MENA Catalysts, a government relations firm for high-tech companies in the Middle East.

The former Head of Google Public Policy and Public Relations in the Gulf region offered a number of key insights including that of 'Programme HQ', a Saudi concerted effort to attract digital businesses to the Kingdom.

Dr. Jassim Haji, President of the AI Society in Bahrain, outlined some of the trends and technologies he expected to see come to fruition over the next 12 months – and highlighted the transformation of the banking sector and the emergence of 'virtual banks'.

We also spoke to Hidetoshi Kaneko, Head of Systems and Solutions Department, Panasonic Middle East, to find out how the Japanese company is positioning itself to be a key player in the electrification of the automotive industry and its approach on sustainability.

Sustainability was also a key theme of our discussion with Tech Mahindra CEO, CP Gurnani, who stressed that profitability and sustainability can exist together and outlined the impact he believes 5G will play on our future society.

In addition to this, we also have interviews with Injazat, Huawei, TrueProfile.io and thought-provoking op-eds from Barco, SolarWinds and Forcepoint.

Enjoy!

Mark Forker Editor



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#### CONTENTS





Digital Innovation Partner



# ver feature: idor MENA





WOMEN IN TECH





#### 6 News

CNME rounds up the biggest regional and global developments in enterprise technology, which includes the announcement of a new partnership between Hub71 and the UAEU SIP. Aiman University is the recipient of the first Microsoft AI Health Research Grant - and Cybereason and Intel partner on new Ransomware protections.

## **10** Panasonic

Hidetoshi Kaneko, Head of Systems and Solutions Department, Panasonic Middle East, outlines his company's approach to electric vehicles and sustainable smart city solutions.

### **14** Women in Tech

Jumana Salem, VP of Digital Business X (DBX) EdTech at Injazat, is the latest in our series of features on prominent women within the IT ecosystem.



### **44** GovTech

We take a closer look at the historic Emirates Mars Mission following the successful orbit of the 'Hope Probe' to Mars, on February 9th.

## **46** TrueProfile.io

René Seifert. Co-Head of TrueProfile.io. outlines in candid detail some of the changes that have occurred in the recruitment sector since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 50 Seera

Abdulrahman Mutrib. CTO. Seera, highlights how the leading tourism company leveraged technology to help them to adapt and respond to market changes following the global health crisis, which grounded aviation and travel.

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#### NEWS

## CNS and novomind's Agile Solution for Changing Consumer Communications



Hossam Amer, novomind MEA Managing Director

#### Messaging communication business

solutions have become mandatory to enhance the customer experience. CNS Middle East, in partnership with German software house novomind, has been guiding clients through this new territory with great success using products that are shaping the market landscape with AI Messaging Communication.

Imagine a system that manages all your customer queries, politely and efficiently answering questions and filtering more complex problems to service departments, all the while learning from each positive or negative result to increase its ability to reduce customer contact time and



Hatem Hariri, CNS Middle East Managing Director

increase satisfactory resolutions. Chatbots perform these functions autonomously; they are practically unidentifiable from real people when appropriately integrated, and consumers seem to prefer the process for its relative anonymity. For one, AI eliminates language barriers—a benefit in regions with diverse population demographics. Companies can switch from an expensive contingent of live agents with a finite capacity for incoming cases to a skeleton crew of experts to step in when needed, while Chatbots respond to a virtually limitless number of incoming queries across all major digital communication channels, from WhatsApp messaging to VoIP platforms.

CNS Middle East supports its clients' mission-critical business objectives with novomind's iAGENT solutions which cover wide range of digital communication touch points including mail, Social media, chatbots in several channels including WhatsApp, web, mobile App, FB messenger, telegram also text and video chat. A strong partnership with novomind is a testament to their expertise in integrating the best solution for their clients.

"We've established our strong position in the market by carefully enlisting the most advanced partner technologies. So, it is our duty to ensure that our partner's products are used most effectively and that the result of every use-case proves our commitment to excellence", said Hatem Hariri, CNS Middle East Managing Director.

"CNS is one of the largest System integrators in Middle east who always want to introduce the latest technology and innovations to their clients, we are at novomind MEA happy to have CNS Middle East as one of our first partners in the MEA regions, who always keen to work closely with novomind MEA team to deliver the best top-notch solution satisfy and exceed customer expectations", said Hossam Amer, novomind MEA Managing Director.

## Khazna to build three new data centres to support UAE

#### Khazna, the UAE's largest supplier

of commercial wholesale data centre services, today announced that it will build multiple new data centres and increase its capacity five-fold over the next four years to provide vital infrastructure as companies and the government agencies accelerate digitisation.

The company today operates two data centres in Abu Dhabi and one in Dubai with a combined capacity of 40 megawatts; with the new expansion plan, it will have a total of 200 megawatts of IT load capacity by 2023. Multiple new data centres will be built in locations across the UAE and additional capacity



will be increased at its current sites.

Hassan Al Naqbi, Chief Executive Officer of Khazna, commented: "The UAE government and private sectors are pressing ahead with digital transformation, which has gathered pace in the last year through necessity. Demand for flexible, scaleable and secure data storage is increasing rapidly, and this trend will continue as smart city and smart government projects gather momentum, cloud computing adoption grows and 5G networks are rolled out".



#### Abu Dhabi's global tech ecosystem,

Hub71, has forged two new partnerships with The United Arab Emirates University's Science and Innovation Park (UAEU SIP) and INSEAD Middle East Campus, to upskill talent in Abu Dhabi and attract new science and technological capabilities to its growing tech community.

Through Hub71's new academic partnerships, each institution will benefit

## Hub7I drives tech talent and nurtures future entrepreneurs

from the tech ecosystem's network of partners and expert mentors to support students in addition to their start-ups receiving priority access to the Hub71 Incentive Program. The mutually beneficial partnerships also include innovation workshops, joint programs, events, hackathons and access to Hub71's vibrant WeWork x Hub71 co-working space. Graduate recruitment and internship opportunities at Hub71 start-ups will also be facilitated, stimulating job creation and deepening Abu Dhabi's talent pool.

As part of enriching its community of entrepreneurs with expert guidance, Hub71 is hosting a pool of accomplished mentors from diverse backgrounds to create meaningful connections and promote knowledge exchange.



#### The recently published global IoT

connectivity standard DECT-2020 New Radio outperforms existing cellular LPWAN solutions LTE-M and NB-IoT, says a study published by Tampere University in Finland. The standard, designed for massive and dense deployments, has ten times lower latency, and requires significantly less power than the cellular alternatives. While not in the scope of this study, the specifications of the standard also promise higher bandwidth and lower cost along with the inherently high reliability of the mesh topology,

## New global IoT standard outdoes cellular IoT alternatives

making DECT-2020 NR an attractive option for industries.

The study saw the new standard vastly outperform existing LPWAN solutions by reaching much higher node densities for the same packet e2e delay and lost packets performance bounds. The high node densities for the samee2e delay is enabled by a novel mesh that applies dynamic channel selection requiring no precise frequency planning.

DECT-2020 NR fulfils both massive machine-type communications and ultra-reliable low latency communications requirements of 5G. Reliably connecting thousands of devices is one of the cornerstones for demanding industrial 5G systems.

### Jacky's Business Solutions lists Temi and Double 3 robots for sale



Jacky's Business Solutions,

a B2B solutions provider for robotics, is offering its Temi and Double 3 robots to consumers at its retail stores and online. The two robots will also be shortly available on several online marketplaces in the region.

Temi Robot is an affordable, ideal companion using groundbreaking AI technologies and built-in powerful features such as VOIP calling, telepresence, navigation, built- in chatbot Alexa, among others. Developed on Android platform, it is customisable with applications using the SDK kits. Once fully charged, the robot can work nonstop for up to 8 hours.

Double 3, is aimed at increasing productivity of remote workers and distance learners with selfdriving and a completely new mixed-reality driver's interface. The hardware comes as a fully integrated solution with a built-in tablet that uses the latest GPU technology in the Nvidia Jetson TX2, two Intel RealSense depth sensors, two high resolution cameras, and a beam-forming microphone array. Combined with a new click-to-drive interface, obstacle avoidance, and pan/tilt/ zoom video, to provide a fully immersive remote experience for all users.

## Data Privacy Day: WhatsApp Privacy Insight by Toni El Inati



Toni El Inati - RVP Sales, META & CEE, Barracuda Networks

#### In a world where we as consumers

have become accustomed to having everything instantly available with just a few clicks, I encourage people to take the added time to think about the implications of their actions. As digital services become inextricably linked to our everyday lives, protecting our digital identities should be a top priority.

With this in mind, let's take a look at the implication of the recent WhatsApp Privacy news that's been making headline.

#### **Implication for Users:**

• At the time of its launch, WhatsApp had a very strongly stated privacy policy. But following its acquisition by Facebook it is no surprise that monetisation is a priority for the platform. These developments demonstrate the need for users to be constantly vigilant and understand that policies and practices are subject to change. After all, the companies that offer these services are for-profit businesses, and their bottom line takes precedence over their users' best interests.

#### Learnings for businesses:

• The media backlash and mass exodus of users to alternatives such as Signal and Telegram highlight just how much of a concern consumer privacy has become.

• It raises question about how data is being used by governments and businesses and whether these practices are in consumers' best interest. Ultimately transparency will be key as the media has become more vocal in bringing such security concerns to light.

• The WhatsApp privacy issue also highlights the influence of social media and other channels as 'sources of truth' for today's consumer. In little to no time, consumers can form rock solid perceptions based on information that is often speculative, incomplete, or inaccurate.

• The rapid action taken by consumers in deleting their WhatsApp accounts in droves is a good lesson for businesses that simply having a majority share of a market segment doesn't mean consumers will be willing to accept a 'take it or leave it' approach to policy changes.

Finally, businesses need to pay attention to how they protect the data of their end customers as breaches and the resultant data loss can significantly impact customer's perception and trust in the brand.

## Prisma Cloud Secures Apps with the Industry's best security



#### Palo Alto Networks today announced

a number of enhancements to Prisma Cloud, the industry's only comprehensive Cloud Native Security Platform. With these enhancements, Prisma Cloud now has the industry's most accurate web application firewall (WAF) capabilities. When securing cloud native applications, Prisma Cloud ensures scalability, automated protection and integrated protection for defence in depth.

"Customers want as much protection as possible, delivered as simply as

possible across the cloud native continuum – securing hosts, containers and Kubernetes, and serverless functions – both at runtime and across the application lifecycle. Many organisations are moving to the cloud and need to protect applications end-to-end, starting from infrastructure and going all the way to the application layer", said Varun Badhwar, senior vice president for product, Prisma Cloud, at Palo Alto Networks. "Prisma Cloud delivers the best-of-breed and comprehensive solution designed to protect these organisations from third-party attacks".

Prisma Cloud delivers cloud workload protection capabilities through a number of distinct modules including Host Security, Container Security, and Web Application and API Security.

## Ajman University gets Microsoft AI for Health Research Grant



#### Ajman University has become the

**first** institution in the UAE to be awarded the Microsoft AI for Health Research Grant, receiving a total amount of over one million dirhams.

Given the urgency of the pandemic, Microsoft's AI for Health initiative has been mobilised to focus on helping those on the front lines of research. The company is focusing efforts in five specific areas where it believes that data, analysis and the skills of data scientists can have the biggest impact and is dedicating over seventy-three million dirhams worldwide to achieve this objective.

"Ajman University (AU) is strongly committed to promoting innovation, and social impact, and this grant is very much aligned with these core values of our pioneering institution", AU Chancellor, Dr. Karim Seghir, said. "The rapid progress made through this Microsoft initiative will support our researchers in identifying sustainable solutions to the pandemic and provide timely information to policymakers for data-driven decisions that protect communities, cities and regions".

## **D-Link Redefines the Home with Digital Transformation**



#### This year at the Consumer Electronics

Show, D-Link showcased their latest mydlink, Wi-Fi 6, 5G, and 2.5 Gigabit Ethernet solutions that digitally transform the home to meet users' needs during and post pandemic. D-Link optimises the home network environment for everyone and helps them adapt to new ways of life through the use of new technologies and solutions.

#### **Home Entertainment**

D-Link's new mesh Wi-Fi system, switch, and adapters bring revolutionary Wi-Fi 6 and 2.5GE technology to users at home, including a 2021 CES Innovation Award Honouree, D-Link's USB-C to 2.5G Ethernet Adapter.

#### **Distance Learning**

D-Link enhances the digital learning experience with its 5G and Wi-Fi 6 solutions that provide high-speed connectivity and high-performance capacity.

#### **Remote Working**

D-Link's 5G solutions feature groundbreaking technologies that provide the high-speed connections and supercharged capacity for users to maximise work efficiency.

### Cybereason and Intel Drive New Ransomware Protections



Lior Div, CEO & Co-Founder, Cybereason

#### Cybereason has announced a

partnership to adopt new Intel Hardware Shield protections for Ransomware available on the 11th Gen Intel Core vPro mobile platforms. Cybereason's multilayered protection, in collaboration with Intel Threat Detection Technology, will enable full-stack visibility to uncover ransomware attacks.

The solution represents the first instance where PC hardware plays a direct role in ransomware cyber defence to better protect enterprise endpoints from costly attacks, and underscores both companies' commitment to empowering defenders by reversing the adversary advantage.

Cybereason's superior prevention, detection and response capabilities combined with Intel Hardware Shield protects enterprise customers from ransomware while improving overall security performance.

"This collaboration with Intel to add CPU based threat detection bolsters our long history and industry-leading capabilities in detecting and eradicating ransomware. The combination of best-of-class hardware, software, and security know-how provides defenders with full-stack visibility critical to ending the era of double extortion that is currently costing organisations hundreds of millions each year", said Lior Div, CEO and Co-Founder, Cybereason.



PANASONIC

## SMART, SUSTAINABLE, STRATEGIC: PANASONIC OUTLINES BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Hidetoshi Kaneko**, Director and the Division Head of System Solutions and Communication Division at Panasonic Middle East, to find out how the Japanese electronics company is positioning itself to play a key role in the electrification of the global automotive industry, the diversification of its portfolio, its approach to sustainability - and its renewed focus on smart city solutions. Reacting the EV backing the EV boom, and this was evidenced further by its recent announcement with electric car manufacturer Tesla. What role is Panasonic going to play in reshaping our future society? Yes, Panasonic's long-term partnership with Tesla illustrates our commitment to the future of the EV industry. So far, we have produced and shipped over

have produced and shipped over 3 billion cells from our Nevadabased Giga factory, and have invested in a 14th assembly line to increase capacity.

We also collaborated in a joint venture with Toyota last year to produce EV batteries as Toyota shifts from conventional gasolinebased cars to electric vehicles by 2025. We intend to expand this sales channel throughout the industry; meanwhile we are also focusing on developing a new generation solid state battery to replace the lithium-ion currently being produced.

As the CE Show made it very clear and with the recent announcement from Apple, EV technologies will eventually overtake the car industry and will continue to evolve over the next decade. And you can count on the fact that Panasonic will continue as a leader in this field.

Panasonic has been aggressive in terms of its approach to R&D and has invested in futuristic technologies such as robotics and automation. However, can you tell us about the recent initiative you launched which tested the acceptance of automatic delivery robots in Japan?

Yes, the growth of e-commerce and the increase in demand for home delivery services, have created a serious shortage of home delivery staff to supply the demand. There is also an urgent need to address

Hidetoshi Kaneko Director and the Division Head of System Solutions and Communication Division at Panasonic Middle East the "new normal" that includes contactless interactions.

Recognising this, the Fujisawa Sustainable Smart Town in Fujisawa city in Japan and Panasonic began testing a compact, low-speed residential delivery service EV robot in November 2020. The selfdriving robots are expected to "go live", making deliveries beginning this February.

We intend and expect that this new service in which people and robots work together will contribute to more vibrant communities.

Because we are one of the very few manufacturers who provide holistic indoor and outdoor solutions from the standpoint of energy control, safety, security, comfort and other aspects of necessary life-enhancing factors, Panasonic has been a key driver of the success of the Smart City operation.

So, in the Middle East, working with smart-city owners is one of the key business strategies that we are promoting in 2021 and for the years to come.

Panasonic has already documented its focus to the B2B sector with investments in key industry verticals such as education, remote healthcare, and the automotive sectors, but how does Panasonic plan to broaden and diversifying its brand strategy over the coming years? Let me touch on remote education and healthcare because I already touched on our involvement in the automotive industry.

First off, with respect to remote education, one of the key factors is how we can mimic the live environment, which is created by teachers and students and recreate it in the online environment.

Panasonic has been a leader in the broadcast industry and in that role, we have been an Olympic sponsor since 1988: many of the cutting-edge broadcasting technologies being used in our remote cameras can be used in a classroom environment.

A teacher can conduct their class without having to be conscious of the camera because our cameras can be pre-set for automatic tracking, panning, tilting – and zooming for preregistered teachers. This makes the operations very easy and allows students to participate in a class via either a laptop or mobile device.

The software we offer captures all lectures and it makes it easy for students and teachers to send a video clip once the session is over; and the students benefit from the rich functions including word search for any word spoken in a lecture.

In the Middle East & African region, we are working with many schools and universities to make remote education more efficient.

With respect to Healthcare, our focus in this region is on robotics. Panasonic has been an early adopter of robotics: already a decade ago, we



### Panasonic's long-term partnership with Tesla illustrates our commitment to the future of the EV industry."

launched the first generation of what we call "HOSPI". HOSPI is essentially a robot with AI and autonomous driving capabilities.

The robot weighs 170 kg, is 140cm tall, and looks like a walking doll with a cute face. It detects and avoids obstacles while driving to a pre-set destination point, requiring no human interaction.

In the Middle Eastern and African region, we have been selling this type of robot to hospitals and we intend to expand the business because we firmly believe this type of robotics will further expand contactless operations which are essential in the hospital environment.

The typical use-cases in the hospitals may include transporting medicines and blood samples from one location to another, guiding patients from the reception area to a designated room, spraying disinfectants to kill germs, bacteria and viruses as HOSPI walks around the hospital floors and lastly, it provides the ability for doctors and nurses to be able to communicate with a patient remotely.

Regarding any new technologies that Panasonic has introduced or may introduce in the future, we are trying to bring them into this region if the demand is there.

Can you provide us with more information on your approach to sustainability – and some of the solutions that you have designed for smart cities, energy, security, and mobility connected with IoT? In terms of smart city solutions, Panasonic is focusing on security in this region. We have a strong lineup of security systems for both residential and control rooms applications.

We have state-of-the-art video intercom systems that can be installed in villas, duplexes, and compounds and plan to make the entire system IoT-enabled.

It can be controlled by a smart phone application called "MirAIe" – a Japanese phrase which may be literally translated as "toward the future."

This is the second region after India that is adopting



There is an urgent need to address the "new normal" that includes contactless interactions."



this new IoT platform. The strength of this software is that it is connected to Amazon Echo, Google Assistant and in the fact that we are proposing inhouse solutions varying from security systems, IoTenabled appliances, lighting switch control, vent fans, air conditioners, air purifiers, solar panels and many other inhouse products that we offer.

Altogether it will help the end-users ensure the ultimate comfort, safety and security of their living environment. We are one of the very few companies globally which can supply all the components of these indoor and outdoor solutions from a smart city standpoint. No one brand can do what we can do.

If you are part of the facility management team that manages retail stores, malls, theaters, restaurants, libraries, parking lots and others in the smart city environment, Panasonic can provide both the software and hardware for AV solutions for your control room.

Some of the current solutions that we provide include mask detection, social distancing detection, traffic management, parking lot management, and face recognition, among many others.

Panasonic has vast experience in providing smart-city solutions in various parts of the world: Fujisawa Japan and some parts of the USA, for example, and our plan is to do so in Saudi Arabia, UAE and other countries in this region.



### INJAZAT

## HUMANITY KNOWS NO LIMITS

In this month's edition of Women in Tech, we spoke to **Jumana Salem**, Vice President of Digital Business X(DBX) EdTech at Injazat, who highlighted the misconceptions around gender equality in the UAE, how the digital transformation provider leveraged its solutions during the COVID-19 pandemic – and the role technology is playing in education.

> ou have enjoyed a distinguished career in education and IT, both globally and in the Middle East region, but can you outline to our readers in detail what your primary roles and responsibilities are in your current role as Vice President of Digital Transformation at Injazat? I joined Injazat at an interesting

> and challenging time – because it was not only the peak of the

We engage with our clients, we talk strategy, we ideate, and we implement." pandemic last year, but it was also in the midst of Injazat's ambitious transformation.

The new model really played into my own strengths. I found myself surrounded by colleagues who are like-minded and we set out to empower our partners and clients with tools that can help them use the acceleration (in infrastructure, in access to online resources, in device penetration) to design wellorchestrated digital experiences.

Today, the EdTech vertical focuses on all aspects of lifelong learning, with an eye towards our strategic objectives which are tied to the UAE's national agenda. One of the examples that I am personally most excited about will be announced soon and it brings some exciting tech to important issues like employability, Emiratization, and the use of advanced tech in some cool new ways to promote these goals. One of the most evident consequences of the global health crisis was a rapid acceleration in digital transformation across the Middle East region. What role did Injazat play in terms of helping those companies that had previously resisted emerging technologies to adapt, evolve and respond?

Transformation did indeed accelerate, but in my sector it was beyond an acceleration in infrastructure and penetration of apps and solutions, it came with a complete disruption to what education has looked like for hundreds of years.

Globally, the initial, and well-intentioned reaction was to allow access to more apps or additional digital curriculum. The result was in many cases a fragmented, frustrated experience and a powerful realisation that simply aggregating these options will not really address the pain points.

This jived well with what we were doing at Injazat anyway, and it matched how we are set up to operate. We have incredible teams who can bring the best solutions, helping partners on their journeys to cloud, and introducing them to the right emerging tech (lovingly known internally as "Engine 1") but we know that is the first and not the only step.

So, we also have our second growth engine, "Engine 2", where we focus on how to take all of this and make sure it is assembled and orchestrated in a way that positions our partner for sustainable future growth. We call this InGenius, where we aim to help our clients see the art of the possible and to map out the end-to-end experience for them and the communities they serve.

We engage with our clients, we talk strategy, we ideate, and we implement. We then bring in a rich ecosystem of global partners and players to be able to quickly implement this experience.

As for the challenges, of course it was not simple at the start of the pandemic to ask well intentioned people to take a moment away from thinking "solutions, solutions, solutions" to ease their immediate pain points, but we managed to persevere and its paid off into lasting partnerships When we come together as one, humanity knows no limits"

that go well beyond the typical IT or tech advisory.

Gender disparity in the IT industry is something that many commentators feel there is still a long way to go in terms of addressing. Have you noticed a seismic change in mindset in terms of women holding senior positions since you first entered the IT and educational domain in the Middle East?

I think there are a lot of misconceptions about women in our region. I think a lot of people mistake our countries, for a place where gender equality is more of an afterthought.

In fact, in the UAE, I have seen that there is a great deal of effort and mindful planning to ensure women have a place and voice at the table. And we are seizing the moment; women are taking those seats at the table here in the UAE whether in the boardroom or leading the entrepreneurial wave in innovative startups.

We have a long way to go, but the direction has been set and the progress is tangible. It is something that you see is put into practice on a day-to-day basis – I notice

16



this especially in my dealings with universities.

I'm not alone in this assessment, according to a recent McKinsey report, Women at work: Job opportunities in the Middle East set to double with the Fourth Industrial Revolution, The share of women in professional and technical jobs is set to more than double by 2030 through digitization, online platforms, and entrepreneurship.

The report has identified four indicators that have relatively higher correlation with women's participation in professional and technical jobs: (1) education; (2) financial inclusion; (3) digital inclusion; and (4) legal protection.

As for Injazat, we are leading the way in the Abu Dhabi tech space in terms of providing career development programs that empower Emirati women to advance their careers in the technology sector. Our associate development program currently employs 111 Emirati women working across multiple departments.

What are your predictions for 2021 - and what sort of global statement do you envisage EXPO 2020 making to the rest of the world? EXPO 2020 is all about challenging the status quo through innovation and human progress. EXPO 2020's global message – "When we come together as one, humanity knows no limits" is echoed by Injazat's strategy and vision – of "empowering human achievement".

At Injazat we are all about encouraging a 'what if' mindset – a mindset that has taken on the role of a problem-solver, an orchestrator of end-to-end solutions that accelerates innovation for our clients and helps them bring their ideas to life, and we are proud it ties in with the essence of EXPO 2020. But our overarching end goal always remains to positively impact the communities we serve.

I'm personally excited for EXPO 2020 and my insider tip is to visit the RewirEd Dubai Cares stand if you are interested in learning more about some ambitious solutions from the Edtech community.

In terms of tech predictions, we are seeing a shift in Education around Tech, the recognition that tech is a means and not an end towards our ultimate goal and like technology we need to reassess our notions and conventional wisdom about the human and social element of education and how that has a necessary symbiosis with technology.



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#### AI SOCIETY BAHRAIN

## SMART TRANSFORMATION

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to technology firebrand **Dr. Jassim Haji**, President of AI Society Bahrain, to find out what his assessment of the IT ecosystem is following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic - and what trends and technologies he expects to see emerge in the new digital economy.

> he consequences and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has rather inevitably restructured the entire social fabric that binds us all together - and has fundamentally changed the way we live and work forever. However, it also drastically upended the culture and changed the mindsets that existed with a lot of enterprises here in the Middle East region.

As a result, we have seen exponential growth in digital transformation projects, and a mass adoption of transformative technologies such as AI and Machine Learning.

Dr. Jassim Haji is one of the most respected and prominent

Since the onset of the global health crisis in March of last year, attitudes towards IT spending and investment in emerging and transformative technologies have changed." technology thought leaders in the GCC region and in a candid interview with CNME, he outlines some of the most pressing issues in today's IT climate, which has been termed the 'new normal'.

One of the welcomed changes experienced by his peers over the last number of months has been the absence of a stringent approach to the allocation of budgets for the IT department.

"Every CIO that I've spoken to in the last few months has expressed their delight with their budgets for the year ahead. Traditionally, when they submitted their annual operating costs for the year ahead it would be slashed by around 90%. The perception prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was that many of the technologies, such as AI, were too futuristic and not needed," said Haii.

He added that decisionmakers have always been relatively conservative and cautious when it comes to how much they should invest in IT, but he conceded that mindsets have changed. "Since the onset of the global health crisis in March of last year, attitudes towards IT spending and investment in emerging and transformative technologies have changed. Technology allowed businesses to keep the lights on during the pandemic. A progressive mindset towards technology is a necessity to survive in this data-driven digital economy," said Haji.

The President of the AI Society Bahrain highlighted how he believes there is an ongoing issue in the IT ecosystem over the differences between digital transformation and smart transformation – and stressed that a distinction needs to be made between the two.

"There appears to me to be a lot of confusion around how you determine digital transformation and smart transformation. For example, I was a guest speaker at a recent Digital Banking conference here in the Middle East, and before my speech I listened to a panel discussion, which was focused on the future of technology and banking, and

quite frankly I found it quite scary. These people are leaders in the banking sector, but all they were talking about was digital transformation and automation, and I thought these are the people who should be perpetuating the future of technology and investment to their stakeholders, but instead they were talking about the future through the digital transformation of traditional outdated models such as mobile applications and websites," said Haji.

Haji stated that he was alarmed by some of the deliberations made by the panelists during their discussion and was unequivocally blunt in his response, stressing that investments in technologies need to be strategic.

"I was quite blunt and informed them that I disagreed with all of them. It is critically important that when your spending money on technology, you acknowledge the fact that it's not like an office decoration that you can change in a year, it's a long-term strategic investment. If you start going that way and shift to Machine Learning, IoT and 5G then you are going to be faced with a big hurdle to jump. They need to start now, and they need to start implementing frameworks for it - and I came to the conclusion from listening to the discussion that they had not yet determined what is the right path for them - wanting to transform is great, but it has to be 'smart', otherwise it's not going to be a success," said Haji. According to Haji there

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Data is there for machines to keep learning and by using historical data to understand the patterns can enable data scientists to make business forecasts and more sound decision making."

are three key pillars that define what he describes as 'real transformation'. The first of which is data science, understanding your data, but more importantly leveraging it to empower you to make decisions that have a positive impact on your operations.

The first stage, or core value of real transformation in my opinion is your data analytics. Data is going to determine your future, and it's going to determine the future for countries, let alone enterprises, so data really is key. It's not about your technician taking your data and simply storing it, the problem is that 90% of data is stored the way files were stored 20 years ago, which serves no purpose as it is ultimately unused, but data is there for you to use everyday and make decisions in realtime that provides intrinsic value to your organisation. Data is there for machines to keep learning and by using historical data to understand the patterns can enable data scientists to make business forecasts and more sound decision making," said Haji.

The second pillar of real transformation according to Haji is in algorithms and statistical data analysis, which as he points out is an area where there is growing demand globally from companies, who are bemoaning a lack of talent.

"I am currently taking part in a program with Universities, which has been designed to select candidates for advanced AI training, but we don't look at how good they are in IT, it doesn't matter, because I know they'll learn it, or can do a course in programming or something. What is important for us is that they are proficient in mathematics, statistics, and algorithms," said Haji. The dynamic IT leader added

20



that a student could be a genius with very little IT background and can be used to help companies build future technologies.

"On a global scale there is a huge shortage of resources and there is a great demand for these skills, namely data analytics and understanding algorithms. If you look at Google and Microsoft's policy of recruitment to bridge this talent acquisition gap, it doesn't matter if you don't have a University degree anymore, as long as you have the skills and knowledge required in these areas then you'll get the job. A University education is a bonus, but it's not a necessity anymore," said Haji.

The third pillar and in his opinion the least important of the three pillars was in relation to the IT in terms of natural language such as Java and Python, which he believes would be more cost effective if it is outsourced.

"Why do you need networking and programming when you can outsource it and you can do it cheaply? If you don't think like that then you're going to struggle. The two key pillars can remain inhouse, and the third part can be outsourced because it is simply much, much cost effective and is more practical," said Haji.

Haji pointed to a study by Gartner, which claimed that 80% of the banks across the world will not be presented in the same way as they are today in 10 years. It is being predicted that traditional banks will make way for 'virtual banks''.

"Today, we have three types of banks. Traditional banks are very cumbersome, and they do limited automation, of course they do have some automation in the back office for their core banking to enable their employees to work with the systems. The second type of banks are banks that embrace digital transformation. They have retained their employees and physical branches, but they are providing much more a customer service driven experience, by giving their customers greater control and autonomy in terms of how they bank. The third type is virtual banks, and these are banks that rely on Machine Learning and smart technologies, and have no physical branches, and no employees," said Haji.

When asked if these 'virtual banks' were an extension to global banks such as JP Morgan and HSBC, or separate entities entirely, Haji made another important distinction.

"Yes, within the concept of virtual banks there are two categories. The first category are financial institutions that have cautiously adopted virtual banks and placed them under their overall organisational umbrella, but there are other banks that are completely new and have been created through significant investment," said Haji.

However, he did stress that he was not an advocate for the first category of virtual banks – and believed this type of business model was not conducive for creating an environment which allowed innovation to flourish, which the second category exclusively caters for.

"Banks in the future will certainly comprise more of the second category. The problem with the first is that they still want to retain control, but this stifles innovation in my opinion, and if you're an established bank and you create a virtual bank then inevitably your costs will be split between the operating cost of your virtual bank and your main physical bank, whereas as the virtual banks of the future, have no real overheads, physical branches and in many cases employees, which will yield better results and greater flexibility," concluded Haji. Come

### SOLARWINDS

## MULTI-CLOUD CAN 'DRIVE' DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

**Sacha Giese,** Head Geek at SolarWinds, has penned an exclusive op-ed for February/March combined edition of CNME, in which he outlines how a multicloud approach and strategy can be a driver for digital transformation.



n most regions in the world, cloud adoption is slower than in the USA or China, for various reasons. But since the beginning of the pandemic and the necessary measures to allow remote work we see an increase.

Plans for digital transformation which spanned the next few years have been accelerated and became reality within just a few months.

And even though knowledge and expertise of IT professionals is continuously increasing, we get loads of questions regards managing the service level of a cloud environment, and more complex multi-cloud environments in particular.

There are various and valid reasons why a modern organisation would use multiple cloud providers instead of just one.

In some cases, the driver behind multi-cloud is to increase the availability of an application.

Using more than one provider allows active/active and active/ passive designs. Multi-cloud high availability is the only valid form of an active/active design and could be used to prevent outages of a single provider, but also of a specific region as a whole, or with DNS.

In an active/passive design, the second cloud provider acts as a failover in a disaster recovery, not only for provider outages but also temporary attacks, like a DDOS.

Both ways are crucial for any business who plans to get serious with offering digital services. Customers want access from any device, any location, and at any time, so availability and reliability are amongst the most important pillars.

In most cases, on the other hand, the intention is to use both—or multiple—providers based on the current business need, or to split a process between them. The most common model is to use one provider for the production environment, and a different one for preprod/dev. This prevents accidental changes on the production system that could feel like an act of self-inflicted sabotage to the business.

It could also help save money, considering a development environment doesn't need to be available 24/7 and could automatically suspend based on the dev-business hours. Yes, even developers would like to go home after work. At least once a week.

A clear separation of platforms based on projects also helps with billing in general, as there might be a specific budget for a project and it's easier to keep control if the bills from vendor A go into the budget pool of project A, etc.

For international organisations, who are concerned with not losing the sovereignty of their data, the situation is a bit different.

Multi-cloud can be a perfect way to stay compliant. Sensitive data could be stored in "local" private clouds, which are basically datacentres inside the region, where controlling data and access is feasible.

It stays encrypted, and the latest innovation and theoretically endless resources of the major, public cloud providers can be used for compute, whilst still remaining encrypted. The decryption happens on the end devices, corporate laptops used by employees wherever they are, with an enforced two factor authentication policy.

Whatever the reasons for a multi cloud deployment, management and transparency are important parts of the digital strategy.

As the performance data looks different on each platform, for example proprietary CloudWatch on AWS<sup>®</sup> and PowerShell<sup>®</sup> on Azure, an independent monitoring system helps with collecting and visualising key performance indicators. Whatever the reasons for a multi cloud deployment, management and transparency are important parts of the digital strategy."

Solutions like the SolarWinds Orion® Platform supports monitoring of AWS® and Azure® environments out of the box, and allows to compare data from both cloud providers on top of managing on-premises entities, or other cloud providers using standard protocols

#### What Data Should Be Collected?

Short answer: A lot. But it's a bit more complicated than that.

In general, the API calls will retrieve information about the underlying infrastructure and start with regions/locations, network information like IP, DNS and connections, information about storage including attached volumes, more specific information like placement groups and availability zones, more general info like resource use, and some security bits.

Azure is a bit more "accessible" using PowerShell, so it's easier to collect specific information like site-to-site connections, or subscription information.

To get information from the OS or application level, an agent on the VM/instance is required. The agent is available for Windows® and various flavors of Linux®. It works in a pushmode, automatically sending metrics to the monitoring platform. Other ways will collect Amazon® Route 53 and Azure DNS zone and their records, as well as V-Nets and their gateways, or storage.

#### What About the Connections?

Often overlooked when monitoring in general is the connectivity between resources. What's easy in an old-school environment is a bit of a challenge from one cloud provider to another.

A common and simple use case could be an application sitting in AWS, maybe a SharePoint® Server, but its database is hosted in Azure because of the attractive SQL licensing.

An automated application dependency mapping can discover the relation between them and even put it on a map for dynamic visualisation:

We learned already it's not a big deal to control both the machines and the application independently of the actual location/deployment type, but the IT team needs to ensure they play nicely together.

This is where a TCP based hop-by-hop analysis come in handy to show each single node in the path between the app and its database:

Using an independent monitoring system is a huge advantage as it allows you to merge individual layers, metrics, and variables collected from a hybrid multi-cloud environment into what's important in the end: IT-based business processes keeping the organisation alive, and help improving digital transformation even in difficult times.

### SEIDOR MENA

## GLOBAL EXPERTISE DELIVERED LOCALLY

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with Ignacio **Ruiz de Eguilaz**, Managing Director at global IT leader Seidor MENA, to find out how the company has acted as a catalyst for change and transformation since entering the GCC region in 2014.

> n an engaging interview, the charismatic Managing Director of Seidor MENA, kickstarted the conversation by highlighting that the decision to penetrate the marketplace in the Middle East, was strategic and part of group long-term plan.

"When Seidor MENA enters a new market it's always a very strategic decision – and we always look at it with a longterm view and commitment. We are not for short term projects here in the Middle East, fly people in and then leave. We are here to create local knowledge in the market and have strong teams located domestically, so that we are close to our local customers" said Ruiz de Eguilaz. He added that the

company's mantra is that they

bring their global expertise but deliver it 'locally'.

We have a deep knowledge on technologies, especially SAP, because it is our main technology provider. It is critically important to have the ability to deliver our services locally and have teams that understand the culture and business environment here in the region," said Ruiz de Eguilaz.

He also stressed the importance of being cognisant of the fact that with the IT ecosystem awash with new technology you know what value can be derived from these technologies for your customers.

"We complement our broad SAP knowledge we have with other applications, because the market is booming with different technologies, so you

FEBRUARY 2021

From an operational

believe that our main

differentiator from

other competitors

our customers."

is that we challenge

point of view I



really need to understand what the impact and outcome is of all these emerging technologies for the customers, and this is what Seidor MENA brings to the table here in the Middle East," said Ruiz de Eguilaz.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted every aspect of our daily lives as we were all forced to embrace a new climate that was termed as the 'new normal'. According to the Managing Director, the main objective for Seidor MENA at the onset of the global health crisis was to keep the projects that they were managing operational, but conceded it was a big challenge.

"We made significant investments in collaborative tools for our consulting team and we conducted a complete training on how to effectively use these new tools and take advantage of working remotely. We invested in emotional support for our project managers to help them understand the stress levels of the entire team. Knowing the customer's businesses well and keeping the projects afloat, we also expanded the support team headcount which ultimately enabled us to make sure smooth customer operations and to stand out by providing great service," said Ruiz de Eguilaz.

Interestingly, he further noted that they quickly discovered that productivity within his own company increased ten-fold, and that people were noticeably more committed, and their meetings were significantly effective.

He also outlined how they worked collaboratively with their customers to better understand how their priorities had been altered and shifted as market demands changed due to COVID-19.

"Before the full force of the pandemic struck, some customers for example had expressed an interest in pursuing a finance project, but that all quickly changed - and all of a sudden they needed an e-commerce platform up and running because they now needed to sell online to maintain their business continuity. It was important for us to determine what direction they wanted to go in, so we could modify their priorities and help their team to adapt to these changes effectively," said Ruiz de Eguilaz.

The Managing Director of Seidor MENA disclosed that their approach in terms of helping businesses migrate to the cloud is an advisory one, because quite simply for most of their customers these technologies are completely new. However, he did stress that their knowledge and expertise on the application side gives them a huge market advantage. "Technology has important

influence on business operations and it effects an organisation's



We are very straightforward, and we like to have a very clear scope of work, which allows us to manage expectations." ability to communicate with their customers. Especially, in today's busy business environment, it is important to be agile and serve customers quickly. So, it's extremely important for customers to know the technology impact. We are coming from the application side, so we have an intrinsic understanding of the different solutions and the change management strategy we are offering is a big advantage. Ultimately, understanding customer's operations and business goals, and with proper technology in place, SEIDOR offers holistic business strategy approach," said Ruiz de Eguilaz.

He also stated that these transitions to the cloud are a great opportunity for improvement.

"Customers are accelerating their migrations to the cloud to keep pace with current circumstances, here our objective is not just simply implement what they want, but advise them out of the box integrations. We are not here to move things around and lift and shift. We position ourselves as a strategic long term SAP technology partner, complementing with solutions such as RPA, AI and datamining, to really enhance our offering. It's very important to bring value to every interaction we do with our customers, otherwise customer's will feel that they are paying for no change," said Ruiz de Eguilaz.

Seidor was founded in 1982, and has managed to establish itself a global IT leader and a champion for transformation, when pressed on the success of Seidor MENA since entering the Gulf region in 2014, Eguilaz



stated that there were two main factors behind their success.

"As I stated earlier, SEIDOR has a long-term strategy and when we enter a new market we are here to stay. We have invested heavily in the region and we build and create local teams, because we firmly believe that we need to give back to the societies in which we operate in as part of our value proposition as a company – and that is a key differentiator for us," said Ruiz de Eguilaz.

He also highlighted how the company has enjoyed five years of organic growth and that they made several acquisitions in the market in order for them to be able to expand and have more geographical reach across the region and be in a position to operate in different countries at the same time. He also stressed that their ability to manage expectations and define a clear blueprint and strategy with its customers was another key factor in their phenomenal success in the Middle East.

"From an operational point of view I believe that our main differentiator from other competitors is that we challenge our customers. Like I said, we don't provide what customers want, but what they really need. We like to challenge the customer to get the best options and find the right approach because if you don't challenge, especially here in the Middle East then you don't get the right results. In this way, we provide the best technology deployment to them."

The dynamic IT leader also claimed that another key

component in the success of Seidor MENA is the direct nature of the way they conduct their business.

"We are pretty straightforward, and we like to have a transparent scope of work, which allows us to manage expectations. Many businesses here in the Middle East, have been guilty of overpromising - and customers believe they are going to be connected to the moon, but the reality is completely different. I think once you establish transparent communication with your customers and they understand clearly what they are going to get then this creates trust and fosters an environment that leads to a seamless project delivery, and this is what we do," concluded Ruiz de Eguilaz **come** 



FEBRUARY 2021

#### **TECH MAHINDRA**

## A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **CP Gurnani**, Managing Director and CEO, Tech Mahindra, to find out the company's vision on sustainability, determining if profitability and sustainability can coincide together - and the impact 5G will have on the digital economy.

lobal enterprises are beginning to prioritise sustainability much, much more in their business strategy as part of their efforts to curtail the devastating effects of climate change. However, what steps have Tech Mahindra taken in terms of their approach to sustainability? In this age of Digital Transformation, there has

been a clear shift in business priorities from being just 'profitable' to driving a 'positive social impact'. The age of social media and heightened public scrutiny has added further steam to this.

In this age of Digital Transformation, there has been a clear shift in business priorities from being just 'profitable' to driving a 'positive social impact'." The focus now is on 'Triple Bottom Line (TBL): profit, people, and the planet

Ensuring sustainability requires persistence. At Tech Mahindra, we are committed to pursue plans that will have long-term impacts on the communities and will lead to a balance between sustainability and overall business profitability.

As a responsible business entity, Tech Mahindra concentrates on integrating sustainability into all aspects of the business and develops strategies for Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Governance.

The company has undertaken a thoughtful and comprehensive program to reduce its absolute scopes 1 and 2 GHG (Greenhouse Gas) emissions 22% by 2030 and 50% by 2050, from a 2016 base-year.

Tech Mahindra aims to leverage technology enabled green solutions to tread on the path of responsible growth and is actively engaged in various Smart cities projects to undertake a modernisation drive.

Our sustainability practices and initiatives in our journey

towards a zero-carbon economy include, implementing an internal carbon pricing, achieving approved sciencebased targets, investing in green technology solutions, inducting our associates to spread advocacy and awareness of climate change, and encouraging green activities in their professional and personal lives.

Some of the other sustainability initiatives include reducing water and energy consumption across buildings, waste reduction, using renewable sources of energy for power generation, achieving carbon neutrality, making supply chains sustainable, and employee and customer engagement.

With a structured stakeholder programme, Tech Mahindra has been able to design strategies and initiatives to build solutions, which not just improve its sustainability credentials but reinforce the overall business philosophy too.

Sustainability is perceived to be expensive, and some climate change activists believe that whilst many enterprises are talking a good game when it comes to sustainability, they are still not doing enough. Do you think sustainability is expensive, or can it co-exist with profitability - and are global entities doing enough when it comes to their strategy on sustainability?

Profitability and sustainability are not conflicting goals; in fact, they must go hand-in-hand to achieve an equitable economic growth. Today, the emphasis placed by many organisations on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), is proof of the realisation that progress is most achievable in an inclusive society and shouldering the responsibility collectively is of utmost importance.

COVID-19 has allowed all of us to reconfigure our priorities and understand the importance of building a sustainable world - by focusing on healthcare and leveraging technology to enable new ways of working.

At Tech Mahindra, we are committed towards building a sustainable business with responsibility and by creating value for our stakeholders, while also keeping in mind the long-term impacts on the environment. It is time to focus on and implement technology-led solutions that will help us reboot.

In June last year, Tech Mahindra signed a UN (United Nations) Global Compact Initiative Statement on climate action reiterating our commitment towards carbon neutrality and calls for a netzero recovery from COVID-19.

## Profitability and sustainability are not conflicting goals; in fact, they must go hand-in-hand to achieve an equitable economic growth."

Tech Mahindra reaffirms the science-based commitment of achieving net-zero carbon emissions while calling on governments to "prioritise a faster and fairer transition from a grey to a green economy."

By moving towards a zerocarbon resilient economy, Tech Mahindra aims to reduce carbon footprint, emissions and will conserve energy using new-age technologies like internet of things, artificial intelligence and blockchain.

Furthermore, an internal carbon price of \$10/ton CO2 has also been implemented by us to boost green investments and we have also adopted a low emission technology path to increase the use of renewable energy from 1.7% in 2016 to 18% in 2020. Moreover, at Tech Mahindra has also taken targets to increase the renewable source of energy to 50% by 2025.

Tech Mahindra has joined 155 global companies in calling for policies that will build resilience against future shocks by supporting efforts to hold global temperature rise to within 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, in line with reaching net-zero emissions well before 2050.

You have been a prolific attendee of the World Economic Forum over the years, but it has had its critics over the years. But in your opinion, how important is the World Economic Forum in terms of being a think-tank that can reshape the world and help us develop new ideas to overcome some of the most pressing challenges facing the world today?

It is a forum to highlight and reiterate global issues that impact the world. As an Economic Forum it attracts corporate leaders who are able



to contribute towards bringing about change.

We are able to take stock of how we met our commitments or fell short and dedicate the year ahead to improving the standard.

#### Qualcomm CEO, Steve

Mollenkopf, said that 5G will have the same impact on the world as the introduction of electricity. What impact do you foresee 5G having on the global economy, and when can we expect to see it become commercially deployed on a widescale basis in cities such as Dubai, London and New York? 5G will be the lighthouse that will guide us in navigating the uncharted waters of Digital Transformation and Industry 4.0. In this voyage, Tech Mahindra will be an eager partner for all CSPs (Communication Service Providers) that want to accelerate 5G adoption and reimagine the enterprises' journey to the future of connectivity.

5G will be the glue that will bind the digital future and bring in immense growth in fields of medicine, agriculture, education.

To me, 5G represents opportunities for transformation and early adopters will reap the benefits. In the Middle East, we see 5G as a big bet with our focus on Networks of the Future.

5G will open up a plethora of possibilities, and preparations for the same are underway. The world is keenly looking forward to 5G roll out and it is expected to happen soon.

Tech Mahindra has enjoyed phenomenal success since its inception in 1986. In your expert opinion, what is that differentiates Tech Mahindra from its rivals and how has it managed to sustain its success over such a long period of time in an ultra-competitive environment?

We are the digital change makers and we are here to disrupt old ideas, blaze new trails and create connected experiences for a connected world.

We will continue to RISETM to be an agile, customercentric and purpose-led company delivering best-inclass technology led business solutions for our stakeholders.

Our leadership team leads from the front.

We believe in localisation and have a strong presence in the geographies where we do business. Here in the Middle East, we are in all six GCC (countries and have 2500 resources in the region.

A huge focus on localisation across all countries translates to increased local talent hiring, local investments and a focus on CSR. The 'Think Global, Act Local' mantra in practice has brought dividends wherever we are and we have a footprint across the globe. 31



## COLLABORATE TO ACCELERATE

**David Shi,** President of Huawei Enterprise Business Group, Middle East, has claimed that collaboration is key to accelerating industry-wide innovation, in a candid interview with CNME Editor Mark Forker.

uawei's Enterprise Business Group has been responsible for pioneering innovation and growth since entering the ME region. Can you give us a comprehensive overview of the group's future strategy for the next 'digital decade'? Digital transformation is the biggest trend at present, which will continue for the foreseeable future. The world around us is embracing next-generation technologies more and more, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated the process.

Things have changed rapidly since early 2020; there was a sudden shift towards remote working and learning, and many industries had to evolve practically overnight in order to meet the needs of a socially distanced world. Some are still

6

Huawei is well-positioned to support businesses and governments in their digital transformation journey." evolving. The ICT ecosystem has never been more in the spotlight as a result of this.

Huawei believes in the importance of collaboration, and we've been an early advocate for open ICT ecosystems, collaboration, and transparent industry standards that can facilitate industrywide innovation.

Companies need to implement a collaborative, ecosystem-based innovation strategy if they are to emerge as global technological leaders through digital transformation. As a leader in the field of ICT, Huawei recognises that the success of digital transformation is dependent upon partnerships between key stakeholders, such as government, private enterprises, education, and ICT providers. Synergy throughout the ecosystem will enable a faster transition into the next digital decade.

In 2020, as 5G has been rolled out at scale worldwide, connectivity, cloud, AI, computing, and industrial applications have all come together to create unprecedented opportunities for the ICT sector.

Therefore, at Huawei, we believe that the ICT industry needs to focus on creating new value with synergy across five key tech domains. We firmly believe that the tremendous potential of digital transformation can be unleashed on the basis of synergy across five tech domains, in which connectivity, cloud computing, AI and applications develop with the power of 5G in ways never seen before.

These five tech domains will create unprecedented opportunities for governments and enterprises in the region. The synergy among these five domains will enable more efficiency and productivity, bringing many industries into the Fourth Industrial Revolution and allowing them to thrive based on their digital capabilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic sparked huge digitalisation across the Middle East. What role did Huawei's technologies play in these sectors responding to new market challenges? The world and this region have **INTERVIEW** 

34

come together now more than ever before to defeat a common threat sparked by the pandemic and one area where this spirit of cooperation is absolutely pivotal is in the development of the Middle East's digital economy.

Governments and analysts across the region recognise that increased digitalisation will boost manufacturing, lead to enhanced healthcare, promote environmental sustainability, and result in many other substantial benefits.

Some of the key technologies that have played a key role in industry digital transformation are 5G, AI, cloud computing, and big data.

Huawei worked alongside its partners to implement these technologies at scale to ensure business continuity, support people's day-to-day lives, and most importantly, empower governments to fight against the pandemic. For example, globally, AI was applied to support financial anti-fraud, shortening the risk warning time to mere minutes as people relied more on digital payments instead of cash. AI-based thermal scanning also helped create efficiencies in monitoring the temperatures of customers or visitors of any public space.

Over the last year, we have worked with leading organisations across various industries in the Middle East to develop and deploy new ICT solutions. This has included implementations for Ankabut, DIFC, and Emirates Group Security in the UAE, and entities like Smart City Solutions Company (SC2) in KSA and many others throughout the region.

All walks of life have been forced to overhaul their lifestyle and work habits, including nearly every industry within the Middle East. Such transitions could not have been possible without the proliferation of cloud-based services, which have enabled enterprises to swiftly alter their business models to catch up with the rapid pace of changes.

Organisations have turned to Huawei in part because we have also brought many new innovations to the market. In Huawei will continue to pursue open partnerships with its customers to help industries go digital."

> vertical industries like education, for example, we expanded our Smart Education portfolio last year to enhance teaching, learning, research, management, and support services.

> In technology solution areas like networking, we also unveiled our CloudCampus 2.0 solution with enhanced connectivity, experience, and O&M to help enterprises of all sizes to build fully-wireless smart campus networks and accelerate the connectivity of everything in enterprise campuses.

> We also launched our autonomous data centre network solution for customers in the Middle East at the end of 2020, offering an upgraded solution that delivers high-density autonomous driving, 400GE

super capacity, and zero-packet-loss intelligent experience.

Huawei is very wellpositioned to support businesses and governments in their digital transformation journey. Currently, 253 global companies featured in the Fortune 500 list have chosen Huawei as their digital transformation partner.

Our Enterprise Business Group has more than 28,000 global partners, and Huawei has helped more than 200 cities around the world implement smart city projects. Furthermore, Huawei has been recognised as a technology leader by the likes of Gartner and IDC.

We were recently named as the 2020 Gartner Peer Insights Customers' Choice for Data Center and Cloud Networking for our CloudFabric Data Center Network (DCN) Solution.

The UAE celebrates its 50th year as a nation. Huawei has played a key role in helping the UAE become a bastion of technological progress, but what role will it play in helping the country shape its digital economy for the next 50? The UAE's leaders have a very strong vision for the future of the country, and technology is at the heart of their plans. Huawei is honored and humbled to work closely with several UAE government entities, private enterprises, and telecom operators.

Some of our recent projects include Ankabut, Dubai International Financial Centre, Dubai Municipality, Abu Dhabi Municipality, and Emirates Group Security, among many others.

We have also rolled out various initiatives like the Seeds of the Future, Middle East ICT Competition, and ICT Academies, driven by our vision to develop a healthy talent ecosystem that can support the UAE ICT industry's rapid growth.

There are currently eight Huawei ICT Academies in the UAE established in partnership with leading academic institutions and providing students with the opportunity to become certified in technologies such as AI, cloud computing, and so on. In the past 20 years, we've helped the Middle East to cultivate at least 100,000 ICT talents.

In late 2020, Huawei also appointed Aloysius Cheang as the inaugural Chief Security Officer (CSO) of Huawei UAE. This appointment came in line with our goal to build a digitally secure future for the country in partnership with our customers in the public and private sector.

The ICT industry is transforming at a very rapid pace, so while we can't predict exactly what technology we will be using 50 years from now, we do know that it will contribute towards creating an intelligent society that is empowered by connectivity, providing more convenience, efficiency, and productivity throughout all aspects of our lives and across industries

such as education, finance, aviation, energy, and more.

A collaborative approach is needed in order to establish a robust digital economy. Strong ICT capabilities on a national scale will empower widespread digital transformation, and the best way to achieve this is by fostering a technology culture that is open and transparent, allowing for greater progress, development, and innovation.

Huawei will continue to pursue open partnerships with its customers and partners to help industries go digital and make life better, businesses smarter, and the world more inclusive.

As mentioned, looking to the decades ahead, we also see a massive convergence of opportunities across five tech domains: connectivity, cloud, AI, computing, and industry applications. These elements have all come together to create unprecedented opportunities for the ICT sector but also enterprises and governments in the UAE and around the world. Over the coming years, it will be critical to focus on applying these technologies to help enterprises grow their businesses and help governments to achieve their strategic goals. By leveraging synergy across the five tech domains, Huawei will continue building a robust digital ecosystem that creates new value for industries. **cnme** 

#### BARCO

## THE YEAR OF HYBRID

**Erdem Soyal,** Vice President Middle East & Africa at Barco, has highlighted five workplace predictions that he expects to see come to fruition in 2021, such as the demand for a hybrid working environment in an exclusive op-ed for February's edition of CNME.

he Covid-19 pandemic caused perhaps the biggest and fastest shift in working practices that we've ever seen.

Many companies are reviewing their office space requirements in light of the pandemic, and some have even made the move to full remote working indefinitely. But the vast majority of businesses – and more importantly, their employees – are desperate to return to the office, albeit with more freedom to work remotely or from home when needed.

This hybrid workplace model was growing in popularity even before the pandemic – Covid-19 has simply acted as a powerful accelerant to an already burgeoning trend.

Organisations have now seen that a blend of office and homebased work can be achieved to great effect. Once the pandemic

Whatever the reasons for a multi cloud deployment, management and transparency are important parts of the digital strategy." has finally been defeated, they know they need to embrace this hybrid approach. With vaccines now rolling out and the end in sight, the big question for 2021 is what companies need to do now to get ahead of the curve.

Here are Barco's top trends to watch for in 2021 as we begin the era of hybrid working.

## Employees will demand a hybrid working approach

As restrictions have eased up, there is now a huge desire from employees to get back to the office while having more freedom to work remotely when needed. In our recent global workplace study, Finding a New Balance, employees in the UAE stated that they ideally want to work from home one or two days a week and in the office for three. Whilst some companies have recognised this desire within their workforces and made efforts to embrace hybrid working, many remain underprepared.

As the UAE government's vaccination campaign is in full swing, companies must invest in hybrid working technology now to meet the expectations of their employees and maintain productivity and engagement.

Now is the time for careful and strategic planning, supported by the right technology, to ensure adoption of new ways of working is as smooth as possible.

## The desire for creativity will reshape our offices

Pre-pandemic, the desire for more traditional meeting rooms was slowly fading away – neglected in favour of more modern huddle spaces and smaller breakout rooms. However, the rise of social distancing requirements mandating rooms large enough to keep the 2-metre rule has changed things significantly.

What's more, this is a trend that looks likely to stay even after we've returned to the office. Our global study found that 50% of employees now prefer formal meeting rooms over huddle spaces and 1 in 3 employees use a standard meeting room or boardroom on a daily basis.

Part of the reason for this is the serious creativity and collaboration deficit that we've felt in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Whilst productivity and efficiency have survived and even thrived, the lack of human connection has been stark, and creativity has taken a nosedive. As we return to physical workspaces, employees desperately want to connect with each other and collaborate in larger groups, making up for the lost time spent working alone during the pandemic.
### People will catch up with technology

Being thrust into the world of remote working with virtually no warning came with its fair share of challenges. Many workers struggled to get to grips with often completely foreign technology and do so alone at home without the face-to-face support of IT teams.

In fact, 2020 may have seen one of the steepest technology learning curves we've ever experienced in the history of working life. In our study, 19% of respondents reported having difficulties setting up impromptu remote meetings, and nearly half said they felt that video conferencing didn't come naturally to them.

Now, after nearly 10 months of remote working for some, we expect employees to finally start making the most of the technology available to them. 2021 will be the year people embrace and understand virtual collaboration technologies and will find it all second nature. Better quality collaboration will take place as a result.

#### **Generation Next**

In 2020 Gen Z burst into the workplace and changed its culture forever. Unlike any before them, this group largely experienced a remote start to employment, perhaps appropriate for the most digitally native generation to date.

Surprisingly however, Gen Z employees place great importance on face-toface connection: a recent survey found that 83% of Gen Z employees prefer to communicate with their managers in person. This affinity for in-person collaboration coupled with Gen Z's strong desire for freedom and individuality in the workplace must trigger greater investment into hybrid working models to satisfy these needs.

As the workplace Gen Z population grows, the challenge for businesses in 2021 will be in offering the freedom of remote working without sacrificing the human connection this generation values. We predict an increase in flexible working policies underpinned by advancing collaboration technology for a generation that wants the best of both.

### Engagement will become the new productivity

In 2021, engagement will become the biggest tool in maintaining productivity.

Whilst so many things about the year ahead remain uncertain, one thing we can be sure of is the continued evolution of the workplace. After a year which

**Erdem Soyal** Vice President Middle East & Africa at Barco saw our working habits change irretrievably, 2021 will be all about catching our breath and investing in the technology to not only catch up to those changes, but to establish a workplace that will be fit for the long-term.

Employee expectations have changed: people have realised the benefits of a more

flexible and autonomous working life, and businesses need to act fast to satisfy these needs.

FEBRUARY 2021

#### MENA CATALYSTS

## **TECHNO-**GOVERNMENT **RELATIONS FOR** THE FUTURE

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to government relations leader for high tech companies, Sam Blatteis, CEO of The MENA Catalysts, the voice of the Middle East digital economy. We wanted to find out the backstory of this rapidly expanding government relations firm, the key role it plays in clearing the path for brand-name high tech multinationals — and hear insights into 'Programme HQ' a Saudi concerted effort to attract digital businesses to the Kingdom.

Government relations is now the API between business leaders and 'clearing the path' in the Middle Eastern regulatory world, who 'wins' and who 'loses'."

n a candid and colourful discussion, Blatteis demonstrated why he is regarded as one of the interesting and prominent thought leaders in the technology ecosystem in the Middle East.

Prior to forming The MENA Catalysts, Blatteis was Google's Head of Public Policy and Government Relations for the Gulf countries and quickly unearthed that (1) incumbents were not delivering tech companies' priorities (2) many executives thought they were in the tech sector but they were actually in the "relationship business."

"When I was at Google, we shopped for a government relations agency with the right connections and the right hightech sector knowledge, to be our 'arms and legs' but we found that there was no substitute for seasoned veterans directly from the high-tech sector and based full-time in the Middle East," said Blatteis.

The charismatic CEO of The MENA Catalysts said that, "The government relations world can move at the speed of molasses or the speed of lightening. The government relations team is the one that opens the market, secures the license in order for your product



38



to generate revenue, strips business barriers, protects operations, and/or defends a trusted brand with regulators that allows clients to continue to operate in key Middle Eastern markets. In short, sales and marketing are tactical activities, it [government relations] is the foundation for growth, the strategic fuel for clients to 'win' in the Middle East, perhaps more than any other corporate function." Boston University Economist James Bisson published a paper demonstrating that from 2000-2016, increased company profits were tied to government relations activity.

Blatteis and his team observed that, "many corporate leaders hada false sense of comfort — that because consumers trust their products — that government leaders maybe trust the reputation of their regional businesses HQs too, a significant gap. However, those that can successfully bridge that divide, could transform their Gulf advantage into a global one."

"When brand name hightech companies are rolling out a new product or facing a problem, they partnered with us because we could 'clear the path.' We knew what they wanted because we had done it before. We have sat at the table contributing to draft digital economy legislation that will affect the region's high-tech sector for decades to come." Blatteis's team 36

Many tech leaders used to think that 'government relations is too expensive', but quickly found that it is not cost-prohibitive. A growing number of companies do it for \$IOk-\$I5k per month with seasoned veterans who know what they're doing."

includes former leading Gulf technology regulators.

The MENA Catalysts has become the principal company standing up for the high-tech sector in the Middle East.

Blatteis said many tech leaders used to think that 'government relations is too expensive', but it does not have to be cost-prohibitive. A growing number of companies do it for \$10k-\$15k per month, if the team knows what they're doing.

One challenge that The MENA Catalysts solves is that many tech companies find it slightly complicated serving the region by 'remote control' where decisions are made eyeball-to-eyeball. A growing number of high tech companies have someone in Dubai, but are responsible for influence in three Arab capitals that they are not in [of Abu Dhabi, Riyadh



and Cairo or Doha], where The MENA Catalysts has significant relationships, Blatteis showed.

He observed that a consensus emerging amongst high-tech companies is that "government relations is quickly becoming the API between business priorities and achieving market expansion here, as governments have become second only to customers in their ability to affect companies' regional business plans," said Blatteis.

Our conversation then moved to Saudi Arabia, and I asked The MENA Catalysts' CEO about his recent interview with the Financial Times, in which he said, "The virus has contributed, counter-



intuitively, to creating a fertile soil in Saudi Arabia for hightech multinationals."

"The impact of the virus has been a two-level game in the region between creating significant business difficulties for offline, analog companies and catapulting demand for digital services as people stay home. In the epicenters of growth in most industries in Saudi Arabia, you will find digital tech companies re-thinking and reinventing their businesses, from social events to entertainment to communitybuilding," said Blatteis. The CEO of The MENA

that Saudi Arabia has a techsavvy young population which fosters an environment for tech companies to achieve significant growth.

"When you have 70% of the country that is under 30, that's not a nice to have segment of society, that's the majority of the population. Saudi Arabia has gone from single digit penetration in the year 2000, to among the highest internet usage per-person on earth, especially social media usage per-person on applications such as Twitter and YouTube. The combination of all these factors create a lot of areas that are ripe for growth for tech companies because you've got so many

digital natives," said Blatteis.

In terms of Programme HQ, which is one of a number of ambitious new Saudi initiatives to attract companies to Saudi Arabia, Blatteis observes that there is growing pool of tech multinationals eyeing the Kingdom as a large, new growth market.

"Saudi's wide-ranging engagement strategy with hightech companies is a marker and demonstrates the country is pursuing attracting the keepers of international good practices in an inclusive, disciplined fashion," said Blatteis.

The notion of companies expanding their operations in Saudi Arabia has shifted from the periphery to the center, as seen with Alibaba and Google's recent market expansions into the Kingdom.

"We hear from a growing number of tech companies' heads of market expansion who understand that Saudi is one of the Arab digital economy's two centres of gravity. The other being the UAE. Saudi Arabia today comprises of about 55% of today's Middle East e-shoppers. The constellation of companies expanding in Saudi reveals that multinationals are reinventing their 'order of operations' to market expansion in the region, from serving remotely abroad to moving datacenters, head count and physical offices to open markets and unlock growth in focused, organized ways," concluded the expert Blatteis. **Crime** 

Catalysts also highlighted







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# **HOPE** FOR HUMANITY



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GOVTECH

MARS HOPE PROBE

# **HOPE' FOR HUMANITY**

In this month's edition of GovTech, we celebrate the remarkable achievement of the 'Hope Probe' following its successful orbit into Mars, which has only served to reinforce the UAE's standing as one of the most powerful countries in the world.



he United Arab Emirates has become only the fifth nation in the world to reach the Maritain orbit, quite the feat, but what makes this project all the more astounding, is the fact that only this year the UAE celebrates its 50th anniversary as a nation.

What the UAE has achieved over the last 50 years is nothing short of incredible. The country is a shining example to the rest of the world in terms of what you can achieve when you cultivate the right environment and infrastructure and develop and foster ecosystems that can trigger reforms and transformation.

The UAE is known globally as being one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world, evidenced further by the appointment of the world's first ever Minister for AI – and that progressive mindset is one of the key components in the country becoming a major player in the global space race.

The Hope Probe is a UAE space expedition mission to Mars that was originally launched in July 2020 from Japan. Since then, the probe has been travelling for around seven months (493 million KM).

The spacecraft will spend two years on Mars to collect scientific data and assess the living conditions on the planet.

His Excellency Mohammad Al Gergawi, Minister of Cabinet Affairs, stated that the historic significance of the event served as an inspiration to every Arab in terms of what role science can play in creating a better world for everyone. "The overwhelming media coverage of the Mars Hope Probe reflects the significance of the historic event to the world as a milestone in the inspiring story of the Emirates. The Hope Probe is a national achievement that brings pride to every Emirati and Arab and an inspiration for each individual in the world who believes in the role of science in creating a better future for humanity," said Al Gergawi.

Al Gergawi also highlighted how the successful mission of the Hope Probe in many ways reflected the journey that the UAE has embarked upon since 1971.

"The journey of the Hope Probe reflects the broader journey of the UAE. The challenges that faced the mission team in turning the probe from

The Hope Probe is a national achievement that brings pride to every Emirati and Arab."

a dream to reality in six years mirror the challenges the UAE has faced in its journey as a nation who made the impossible possible," said Gergawi.

Omran Sharaf, Head of the Mars Mission for the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Center documented the particularly challenging and dangerous aspects involved in orbiting Mars.

"Reaching Mars's orbit was the most critical and dangerous part of our journey to Mars, exposing the Hope probe to stresses and pressures it has never before faced. With this enormous milestone achieved, we are now preparing to transition to our science orbit and commence science data gathering," said Sharaf.

On the probe's arrival day, the UAE Government Media Office organised an event at Burj Park in Dubai that followed the Hope Probe's arrival live in the presence of 221 journalists from 131 media outlets. Burj Khalifa beamed with lights and astonishing shows that marked the different stages of the Hope Probe's journey, leading up to the historic announcement of its success in reaching the Red Planet's orbit.

The next day, the UAE Government Media Office held a press conference in the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Center to update journalists on the upcoming stages of the probe's scientific mission.

Since those meetings UAE leaders have shared the first images of Mars from the Hope Probe.

His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, posted: "The transmission of the Hope Probe's first image of Mars is a defining moment in our history and marks the UAE joining advanced nations involved in space exploration. We hope this mission will lead to new discoveries about Mars which will benefit humanity." 45

# THE RIGHT PROFILE.IO

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **René Seifert**, Co-Head of TrueProfile.io, to find out how the HR and recruitment industry has been affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic – and how the global leader in document verification is leveraging blockchain technology to empowers users of their platform.

eifert is a serial entrepreneur and was the co-founder and co-CEO of successful crowdfunding platform Venturate AG, which was subsequently sold to FinLab AG in 2015.

He is currently the Co-Head of TrueProfile.io, a company that sits under the umbrella of the DataFlow Group – and

The change in climate has prompted recruiters to look domestically for hiring opportunities." has completely transformed document verification for recruiters and HR experts.

In a candid and fascinating interview, we began our conversation by focusing on what impact the current global health crisis was having on the recruitment sector.

"The change in climate has prompted recruiters to look domestically for hiring opportunities. Due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also witnessed a surge in unemployment, which unfortunately leads to a higher percentage of individuals embellishing their credentials in order to land a job, so there has been a huge rise in the risk factor of doctored documents over the last number of months," said Seifert. As a result of the economic

uncertainty, rather inevitably many sectors opted to delay their hiring plans, but contrary to that, and largely out of necessity there has been a significant recruitment drive globally for healthcare professionals.

"One of the highest sectors that people have been sought after has been in the healthcare industry as countries all over the world attempt to get the virus under control. The urgency meant that recruiters in the healthcare sector were looking for pre-verified candidates to expedite the hiring process. Those that had already been screened were at a huge advantage because that accelerates dramatically the process versus having to go through a number of verification steps that can take weeks, or in some cases even



months when the talent is needed right now," said Seifert.

Seifert explained how the DataFlow Group has been in PSV (Primary Source Verification) since 2006, and that it focused mainly on document verification for healthcare staff. However, he stressed that TrueProfile. io have revolutionised the experience for the end-user.

"What we at TrueProfile. io have done is really reempower the individual by building something that he/ she can maintain - and this is the sort of empowerment that we are bringing into TrueProfile.io on the B2C side. I would be cautious against classifying what we do as all out empowerment as its more of a service we provide. However, on the other side of the market we are enabling companies or regulators to make qualified hiring decisions by verifying and screening candidates in a very convenient and elegant way, and this ultimately allows decision-makers to determine that the candidate is legitimate and as a direct consequence your de-risking the process because you know the individual is not fraudulent," said Seifert.

According to the dynamic Co-Head at TrueProfile.io, DataFlow has been built on the back of big contracts that the company got from government regulators, and he said that it was always a sort of a 'one-off' process when it came to verification.

"For example, if a nurse from the Philippines wants to work in the UAE, they go through a screening process and gain employment, but then when they want to move to another country, they need to go thought the exact same robust screening process again. It was very strongly focused on making this regulator client happy, but we tried to turn that on its head by saying, "let's put the individual in the centre" and allow them to be empowered," said Seifert.

However, he stressed that this archaic and rigid verification model is what inspired TrueProfile.io to innovate and completely transform the process.

"The key problem that we wanted to solve at TrueProfile. io was that when people were changing jobs they needed to get verified over and over again, but what we want to introduce is a standard that once it is done once it is accepted forever, so it also means if the company pays for the verification the actual applicant is allowed to keep the result of their verification on their myTrueProfile – and carry that forward through their career," said Seifert.

Seifert outlined some of the market dynamics that are driving certain adoptions – and highlighted how the move from the compounds of the physical traditional office space to a work from anywhere culture had triggered a demand for greater integration.

"Working remotely almost had a counter force,

TrueProfile.io is re-empowering the individual by building something that he or she can maintain."

> which has led to a stronger integration of the work environment. Employers did not want their employees to be working on a plethora of different services, but ideally on fewer by integrating them. We have supported that shift in change by launching TrueProfile Connect for businesses," said Seifert.

He explained that in the past if you were an employer you had to go on TrueProfile.io and use their backend to trigger a verification, but what they have done with the launch of TrueProfile Connect is implement API's which are connected into third party HR systems.

"We launched our first integration with Salesforce,



and they have a very powerful HR administration and management engine. What it means now for a HR decisionmaker is that you can do everything out of Salesforce. The systems talk to each other and you get the verifications without ever leaving Salesforce and this is something that we are driving to integrate this into other services," said Seifert.

TrueProfile.io is leveraging blockchain technology to once again enhance its ability to 'empower' its users, but he also added that in this very politically charged climate we now live in there seems be an alarming amount of censorship across social media platforms and applications, which he believes only serves to reinforce and highlight the benefits of blockchain technologies.

"Our view on using blockchain technology goes back to our primary objective which is to empower people. If our users buy a verification with us and it's sitting in their myTrueProfile account, well that's great, but what if and especially in the current climate when you look at what Twitter, Facebook and Robinhood has been doing in relation to censorship at some point we as TrueProfile. io decided for whatever reason that we don't like that person and shut them down then their verification is no longer verifiable. We wanted to go to

the next level and empower the individual by adding each of the TrueProofs. A TrueProof is a single unit of one document that has been verified, so for example if you sent us your University diploma, and then we get a positive result from your University, then we create a so-called TrueProof - and that TrueProof is a PDF that sits on your PC, but we also add a fingerprint of that TrueProof on to the Ethereum blockchain. The benefit of this is that if we were to behave in a nefarious way the blockchain is there for good! It can't be changed, and this again reinforces our overall message and mantra which is empower our users," concluded Seifert. Come



SEERA

# REINVENTING TRAVEL IN THE 'NEW NORMAL'

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Abdulrahman Mutrib**, CTO, Seera, to find out how the leading travel and tourism company adapted its business model to deal with the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis – and how technology is empowering them to make better decisions.

OVID-19 pandemic impacted every global industry, however, it's fair to say that the travel and hospitality sector was one of the worst affected. What strategy did Seera undertake as part of their efforts to combat the unprecedented challenges they faced and maintain their overall business operations?

In the early stages of the pandemic, our main focus was geared towards supporting customers in their travel arrangements and changes thereof, for our flagship consumer travel brand Almosafer, that meant consolidating our omnichannel efforts to provide travel advisory, and seamless cancellations, amendments and refunds for our customers.

The second phase was driven by our efforts in terms of preparation for what we anticipate to be the new normal. Re-evaluating our roadmaps and seizing the 'downtime' as an opportunity for the intensive development of products and services that will be crucial for when travel recovers.

During the crisis, we have re-evaluated our roadmaps and seized the 'downtime' as an opportunity for the intensive development of products and services that will be crucial for when travel recovers.

We are working on a lot of our legacy technologies and bringing them up to speed, as well as tech projects focused on improving efficiencies across the group. Automation of process will play a major role in efficiently being able to handle a potential second wave or another crisis of this magnitude. Flexibility vs. trip certainty will play a key part in this.

Travel advisory across the omnichannel offering was essential – training our teams to become experts in regulations, developments and overall advisory geared towards the safety and ease of mind for our customers.

The COVID-19 crisis is still ongoing, and whilst there is room for renewed optimism and hope in 2021, especially with the introduction of a new vaccine, the situation in many countries around travel remains very fragile and subject to change at any time. How have you altered your business model to be more fluid and flexible to be able to adapt to the evolving changes and market demands in this new era labelled as the 'new normal'?

We have further pursued our vision of transformation across the organisation and are heavily investing in the digitisation of products and services, as well as the training of our teams to become the best travel advisors in the region and beyond.

The automation of processes, and the evolution of customer service channels also played a big role. Basically, we have done nothing but get ready for what is to come.

You have enjoyed a five-year partnership with Amazon Web Services, but the collaboration between both entities became broader and was significantly deepened as a direct result of the global health crisis. What role did



We are a tech-driven organisation that puts datadriven decision making at its core."

AWS play in terms of helping you cut costs and become more operationally efficient in the days after the global lockdown was announced? I wouldn't necessarily say our relationship has deepened, it has always been a fruitful partnership from the beginning and the pandemic has not changed that. We work with AWS as part of our team and they have helped us identify those areas, where cost cutting was possible by working with devops and tech teams on optimisation projects. This has certainly helped us navigate our way through lockdown times, where cost saving was essential.

In the case study you conducted with AWS, you reference the importance of putting technology front and center in a post-COVID future. Where you guilty of not embracing emerging technologies quicker and integrating them as part of your organisation prior to the outset of the pandemic? No. We pride ourselves as a tech-driven organisation that puts data-driven decision making at its core. I believe that our technology-first mindset was largely what helped us navigate through tough times. With certain systems in place and the groundwork for developments in place, we were able to work with agility.

Seera is one of the leading travel companies in the Middle East and has a long and distinguished reputation with over 40 years of experience. In your opinion, how has Seera sustained its success over such a prolonged



#### period of time, and what ultimately differentiates the company from other travel companies?

Our vision is to become the leading travel and tourism company in the region with a portfolio of trust brands that will consistently exceed customers' expectations.

Seera's strategy is driven by 3 key value-creation engines; namely, the travel market, in-and-out of Saudi Arabia, is massive, underserved, and is growing; brand trust and local knowledge matter; and scale in travel is essential and is a powerful competitive advantage.

Saudi Arabia is undergoing an economic and social

## Our vision is to become the leading travel and tourism company in the region."

transformation, and we are determined to be at the forefront of these positive developments, with the ultimate purpose of opening up the opportunity of travel for all, by connecting cultures.

What sets us apart from other travel companies:

- Talent we recruit, foster and develop the some of the brightest minds in the business.
- We have 40+ years of experience in the Middle East and KSA market and truly know the customer better than any 'outsider' ever could.
- Our vast network of strong partnerships helps us elevate the customer experience.
- An ambitious vision, board and management team and we are willing to take or risks.

Nobody could ever have predicted what occurred in 2020, but as stated above there is great hope that 2021 will be the start of the fightback. What's your predictions for 2021, and the future of travel in a post-COVID world?

We see initial interest in international outbound from KSA with the recent announcement of international opening post Ramadan (as of January 29th announcement).

Domestic tourism is still of high interest to Saudi travellers. As for international inbound, our DMC is already getting busy with leads from groups and individuals from around the globe.

We will see regional tourism recover to a large extent, especially towards Q3/Q4 - as Seera we will emerge stronger, as we have used the downtime to set the foundations in place.

#### FORCEPOINT

# THE UNBOUND ENTERPRISE

**Nico Popp**, Chief Product Officer, Forcepoint, has written an op-ed on the 'unbound enterprise' which he believes represents a new age in our cloud migration journey which has been accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



ooking back before 2020, we knew where the digital transformation was taking us. But we had no idea how quickly it would arrive. Because of the pandemic, our journey to cloud migration happened at light speed.

As a result, businesses today are now less constrained by traditional network infrastructures and designated worksites, and their employees have the freedom to work wherever and whenever. And while we've always had some agility within our digital structures to move work between on-prem and remote, what we're seeing now is a completely new category, a new age that I like to call the unbound enterprise.

### Understanding the Need for the Unbound Enterprise

When COVID quickly forced a majority work from home environment, many companies experienced a surge in productivity and the widespread adoption of the cloud.

For these companies, it is likely that leadership will keep remote work (in some form) as a longterm option for employees, even after the threat of the pandemic has passed. In fact, they're embracing new, flexible technologies and arrangements that offer the ability to work from anywhere, at any time, on any device, and across applications that can exist anywhere. Users are no longer bound to the workplace.

Applications and data are no longer bound to the corporate network. That's what unbound means to me.

Getting to unbound depends on a corporate leadership open to the change of moving traditional software to the cloud. That is step one. Step two is reenvisioning cybersecurity for the unbound enterprise.

As remote workers shift to cloud applications for productivity, and the workforce becomes more agile, traditional perimeter security breaks down. In this new environment, people can be anywhere. The data center is no longer the center of the data. User and data become the new security perimeter.

#### **User and Data-Centric Security**

Traditional security tends to take an outside-in approach, starting with the perimeter and building layers of security toward the data, all to keep the bad guys out.

#### Applications and data are no longer bound to the corporate network. That's what unbound means to me."

As many companies started to realize during the Sunburst attack—that's an approach that falls short. So why not take an inside-out approach instead? Attempts to rein in users and data tend to be counterproductive because they usually cost organizations dearly, both in terms of production and overall efficiency.

A user and data-centric security approach no longer starts with where they reside. No longer tethered to a fixed network, unbound employees become liberated from hardware infrastructure limitations of the past.

No matter how robust security strategies are, data breaches will continue to happen. As users continue to work remotely, they'll continue to introduce new security risks. The cybersecurity path forward requires a deeper analysis of behaviors.

The first step is establishing a behavior baseline at the individual level. What constitutes normal behavior? What behavior is unusual? Bad actors impersonate our employees to access and steal our data. Taking a closer look at how users interact with data no matter where it resides will help move the unbound enterprise left of breach.

The deep understanding of behavior and risk creates a shift in security strategy one where policies no longer have to be binary but instead, automatically personalized to the user.

#### **Cloud and Intelligent Security**

Due to the level of specialized talent focused on cloud security, overall security of cloud applications often exceeds on-premises application security. But even cloud providers suffer from the talent shortage, and data security is still the responsibility of your organization and the employees accessing data.

And no security team can do it all. These days, you need to leverage AI and machine learning to help with creating and enforcing rules that play a role in executing security strategy at the user level. Done correctly, this marriage between cloud security and AI security will be invisible to the user. Productivity won't be disrupted. Even better, a truly dynamic system can help identify and react to indicators of behavior, keeping your organization left of breach.

The unbound enterprise will bring new levels of productivity and efficiency to organizations and their employees—but getting there requires a security strategy that is unbound as well.

#### HUAWEI

# THE EVOLUTION OF INTELLIGENT DATA CENTERS

**Sanjay Kumar Sainani,** SVP and CTO of Huawei Global Data Centre Facility Business, outlines the evolution that data centers have underwent in order to cope with the exponential increase in data growth.

B y 2025, global data volumes are expected to reach 180 zettabytes – an increase of more than 400% compared to the 40 zettabytes recorded in 2019. Most of this will pass through a data center at some point. Data centers need to cope with this massive demand.

Future-proofed data centers - that feature smart, scalable, flexible solutions - will form the heart of the digital economy, in which data will be a major commodity that will enable both public and private sector entities to thrive.

A connected world relies upon efficient data centers. These enable the applications and services used throughout society to run as smoothly and seamlessly as possible. As the Internet of Things (IoT) expands, fueled by the roll-out of 5G and artificial intelligence (AI), data centers will need to process increasingly more data.

Huawei's Global Industry Vision suggests that 97% of large enterprises intend to use AI by 2025, and AI will form a primary component of their digitalisation strategies. A robust underlying data center and networking architecture

The data centers of today and tomorrow require a tailored approach based on individual requirements." is essential to enable datahungry AI-based systems and infrastructure of a digitallydriven society.

The need to build data center environments that are adequately equipped to handle growing data volumes has seen an increase in investment recently, especially from organisations that recognise the value of getting ahead of the upcoming boom. They understand that building an appropriate networking and data center infrastructure requires more just considering today's business-as-usual workloads and anticipated spikes caused by major events. Long-term growth and the ability to cater to unexpected occurrences, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, are essential



Custom-build Data Center Interconnect (DCI) technology is becoming increasingly important to meet these requirements. DCI technology has the ability to boost interdata center bandwidth, reduce latency, and eliminate packet loss for an overall better experience. As a result of this it is growing in importance for large enterprises, many of which are taking the step of owning and controlling their own DCI infrastructure to handle current and future traffic needs. This is particularly the case amongst larger web companies, even highly digitalised

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entities such as government departments, large utilities, telecommunications, and financial services are following suit. Controlling the DCI allows oversight of all decisions, such as those related to bandwidth availability and security profiles, rather than relying on a third party.

Huawei has developed a deep understanding of DCI technology, resulting in the development of awardwinning solutions. Our findings have revealed that an approach using high-density, optical-electrical integrated design incorporate flexible configuration of up to 800G per wavelength should provide sufficient power to handle the next 10 years' of data demands. Solutions such as this represent the future of data center evolution. The ability to rapidly adapt to the needs of the time, whatever they may be, is what will enable businesses and governments to extract the most value from their data.

Another key advantage to the more intelligent data center is that it requires considerably less physical footprint than previous versions. Advanced modular



Huawei has developed a deep understanding of DCI technology." data centers significantly simplify equipment room construction and location requirements, with shorter installation times, lower costs, and ever a faster time to market for enterprise digital transformation services.

The data centers of today and tomorrow require a tailored approach based on individual requirements. But while there may be no one size fits all approach to developing them, there is a common element that must be incorporated regardless of data needs: sustainability. With exponential data growth on the horizon, the best investment in data centers is to ensure that they are developed with flexibility and increased demand in mind. cnme







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