## computer news middle east

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## REIMAGINING WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES

NIDAL ABOU-LTAIF. **PRESIDENT, AVAYA INTERNATIONAL, TELLS CNME EDITOR MARK** FORKER, HOW THE IT COMPANY IS RESHAPING THE FUTURE OF WORK. 10



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Avaya is a company that is leading the way in terms of reshaping the future of work.

### EDITORIAL

## WORK FROM ANYWHERE

here have been many changes as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but one of the most tangible and telling has been the complete transformation of the workplace.

Prior to the pandemic many tech-centric companies had been adopting a hybrid work model, and they could see the benefits a flexible approach to work was having on the productivity and efficiency of its employees.

A hybrid work model was forced on companies on a global scale in March 2020, but it has yielded the same results in terms of enhanced productivity and a happier workforce.

A series of reports have been commissioned over the last 12 months on the work-from-anywhere model – and all of them have found that employees are much happier with a hybrid approach to the workplace.

Avaya is a company that is leading the way in terms of reshaping the future of work, and our cover story interview in this month's magazine is with Nidal Abou-Ltaif, President, Avaya International, who explained to us how their solutions and products are reimagining the workplace and empowering employees to have better experiences.

Our Women in Tech segment features Reem Asaad, Vice President Cisco Middle East & Africa, who goes into candid detail on her decorated career in the IT industry – and outlines what businesses need to do to increase diversity and inclusion in the sector.

Chris Cooper, General Manager, Data Center Group, Lenovo Middle East & Africa, has predicted that due to the sheer volume of data being generated in the new digital economy will mean that the future of enterprise data will be processed at the edge.

Gaming has grown exponentially across the Middle East over the last year. However, worrying research has emerged which indicates that online predators targeting children has increased significantly.

Loui Kofiah, Brand Communications Director at Mobily eSports, discusses what parents need to know in order to keep their children safe when gaming online.

Langley Eide, CFO at Mambu, discusses her new role at the banking provider, the future of banking in Industry 4.0 – and what makes the company different from its market rivals in that space.

We also have some brilliant op-eds from Veeam and AppDynamics, whilst we also have coverage from a brilliant virtual webinar hosted by Mimecast, which documented the growing threat of brand impersonation attacks which have been orchestrated through phishing and domain attacks.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish all our clients and readers a very blessed Ramadan and the holy month brings happiness and prosperity to you and all your loved ones.

Ramadan Kareem!

Mark Forker Editor

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CNME rounds up the biggest regional and global developments in enterprise technology, which includes the announcement that Shell and AVEVA are partnering to discuss the future of smart production. Huawei's Women Developers program is driving technological innovation - and Cisco Webex introduces realtime translations for inclusive meetings.

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Reem Asaad. Vice President. Cisco Middle East and Africa. is featured in this month's installment of Women in Tech. She discusses her incredible career and acknowledges that whilst the IT industry has made strides to bridge gender disparity in the sector there is still a long way to go.

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Chris Cooper, General Manager, Data Center Group, Middle East & Africa, highlights how the vast explosion in data means that the future of enterprise data is going to

be generated at the edge.

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The popularity of gaming across the Middle East region has grown exponentially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Loui Kofiah. Brand Communications Director at Mobily eSports, discusses what the gaming industry needs to do to reduce the dangers poised to children gaming online.

### **34** Star International School

Claire Gilmour. Head of FS and Primary at Star International School, provides details of their wonderful program with a school in Zanzibar, and how the power of technology has brought them closer together.



Langley Eide, the newly appointed CFO at Saas banking provider Mambu, talks about her new role, the future of banking - and what differentiates the company from its market rivals.

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FOUNDER, CPI Dominic De Sousa (1959-2015)

Publishing Director Natasha Pendleton

natasha.pendleton@cpimediagroup.com

ADVERTISING Group Sales Director Kausar Syed kausar.syed@cpimediagroup.com

Senior Sales Manager

Sabita Miranda

sabita.miranda@cpimediagroup.com

Editor Mark Forker mark.forker@cpimediagroup.com

Daniel Shepherd daniel.shepherd@cpimediagroup.com

PRODUCTION AND DESIGN Senior Designer Analou Balbero analou.balbero@cpimediagroup.com DIGITAL SERVICES Web Developer Adarsh Snehajan

webmaster@cpimediagroup.com

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Dubai Production City, DCCA PO Box 13700

Dubai, UAF

Tel: +971 4 5682993

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EDITORIAL

OnlineEditor

## Vectra unveils StreamPlus to simplify proactive threat hunting



Ammar Enaya, regional director, Middle East, Turkey and North Africa (METNA) at Vectra

#### Vectra AI released StreamPlus, an

on-premises data lake that collects, stores, and searches important network metadata for organisations that do not use the cloud due to compliance protocols or a lack of resources. StreamPlus delivers turnkey productivity by offering all the value of Vectra's Cognito Stream without building and managing a data lake. The first of its kind, StreamPlus ensures complete control over infrastructure data to meet growing privacy and compliance concerns while empowering proactive threat hunting to thwart attacks.

"The decision to keep certain business-critical workloads on-prem is even pronounced when it comes to cybersecurity as regulatory and compliance frameworks can also add a layer of complexity. However, with digital forensics playing such an important role in effective threat mitigation, there is need for an effective alternative to cloud based offerings", commented Ammar Enaya, regional director, Middle East, Turkey and North Africa at Vectra.

Organisations can seamlessly complete investigations using fourteen different security-enriched metadata streams, including iSession, DNS and DHCP. StreamPlus further simplifies investigations by allowing analysts to examine specific device names rather than IP addresses.

## SEIDOR receives SAP's Best Partner in Delivery Excellence

### SEIDOR MENA has announced that it

has received SAP's 2021 Best Partner in Delivery Excellence, which recognise its outstanding quality of SAP project implementations. SAP presents these awards annually to the top partners that have excelled in developing and growing their partnership with SAP and helping customers in business transformation initiatives.

This year marks the second year in a row that SEIDOR has received Delivery Excellence Award – the most Awarded partner by SAP in this category. Quality services delivery and innovation have been pillars of our work with customers and SAP which is essential for supporting



our customers to take the lead in digital transformation, empower the intelligent enterprise and adapt to ever changing customer experience.

In 2021, SEIDOR MENA continues to focus on helping customers build reliable cloud strategies, deliver quality ERP implementations, and embrace innovation in the areas like RPA and AI. Being recognised year over year by SAP for our project's quality in SAP S/4HANA, SAP SuccessFactors solutions is a huge source of pride for the entire team.

## CyberKnight Becomes Middle East Distributor for Netwrix and Stealthbits



Vivek Gupta, Co-Founder & COO at CyberKnight

#### CyberKnight has extended its

relationship with one of its technology partners - Stealthbits to become the sole Middle East distributor for Netwrix, following Stealthbits' recent merger with Netwrix. This partnership will enable CyberKnight customers to address challenges related to identifying and detecting data security risk as well as protecting, responding, and recovering from cybersecurity attacks.

Gartner predicts that "through 2024 80% of information governance programs that do not include unstructured, semi-structured and structured data into the same governance program will fail, up from 30% today". In addition, fragmented solutions in the data security market prevent organisations from building comprehensive security strategies to protect their sensitive and regulated data.

"We are thrilled about a strategic partnership with the combined entity of Netwrix and Stealthbits, now part of Netwrix. Their solutions will empower our regional customers to identify and classify sensitive information with utmost precision, reduce exposure to risk and detect threats in time to avoid data breaches – all while achieving and proving compliance", commented Vivek Gupta, Co– Founder & COO at CyberKnight.



**OptiPulse has discovered a new light** source that sends invisible eye-safe photons wirelessly from one building

## OptiPulse Announces New Type of Laser That May Replace Microwaves

or pole to another at 10Gbps with its 3rd prototype. The light source is a miniature semiconductor chip that costs ~\$1 to produce in large volumes and has tested error-free at 25Gbps, which means the Light is turning on and off at 25 billion times a second to send data over a "laser" type beam of invisible light.

OptiPulse is trying to prove that light is superior to microwaves for sending high speed wireless data. The links use invisible light about the same wavelength as your TV remote's infrared light. The demonstrated 10Gbps upload and download systems can reduce the cost and increase the performance of those links. The 3rd prototype used less than ¼ of the energy a typical microwave link uses per bit sent. These combined factors may ultimately lead to a significant reduction in energy use worldwide even as the bandwidth demands increase.

## Formative AI and Distributed Cloud among 4 mega trends at MIPS 2021



Milestone Systems CTO Bjorn Skou Eilertsen

**The 3 trends of 2020 - aggregation,** automation and augmentation were replaced by 4 mega trends in 2021 at the annual MIPS 2021. Formative AI, Distributed Cloud, Composite Architecture and Digital Ethics were revealed as the 4 mega trends in the video industry by Milestone Systems demonstrating how quickly emerging technologies are forming new trends.

Mega Trends of 2021

Formative AI refers to a set of emerging AI enabled technologies that can dynamically change to respond to situational variances. These technologies enable application Developers and UX designers to create solutions using AI enabled tools.

Distributed cloud computing is the first cloud model that incorporates physical location of cloud-delivered services as part of its definition. It is the next generation of cloud computing which retains the advantages of cloud computing, while extending the range and use cases for cloud.

Composite Architecture enables enterprises where Integrations works seamlessly and can change shiftily as requirements change, without having to rebuild or reinstall the solution. A composite architecture enables an open data fabric to serve a variety of core and add-on solutions.

One of the trends within digital ethics is Responsible AI which focuses on ensuring ethical, transparent, and accountable use of AI technologies, in a manner consistent with user expectations, organisational values and societal laws and norms. Responsible AI can guard against the use of biased data or algorithms, ensure that automated decisions are justified and explainable.

Milestone also revealed plans to focus on Cloud Managed video management which will leverage Distributed Cloud and Composite Architecture and drive up the agility of an organisation using XProtect, Milestone's industry leading video management software, to cope with the new next in the Middle East and beyond.

Milestone predicts a successful 2021 in EMEA for multiple reasons including the massive amount of technology at hand that has accelerated the development of new innovative solutions to help businesses and societies navigate in a post-pandemic world. They see a clear mind shift in society, and a new market perception, fuelling the relevance and readiness for more intelligent sensors and video technology.

### NEWS

## HUAWEI Women Developers Program Drives Technological Innovation



Chen Lifang, Huawei Senior Vice President

#### Huawei officially launched its HUAWEI

Women Developers (HWD) program, which aims to empower women developers to create applications and tools that can change the world. The program is intended to encourage more women to join in technological innovation by providing participants with more opportunities and platforms for career development and skill training. Any woman developer from around the world can register to join the program on the HUAWEI Developers official website.

Huawei Senior Vice President Chen Lifang said: "We believe that women will lead technological innovation. We hope that the HUAWEI Women Developers program will help women better leverage their talents and unique value, and give them opportunities to demonstrate their leadership abilities. This will help make our world a better place".

The program will provide participants with training on technological innovation and career development paths, along with opportunities to meet with experts in cutting-edge technologies from various fields, and to participate in hands-on scenario-based experiments and drills.

## 2021 SANS Cyber Threat Intelligence survey reveals impact of COVID

ThreatQuotient, a leading security operations platform innovator, announced the results of the 2021 SANS Cyber Threat Intelligence survey. The spike in cyber breaches in the past year, compounded by COVID-related attacks, has only increased the importance of Cyber Threat Intelligence (CTI) in 2020.

Respondents identified work-fromhome threats such as phishing, lost or stolen devices, home networking equipment, malware, accidental release of sensitive data information, and employees having unauthorised access to business assets, as playing a big part in how their implementation of CTI changed.

The findings show remote working changed the way CTI, incident response and security operations centre teams communicate. With responses demonstrating that remote working



Firas Ghanem, ThreatQuotient, Regional Director, Middle East & Pakistan

helped teams be more focused and collaborative. However, some respondents identified the loss of face-to-face conversations as inhibiting.

Organisations also reported an awareness of how the crisis impacted their employees, understanding that while many enjoyed working from home, CTI analysts found it difficult to shut down and take breaks when the office is your home. CTI and security professionals have also seen a benefit from working virtually in the ability to attend virtual events, conferences or meetings.

AVEVA and Shell Provide Perspective on Industry 5.0

### **AVEVA** and Shell Provide Perspective on Industry 5.0



Brent Kedzierski, Head of Learning Strategy and Innovation at Shell

lan Willetts, AVEVA's Vice President for Process & Simulation

Leaders from AVEVA, a global leader in engineering and industrial software, and the Shell Oil Company joined forces to discuss the future of Smart Production. Brent Kedzierski, Head of Learning Strategy and Innovation at Shell and AVEVA's Vice President for Process & Simulation Ian Willetts explored how more personalised solutions will empower workers to take greater control over their work experiences creating, more adaptive, on demand experiences which will increase worker confidence, resulting in greater workforce creativity, autonomy and performance.

There is a need to better blend Industry 4.0 connected technologies with the humanistic practices and expectations of Industry 5.0 to deliver even more personalised worker experiences characteristic of higher concept and touch designs.

While Industry 4.0 was about smart production, IoT, sensors and drones, the discussion highlighted that Industry 5.0 will be differentiated by mass personalisation and experience design. Kedzierski is hopeful that Industry 5.0 will be a turning point for the human condition at work as physical and environmental safety competence is mastered and industry can shift to addressing psychological safety.

## Philips meets its 'Healthy people, Sustainable planet' targets



Royal Philips, a global leader in health technology, announced that it successfully met all the targets set out in its 2016 – 2020 'Healthy people, Sustainable planet' program. Key achievements of the program include carbon neutrality in its operations, 100% electricity from renewable sources, over 70% of sales from Green Products and Services, 15% of sales coming from circular revenues, recycling 90% of its operational waste, and sending zero waste to landfill.

Philips Annual Report 2020 highlights include:

#### **Environmental:**

Renewable energy sources: Through consortium-led virtual Power Purchase Agreements, Philips is securing renewable electricity supply to power its European operations.

#### Social:

Lives improved: In 2020, Philips' products and solutions improved the lives of 1.75 billion people. This figure includes 207 million people in underserved communities. To this end, Philips is also teaming up with governments, NGOs and hospitals.

### Governance:

Philips has a strong track record of transparency in its plans, actions and reporting. For example, all Philips' ESG data is externally audited at the highest level.

## **Cisco Webex Introduces Real-Time Translations for Inclusive Meetings**



Reem Asaad, Vice President, Cisco Middle East and Africa

#### Cisco has announced today the

availability of its real-time translation feature while also expanding the language library from 10+ to more than 100 languages, ranging from Arabic to Zulu. Cisco believes that eliminating language barriers is a key step to enabling a truly global, hybrid workforce.

As part of the all new Webex, organisations can provide employees with inclusive and seamless collaboration experiences, which is essential to supporting the needs of a workforce that is more globally dispersed than before.

Users can create their own personalised Webex meeting experience by easily self-selecting the language of their choice from the most commonly used languages, such as Arabic, Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Russian and Spanish, as well as more localised languages such as Danish, Hindi, Malay, Turkish and Vietnamese. Now users can engage more fully in meetings, translating from English to 100+ other languages, enabling teams to communicate more effectively with each other, and opening new opportunities for businesses to build a more inclusive, global workforce.

The feature enables businesses to focus on finding the best talent regardless of wherever they call home or their native language. A recent report from Metrigy on intelligent virtual assistants found that nearly 24% of participants have meetings that include non-English native speakers and of these, more than half have been using third-party services to translate meetings into other languages (incurring an average cost of \$172 per meeting). Integrating intelligent virtual meeting assistants with language translation capabilities significantly reduces or even eliminates this cost entirely.

"The inclusive features of Webex help create a level playing field for users regardless of factors like language or geography. Enabling global Real Time Translations is another step toward powering an Inclusive Future, and an important component of driving better digital experiences and digital workplaces", said Reem Asaad, Vice President, Cisco Middle East and Africa. "AI technologies play an integral role in delivering the seamless collaboration, smart hybrid work and intelligent customer experiences that Cisco is known to deliver".



APRIL 2021

ASMAK

## DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION LEADS TO 'SEA CHANGE' FOR ASMAK

**Mamoon Othman**, Chief Executive Officer of IHC, spoke to CNME Editor Mark Forker, about why they selected SAP's technology to drive their digital transformation goals, the challenges they needed to overcome to achieve greater operational efficiency, and the success of its partnership with experienced IT leader Seidor MENA.



n April 2019, ASMAK took the decision to embrace digital transformation and decided to invest in SAP's digital expertise and knowledge as part of their effort to increase its operational efficiency. However, can you tell our readers why you have decided to do business transformation and digitise your entire business? And what where the key challenges that you were looking to overcome? Alliance Food Company (ASMAK), a subsidiary of ADXlisted International Holding Company (IHC), is the leading

provider of fresh and frozen seafood across the region.

The company's AED200 million investment in one of the largest seafood factories in the Middle East enables us to process an initial 40,000 tons annually, with scope to increase capacity to 60,000 tons.

This is in line with our objective to expand our business model and evolve the value-added convenient products in the most efficient and cost-effective manner, complementing IHC's aggressive expansion plan to grow the food business.

To achieve this, we could no longer operate on an old process with an outdated system, which would only slow us down. Undergoing a business transformation was inevitable and our investment in operations including adopting advanced technology capabilities, efficient operations, customer centric approach, data modeling, user experience, effective decision making and successful business processes, with the help of SAP, is what made this achievement possible.

The key challenges we were looking to overcome with SAP implementation included the lack of online processing of transactions leading to manual input and higher risk of human error, lack of online data for effective decision making, supply chain and production inefficiencies, high inventory level, inventory loss, customer dissatisfaction due to inconsistent quality and late deliveries, and nontraceability of products across the supply chain.

We know that many companies in the IT ecosystem have positioned themselves as agents of digital transformation, and there are many other technologies available outside of SAP, but can you outline to us why the management of ASMAK, selected SAP Technology and Seidor MENA as their partners for transformation?

Our first step was to change the processes related to our core business operations, hence it

We also considered our future scalability of the systems to other technologies like BI and IOT for which SAP is well suited."

called for the implementation of an ERP system. We compared multiple ERP systems with different parameters.

After conducting a full fledge and thorough evaluation, SAP was identified to cater to our challenging needs especially in the operation of fresh foods and fish market operations.

We also considered our future scalability of the systems to other technologies like BI and IOT for which SAP is well suited.

Asmak evaluated a number of implementation partners for this change initiative. We found Seidor had the right experience and team for such digital transformations. They also committed to providing back up in the form of their team from their global competence centre in Spain.

We know the benefits of digitalisation in terms of its ability to lower costs, increase efficiency and provide visibility on your overall business performance. But was there resistance from some within the ASMAK organisation, because going



digital, you are radically changing the culture of the business? Was this a challenge you had to overcome to ensure the project was a success? We anticipated there would be challenges on such significant changes. Accordingly, we ensured all heads of departments and chiefs of respective areas were the key drivers for changes in their domains.

Messages for change were communicated from the bottom to the top. We even got the support of external business consultants in some areas, such as HR for implementing changes like grading structure.

# DIGITAL RANSFORMATION

Multiple training sessions were planned and conducted for all levels, especially to blue collar employees. As an outcome of the change, we needed to adjust a certain percentage of the employees.

At what stage in the project did ASMAK begin to see a ROI on its decision to go digital with SAP and Seidor MENA – and what where the clear and tangible business benefits to the company in addition to managed costs and increased efficiency following the implementation of SAP technology? We did the estimation for both the quantitative and qualitative ROI before making the investment. We as a team felt the ROI is clear, KPIs for different processes were estimated and payback is achievable within 3 years.

Currently, we have just completed 1 year after going live. We have already started achieving a number of KPIs, such as a decrease in inventory loss, inventory reduction, man-power adjustment, traceability, rollout for poultry distributions, quality and on time delivery to customers and we plan to rollout to other divisions as well. In your opinion, what where the key contributing factors that ensured this project was a resounding success for ASMAK? If you had to do this project again, what would you do different?

It is always the teamwork, which is one of the key factors for the success of such a project. Some of the other important factors, which contribute to the success include proper innovation for the critical process, right selection of the implementation partner and the team, and following the 10 quality principles from SAP, and most importantly continuous emphasis on change management and training.

There is no end to doing things differently, so I do not think I would do anything differently than what I have done. We are constantly improving our processes and systems whenever we think it is adding value to the business.

As aforementioned above the project between ASMAK, SAP and Seidor MENA was a phenomenal success, but what were some of the key lessons you learned throughout the process that you perhaps did not foresee at the outset?

We always learn from the past and that builds our experience. Probably some of the processes like parallel run with old systems could have been planned a bit better than anticipated. But ultimately, we delivered a successful project.



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#### CISCO

## POWERING AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE FOR ALL

In this month's edition of Women in Tech, CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Reem Asaad**, Vice President, Cisco Middle East & Africa, to learn more about her incredible career in IT - and how Cisco's vision mission statement is to power an inclusive future for all and increase gender diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

> ou have enjoyed a distinguished career in the IT industry here in the Middle East - and are seen by many in the region to be somewhat of a trailblazer by becoming a C-Level executive at one of the world's largest technology companies. Can you provide us with an overview of your career and how you climbed the corporate ladder?

As anyone in a position of leadership will tell you, there are many moments throughout one's career and even education, which have contributed towards where we stand today.

From a very young age, I was intrigued by technology and its ability to transform the ways in which we navigate our lives. Keen to learn more, I made the decision to move to the United States at the age of 16, specifically to pursue an education in IT. It is at this moment that I truly felt a career in the tech sector could not only be possible, but absolutely had to happen.

In my early career, I remained in the United States for around 15 years, working in roles involving technical consultancy. Where I was really able to thrive and progress was back in my home country of Egypt, where I spent 8 years with Raya Corporation, across various roles.

At a most senior level, I served as CEO of Raya Contact Center – a business process outsourcing service provider with operations across Europe, Middle East, and Africa, working with multi-national and Fortune 500 companies.

The same is true with Raya Data Center, where I also previously worked as the company's CEO. In each of these positions, I was able to gain the knowledge and expertise required to drive company growth, accelerate digital transformation and improve regional market development.

I did not reach such positions by mere fortune, there was of course, plenty of hard work and dedication which led to these appointments. Other positions I have held with Raya Corporation include Chair of Corporate Sustainability Committee, Board of Directors Corporate Secretary and Director of IT, Investor Relations and Corporate Communication.

There have been huge strides made in terms of addressing the gender inequality in the IT and technology industry, but many believe that there is still a long way to go. Do you think major technology companies are doing enough to bridge the divide – and can you outline to us what programs and initiatives Cisco have

## undertaken to boost diversity and inclusion?

When we look at the efforts being made across all sectors to address gender inequality, I will start by saying that certainly, there is progress. However, we must not become complacent – there is still work to be done.

Around the world, we are seeing technology companies in particular double down on their efforts to ensure diversity and inclusion – both from an ethnical standpoint and also to serve the overall objectives of the business.

Studies are time and time again proving that diverse teams lead to better output. In the tech sector, we are often building products or solutions for end users. It makes business sense to have a team that will go against the grain and actually work towards creating something new. This is only possible when you have a diverse team and a plurality of thoughts and experiences.

I have been working with Cisco for just over a year now and the reception has been tremendous. I can confidently say that Cisco celebrates women – not just for the sake of ticking a box, but to actually have fair representation and acknowledgement of achievements.

At Cisco, we strive to have balanced leadership teams and boards. We want people to look at our senior leadership and feel a sense of belonging, knowing that they too can get there – based solely on merit. Our purpose as a company is to 'power an inclusive future for all' – this

## Studies are time and time again proving that diverse teams lead to better output."

really gives you a sense of how we seek to embody inclusivity in every aspect of our operations.

In terms of ongoing activities and initiatives, we have many, but I will highlight a few. We have established 'Women of Cisco' – a global community focused on attracting, developing and retaining talented women in the workplace, as well as celebrating their achievements.

Each year, we also hold an event known as 'Girls Power Tech', which provides an opportunity for girls and young women to connect with Cisco mentors both locally and around the world.

We believe that progression should be a topic of discussion

at every stage in a person's career. In this regard, we run our annual 'Women of Impact Conference' – a whole day devoted to the professional development of women. As well as being open to Cisco employees worldwide, we also invite members of the public to attend.

Outside of the Middle East, there is a perception that women are not afforded the same opportunities as their peers in other international markets and regions in the IT ecosystem, but do you think this is a misguided and uninformed view of the region? Or is there merit in this view, and does the region need to do better in terms of broadening diversity and inclusion across the board?

Much of this comes down to stereotypes and often, a lack of awareness. The Middle East spans a significant geography, and we must first acknowledge that each country is at a different stage with regards to creating equal opportunities.



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There are those which have work to do, and actually, plenty which are outpacing other markets further afield.

We have countries like the UAE and Bahrain, which have only been independent nations for around half a century each – yet, look at where they stand today. The UAE specifically introduced its Gender Balance Council back in 2015. Policymakers across the region are looking hard at driving the equality agenda, and this will only continue to improve as time goes on.

At a governmental level, the mandate is clear. What we need to see is every corner of society making a conscious effort to

Policymakers across the region are looking hard at driving the equality agenda, and this will only continue to improve as time goes on." challenge assumptions and also create opportunities which fit in line with the equality narrative. Being the first woman in a particular field, or position of leadership is something that we celebrate today, and rightly so – but my hope is that one day, there will be no barriers left to break.

#### Can you tell us a little bit more about Cisco's Networking Academy and what the primary objective of that project is for the company?

The Cisco Networking Academy was established back in 1997 out of sheer necessity. Cisco donated networking equipment to a school, but as no one was trained how to use it, the technology sat unused.

This initial donation led to a valuable insight: technology is truly powerful when combined with education. We need to ensure people are empowered to not only use technology, but also get the most out of it. The Cisco Networking Academy was born out of this need, and we began by training staff to build their network. Fast forward to today, and the Cisco Networking Academy is a global powerhouse – a platform via which we are training, upskilling and developing human capital each day. Cisco is helping to futureproof careers and aid digitisation agendas through courses which develop skills in networking, IoT, cybersecurity and more.

Focusing on the Middle East and Africa, in this region alone, we have 1,627 academies running in 60 countries. In FY20 alone, we were proud to see over 370,000 students in the region gain Cisco Networking Academy certifications.

This actually represented a 27 percent year-on-year increase. It is also great to see that interest is not coming from one particular group alone. Since the Academy's inception in the UAE, we have had a 51 percent cumulative number of female students. In Oman, we are looking at 59 percent. What this tells us is that the right opportunities have to be created, and people will come.





### **LENOVO**

## LIVING ON THE EDGE

Chris Cooper, General Manager Data Center Group, Middle East & Africa, Lenovo, outlines to CNME Editor Mark Forker, how the future of enterprise data will be generated at the edge – and the role the global technology leader is playing in this space with its broad portfolio of solutions.

hris Cooper is regarded as one of the most prominent and innovative thought leaders in the IT ecosystem here in the Middle East, and under his vision and direction, Lenovo has become the partner of choice for enterprises seeking to execute their digital transformation goals.

However, as Cooper highlighted in a candid interview with CNME, he believed like many of his peers that when the COVID-19 pandemic struck it would serve as a temporary death knell for digital transformation.

I believe that the findings from Gartner indicate that there is a real definitive requirement now for edge computing."

"During the pandemic many of us thought that digital transformation would grind to a shuddering halt, but frankly speaking it has accelerated. That has clearly had an impact in terms of hybrid cloud and there have also been challenges accessing data centers. One key consequence of this changing landscape has been the vast explosion of new data, and Gartner is predicting that by 2025, 75% of enterprise generated data will be processed towards the edge," said Cooper.

Cooper added that if you examine those predictions from Gartner, then 50% of enterprise data will be generated at the edge by 2022, which is in less than 12 months.

"I believe that the findings from Gartner indicate that there is a real definitive requirement now for edge computing. I believe what we are seeing now is the beginning of that. You have the traditional data center business, cloud business and hyper-scalers, but more and more data is being generated outside of those environments at the edge – and then is being backhauled into those environments, and that's why we are looking at a combination of edge to core and edge to cloud," said Cooper.

The dynamic Lenovo executive also pointed to the growing use of AI that is also happening at the edge, but firmly believes that Lenovo's robust and diverse offerings in terms of edge computing gives them a great advantage – and is a key differentiator over their market rivals.

"When you look at our edge computing, we can run GPUs in there, so we can do AI at the edge. If you look at some of the key ISPs that are driving in this space, we are the only supplier and manufacturer that can deliver Microsoft Azure at the edge today. We build those appliances for Microsoft, so they can run Azure outside the data center at the edge," said Cooper. 19

According to Cooper, there are very few providers of what he describes as true edge computing – but conceded that one of the biggest concerns for customers in relation to IoT and edge is security.

"If you take some of the new technologies that is required to drive out the whole focus on digital transformation and intelligent transformations then you are talking about 5G, edge, AI, and blockchain. However, at the end of the day one of the biggest concerns is security, because what we are now talking about is having physical infrastructure outside of a data center, so it is not on your site, it is not in a secure data center. If you talk to customers about IoT or edge, the biggest issue they have is with security," said Cooper.

5G is a technology that has consumed many column inches in technology and business publications over the last number of years, but as Cooper points out, there are many misconceptions amongst the public as to what 5G has been created for.

"5G as a technology was not developed for streaming video content on your smartphone device. It was specifically designed for industrial IoT applications, and the reason being is, if you think' about the manufacturing environment people would use Wi-Fi for connecting infrastructure, but Wi-Fi is not a highly secure network. As you move towards

The benefit of Lenovo is we can be agnostic and approach the customer to find out what the right solution for them is in that environment,"

LTE, 4G and 5G, it is a much more secure network. There is almost this view that edge computing is expanding out the entry points for cyberthreats, but at the same you are moving from more of a Wi-Fi environment to an LTE, 4G, 5G environment, which is inherently much more secure," said Cooper.

In addition to this, he added that the other challenge from ISPs putting out 5G infrastructure is that the costs are excessive.

"Network operators are now working with the likes of Lenovo to look at how they can build new revenue models and create new opportunities where they can get new revenue streams to fund that 5G network. As you migrate from 3G, 4G and 5G, the bandwidth of that wave is getting smaller, that means it travels a shorter distance, which requires the need for your base stations to be much closer together, but that also results in the need for extra base stations to support your 5G network. Operators are now looking at industries and are working out



how they can turn that into a business opportunity, and we are helping them with that as we have the infrastructure, so we are working closely with the ISPs to deliver those solutions," said Cooper.

The latest data from IDC has illustrated that Lenovo has strengthened its grip on the UAE's x86 server market, and Cooper explains how the IT leader has been able to solidify its position.

"Our success is based upon a number of factors, one of which is customer centricity. We spend our time talking to enduser customers to really try

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and understand what are the business issues they are facing? Once we determine what those issues are, we can put together the right solution for that customer. Secondly, we sell 100% through the channel, and we embrace the channel, we are not like other vendors that flip-flop between channel and direct. We have a very simple philosophy and that is we are 100% channel, we live or die by the channel," said Cooper.

In addition to this, Lenovo's ability to be agnostic is also a key differentiator that has contributed to their phenomenal success. "We can architect the right solution that is tailored specifically for our customers, whereas most of our competitors if you are looking at a hyperconverged platform, have their own in-house offering and they will focus on that for a customer. The benefit of Lenovo is we can be agnostic and approach the customer to find out what the right solution for them is in that environment," said Cooper.

One of the most tangible examples of the impact COVID-19 has had on our day-to-day lives has been the transformation of the workplace. Cooper gave his overview on how Lenovo adapted throughout the crisis, and what the future of Workplace 2.0 looks like.

"I don't have a crystal ball, but the pandemic is still here, and we are still in the grips of the global health crisis, and no one really knows when we are going to come out the other side. We have seen a massive transition and transformation in our business, and those of our customers and partners. The first thing we experienced was that customers could not get access to the data centers. Everyone had challenges getting infrastructure into the country, but one of the benefits we had at Lenovo was the fact we own our own manufacturing globally. The benefit of that compared to our competitors is that they are generally very reliant on OEMs. We have global relationships with the component manufacturers, so we are in a much stronger position to service our customers and deliver on time in these challenging environments. People are starting to return to the workplace, and we are seeing a continuation of digital transformation, and more interest and understanding as to how we access data and manage it remotely with edge computing, so there is a lot going on, and the future remains unpredictable, but the future for Lenovo holds great promise," concluded Cooper. cnme

### APPDYNAMICS

## I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW THE CLOUD HAS GONE

**David Noël,** Regional Vice President, Southern Europe, Middle East & Africa at AppDynamics believes that 'visibility' in a hybrid cloud model is critical and could be the difference between prosperity or failure for enterprises in an exclusive op-ed for CNME.

> he current pandemicinduced economic downturn has led many to rapidly increase the speed at which they digitise their business sequestering workforces in their homes and looking for ways to serve a customer base that is now concentrated within digital channels.

For many brands a greater transition into the cloud has been a fundamental strategy underpinning this move.

However, moving to the cloud still has its challenges for some organisations. New complexities in the IT environment can prevent IT teams from delivering the promised return on cloud investments. Monitoring and observability are now critical components to an effective hybrid cloud strategy.

David Noël Regional Vice President, Southern Europe, Middle East & Africa at AppDynamics

#### Beware of the hype:

A YouGov survey — prepandemic — revealed 88% of UAE-based IT decision makers were planning to increase their spend on cloud. And across the Arab Gulf, all evidence suggests these plans have been accelerated by COVID's intrusion.

IDC expects multi-cloud to grow in popularity, with the GCC public cloud market alone projected to more than double by 2024, from US\$956 million in 2020 to US\$2.35 billion.

There is no denying that cloud adoption is on the rise and cloud has helped technologists overcome many of the conundrums unearthed by the pandemic, but it presents its own challenges. In many cases, the shift to the cloud has also led to a more complex, distributed application architecture and configuration.

Some components remain on-premise, while the rest of them move to the cloud, creating a hybrid architecture.

This leaves enterprises struggling to keep up and therefore failing to fulfil their customers' needs. In a market environment in which customer demands are trending towards immediacy, and IT teams are scattered to the four winds, the savvy CIO must surely ask, "What if something goes wrong?" In this scenario, teams urgently need a way to monitor, configure and optimise their enterprise's application ecosystem, through a bird's-eve view that captures complexity but reflects it in a concise form.

### The GCC public cloud market is being projected to more than double by 2024."

In the driver's seat:

By introducing tools that monitor and visualise the entire technology ecosystem, IT teams can take control of what matters and prioritise the digital user experience.

Observability is important here because it provides the raw, granular data necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of complex and highly distributed systems.

By implementing the right observability, cloudmanagement and on-premise solutions, organisations can maintain visibility across their application environment, from a browser session request to a backend database call.

Because the management console sits as a layer of intelligence across all platforms — and allows businesses to combine data from and apply policies to any of those platforms — they're not locked into any one cloud solution. They can choose whichever is best for the task at hand.

From their eagle's nest, IT teams will see the bottlenecks as they occur, and dispatch resources, either human or digital, to address them. Users will no longer be impacted by poor performance and brands will retain revenues and brand reputation.

Sometimes more action is needed than a tweak here or an adjustment there. Occasionally, monitoring solutions may unveil deeper issues, such as an infrastructure that is insufficient for the applications it hosts.

Still, with the right flexibility in your environment, real-time action can still be possible, allowing the dynamic allocation of resources and adjustment of workload placements. What follows is an optimisation of performance and costs, and the preservation and enhancement of customer experience, revenues, and profits. Observability provides validation and fine-grained understanding that highly distributed applications and systems work as they should.

#### Setting up for cloud success:

However, according to a 2018 report by Gartner, fewer than 15% of businesses implement an effective monitoring solution, which may endanger investments made in cloud computing.

All advantages — the flexibility and cost saving; the chance for innovation and expansion — could be neutralised by an infrastructure that is insufficiently understood by the very organisation it was designed to empower.

Remote workforces and collaboration tools require the cloud, but the cloud cannot be the answer to all innovation goals. Businesses need to harness the benefits of an effective monitoring and observability strategy across its entire IT landscape, or the benefits of the cloud almost disappear.

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AVAYA

## AVAYA EMPOWERING BUSINESSES TO REIMAGINE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to Nidal Abou-Ltaif, President, Avaya International, to find out how the global unified communications leader is shaping what's next for the future of work, how its solutions are enabling enterprises to create enhanced experiences for their workforce – and why the Middle East has been able to adapt so effectively to a 'Work-from-Anywhere' model.

he COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally impacted many facets of our everyday life, but one of the most tangible examples of its effect has been the transformation of the workplace. On a global scale, companies have embraced the 'Workfrom-Anywhere' model. Can you tell us how Avaya has adapted to the changing dynamics of the workforce, and how its solutions have empowered employees working remotely?

When the pandemic started, there was a huge rush to get people working from home. And I think a lot of organisations found they weren't prepared from a technology point of view. First, the priority was to simply provide access to company resources and enable basic video conferencing so that employees could still interact. Then came the real work – addressing challenges around security, privacy, ease-of-use and adapting between systems.

At Avaya, I think it's fair to say that we sprang into action to try to make it easier for our customers to move to a workfrom-anywhere mindset and communicate easily. Within a month, we'd empowered 2 million remote workers across 11,000 companies around the world. We provided complementary 90-day remote worker licenses, and our teams worked around the clock to get our customers set up and working safely. I was immensely proud of my teams for the incredible dedication they showed.

In the year since, the intensity of our work hasn't stopped, and we've been dedicated to helping our customers truly transition to a work-from-anywhere world. For sure, there's a hybrid mindset emerging, and that's borne out in the research we just completed. As it becomes safer to return to the office, we'll see people want to move seamlessly between the office and home – choosing the best environment based on the tasks they need to complete.

With that direction in mind, we're helping customers manage, for example, app overload - the fatigue of constantly switching between video conferencing, messaging, email, task management, whatever – with our workstream collaboration solution, Avaya Spaces. We're helping organisations create Total Experience strategies to reimagine customer and employee journeys to the point that any experience across any touchpoint is effortless. And we're doing that through composable solutions which address specific use cases and experiences.

It's a very exciting time in that we're genuinely driving new conversations around remote employee and customer engagement. Avaya has commissioned **Davies Hickman Partners** to conduct research entitled 'The Life and Work Beyond Study 2020' - and some very interesting statistics were unearthed. In the UAE, 51% of respondents surveyed said they much felt much happier since beginning to work from home. As a global leader in unified communications that are designed to enhance workplace collaboration, why has the approach to remote working been such a success here in Middle East - and why do you think they are more satisfied than their counterparts in the UK and US?

Honestly, we aren't surprised to see that Middle Eastern countries have managed the move to a work-from-anywhere world well. The region's workforce is technologically literate, and there's a high penetration of digital services with advanced infrastructure.

Certainly, one of the reasons why Middle Eastern workers have adapted to the change so well is that they're among the best-equipped in the world



We deliver an incredibly differentiated set of capabilities to the world's largest companies and governments."



for remote working. This is reflective of what we've seen in the field when enabling our customers to transition to a work-from-anywhere world – management moved quickly and decisively to empower their employees, and have since committed to a hybrid world of work.

All of that said, the rest of the world isn't far behind – workfrom-anywhere was already prevalent in a number of markets, and what we've seen is an acceleration of that trend.

Interestingly, 44% surveyed expressed a real fear that the rise of AI and automation will lead to them losing their jobs? Is this concern justified, or do you think that even if their jobs are



replaced by AI, new jobs will be created for them as a result of these technological advancements? What is Avaya's position on AI and automation in the workplace?

We specialise in infusing AI into customer and employee journeys. In that sense, the AI is there to make employees' lives easier, not to replace their jobs.

As an example, in the contact center, we're using AI to better connect and orchestrate customer touchpoints across the customer journey, pulling insights, knowledge and resources from across the organisation. This helps users to deliver not only the right customer experience but also the right employee experience for those supporting the customer journey.

So, we're helping organisations deploy machinelearning algorithms to determine the next best action by the agent, delivering the right information, step-bystep guidance, and knowledge articles to enhance the customer experience. Instead of replacing the agent, this actually increases both agent satisfaction and contact center efficiency, because we're providing additional empowerment to delight customers.

The survey also established that the UAE was the best equipped nation to foster an environment that allows hybrid and remote working to flourish. Why is the UAE in a better position that global superpowers such as the UK and US, and what advantages in terms of technology do they have over the other countries that were part of the research?

As we mentioned earlier, the Middle East has a very advanced infrastructure capable of delivering these sorts of services at scale. Other geographies have their strengths, too, of course. What's impressive about the UAE, in particular, is the drive from the leadership to foster innovation and embrace the technological trends of the day. From the UAE Innovation Week that was launched in 2015, to the Emirates Mars Mission, technology is high on the agenda for sure. And recent moves such as the multipleentry remote work visa show that the country is committing

At Avaya, I think it's fair to say that we sprang into action to try to make it easier for our customers to move to a work-from-anywhere mindset and communicate easily."

to the new world of work with just as much enthusiasm.

The work-from-anywhere model is here to stay, but what role will Avaya play on a global scale in terms of providing solutions that will keep the remote workforce connected at-all-times? What are your plans for the next 12 months?

Put simply, we're shaping what's next for the future of work. We deliver an incredibly differentiated set of capabilities to the world's largest companies and governments. And the complexity and scale that we can handle, coupled with the experience, innovation, and breadth we offer our customers and partners, is unparalleled.

So, we will continue guiding our customers and partners as they make that transition to the new world of work. All while executing on our own transformation strategy that sees us continue our move to a cloud and SaaS business model. We've made great progress, and we can't wait to see where the coming years take us. INTERVIEW

#### **MOBILY ESPORTS**

IT'S ALL IN THE GAME

Online gaming has grown exponentially across the Middle East region since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, CNME Editor Mark Forker, explores what the gaming industry needs to do to reduce the risk for children gaming online in a candid conversation with Loui Kofiah, Brand Communication Director at Mobily, and Mobily eSports.

The technology with ProtectSet is quite simple, but it is the way that it has been packaged that makes it a special product report commissioned by Mobily eSports unearthed some alarming statistics and figures and clearly illustrated that the current COVID-19 climate had significantly heightened the risk for children gaming online.

Some key numbers that jumped off the page from the comprehensive research conducted by Mobily eSports was that 74% of parents were worried about the safety of their children online, whilst 46% said they were unsure as to who their children were gaming with online.

In September 2020, the Internet Watch Foundation noted a monthly record of 15,000 reports of online child abuse in that month alone – and the NSPCC found 1,220 online grooming offences against children had occurred in the first three months of lockdown.

Loui Kofiah, Director at Mobily eSports, is an avid gamer, and understands the environment, but he is also a parent – and he offered his summary on the current situation.

"I think a large chunk of the

percentage regarding the risk is lack of understanding. It is not really the case that the gaming world is overtly risky, but instead it is more about the lack of understanding that is involved when it comes to gaming. One of the major things we noticed with many people was that they classed video games as 'kids only' territory – although most video games are targeted for teens and older," said Kofiah.

He pointed out that there was a generational aspect at play when it came to gaming from many parents, who were blissfully unaware that all these video games have public lobbies that enables you to connect with other users online.

"Back in the day when gaming was in its infancy, there was a clear distinction between which games are offline and which games are online. However, nowadays almost every single game, even the mobile games have public chat lobbies, and what happens is that there is a lot of targeting that occurs, either by bullying or harassment once you identify there is a kid in the lobby, or by grooming, by trying to be friendly with that kid and then moving that kid away from the public chatroom into a private one," said Kofiah.

Kofiah declared how he does not direct blame towards the kids – and stressed that they are outspoken and exploratory by nature, and view everybody as their friend.

"Video games and the online space in my opinion is all about mutual trust. If you trust your kid to have an open channel with you then they will come back to you and tell you about their experiences, but usually the way you react either opens the door for further dialogue, or completely closes the door. Parents need to be cognisant of the fact that kids don't know they are doing anything wrong, so they could be providing information willingly regarding their exchanges online without you even asking them," said Kofiah.

The Director at Mobily eSports also revealed that in many instances research indicated that many of these online predators adopt a paternal role when grooming.

"These online predators will say things like your parents don't understand, and they don't know what they're talking about and that sort of emboldens the children, but at the same time lures them into a false sense of security, as the predators assume the role of guardians in an online environment, so the kids view them as an uncle, or a family member," said Kofiah.

There has been concerted efforts from video game publishers and console manufacturers to remove toxicity from game play, but they tend to focus more on the toxicity, as opposed to sexual harassment.

"They want the business to be more sustainable and want to provide people with the options to reduce the levels of toxicity that some gamers have been exposed to. We have recently seen companies like PlayStation start to transcribe conversations, so they can pinpoint certain keywords that are being used to identify that this person is a risk, or that group is a risk, and they might even take action based on what they catch," said Kofiah.

He reiterated how building an open channel with your kids



**Back in** the day when gaming was in its infancy. there was a clear distinction between which games are offline and which games are online."

and trusting them was vital, especially if you're not going to take parental control over the devices they use.

"A multinational company does not know what lines are culturally acceptable in the culture that you are talking about, and what lines are completely prohibited, so they try to play on whatever is safe. This is why, it is more of a mutual exercise. It takes two to tango, and it takes the company to provide the parental guiding tools and controls for the parents that are aware enough to use them. You need that open channel with them, so they feel comfortable enough to come back to you about what they experienced. It's then up to the parents to decide whether they up their parental control game, or start using trust more," said Kofiah.

Mobily eSports have collaborated with Mullenlowe on the creation of their new product called the 'ProtectSet'- which has served rather effectively to become a conversation starter with parents when it comes to their children's online gaming.

"The technology with ProtectSet is quite basic, but it is the way that it has been packaged that makes it a special product. It is essentially a voice modifier, so it takes a pitch of your voice, and makes it sound older, and it mainly targets feminine voices, or children's voices, so that when they go through the modification process they sound like an adult male. The point of this is when they are talking in a public lobby, and they sound the way that they sound, then that protects them from online predators by throwing them off the scent, who are usually very active in terms of trying to source a childish

voice, so this filters them through, so they are not heard as a kid," said Kofiah.

He admitted that if there is an anonymous level predator online, and he focuses hard enough then he will be able to detect that the voice has been modulated, but what ProtectSet is doing is reducing the risk of potential online threats detecting children in the public chat lobby.

"The second part of this product in its entirety does not exist, so it is actually a stunt. The fact you need this product indicates how big the problem is. When we conducted the focus study with the parents, they quickly became divided into two groups, the first of which was take my money I need this product for my kid, whilst the other group was like thank you, but that's too extreme, I know my kid, and I don't need it," said Kofiah.

According to Kofiah their focus was drawn towards the parents that expressed a desire to have the product, because there was an acknowledgement that there is a problem.

"We hope that through the campaign we can better educate parents and make them aware of all the 'common sense' tools that are all available and accessible to them for free, and we use the ProtectSet solution simply to start a conversation. The need for that product indicates the size of the issue, more than the other way around. It's not because of the size of the issue that we developed the product, because products alone won't solve these issues, it's about starting the conversation as to how you can foster a safe gaming environment for your children that is built on a mutual trust," said Kofiah.

MIMECAST

## PROTECTING YOUR BRAND

CNME Editor Mark Forker moderated a virtual webinar that examined the measures and policies enterprises can implement to prevent their brand from becoming the victim of an impersonation cyberattack.

he virtual webinar was held by CPI Media Group and global IT security leader Mimecast - and was entitled 'Stop Brand Impersonation Attacks – Beyond Your Perimeter Protection'.

Online brand exploitation has become a huge problem and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Customers at many major banks and other large enterprises have been the victim of cybercrime via phishing e-mails, duped into thinking they were legitimately dealing with that brand, which only serves to indicate the sophistication of these types of attacks.

The primary objective of the session was to determine the best practices for finding, blocking and ultimately taking down domains that are ripping off legitimate and reputable brands, which can cause lasting damage to their reputation.

Werno Gevers, Regional Manager, Middle East, Mimecast kickstarted the webinar by delivering a short keynote, which laid the foundations for the discussion.

He highlighted how cyberhackers have become privy to the methods used by major enterprises to deter their attacks, and as a result have switched their focus to customers via domains and brand impersonations.

"Hackers have become wise and privy to the defenses of the industry and have turned their attention to human error, or domain and brand attacks specifically. Technology has permeated every nook and cranny of our personal and professional lives, and whilst it creates many opportunities and greater efficiencies, it also increases risk," said Gevers.

He added that technology was at the heart of what he describes as today's busines disruption triangle, and that this triangle typically consists of a dependency on old technology and systems, and interdependency on other organisations technology and systems.

"From a dependency point of view the vast majority of businesses and operations are dependent on digital technologies, and when one goes down it can result in a loss of productivity and revenue. When you think of interdependency, each organisation has invested to connect its internal systems, but in order to streamline processes, transactions and efficiencies, organisations also have to be able to connect to each other. Domain hijacks and brand impersonation attacks are a very real threat, and organisations are struggling with this because you don't know what you don't know, so it's crucial to have visibility to know what is happening with your brand and be able to protect your brand," said Gevers.

The first presentation of the webinar was conducted by Ronald Dubbeldam, Senior Specialist, Emerging Products, Mimecast, and he focused on practices businesses can take to protect their customers and their domains – and highlighted the unique capabilities of their DMARC Analyzer.

Dubbeldam outlined that one of the biggest and most persistent issues that has always faced e-mail since its inception is the fact that it has never had any protection against identity theft.

He cited the damage a successful attack can have on an enterprise and pointed to research which indicated that 30% of customers will stop dealing with an organisation that has been subjected to an attack, even if they do not suffer any material loss.

Dubbeldam said that prior to the introduction of Mimecast's DMARC solution, businesses were simply ill equipped to deal with this threat and prevent attacks, but now DMARC enables them to mitigate the impact of attacks.

"Organisations need to implement DMARC. It really is that simple. Implementing DMARC gives you insight in the outbound e-mail environment and can allow you to determine which sources can send e-mails on the behalf of your domains. Traditional security focused only on securing your inbound gateway, DMARC is used by Mimecast for inbound protection, which means if someone is sending a message to your gateway, Mimecast will do a DMARC check and based on that will determine what to do with that message," said Dubbeldam.

Dubbeldam explained that DMARC is not an authentication technique, but it does rely on two existing authentication techniques SPF (Sender Policy Framework) and DKIM (Domain Keys Identified Mail).

"Because the domain owner and the source both need to work together the malicious source can never reach the alignment on SPF and DKIM and the alignment is really the most important part of DMARC in order to get control over your own domains, and this means you can control all the domains you own and block unauthenticated messages from being sent on your behalf," said Dubbeldam.

Roy Ram, Product Manager, Brand Exploit Protect, at Mimecast was the next expert to deliver his presentation.

He stressed that it was very likely that your brand is already being targeted by bad actors that are trying to manipulate your brand. He pointed to research which found an increase of 30% in phishing sites, and a 58% increase in phishing attacks over the last 12 months.

"We are all very familiar with the various methods that are available to protect end-users, but the problem is that the bad actors also know and can easily bypass them with a simple man

Hackers have become wise and privy to the defenses of the industry and have turned their attention to human error, or domain and brand attacks specifically."



Werno Gevers Regional Manager, Middle East, Mimecast

in the middle. You may have twofactor authentication, biometrics and device recognition which are all great, but the truth is that they can be very easily bypassed as well. The key message for our customers is that your customers are not security experts, so please don't rely on them to be able to identify suspicious and malicious websites," said Ram.

Ram also highlighted how cyberhackers have transformed their methods from manual attacks to automated ones.

"Older tools are simply not able to cope with new attack methods, as more and more sophisticated and elusive techniques are being built to evade older defenses, which means you need to become more agile to better defend yourself. We have three core pillars to help us handle these attacks and they are early detection, proactive approach and a swift response," said Ram.

You can watch the entire session on tahawultech.com

### COMPUTER DATA NETWORKS

## BUILDING RESILIENCY

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Hanaa Al-Nashwan**, Vice-President, Computer Data Networks, Kuwait, to learn how the IT leader has helped its customers become more resilient in the face of new threats that have emerged as a direct consequence of the global COVID-19 crisis.

B usiness Resiliency has become a top priority for organisations across the region. More and more organisations are now understanding the level of impact that IT related disruptions can cause to their business. What are the key Cisco solutions that an end customer should adopt in order to maintain business continuity and resilience?

The pandemic has caused unprecedented levels of uncertainty across the industry and has disrupted the operations of many organisations – a lack of concise resiliency plans, and action-oriented playbooks saw IT teams struggling to recover their business with many facing significant disruptions.

We are a strong believer in the fact that technical certifications drive a multiplier effect on all our systems and processes." To enable organisations of all sizes you must be able to stay securely connected, Cisco offers a variety of solutions including Secure Remote Access, Virtual Meetings etc. Here is a quick glance at some of the key solutions we offer our customers with Cisco:

Cisco AnyConnect VPN allows employees to securely access corporate network from anywhere and any device. The solution offers granular control to restrict access to the infrastructure based on user identity and also provides visibility to ensure the team can track who, when and what of remote access.

Cisco Duo shields any and every application from compromised credentials and devices. It natively integrates with applications to provide flexible, user-friendly security that's quick to roll out and easy to manage.

Cisco Duo is a building block for Zero-Trust model with multi-factor authentication, dynamic device trust, adaptive authentication and secure single sign-on for every user and device.

Cisco Umbrella delivers flexible, fast and effective cloud security to secure remote users in a matter of minutes. It combines multiple security functions into a single cloud-delivered service helping deliver the right level of security to users within or outside corporate network.

Umbrella protects users from accessing malicious destinations, spam links, phishing attacks etc. with a single click. It also enables organisation to gain visibility and address the security blind spots in a fast and easy manner.

Cisco WebEx offers the most secure collaboration platform to stay connected during these challenging times. From virtual classrooms for education, telehealth for healthcare to conferencing for all, WebEx offers the most comprehensive solution to address the need of the hour.

The cloud hosted option allows organisations to set up meeting within minutes and start collaborating instantly in a secure manner.

Cisco Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) enables users to access their desktops and applications from any device while keeping the corporate data and applications safe and secured by policies.

It allows organisations to quickly deploy, upgrade, patch and manage desktops without user disruption and ensure they meet the increasing demand of remote users.

Cisco Cloud Mailbox Defense secures Office365 emails against advanced threats and provides complete visibility across email infrastructure.

With the rapid growth in



adoption of Office 365 to address the current demands and the increase in email bound threats including account takeovers and malware infection, Cisco offers a simple to deploy solution that can detect and block these threats with superior threat intelligence.

Cisco Secure Endpoint secures the most critical component of remote workers – the endpoint. It detects, prevents and helps remove threats in an efficient manner from computer systems by combines behavioral analytics, machine learning, and signaturebased techniques.

With its integrated XDR capabilities, it offers unified view to assist threat hunting and incident management.

### What are some of the key milestones including trainings & certifications that CDN has achieved as a Cisco Partner over the years?

Trainings and Certifications is integral part of CDN's business development strategy.

On the process front, CDN has demonstrated and achieved multiple ISO certifications that showcase the efforts taken to ensure the quality of products and services being delivered. These certificates include ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 17799, ISO 18001, ISO 18028, ISO 20000, ISO 22301, ISO 27001, ISO 27002, ISO 27003, ISO 27004, ISO 27005.

We are a strong believer in the fact that technical certifications drive a multiplier effect on all our systems and processes.

CDN has ensured continuous advancement in its technical skillset by certifying and recertifying on a timely manner. CDN employees are regularly trained and validated to ensure they remained updated and skilled to deliver the best solutions to the customer. Some of the Cisco Certifications achieved by CDN team are:

- CCIE Security
- CCIE Enterprise Infrastructure
- CCIE Data Center
- CCIE R&S
- DevOps.

There has been a huge increase in cyberattacks during the COVID-19 pandemic. In your opinion, what are the key security related concerns that organisations are facing in Kuwait – and what Cisco solutions do you propose to help address these concerns? The pandemic has seen a rise in cyber-attacks and Kuwait is no exception. The region continues to experience many compromises with organisations not prepared, crippling to restore operations.

Major threats witnessed recently include ransomware attacks, phishing attacks, malware attacks, code injection attacks among others. This has resulted in data breaches, denial of services and even complete halt of operations in certain cases where the customer had no protection.

CDN has been actively working with many of these organisations, assisting them to address the issue with short and long term solutions to ensure business operation is restored in the shortest possible time while the security gap is minimised to maximum possible extent.

In this effort, CDN has been positioning multiple solutions including Cisco Firepower to secure the perimeter and the data center, Cisco Secure Endpoint for endpoint protection, Cisco Secure Email for email protection, Cisco Duo for identity protection, Cisco ISE for network access control, Cisco Umbrella for DNS security and Secure Web Access, Cisco WebEx for collaboration, Cisco AnyConnect for secure remote access, Cisco Tetration for microsegmentation etc.

CDN has adopted a holistic approach to security and Cisco enables us to deliver this to our customers by providing consolidation and seamless interoperability options.

This delivers a great customer experience in terms of unified visibility and control, which we believe is the key for a strong defense system. 33

### STAR INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

## **A SHINING 'STAR'**

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Claire Gilmore**, Head of FS and Primary, at Star International School Al Twar, Dubai, to find out how technology is underpinning their ability to help transform and empower educators as part of a unique partnership they have undertaken with a school in Zanzibar.



ducation is power. It creates knowledge, builds confidence, and most importantly of all, it breaks down barriers to opportunity.

However, in developed nations, we often take education for granted and lose sight of the fact that for many children in underdeveloped countries, education is not as easily accessible, therefore does not provide the pathway required for greater opportunities.

Star International School Al Twar, based in Dubai, is playing its part in terms of addressing and bridging the gap that exists in the global education system through a unique partnership with an education facility in Zanzibar.

CNME spoke to Claire Gilmore, the person responsible for creating the initiative and spearheading its future direction to learn more about the project.

"The school is called Creative Education Foundation Zanzibar, and it has adopted a Steiner teaching model approach to how it dispenses its education. For those not familiar with a Steiner school, it is pedagogy strives to develop pupil's intellectual, artistic and practical skills, which looks holistically at the child, as opposed to just focusing on

I and the other teachers are looking forward to providing all children with an education. We will begin this process with live phonics lessons to help support their English." academics, so it really is a very different way to deliver the curriculum," said Gilmore.

The school was specifically designed to provide education to both those who have been orphaned, and children who hail from disadvantaged areas, but as Gilmore points out the school faces huge challenges in terms of how it finances its operations as it does not meet the criteria required for government funding.

"The school has 73 students enrolled from Grade 1 to Grade 7, and 87% of these students are either orphans, or from disadvantaged families. Unfortunately, the school receives no government funding, so they need to fundraise to be able to provide these services. The school also does not qualify for international aid because they are operating on such a small scale. Incredibly, it has taken them 9 years to get internet access to the school. They finally got internet broadband this year, which ultimately has allowed us to extend our partnership with them," said Gilmore.

Gilmore highlighted how the partnership initially began to help Creative Education Foundation Zanzibar reach their fundraising targets, and disclosed how FS students at Star International School, embarked upon an enterprise project where they designed lanterns out of tin cans and then sold them to parents to raise money for the school, but she stressed how this year her objective was to expand the partnership, especially considering that the school now had the broadband capabilities which allowed them to broaden the partnership.

"I really wanted to expand it this year and make it more of a partnership, rather than just being a vessel to help them fundraise. I met with the principal in Zanzibar to share my ideas and thoughts and I outlined how I wanted to base our partnership through a collaboration model. I wanted it to be collaborative. because I believe we can both learn from each other, and I was reluctant for it to be just us sharing our ideas, as I want it to be a two-way street. We want to find out and determine what their culture and beliefs are, what their school day looks like, the resources at their disposal and the facilities that they use. We started it off as a pilot, as we did not want to go to too large too quick. We have started off with Year 2, Year 6 and the secondary school council students, and they will be having the most contact with the school through live Zooms," said Gilmore.

Gilmore added that the advent of technology at the Creative Education Foundation has fostered an environment which will allow Star International School to conduct LIVE lessons in the future.

"Some of the older students have created step-by-step 'how to' videos that teachers can reference and incorporate into their own teaching – and I'm really excited along with the other teachers to be able to conduct live phonics lessons to help support their English. The principal of the school informed me that this is an area in which they lack – and is not a particular strong point for their staff, so they are very keen for us to deliver these lessons. We believe that through these lessons we will equip the teachers will the right skills and methods to carry out these lessons on their own in the future," said Gilmore.

Despite the fact Gilmore has pursued an expansion of the program, she is cognisant of the fact that they still need to play their role in terms of helping the school meet its fundraising objectives to maintain the hugely important mission Creative Education Foundation are playing in terms of empowering children in Zanzibar.

"We plan to do another enterprise project in which we will create a number of different products that we can then sell at an online auction, in which the families can bid against each other online. We do understand that with no government funding, or any international aid, they need all the financial support and assistance they can get to allow them to continue to do the incredible empowering work that they do each and every day for these children," said Gilmore.

The education sector like every other major industry across the globe has been impacted and disrupted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that shuddered the world to a halt last year.

However, the UAE has been used as a test case for other nations across the world as to how you can harness the power of technology to create an effective online learning model for students forced to learn remotely.

Gilmore candidly provided her views on remote education and highlighted the negatives and positives that have arisen from the adoption of that model,



which was of course forced due to the global health crisis.

"Distance learning was incredibly challenging for everybody last year, but especially for younger students like those in FS and Year 1. Trying to adapt the curriculum is tough, because it is very play-based and collaboration-focused, so it was difficult. We were very lucky that we were already using a lot of online platforms to support the learning, such as seesaw for primary, so the children were not being introduced to anything new as they had an understanding of the technology," said Gilmore.

Gilmore also praised the adaptions made by Microsoft to enhance their MS Teams application, which has tailored the solution to meet the evolving needs of teachers.

"It allows the children that are still distance learning to be more integrated and can help us to better assess them and track the work they are doing throughout the lesson," said Gilmore. Gilmore concluded a brilliant interview by conceding that despite the incredible success of the distance learning provided by Star International School, and other schools in the UAE, she would prefer the traditional method of learning, which of course consists of ALL children being back in the classroom.

"In an ideal world I don't think I'd like there to be two modes of education! You hear people talk about the 21st century skills, but a huge part of these skills are learnt at school, and they need to be in school to properly engage and interact with their peers. I would be concerned about the impact the restrictions could have on some children longterm, especially the younger children. Online distance learning has worked, and thankfully we had already integrated the technology into our curriculum, so the children were familiar with it, but the sooner we have everybody back in the classroom the better," said Gilmore.






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#### SOLARWINDS

# **SECURITY BY** DESIGN

Sascha Giese, Head Geek at SolarWinds, outlined to CNME Editor Mark Forker, what the IT leader meant by its concept 'Secure by Design, the recent cyberattack on its Orion Platform - and what he believes are the fundamental characteristics needed to create a safer online community.



an you provide our readers with more information in relation to what the concept Secure by Design means, and how you aim to achieve it?

We're reflecting on our own security practices and seeking opportunities to enhance our posture and policies. Among other things, our focus is on



While investigations are still ongoing, we try to be as open as possible in our communication as transparency is key."

further securing our internal

environment, enhancing

our product development

SolarWinds has stated

that it has always been on a

Secure by Design, but has that

long-term goal and objective

cyberattack on your Orion® Platform a few months ago?

It absolutely has been

an additional, robust threat

accelerated. We deployed

protection on all internal

endpoints, broadened our

enforcement of multi-factor

authentication, and moved

to a completely new build

environment with stricter

access controls and independent

products we deliver.

security and integrity of the

deploying mechanisms of builds. There will be further automated and manual checks to verify the integrity of our source code.

Have you been able to establish and determine how the cyberhackers were able to infiltrate your environment through the Orion Platform, and what has been the reaction of your customers since the attack? While investigations are still ongoing, we try to be as open as possible in our communication as transparency is key. We've confirmed suspicious activity related to our Office 365 environment, and while no specific vulnerability has been identified, we've confirmed a SolarWinds email account was compromised and used to access targeted SolarWinds personnel.

We continue to share our findings with third parties, law enforcement organizations around the world, and with our customers.

Can you outline to us what the key components and fundamental principles are in achieving a safer SolarWinds and Customer Community? One of our first actions was to resign the Orion Platform software code and its related products with new digital certificates to allow customers to verify the integrity of our new releases.

We expect these efforts and plans to guide our journey to becoming an even safer and more secure company, and we understand there's much more work to be done. In the coming weeks, we'll plan to share further plans and programs we believe will help us achieve that goal. come

AGC NETWORKS

# HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

### Sanjeev Verma,

Executive Director, AGC Networks and President & CEO at Black Box Corporation, explained to CNME Editor Mark Forker, how the company is leveraging its partnership with Cisco to help to address the new demands and expectations of its customers – and how the hybrid workforce is here to stay in the digital economy.

Sanjeev Verma Executive Director, AGC Networks

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here has been a surge in remote working solutions over the past year and organisations across the region have been forced to evolve and adapt their IT infrastructure at an unprecedented rate. Can you explain how AGC Fujisoft, as a key Cisco Partner is working to address the evolving needs of end users in the region?

As a key Cisco partner, we at AGC Fujisoft have taken a highly strategic approach during these unprecedented times. We have equipped our teams and conducted several awareness and training sessions on the latest Cisco Collaboration and Security solutions for our customers in the region.

In parallel, we are running digital marketing campaigns and business development activities with a targeted market vertical specific approach.

We are also conducting proof-of-concepts and demos for existing customers - as well as new customers to create awareness and drive adoption on the latest features and solutions from Cisco.

#### What are some of the key milestones that AGC Fujisoft has achieved as a Cisco Partner over the years?

AGC Fujisoft has seen significant growth with Cisco over the last couple of years. One of the key accomplishments has been the completion of Cisco Gold certification during the last year.

We have delivered some very complex projects with some of

### We strongly believe in the importance of having hands-on experience on the latest technology solutions."

the most recent ones being the deployment of an immersive Cisco telepresence solution for one of the biggest universities in the UAE as well as the design & implementation of a state-ofthe-art telepresence solution for one of the renowned Science and Technology universities in the UAE.

We have also successfully completed the deployment of integrator Cisco C90 solution with 3 precision HD cameras for the 160-seater learning center and 18-seater immersive Telepresence solutions.

This is the first Cisco IX5200 deployment in the region and a landmark deployment for a key customer in the education vertical to enable hybrid learning solution through Cisco Collaboration solutions and the integration with MS Teams for the schools across UAE.

We strongly believe in the importance of having handson experience on the latest technology solutions.

Hence, why AGC Fujisoft has invested in Cisco Webex devices for customer demos and has adopted extensive de-facto utilisation of Webex within the organisation and for customer meetings.

Some recent surveys have highlighted that many organisations might prefer the option of adopting a hybrid model, in which a part of their workforce will continue to work remotely post pandemic. How is Cisco helping to address the needs of these organisations? We at AGC Fujisoft have been successfully creating awareness on the benefits of Cisco collaboration products through digital marketing and sales campaigns.

We have been educating our customers on the benefits of Cisco Webex solutions which include devices for conference rooms, Webex teams for daily collaboration between remote teams and Webex app on devices for quick meetings.

We have also been positioning Webex Training Centre, Event Centre and Remote support for customers from specific verticals.

We have been driving a lot of focus on Security solutions and awareness on its criticality for remote employees and how FST helps securely connect users wired and wireless devices to the network with enterprise-class identity-based policies.

Deployment of Cisco AMP, Umbrella and Duo for remote workers provides a fast and easy way to protect remote workers while securing direct internet access at branch offices and controlling the use of cloudbased apps without the need for another appliance.

#### VEEAM

## MODERNISING DATA PROTECTION CAN REIGNITE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

**Daniel Fried,** GM & SVP EMEA and Worldwide Channels, Veeam, believes that the modernisation of data protection can foster an environment that can breathe life into some flailing digital transformation initiatives.

here is an encouraging narrative around Digital Transformation (DX) to emerge, not just from the pandemic, but from the last few years. Businesses are more aware of their place in the digital economy and how to leverage new technologies to better enable success.

While trends such as customers wanting to be more data driven and invest in their cloud strategy accelerated during 2020, as did the shift to using collaboration tools to enable remote working, they are not just a reaction to COVID-19.

These are shifts that were happening before and will continue to do so as we emerge from the crisis, but over the last year they have gathered pace at an exponential rate.

However, there are clearly still inhibitors to DX that are preventing organisations from investing in their own growth strategies, de-risking and future-proofing their business. The opportunity and the need for DX has been made so clear during the past 12 months, but above all there is one factor holding it back: data protection and a company's ability to ensure one of its most critical assets – data – is available at all times.

The inability to modernise data protection is undermining the ability to execute on DX for a significant number of EMEA businesses. The Veeam Data Protection Report 2021 found that over a quarter (28%) of organisations in the Middle East have slowed or halted their DX initiatives in the past year.

This is a high number when you consider that for the vast majority doing business online, enabling a remote workforce and migrating data systems to the cloud has been a matter of business continuity.

Furthermore, for those businesses that are accelerating spending on DX and increasing their use of cloud services, many are doing so on shaky data protection foundations. Our report shows that in the Middle East, 31% of all backups jobs fail, which tells us that businesses are trying to run before they can walk when it comes to their investment in technology and the majority are not adequately protecting their information.

From the conversations I have with CXOs, they do not need to be told about the potential impact of poor data protection. What they need vendors and partners to support them with is developing a clear investment strategy to modernise data protection at the same speed as they are transforming digitally and help them navigate an increasingly complex environment.

Moreover, they need a wider resource of talent and skills in the Middle East – 32% of UAE organisations and 23% of Saudi Arabian organisations citing a lack of skills to implement technology as a barrier in the next 12 months.

There is a fundamental opportunity for partners to play a critical role in supporting customers. By advising them on their DX strategy, as well as providing the skills and solutions to modernise data protection, they become much needed trusted partners beyond implementation.

If you look at Veeam's ProPartner Network as an example, there are hundreds of partners across the Middle East alone, with the skills and expertise to help businesses implement data protection solutions that are fit for purpose in the digital economy.

In turn, this is why at Veeam we are looking to evolve our relationships with partners and focus on developing key competencies, by offering them the opportunity to upskill their teams and provide world-class consultancy on DX and data protection.

With customers increasingly consuming IT services via the cloud (as a service), we are also helping partners transform their service models accordingly to deliver data protection solutions via a subscriptionbased IT model.

By moving to more recurring sales and business models, partners can become strategic partners to their customers looking to get their DX journeys back on track, by taking the first step of modernising their data protection strategy. ETTTE **Daniel Fried** GM & SVP EMEA and Worldwide Channels, Veeam 43

#### LENOVO

## A HUMAN APPROACH TO DATA-CENTRED ORGANISATIONS

**Ronald van Loon,** CEO, Principal Analyst Intelligent, and a Lenovo partner, has penned an exclusive op-ed for April's edition of CNME, in which he outlines the steps needed to construct a human and data-centred organisation.

onald van Loon is a Lenovo partner, and was invited to participate in their Think Transformation: An experts' guide to becoming 'Data-Centred' campaign, which shines a light on the importance of human involvement in sparking enterprise-wide intelligent transformation and making the most of data's infinite potential - a principle of Ronald's perspective as a digital transformation thought leader.

How to Build a Human & Data-Centred Organisation "Data is the new gold" is an

Like any tool, data must be used with purpose to light the fires of change, transformation, and innovation." often-repeated industry phrase intended to illustrate the increasing commoditisation and value of data. But consider a lump of gold; monetarily valuable, yes, but with unrealised potential. Yet in the hands of a master jeweler, its value magnifies as it's combined with other materials, shaped into something entirely new, and repurposed as a treasured family heirloom, or a symbol of wedding vows.

Like any tool, data must be used with purpose to light the fires of change, transformation, and innovation. Yet this depends on who is using it and how it's being used.

People have the power to invoke transformative competitive advantage and growth within their organisation by using data for strategic purposes. But it takes the right leadership, data structure, and skills to bring about the greatest business impact that can set it on a course for future success. Being data-centric is critical for any future-facing business but being data-centred is the cornerstone to drawing the powerful potential of creativity, innovation, and new opportunities from data through the value of the human perspective.

### What's the Role of Leadership in this Process?

Business leaders, executives, and C-Suite are responsible for creating a datafirst culture within their organisation that improves digitisation, agility, resilience, and adaptability, which are the new business imperatives of the current times.

As leadership looks to reimagine or rekindle their organisation to accommodate the changes and challenges that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, their role as paragons of data has simply become part of the digital agenda. This requires using data for strategic purposes that accelerate intelligent change and innovation.

The best leaders understand that it isn't about finding data that supports their own methods but seeking out data that supports different ways of thought. This line of thought sets an example that sparks trust, transparency, and a true commitment to intelligent change, where everyone in the organisation is accountable and involved in finding the best data solutions.

For example, as data scientists are responsible for analytics, they should be challenged to branch out and communicate across various lines of business. Simultaneously, people who are IT focused must be pushed towards communicating their relationships and understanding of data to data scientists and other business-focused teams.

Leadership sets the example for everyone to follow and should understand that they must involve their entire workforce in the transformation process and bridge the gap between technical and businessoriented people.

This is evident in findings from Lenovo's research, which describes key barriers to transformation being technology related, with 45% of IT project impact across EMEA impeded by legacy IT challenges and 42% attributed to overly complex technologies.

Below are just a few of the important ways that business leaders reinforce an organisation-wide data mindset and approach to data that enables the full value of data to be realised:

• Encourage enthusiasm: Leadership sets

the tone for dataenthusiasm across the entire business and inspires their teams and departments to use data to

**Ronald van Loon** *CEO, Principal Analyst Intelligent, and a Lenovo partner*  work towards a common goal and vision.

- Establish data accessibility: Setting a standard for data access that starts making data available based on the metrics and KPIs C-level wants to focus on.
- Accelerate data
  democratisation: Data must
  be used for everything from
  daily decision-making to
  empowering new product
  development, which requires
  non-specialists to be able to
  autonomously analyse data
  and prevents information
  bottlenecks.
- Data discipline: Responsibility for data should start with leadership, who should ideally be overseeing and enforcing data governance, privacy, and security standards across data collection, storage, and use.
- Reward system: Employee efforts and data breakthroughs should be rewarded to reinforce positive behaviors surrounding data and analytics techniques.

#### How Do You Build a Data-Centred Organisational Structure?

For digital transformation to take hold within an organisation, the right structure needs to be in place, which can be challenging to execute. 52% of IT managers are optimistic about the ability of new technologies to improve productivity, but 26% expect it to compound the complexity of their current infrastructure, according to Lenovo. IT's role in creating a structure that supports a data-driven organisation is unparalleled because they have a 360° view of how the organisation works via employee workflows, different systems, and transactions. IT should therefore work closely with leadership so that a holistic understanding of how data can be used to support the organisation is incorporated into infrastructure development.

Flexibility is another integral factor in building a datacentred organisation, such as through cloud, for example. Tools like the cloud are key transformation drivers and improve how a company runs and maintains their data infrastructure, platforms, and applications. It also improves real-time data processing that can result in better analyticsbased solutions.

Modern, data-centred structures should also be able to support advanced analytics and AI solutions so that they can be effectively operationalised at scale and contribute to datadriven transformation.

### What Skill Sets are Needed to Make Everything Work?

Data and technology are the engines of digital transformation, but people will always remain the drivers. As Harvard Business Review asserts, "it's critical to bring the people along with the technology."

Tools and technologies should enhance the roles of employees, only replacing those



roles that can be automated, like lower-value, repetitive tasks. Technology and people shouldn't be conflicting opponents, but teammates working together in harmony.

Certain skill sets are an essential component of being data-centred, especially to support new or changing business models and workflows, and the growing technology trends that are becoming staples for intelligent transformation, like robotic process automation (RPA), AI, and data science and analytics.

Successfully scaling data, analytics, and AI projects

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requires both data science and business-oriented skills, including data literacy, data visualisation, business knowledge, data engineering, and UX design.

Also, as technology is only as good as the people who use it, organisations must pair people with the right technology to get the most out of it. Soft skills are as valuable as hard skills because people who are adaptable and agile can learn how to keep pace with a constantly fluctuating digital workplace and are most likely to learn the right skills for the job.

From Lenovo's experience,

For digital transformation to take hold within an organisation, the right structure needs to be in place, which can be challenging to execute."

incorporating the human element into the roadmap towards intelligent transformation and supporting necessary change involves:

Technological execution:

Ensure employee understanding, education, and usability regarding new technologies is deepened via appropriate planning and support. This might be through empowering users with automated, AI-driven self-service tools that include AR tutorials to reduce onboarding challenges.

- Fulfilling human potential: IT-enabled opportunities to increase corporate responsibility and sustainability should be infused into the technologyselection criteria.
- Inclusive technology: Users should be prioritised to help technology support human workflows and drive productivity and support the desired role the business wants to play in the future.

#### Humans Provoke Successful Outcomes:

Becoming a data-driven company is a journey, not a destination. While on the surface it may seem like the key to unlocking success with data resides in technology, it's important to look deeper and remember that this is only part of the story.

"Humans ultimately make or break the success of digitisation and modernisation programs," Lenovo affirms, reinforcing the theme of people as the real enablers of business value.

For more information and resources on how to cultivate a more datacentred organisation, be sure to visit Lenovo. **INTERVIEW** 

Langley Eide CFO, Mambu

MAMBU

## COMPOSABLE BANKING THE KEY TO MAMBU SUCCESS

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Langley Eide**, newly appointed CFO at leading Saas banking prover Mambu, to hear more about her new role, what differentiates the company from other vendors – and the importance of creating a culture within their organisation that fosters inclusion and diversity

ongratulations on your recent appointment as CFO at leading SaaS banking platform Mambu. Can you tell our readers what your key roles and responsibilities will be at the company in terms of shaping their future strategy in this new business climate now labelled the 'digital economy'? As the CFO of Mambu, I oversee all aspects of the finance and legal organisations to drive strategic growth and efficient operational scaling.

With more than two decades of experience in key senior executive positions at some of the industry's leading publicly traded financial services companies, I am looking forward to maturing Mambu's finance and corporate functions as the company pursues its compelling market opportunity in today's digital economy.

Mambu has enjoyed phenomenal success since entering the market in 2011 - and is now present in over 65 countries. In your opinion, what is it that differentiates Mambu from other SaaS banking providers?

Banking systems vendors have been touting modularity for years. What they really mean is a pre-defined suite of proprietary modules that extend the functionality of their core systems. They're extensible but they're not flexible or open. An apt metaphor is the jigsaw puzzle piece versus the Lego brick.

A modular approach, just like a jigsaw puzzle, combines different pieces into one pre-set picture. It is impossible to swap out pieces for better ones and the platform is locked into one vendor. On the other hand, composable banking, that Mambu offers, combines independent components in any structure to create many different things. It is re-usable, and users can swap in or swap out any component. Additionally, composable banking follows a best-for-purpose approach with no vendor lock in.

Traditional banks turn to Mambu's cloud-native banking platform to replace their costly and complex traditional core banking systems.

With Mambu, they are able to migrate, launch and service a new digital challenger proposition, any lending or deposit portfolio, and reduce their time-to-market from several months to just a few weeks or even days in some cases.

You have enjoyed a decorated and distinguished 25-year career in the IT and financial services industry. However, it has been well documented that the IT and technology sectors have issues to resolve when it comes to the gender gap. Do you think the IT industry has made great strides in terms of addressing the inequalities that exist in the industry since you first entered the job?

The technology industry has been dominated by males for a very long time. However, with female empowerment initiatives across the Middle East, and especially in countries such as the UAE, we have seen the gender gap diminishing.

Whilst there may still be challenges, the UAE'S women empowerment national strategy along with its Gender Balance Council are encouraging and supporting women to lead in decision-making positions. Traditional banks turn to Mambu's cloud-native banking platform to replace their costly and complex traditional core banking systems."

> There are a lot of companies now proactively trying to bridge the gender disparity that exists within their own organisations. You have worked with some huge enterprises, namely Morgan Stanley and Service Now, did those companies have a strong culture towards inclusion, and how do they compare to Mambu's approach to gender equality?

> Mambuvians come from over 30 countries across six continents. Over the years we have become increasingly diverse in perspectives and ideas. To us, diversity and inclusion is a company-wide value, and a strategy to boost productivity and to leave a positive, global impact on our industry.

From Europe to Asia, and the Americas - Mambuvians are experts at collaborating globally.

Your role as CFO is global, but how important to Mambu are the emerging markets here in the Middle East in relation to new growth and opportunities?

As the digital world is gaining momentum, we see the proliferation of new digital banks and digital challengers across the globe. For the vast majority of existing and well-established banks this rapid change can be perceived as an existential threat. But for some banks, whether they are startups, spinoffs and incumbents, change isn't a threat at all. In fact they see change as a major opportunity to build new digital banking propositions.

They also take a fresh approach to it – instead of coding, they are configuring and integrating; instead of on–prem workloads, they are deploying in the elastic cloud; instead of major and disruptive releases, they continuously improve.

Essentially, we see more digital banks and fintechs alike working as a tech company, rather than a bank.

Digital challengers in emerging markets have a unique opportunity to operate like modern, platform-based companies. This brings us to a competitive advantage that tech companies have. Their IT is typically organised around a set of platforms, run by accountable and lean digital teams.

These platforms are each managed individually, can be swapped in and out, and when put together, they form the backbone of a company's technology capability. This is why technology companies can get their products and services to market 100x faster than their industry counterparts.

This is what we call a Composable Banking approach. This approach has a big impact in two ways. It helps grow your top line revenue by rapidly acquiring new customers, for example through account opening and personal finance, as well as your bottom line through SaaS and cloud operating models which can radically improve your cost to income ratio by applying lower capital expenditures.

#### **BSQUARED WIFI**

# **BE THERE OR 'BSQUARED'**

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to the dynamic and innovative co-founders of BSQUARED WiFi **Tavis Butler** and **Yan Bergeron** to find out how they are leveraging their knowledge and expertise to help cope with the demand for more scalable and secured wireless networks - and how its new partnership with CommScope has enhanced its entire solution portfolio.



ith a large part of the workforce working remotely, there has never been a bigger focus on the need to have scalable and secured wireless networks. How has the CommScope solution helped you in terms of catering to and addressing the needs of your customers? Yan Bergeron: When we joined the CommScope family 4 years ago, our vision was to become the best WiFi managed service provider in the Middle East region. Adopting the Ruckus Cloud

solution was a natural fit for us, enabling our engineers to configure, monitor and support all our infrastructure from one central access was key to our success.

Given that our team is geographically spread out – and with our Network Operating Center located in Europe, our call center for end user support in Dubai, and customers across the seven Emirates of the UAE and Saudi Arabia, we wanted to be able scale quickly and securely, and be able to work from anywhere.

The Ruckus Cloud Solution gave us exactly that, we can even control our infrastructure from our Smart Phones.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed us the power of the cloud when the UAE Health Authorities requested us to setup large scale WiFi network within 24 hours of notice for field hospitals and isolation rooms for Covid patients.

We could drop ship equipment to site to our contractor and configure these networks in minutes- all from the safety of our Network Operating Center.

What are the 3 key highlights in the CommScope solution that really sets it apart from all the others on the market? Yan Bergeron: The roadmap keeps evolving constantly with new features being added to automate and simplify jobs of our engineering team.

The API library is very rich, enabling our IT team to easily integrate the CommScope platform into our monitoring, alert and maintenance system.

As our business is evolving rapidly, so to, are our needs, and APIs enable us to adapt our workflows on the spot.

What are some of the key milestones that BSQUARED has achieved as a CommScope Partner over the years? Tavis Butler: Becoming one of the few Commscope Platinum partners in the Middle region is itself a great achievement.

With over 10,000 Access Points managed by BSquared WiFi, we could not have grown so quickly without a solid vendor like Commscope!

It has been an incredible journey for us so far, and we are really, really excited about what the future holds for our company.

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