### computer news middle east

ISSUE 355 | DECEMBER 2021 TAHAWULTECH.COM WHERE TECHNOLOGY MEANS BUSINESS

MCAFEE'S CHIEF SCIENTIST

LENOVO'S ISG PRESIDENT EMEA

> ZOOM'S HEAD OF MENA

CNME CELEBRATES THE HISTORIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE UAE OVER THE LAST 50 YEARS - AND HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF THE SEISMIC EVENTS THAT HAS POSITIONED THE COUNTRY TO BE A GLOBAL LEADER WHEN IT COMES TO TECHNOLOGY.





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### EDITORIAL



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So, whilst 2020 is a year none of us will look back fondly on, 2021 was the year in which we all kickstarted our society again and together embraced a new future."

# **AN EXCITING FUTURE**

t's the final edition of CNME for 2021, and what a year it has been!

After the challenges that we were all presented with in 2020, the last twelve months allowed us all to hit the reset button and adapt to the 'new normal' environment that we were all thrust into.

The pandemic forced us to all to think in a different way, and it has provided all of us with new opportunities to improve the services we provide. So, whilst 2020 is a year none of us will look back fondly on, 2021 was the year in which we all kickstarted our society again and together embraced a new exciting future.

A testament to this was GITEX Global, which was a rip-roaring success for all participants and attendees, and this has been complimented by the phenomenal success of EXPO 2020 in the first few months of the exhibition.

It's fair to say the dark days are now behind us, and whilst life will never return to what it once was, at least now we can look ahead to the future with great vigor, excitement, and enthusiasm.

On the front cover of December's edition of CNME, we felt it would be remiss of us if we didn't pay homage to the Golden Jubilee of the UAE.

What is has achieved over the last five decades is nothing short of remarkable, and we decided to look back on two historic projects that it pulled off in 2021, which was fitting considering the significance of its anniversary as a nation.

It's also safe to say that the UAE will remain on path to be one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world, and hopefully we'll still be here to chart the journey!

In terms of interviews, we spoke to some high-profile figures from the IT ecosystem in this edition.

CNME spoke to Lenovo executives Giovanni Di Filippo and Per Overgaard to find out how the IT behemoth is aiming to become the largest infrastructure provider in the world – and in a brilliant interview they also disclosed the lofty ambitions the company has in terms of its growth globally.

Raj Samani, Fellow & Chief Scientist at McAfee Enterprise & FireEye highlighted the nuanced nature of the challenges facing the cybersecurity ecosystem – and he cited some interesting insights that emerged from a recent report they conducted on the cybersecurity landscape in the UAE.

Remaining on the topic of cybersecurity, we also spoke to Ashraf Koheil, Director of Business Development, Middle & Africa at Group–IB, who believes his company have the 'complete platform' when it comes to cybersecurity.

In addition to this, we have excellent interviews with Mekdam Technology, Zoom, selfologi and Infobip.

We would also like to take this opportunity to wish all our partners and readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

See you in 2022!

Mark Forker Editor



# YOUR DATA IS YOI



ENDPOINT

SECURITY



DATA ENCRYPTION









CLOUD

SANDBOXING



MAIL SECURITY

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**DETECTION &** RESPONSE





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**4.6** Simon Bennett, EMEA CTO at Rackspace Technology has warned that it is time for businesses to get up to speed when it comes to adapting to the changes required to succeed in our new normal world.

**GROUP-IB** 

MCAFEE

have the 'complete platform' when it

comes to tackling the major security



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### NEWS

### 67% of top online retailers in the UAE not blocking fraudulent emails from reaching customers



Emile Abou Saleh, Regional Director, Middle East and Africa, Proofpoint

### Proofpoint, Inc., a leading cyber security

and compliance company, has released a research which identifies that eight out of the top nine online retailers in the UAE have a Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting & Conformance (DMARC) record in place.

However, only three out of the nine (33%) retailers have the strictest and recommended levels of DMARC protection in place, which allows them to identify and block fraudulent emails. This leaves customers of 67% of the top retailers in the country exposed to email frauds.

As retailers gear for high online sales volumes during the Black Friday and Cyber Monday special offers, it is imperative for them to ensure their customers are safeguarded against potential cybersecurity threats.

Emile Abou Saleh, Regional Director, Middle East and Africa for Proofpoint, said: "Cybercriminals are on the lookout for festive seasons and high sales period to drive targeted attacks through impersonation and retailers are no exception to this. While the Black Friday and Cyber Monday high sales period is a time to grab the best deals, it could also be a potential target zone for cybercriminals to attack. Our research has found that most retailers in the UAE are not implementing effective protection and email authentication best practices to safeguard themselves and their customers".

# SolarWinds Expands International Leadership Team in EMEA Market

### SolarWinds, a leading provider

of simple, powerful, and secure IT management software, announced the appointment of Laurent Delattre as Vice President of Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) sales. Delattre will focus on strengthening the company's commitment to customers and Partners where he will drive business development, foster strategic partnerships, and oversee the EMEA sales teams. Delattre will be based in France, serving the central Europe, south EMEA and Africa, and Middle East regions.

"It's an exciting time to be part of a larger go-to-market strategy, and I believe the team has a great opportunity to build momentum and work more closely with our customers and channel Partners in the region, providing



Laurent Delattre, Vice President, EMEA sales, SolarWinds

enhanced support to help the wider IT community solve today's complex IT management challenges", said Delattre. "It's a privilege to join the SolarWinds family, and I look forward to working closely with our Partners to meet our customers' growing needs and ensure their continued success".

### A New addition to the OMEN gaming portfolio by HP

**HP Inc. and the OMEN team, have** announced the newest addition to the OMEN portfolio – the OMEN 27c Gaming Monitor.

This is also the world's first Eyesafe certified 1000R curved gaming monitor, which serves to enable longer play sessions thanks to greatly reduced eye strain. Combined with VA panel technology, HDR 400, DCI-P3 92% colour gamut, and Quad HD Resolution gamers can expect stunning visuals which are bolstered further by its 240Hz refresh rate with 1ms response time and AMD FreeSync Premium Pro certification.

On the software side, the OMEN 27c features the latest and greatest



features from OMEN Gaming Hub, such as dynamic crosshairs, which changes colour based on the environment, along with 248 customisation options for shape and colour. Shadow Vision enhances details in dark areas, so you don't miss that crucial clue in a dark dungeon, while Edge Precision smooths and corrects sharp images within the game.

For console gamers, this monitor is plug and play ready with the PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X, and Nintendo Switch, with over 140 tests conducted. Simply connect the monitor with the HDMI cable and start playing.

# Human error undermines benefits of cloud adoption, finds research from Veritas

#### Veritas Technologies, the global leader

in data protection, has today unveiled research finding that office workers in the UAE are not always quick to admit their errors when losing data from cloud-based applications, such as Microsoft Office 365, which they have been asked to adopt in the wake of the COVID pandemic. As a result, their employers are losing critical business information, including customer orders and financial data, through accidents and ransomware attacks.

### UAE EMPLOYEES MORE LIKELY TO ADMIT TO MISTAKES THAN GLOBAL COUNTERPARTS

According to the research, UAE employees are more willing than their global counterparts to come forward and admit their mistakes, with 89% saying they have owned up to accidentally deleting data from cloud applications such as Office 365 or Google Docs, compared to 84% globally. Of those that weren't so quick to come forward, 36% said no one noticed their error, but in the cases where the accidents were discovered, almost a fifth (19%) of respondents reported that the data was lost for good.

Employees are even less forthcoming with ransomware incidents. Just 18% of UAE respondents said they would immediately alert their IT department if mistakes they made introduced ransomware into their organisations. Another 43% said they would either do nothing or pretend it hadn't happened.

### MISCONCEPTIONS EXIST AROUND CLOUD DATA PROTECTION

The research also highlighted that there are misconceptions around how much help the cloud companies hosting their files would offer, in the event that their data is lost. In fact, nearly all UAE-based respondents (96%) thought their cloud provider would be able to restore their files for them, either from a cloud copy, their 'deleted items' folder or a backup.



Johnny Karam, Managing Director & Vice President of International Emerging Region, Veritas Technologies

### BUSINESS INFORMATION IS BEING LOST FOREVER

The research revealed that the average office worker in the UAE has accidentally caused the loss of 39 documents in the last year, reflecting the scale of the problem impacting cloud applications. In addition, half (50%) of employees say that when they have lost data, they didn't know who to tell or didn't think it was important to tell anyone. And 21% admit they have either forgotten their company's policy for safe file storage or have never seen it.

### ServiceNow launches new messaging service



#### ServiceNow, the leading digital

workflow company that makes work, work better for people, has announced ServiceNow Messaging Service to help organisations drive better service experiences from issue to resolution. Leveraging the Twilio platform, ServiceNow Messaging Service allows organisations to purchase SMS and WhatsApp directly from ServiceNow, making it easier to quickly integrate popular messaging platforms with ServiceNow workflows. This gives organisations another channel to engage with customers and employees, regardless of their location, and help quickly solve customer requests for a more seamless end-to-end experience.

As the global economy expands at its strongest post-recession pace in 80 years, organisations must adapt to deliver compelling customer and employee experiences in any environment to thrive in a new economy and a hybrid world of work. According to Gartner, "by 2025, 80% of customer service organisations will have abandoned native mobile apps in favour of messaging for a better customer experience".

ServiceNow Messaging Service helps organisations meet heightened customer expectations, enabling transparent, two-way conversations between businesses and customers.

### NEWS

### Supertech Group Digitally Transforms with Infor to Boost UAE's Industrial Growth



Deepak Odhrani, Managing Director, Supertech Group

Infor, the industry cloud company,

has announced that Supertech Group, a diversified conglomerate based in Dubai, has digitally transformed with the help of Infor LN, enhancing its ability to meet growing demand for industrial products and discrete manufacturing across sectors. Supertech Group's digital transformation aims to support national initiatives such as the UAE's 'Operation 300bn' strategy to increase the industrial sector's contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) to AED 300 billion (US \$81.7 billion) by 2031.

"To help meet the region's surging demand for industrial products and bespoke solutions, Supertech Group needed to transform its systems and processes including sales, engineering, distribution, and human resources", said Deepak Odhrani, Managing Director of Supertech Group. "By deploying Infor LN and HCM as part of our digital transformation, Supertech Group has raised its efficiency and productivity, enabling us to focus on our customers' needs".

With Infor LN, Supertech Group is now able to capture and manage product warranty information, which is essential when its customers visit for quality audits. The solution has transformed integration between the engineer-to-order cycles, improved sales and finance processes, and increased visibility of complex supply chains. As a result, stock values are now 100% accurate.

### HP Partners with Dynagraph to Launch HP Indigo and PWP in the UAE



HP Inc. and Dynagraph have announced

their collaboration to introduce HP Indigo and PageWide Press (PWP) technology for the first time to the UAE market. HP Indigo 7K digital press will be the first company's product installed at Dynagraph premises. Like all other HP Indigo presses it offers endless applications using the widest range of media and over 30 specialty inks and aims to meet the changing world demands whilst maintaining agility, productivity, and innovation.

"Digital printing in the commercial

### Microsoft leads coding training for students with hearing disabilities

**Microsoft today announced its** successful collaboration with Sharjah's Al Amal School for the Deaf to deliver two days of coding training for students

with hearing disabilities. "Accessible technology is critical for the development of youth who need to overcome the additional layers of challenges that stand in their way of growth", said Afaf Ali Al Haridi, Principal, Al Amal School for the Deaf. "Through this collaboration with Microsoft, we will be able to provide the best in training and learning experiences for one of the most in-demand skills in the digital world. All students deserve the opportunity to excel in their field of interest, as well as opportunities to equip themselves with the right tools to shape their future. Our students will now be able to develop new skills and be confident in expressing and sharing their talent with



arena as well as for labels, packaging and Folding cartons has been growing tremendously in the past years. Combined with the evolving consumer taste and the recent

unprecedented moment of economic

disruption, it is evident that now more than

ever, it is our role as technology suppliers

to bring wider choice of innovation to the

digital printing market in the UAE", says

Adir Ariel, Central Europe, Middle East,

Africa Regional Business Manager at HP.

technology brought by HP Indigo is set

performance that allows for unlimited

to give users high quality production and

smart efficient solutions, the new

applications and opportunities.

Building on HP's reputation of creating

the rest of the world".

In today's announcement, which comes on the heels of the International Day of Persons with Disability on December 3, Microsoft explained how the training delivered to the students on 25 and 28 November was in line with the company's ongoing leadership on accessibility issues. The sessions were designed around developing the students' problem-solving skills and boosting their individual confidence. Over the two days, interactive teaching methods were deployed to introduce the participants to coding principles and encourage them to apply what they had learned to the design and implementation of computer games.

# Genetec shares its top physical security trends predictions for 2022



**Genetec Inc. ("Genetec"), a leading** technology provider of unified security, public safety, operations, and business intelligence solutions, today shared its top predictions for the physical security industry in 2022.

### MONITORING OCCUPANCY AND SPACE UTILISATION WILL REMAIN A TOP PRIORITY

Beyond safety objectives, organisations will embrace the use of spatial analytics data to reduce wait times, optimise staff scheduling, and enhance business operations. As businesses give employees the flexibility to split up their work time between the office and home, organisations will be looking for ways to best optimise their workplaces. By using space utilisation intelligence, they will be able to analyse employee office attendance, monitor meeting room demands, and make informed floorplan changes such as adding more desksharing options.

### VIDEO ANALYTICS WILL BECOME MORE VIABLE FOR LARGE-SCALE DEPLOYMENTS

As we move into 2022, we believe video analytics applications will mature in ways that make them easier and more economical to deploy at scale. This evolution will be made possible by vendors who focus on hardware resource efficiency and offer more granular controls for running analytics at certain intervals or schedules, instead of continuously.

Cybercrime will continue to grow and inspire new strategies

As more devices come online and data processing becomes central to operations, businesses will need to remain agile and responsive to the evolving threat landscape. Their customers will also demand greater transparency about how they are keeping data secure and private. All of this will usher in an entirely new model for cybersecurity that relies on continuous verification rather than just hardening networks and systems.

### SUPPLY CHAIN RISKS WILL GAIN MORE FOCUS AND ATTENTION

The supply chain issues that the world is currently experiencing will encourage businesses to be less dependent on single-source, proprietary solutions Forward-thinking organisations will instead seek open architecture solutions that offer increased choice and flexibility based on requirements and current availability.

### MORE ORGANISATIONS WILL MAKE THE MOVE TO CLOUD AND EMBRACE A HYBRID DEPLOYMENT

As more businesses take a step towards trialing cloud applications, they'll quickly understand the benefits of hybrid cloud, which will produce even greater forward momentum in the adoption of cloud technologies in the new year.

This could include implementing a digital evidence management system to speed up video and data sharing between different departments during investigations, deploying a cloud video management system to secure a high-risk remote location, or installing a physical identity access management (PIAM) solution to better manage access rights for all employees.

### Thousands of Potentially Malicious Servers Hiding in World's Most Popular Websites



David Warburton, Senior Threat Research Evangelist, F5

### Web encryption practices are

improving, but the flexible nature of HTTPS and cipher suite negotiation combined with stagnation or regression in many areas—is hampering progress and putting websites at risk.

According to F5 Labs' 2021 TLS Telemetry Report, which frequently scans 1 million of the world's top websites, over half of all web servers still allow the use of insecure RSA key exchanges. At the same time, certificate revocation remains problematic, and old, rarely updated servers are visible everywhere.

The research also found that attackers are increasingly learning how to use Transportation Layer Security (TLS) to their advantage in phishing campaigns. At the same time, new fingerprinting techniques are raising questions about the prevalence of malware servers hiding in the top 1 million websites.

"More than ever, nation-states and cybercriminals alike are attempting to work around the problems caused by strong encryption. With these risks ever-present, it has never been more important to focus on strong and up-to-date HTTPS configurations, particularly when digital certificates are shared across different services", said David Warburton, Senior Threat Research Evangelist at F5 and the author of the report.

### Z00M

# ZOOMING IN ON PERFECTION

**Sam Tayan,** Head of MENA at Zoom, has declared that despite the company enjoying exponential growth it will not rest on its laurels, and is continuing to innovative aggressively to maintain its position as the global leader in video collaboration during a fascinating conversation with CNME Editor Mark Forker.

n March 2020, the world as we knew it was brought to an abrupt and shuddering halt as the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe.

Technology enabled many enterprises and industries to adapt to the seismic changes they encountered in a bid to maintain business continuity and keep the lights on.

A key pillar and component in the fightback against the pandemic, and to many the central foundation of what was labelled the 'new normal' was the Zoom Video Communications platform.

Zoom has now become one of the most distinguishable brands in the world over the last 18 months, and as a result has enjoyed phenomenal growth.

CNME spoke to IT veteran Sam Tayan, who has been tasked with the responsibility of overseeing its operations in the Middle East. However, as Tayan points out Zoom were already on an upward trajectory long before COVID-19 accelerated it into a different stratosphere.

In addition to this, he highlighted how its customercentricity has also given the company an advantage in what has become a saturated and competitive space.

"Obviously over the last number of years we have enjoyed significant growth, but it is also important to highlight that we had enjoyed very substantial growth prior to the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. At Zoom, we like to keep in touch with the market and our customers. We conducted a very comprehensive survey last year to find out which platforms in the UAE were the most popular with end-users. We discovered that 70% of respondents had an extremely strong preference for Zoom ahead of other video collaboration tools that are available on the market, and that gives us huge confidence that we are delivering the experiences our users want," said Tayan.

It is understandable that a company that has enjoyed the success that Zoom has could become complacent, but Tayan insisted that innovation is very much at the core of what the company does and was adamant that it will not rest on its laurels in its pursuit of perfection and excellence.

"We are in the technology business, so innovation is a constant. In the past few years, I think it's safe to say that we have certainly not sat on our laurels. We have launched a whole series of new enhancements, innovations and products, whether that be from a security perspective with our end-to-end encryption, or through the introduction of waiting rooms, we are constantly looking at ways to better improve our product offering," said Tayan.

The charismatic Managing Director at Zoom also pointed out how at their recent Zoomtopia event they brought forward elements of virtual reality and video engagement platforms, which reinforces the fact that they are certainly not resting on our laurels.

Tayan also stressed how its ability to take feedback on what their customers want and to specifically tailor their product offering to suit their needs is another key differentiator between them and its market rivals.

"We need to make sure that we maintain the lead that we have in the market, and to do that we really need to listen to our customers to see what they appreciate, and what they would like to see and then it's up to us to try to incorporate that into our product portfolio. We have also spent a lot of time on improving the functionality, security, ease of use and performance and we believe that we have really pushed ahead in all departments," said Tayan.

Zoom has also chosen oktopi, a next-generation AI-powered and cohort-based teaching management platform, as their first EdTech partner in the region to take the live online classroom experience worldwide.

Tayan believes its relationship with oktopi will empower teachers all over the world to have a greater impact with its students through the greater flexibility and autonomy provided by the new online teaching experience. He used tutoring as an example of how teachers can now do more.

"I think a good illustration of how we have helped to empower educators is through tutoring. Traditionally, tutoring was a very clunky business, and over the last number of years private tutoring has become a very popular growing trend, as it has become in many ways more accessible. However, typically it involved a tutor having to travel to the home of the student, that required you to provide an adequate space for them to perform their lessons, and it meant that the teacher was spending a lot time commuting back-and-forth. However, this can all now be done slickly over Zoom-based platforms such as Oktopi and it really solves a problem that was real for parents. A teacher can now also potentially teach a dozen children in the one evening and can also have multiple kids in the one tutoring class. It solves a real problem

# We are in the technology business, so innovation is a constant."

in a very elegant way and is a good example of an excellent integration of Zoom," said Tayan.

In terms of what he believes ultimately differentiates Zoom from other video communication collaboration providers globally, Tayan said he believed it was the quality that they provide that distinguishes the company from its rivals, citing that in the experience economy users wants seamless experiences and that is what Zoom provides for its end-users.

"I think the key differentiator for us is the quality. This is something that becomes very evident to customers from the moment they start a call. They notice the quality of the audio and video and quite simply we deliver a top-class experience. We know that if users have 2–3 bad experiences with applications, then they it is very likely that they will not use it again. However, if they are having a consistently good experience then it goes without saying that they will be very satisfied and they are going to keep using it all the time, and this is a major reason why we have been able to achieve so much success globally," concluded Tayan. **CITTE** 

**Sam Tayan** Head of MENA at Zoom

### **WESTCON**

# A 'HEALTHY' IT INFRASTRCUTURE

Harley Street, a word renowned healthcare provider based in Abu Dhabi, has disclosed how they have completely transformed the experience they provide to their clients through their partnerships with SysSense, Comstor and Cisco.





he Challenge Harley Street has been experiencing positive growth following huge demand for their services and the management has decided to expand their footprint by taking up new projects and expanding current services offered by strategically

acquiring new villas closer to the existing facility.

One of the key objectives has been to offer the best experience to their patients even in the newly acquired properties. The customer was also facing a challenge on bandwidth, since the addition of the new facility and integrating it to the network would bring about more workload on the existing core switches which were also nearing their end of operating cycle and support.

#### **The Solution**

SysSense identified the need for more bandwidth and switching capacity as the facility is growing; whilst there was also

DECEMBER 2021

a need for 'future-proofing' the infrastructure for the next 5 years.

The team at SysSense proposed and successfully implemented the Cisco Catalyst series network switches for the core and access layer with a 10G ethernet backbone.

This helped ensure that there was suffcient bandwidth and enough room to deploy applications and network services with minimal latency. The core switches offer redundancy with dual uplinks from each access switch thus ensuring the uptime on the network.

#### **Role played by Comstor**

As a part of their role in the channel as a valueadded distributor, Comstor extended their value to this requirement by designing the bill of quantities (BoQ), conducting the proof (PoC) of concept and ensuring timely supply of solutions and services to SysSense.

#### Outcome

The customer appreciated that the project was completed successfully with minimal disruption on the application and services. Another key aspect that the customer valued was the smooth transition during replacement of the core switches which could have been very complicated if it was not planned and executed well. Suhail Paliath, Technical

# In today's world, a healthy IT infrastructure is essential to the success of any industry."

Manager at SysSense, praised the role played by Comstor in helping them successfully execute the project – and thanked Harley Street for giving them the opportunity to participate on their transformation journey.

"I'd like to thank IT manager Firoz Farooq and the rest of the management team at Harley Street Medical Center for giving us the opportunity to collaborate together, and we look forward to working with them again in the future. I would also like to thank the Comstor team for their support in successful completion of the project."

Firoz Farooq, IT manager at Harley Street Medical Center, highlighted how it was critical to have a robust and flexible IT infrastructure in a bid to be able to adapt and evolve to changing market dynamics and customer demands.

"In today's world, a healthy IT infrastructure is essential to the success of any industry. But it becomes increasingly important when it comes to the healthcare industry, where 'business as usual' often involves saving people's lives. In, IT these situations, the critical significance of the work we do from entering data on a patient's file to alerting doctors to urgent needs necessitates that every component of our network performs optimally at all times.

He also outlined that with advances in technology, the network of a typical healthcare business is both ever evolving and everexpanding.

Illustrating that healthcare organisations had begun leveraging mobile devices like smartphones and tablets to handle tasks like accessing medical records and submitting prescriptions.

"If networks aren't properly maintained, it can significantly compromise the quality of care to patients. IT services uptime and availability is the key to any medical facility and our patients deserve nothing but the best. We were about to hit the upper limit on our network infrastructure equipment, and we needed to ensure that we are taking the right decisions at the right time and foresee our needs in the future that will be a catalyst for our growth in the near and long term. The Cisco catalyst 9500 and 9200 were proposed and implemented by the SysSense team and they have satisfied all of our requirements of capacity, uptime & scalability," said Farooq. Come

### SELFOLOGI

# **'SELF' BELIEF**

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Rob Pye**, CEO of selfologi, to find out how the technology company is positioning itself to become the 'go-to' platform for people looking to book online cosmetic treatments across the Middle East region.

> e live in an era that many analysts have labelled as the experience economy. Our dependency on technology has intensified and we rely on mobile applications to run our daily lives.

Interestingly, despite the fact it is now glaringly evident that we value convenience when it comes to how we interact with products and services, some industries have not yet leveraged the power of new technologies to transform the way it operates its business, and one such industry is that of cosmetic treatments.

Dubai-based start-up selfologi, which aims to better educate users on cosmetic treatments across the GCC region through its innovative and customer-centric platform – have projected that there is over \$2.2 billion worth of cosmetic treatments annually in the GCC. However, there is a huge

We are providing a complete end-toend experience for the consumers and clinics. We are doing the full funnel from awareness to acquisition to conversion." void when it comes to the information on the treatments available, the quality and credibility of the clinics, and the ability to compare services, however, they believe their platform can radically transform the experience for consumers interested in cosmetic procedures.

"Our mission at selfologi is to become 'the destination' for cosmetic treatments. selfologi itself is a platform in which we want consumers to come and learn more about the cosmetic procedures that are available online. For us, the learning element is a huge pillar in what we are offering to consumers. We know from our research that there is over 1 million people actively searching every single month across the GCC region for information on different cosmetic treatments, but the consistency and quality of that information leaves a lot to be desired," said Pve.

Pye said that users interested in cosmetic treatments quickly discovered that there was no authentic central source of information for them to get the answers that they wanted.

"Currently, if you Google laser hair removal, or Botox, or fillers, the search engine will generate results from 20 different websites that all have varying credibility, quality and consistency in relation to what are the best treatments for you. What we are aiming to do at selfologi is to fill that void, and really be that go to destination to find out the information that you need to know when considering cosmetic treatments," said Pye.

As Pye pointed out, whilst many of the treatments available are non-invasive, some are obviously invasive, so it was understandable that many people considering treatment wanted access to the best possible information available to them.

"We want to provide consumers with the ability to compare and find the best clinic and practitioner for their specific treatment. Once they decide to press ahead with their treatment then they can look at user reviews, ratings, before and after images. Essentially, we give them a catalogue of information to better inform their decisionmaking. We are empowering them with knowledge, and once they have selected the clinic that they would like, then they can book directly from our platform," said Pye.

There has been an exponential increase in digital transformation since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially across the Middle East.

The fact clinics within the cosmetic treatment industry in the region have not become digitalised, is not though resistance to change, but instead the fact that they are not sure how to get to where they need to go, but now selfologi is aiming to be that enabler.

As mentioned earlier in the article, there are around \$2.2bn worth of cosmetic treatments carried out across the GCC, but almost none of **Rob Pye** CEO of selfologi it is booked online, so according to Pye if online channels can be utilised effectively then there is a huge opportunity to scale. He also highlighted the influence of its founder Tamer Wali.

"We are providing a complete end-to-end experience for the clinics. We are doing the full funnel from awareness to acquisition to conversion. Today, almost 0% of cosmetic treatments are booked online, it's typically just lead generation forms and in-clinic bookings. We are backed by an incredible founder in Tamer Wali, who is our lead investor.

He has 30-years of experience in cosmetic treatments, and he has worked for the leading distributor of medical aesthetic devices in the GCC. He has seen the B2B aspect of the business, and he has witnessed firsthand the evolution of that technology, and the delivery of these services has advanced massively over the vears. However, the business model and how the business operates has remained relatively static, but we are here to help the clinics, and we truly believe our platform can completely transform their business and the industry overall," said Pye.

Pye has enjoyed a decorated career in building startups in the beauty industry, and he is very excited at what he believes selfologi can achieve in the cosmetic treatment sector in the Middle East. His confidence is well-founded considering the company secured \$17.5 million in seed funding in June of this year.

Pye said that he sees the role of selfologi between the end users and the clinics as that of a matchmaker.

"I always say to our team that our B2B customer is just as important as our B2C customer, because without us bringing the demand and bringing potential customers to the platform then we've got nothing of interest to the clinics. However, without the clinics coming on the platform and onboarding their services then we ultimately have nothing to offer to the consumers, so we have got to be that matchmaking agent. We need to infuse and sync both elements to make the platform a success. Our promise to the clinics is you take care of the patients, and we'll take care of the rest,"

### AMAZON WEB SERVICES

# A NEW KIND OF 'ENERGY'

**Bill Vass,** Vice President of Engineering at Amazon Web Services, explains to CNME Editor Mark Forker how innovations in digital technologies have sparked major changes to the way businesses operate in the energy sector following the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic.



hat are the trends that are shaping

the energy industry today? What are the key factors that are driving the digital transformation of the energy sector?

The energy industry is primed for unprecedented opportunity for two major reasons, firstly innovation is accelerating energy transition in the sector, and secondly, new cloud-based technologies are making it possible to reimagine how they do business.

The industry is poised to take advantage of connecting complex and distributed workflows and workloads, dramatically improving risk and safety measures, and increasing efficiency substantially.

In addition, new technologies like AI, ML, and IoT are tools that have the potential to accelerate innovation across the value chain.

## What impact did the pandemic have on the sector?

The global pandemic accelerated the adoption of cloud technology as companies across every industry dealt with supply chain issues and dramatic shifts in customer buying habits.

For the energy sector, it increased the need for data and agility to optimize existing assets due to significant supply and demand shifts. It also highlighted the need for efficiency in business operations across the value chain.

How can technology help the sector reach its goals of efficiency and sustainability? What key technologies do you think will shape the sector's future? Innovation in digital technology has allowed energy companies to create significant operational improvements to drive efficiencies and lower their overall environmental impact.

Advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), high-performance computing (HPC), Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, and digital twins allow energy companies improve productivity, operational agility, and maximize intelligence across their operations by seamlessly connecting people, systems, and assets for new insights and foresight, yielding faster and better decision making across their organizations.

AWS is helping leading energy companies deploy and scale disruptive technologies across the world.

As a result, explorers can derive deep insights faster to improve field planning. Geoscientists can run more demanding HPC workflows to identify energy sources faster, cheaper and with lowered environmental impact.

Asset managers can optimize production and assure technical integrity (across reservoirs, processing facilities, pipelines, wind and solar farms) to reduce business and operational risk, positively impacting HSE performance by using advanced analytics and AI like predictive and prescriptive maintenance -maintaining high safety standards for employees, customers and the environment.

Retailers can predict and respond to their customer's changing mobility needs with diverse fueling options and simplification in payments. As for business leaders, they can scale the development of businesses focused on transforming energy generation and transmission as well as new delivery networks to improve reliability and enhance customer satisfaction.

### In what ways is cloud technology being used in the energy sector today?

Cloud technology is enabling the sector to improve operations and innovate at a faster rate in a variety of ways. For example, sensors and IoT are enabling organizations unprecedented capability to increase the speed and quality of decision making to lower costs and make operations more sustainable.

Woodside's Pluto Liquefied Natural Gas facility in Western Australia is now equipped with 200,000 sensors that monitor operations 24/7.

By connecting these IoT sensors to the AWS Cloud, they've been

### AWS is helping leading energy companies deploy and scale disruptive technologies across the world."

able to optimize the production and maintenance in a way that we were never able to do in the past.

Woodside used sensor data to build an algorithm that allows the team to predict and prevent foaming in the Acid Gas Removal Unit (AGRU), a critical part of the production process that cannot be monitored directly. Currently, Woodside runs more than 6,000 algorithms on the sensor data from its Pluto plant.

French multinational utility company, ENGIE, has been forward thinking in how it responds to this new landscape, and how it stores, uses and mines data for insights. The company moved its data from silos to create the Common Data Hub (CDH), a custom-built data repository using a globally distributed data lake and analytics solutions.

Since implementing the CDH, ENGIE's renewable fleet of wind farms, solar farms and hydroelectric dams has become significantly more efficient. Improving the availability and the performance of an asset that's worth \$100 million or \$500 million by just 1% by tapping into the right sort of data is significant. The move has also been a huge performance lever, and has impacted other operational areas, furnishing up to 5% savings without ENGIE needing to hire extra staff.

Is the energy sector on par with other sectors in its pace of cloud and technology adoption? What are the current challenges that are in the way of an accelerated digitalization of the sector? Energy remains one of the most relied upon and essential industries on the planet and the energy transition underway requires organizations to accelerate the pace of digital innovation and transformation.

Despite major investments over the years in IT infrastructure, equipment, and operational technology, many industry processes remain manual, disconnected, and inefficient. Data is siloed. Simulations are lengthy.

Applications and infrastructure are legacy-based. Performing risk assessments, asset integrity inspections, and tracking safety incidents are costly and time consuming. Leaders in the energy sector must set the stage for recovery and be able to respond to energy demands in both the short and long term.

What is certain is that change is needed and that begins with internal cultural transition. Transformation is difficult and over 70% of digital innovation initiatives fall short.

Organizations need to drive greater awareness and alignment between IT, lines of business, and outcomes. AWS's culture of innovation and working backwards processes can help organizations achieve their digital transformation and innovation goals.



We need to better commuicate to consumers about the trending tools used by scammers and educate how to spot them."

**Ashraf Koheil** Regional Director, Middle East, North Africa & Turkey at Group-IB

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### **GROUP-IB**

# THE COMPLETE PLATFORM

**Ashraf Koheil,** Director of Business Development, Middle & Africa at Group-IB, has stated his belief that the security solution and service provider has the 'complete platform' when it comes to cybersecurity in a conversation with CNME Editor Mark Forker.

roup-IB's Ashraf Koheil has been in the Middle East region for over 10 years, and during that time he has cultivated a reputation as a key thought leader within the cybersecurity ecosystem. Prior to his appointment as Regional Director for the Middle East & Africa at Group-IB, Koheil held senior positions at Microsoft and FireEve.

We began our conversation by discussing some of findings that emerged from a comprehensive report that examined new threat actors and global scams during a recent virtual summit that was held by Group-IB.

It has been claimed by some security analysts that the UAE and other GCC nations are more vulnerable than other developed nations when it comes to cyberattacks. According to Koheil the United Arab Emirates has been a victim of its own success.

"I think in terms of cyberattacks it is fair to say that the UAE is targeted more than other nations in the region, and the primary reason for that is the fact that the UAE is leading in so many areas when it comes to technology and innovation. EXPO 2020 is a great illustration of that sort of visionary leadership that fosters new innovations. However, as we know threat actors follow the noise and go where the big brands are based. I would stop short at saying the UAE is being singled-out, but it is certainly a big attraction simply because they lead on innovation and digital transformation," said Koheil.

Koheil also highlighted that when businesses embark on large transformation projects then there is always the inevitable risk that some will lag and fall behind, which creates a pathway for scammers and cybercriminals.

"We know that the UAE government leads on innovation, and they always set the bar high for businesses in terms of the transformation required, so in many ways it's rather inevitable that there will be some that lag behind, as some enterprises that are bigger than others will be able to comply faster than SMBs for example, so that's how it can be easy for threat actors to target some enterprises," said Koheil.

One other interesting statistic that emerged from the report was that more than 130 wellknown and popular brands had been the victim of impersonation attacks. According to the recently published fifth part of Group-IB's report HI-TECH CRIME TRENDS 2021/2022 "Scams and phishing: the epidemic of online fraud", another trending scam that has been gaining popularity is the use of special targeted links, fine-tuned for a specific victim. Group-IB Digital Risk Protection analysts have recorded the presence of this targeted scam in over 100 countries worldwide, including in the the GCC region. The users receive a rogue unique link customized for their victim, which utilizes the potential victim's unique parameters (country, time zone, language, IP, browser, and etc.) to display the relevant content on the scam page. The targeted link most frequently leads to the website with the notorious surveys. Very

often scammers promise a large prize for completing the survey. But after completing this survey, the user will be asked to fill out a form with their personal data or payment data which goes straight to scammers. It's extremely hard to detect and take down as scam actors create a targeted link customized for a specific user so that it doesn't display any content to those who attempt to follow it without specific cookies.

Again, Koheil outlined how the hackers were clever in terms of monitoring which entities were embarking on large marketing campaigns to again exploit unsuspecting end-users.

"Brand equity is massively important. it's big money, and it is a large part of a company's market capitalization. If you examine the marketing investments being made by the biggest brands in the UAE, whether they are telecom providers, retailers, or airlines, the scammers follow that because if enterprises are advertising aggressively across all the mediums available to them then this inevitably creates noise and draws attention, which is want they want from a consumer perspective, but the negative consequence of the marketing campaign is that it alerts those potential threat actors. Companies send offers directly to their customers, so as a consumer if you get 5 offers, you're not going to know if the 6th or 7th is a scam, as all your identifying with is the brand logo, and that's why so many are falling victim to these types of attacks," said Koheil.

In terms of what can be done to combat and thwart brand



We are not a firewall company, and we have very specific surgical set of solutions that moves your environment from good to great."

impersonation attacks in the future, the Group–IB executive believes a combination of greater cyber education and responsible approach to digital risks mitigation on the part of big-name brands would be the appropriate remedy for the issue.

"An important component in stopping brand impersonation attacks is cyber education. Scams thrive on lack of information and silence. We need to better communicate to consumers about the trending tools used by scammers and educate how to spot them. I think from the enterprises perspective they need to ensure that their marketing campaigns adhere to the secure guidelines that are in place. Banking providers, to their credit, always state when they are marketing that they will never ask a customer for their personal information and businesses need to continually reinforce these messages when launching marketing strategies. Finally, users alone can hardly do anything about the spread of scam. Companies should focus on monitoring and taking down scammers' entire infrastructures, instead of blocking separate violation. It's important to gather knowledge about their evolving schemes tailored to target a particular entity and



investigate the violations to bring the perpetrators to justice together with law enforcement," said Koheil.

Over the last 12 months, we have seen some high-profile ransomware attacks that have had some devastating economic ramifications for those targeted.

The economics of modern-day ransomware attacks are a far cry from the very first ransomware attack on a bank which was for \$189 dollars, as Koheil pointed out the average ransomware attack on a bank last year was \$1.25 million.

According to the Group-IB's HI-TECH CRIME TRENDS 2021/2022, data relating to 2,371 companies were released on ransomware DLS (Data Leak Sites) over H2 2020–H1 2021. This is an increase of an unprecedented 935% compared to the previous review period, when data relating to 229 victims was made public.



In the Middle Eastern region at least 50 organizations fell prey to ransomware attacks so far in 2021. To compare, in 2020, the data on 27 companies in the Middle Easter region was released on DLS, which is an increase of 85%.

When asked for his view on the opinion that businesses should never pay a ransom, he agreed, but said that in many instances it's not as black and white as that.

"I would agree with the categorical answer that you should not pay the ransom, but there are so many different scenarios where it becomes very difficult to judge the situation for the business. In my opinion, ransomware is like crying over spilled milk, because there are so many easy functionalities and features today to support and prevent ransomware. However, when we say don't pay the ransom we need to explain why. If you look at the threat landscape today, then ransomware is like the Facebook of organized crime. Unfortunately, I have been in meetings with clients where they have disclosed that they will not invest in security infrastructure because if they get hit by a ransomware attack then they'll probably end up paying for it. That's obviously the wrong approach, the question businesses need to ask themselves is what can we do to prevent an attack?" said Koheil.

In terms of what businesses needed to do to bolster their security offering, Koheil bemoaned the fact that many enterprises still believe that having the best technology will protect them from cyberattacks.

"Many organizations believe that because they have the latest technology, or the best-in-class solution, or the most expensive firewall that they are protected, but that is not the case. There are

three key factors that enterprises need to consider. We know that technology is important, but even if it works 99.9% of the time, there is always the risk of that 0.1% when it fails. Secondly, we also look at the skillsets required within organisations, and we make sure that there is a transfer of knowledge, so these teams have the best pilots for the planes that they have invested in. The final piece is the escalation itself, and the escalation, efficiency and KPIs needs to happen through constant security fire drills," said Koheil.

In terms of what differentiates Group–IB from other security vendors, Koheil believed it was a combination of their commitment to transferring knowledge and their product lifecycle that distinguished them from their market rivals.

"Group-IB has a complete platform. We are not a firewall company, and we have very specific surgical set of solutions that moves your environment from good to great. We are probably one of the very few companies in which the No.1 mandate of all our services is knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer is so important to us. For example, when we do an incident response with a client, after which we will then spend two days on incident response training, and this is something that is simply not done by others in the market. I think another key differentiator for us is our product development lifecycle, it is very impressive. There is not a quarter that goes past where we don't add new functionalities to our products, and the feedback we get back from our clients also serves to reinforce that," said

### **LENOVO**

# BEST KEPT SECRET

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with Lenovo executives **Giovanni Di Filippo** and **Per Overgaard** to find out more about the vendors aspirations to be the largest infrastructure solutions provider on the planet.

> **Giovanni Di Filippo** President for EMEA, Lenovo ISG

enovo have firmly established themselves as one of the top three technology vendors in the world, renowned for its ability to continuously innovate in a bid to address the acute pain points and challenges for their customers.

Giovanni Di Filippo, President for EMEA, Lenovo Infrastructure Group, joined the company in 2019, and he singled out the vision of Lenovo Chairman Yang Yuanging has a key factor in its emergence as a major player in the data center space and provider of intelligent infrastructure solutions.

"I think it's very important to highlight the role of our chairman Yang Yuanqing, who is really driving our vision and overseeing the exponential growth we are enjoying in all our markets globally. I recently had the opportunity to spend a few days with him, and he told me that by 2024, he wants Lenovo to have multi-billiondollar growth over that period. Today, we are a \$60 billiondollar company, but by the end of our fiscal year we will be a \$70 billion-dollar company, so over the next 3 years we are aiming to continue that growth trajectory. That's the ambition and that's the expectation of Lenovo and he wants us to become the largest infrastructure solutions provider on the planet," said Di Filippo.

Now many cynics will argue that all multinational companies are guilty of having weighty expectations when it comes to their goals and ambitions, but as we all know talk is cheap. However, as Di Filippo pointed out, this isn't the first time that Yuanging has had to what some might perceive as an unrealistic goal.

"Some might say that every company was always set lofty targets in a bid to maintain its growth and solidify its position as a market leader, because we know that in the technology and IT space if you stay still and don't evolve then you die. However, in 2013, Yuanging said he wanted Lenovo to be the No.1 PC company in the world, and today we are the No.1 PC provider on the planet,



so I am extremely confident we will be the biggest infrastructure solutions player in the market," said Di Filippo.

Interestingly, Di Filippo believes that Lenovo suffered in terms of its 'identity' when it came to their product portfolio amongst its industry peers, as it had been labelled simply as a PC and laptop company, but as Lenovo's EMEA President stressed its data center business was the 'best kept secret' in the industry.

"When I joined Lenovo two years ago, I quickly discovered following a series of meetings with my executive leadership team that we were the best kept secret in the IT industry. The data center piece within Lenovo was incredible but not enough people within the IT ecosystem were aware of it. When I started to travel and exchange information with customers, partners, and analysts I realized that a lot of people when they hear Lenovo automatically think notebook, laptop, and PC. They did not think data center," said Di Filippo.

That was obviously a big concern for Lenovo, but Di Filippo and Lenovo decided to set the record straight and that it is how they created their 'Think Human' thought leadership campaign.

"We needed a vehicle to transport the message in terms of what we are at Lenovo are standing for, so we created a mantra and a vision entitled 'Think Human'. I then did a series of interviews and podcasts, which received a great reception and generated a huge response, so the best kept secret was suddenly unleashed to the rest of the world. I wanted to spread the word that we are so much more than just a notebook, laptop, and PC company, and that we are a very serious contender when it comes to infrastructure solutions," said Di Filippo.

Lenovo has enjoyed phenomenal growth in the EMEA region and has seen growth of 30% in the last six months, and as the saying goes 'the proof is in the pudding', and that is certainly the case when it comes to Lenovo's figures. "Over the last eight quarters we have been growing doubledigit premium to market. We measure success on double-digit premium to market, but what does that mean? Essentially it means that we need to grow faster than everybody else. If our market is growing by 2% which it is, then we are growing by 20%, so the premium to market is 18%. We are witnessing unprecedented growth, and the interesting aspect is that it is not going to slow down," said Di Filippo.

Di Filippo claimed that Lenovo would have achieved even greater levels of growth if it had access to all its supplies, but such is the confined nature of our new environment that has not been possible. He has been well-placed to see firsthand the acceleration of digital transformation across the region and provided an illustration of the sheer scale and speed of some transformations.

"We got a request from a government entity on a Thursday night to enable 5,000 of its employees to work from home, and it needed to happen within the next 7 days. The request happened on a Thursday, on the Friday we conducted the architecture on this solution, on the Saturday the Ministers approved the budget for the project and on the Sunday, we got the PO, and three days later we delivered the entire infrastructure. I have been working in this industry for over 30 years, and I've never seen this done before. Traditionally, when working with public sector companies it takes 12 months to deliver this type of project, so this was a real illustration of how the pandemic accelerated intelligent digital transformation across the

# We are witnessing unprecedented growth, and the interesting aspect is that it is not going to slow down."

Middle East," said Di Filippo. Lenovo's business is in rude health in the EMEA region, and Di Filippo cited its balanced business models as the key factor in its success in the market.

"If you look at our total business operations globally then the EMEA region accounts for around \$16 billion. We do \$2 billion in infrastructure solutions and that will grow exponentially. However, the beauty of that is when you look at it from a Lenovo ISG perspective it is very well balanced between the cloud and the hyper-scaler business and enterprise public sector and SMB business and that is allowing us to achieve huge levels of new growth across a number of different industry verticals," said Di Filippo.

Per Overgaard, Executive Director for Lenovo ISG EMEA, is one of the most respected figures in the IT ecosystem and he has enjoyed a decorated career in the industry. He has been tasked with the responsibility of driving the direction of Lenovo's ISG (Infrastructure Solution Group) for the EMEA region.

A recent report commissioned by Gartner found that more and more governments are investing in AI, but many within the workforce remained skeptical of the integration of AI into their processes. When asked for his views on the research, he bemoaned the amount skepticism that still existed amongst some - but reserved strong praise for the approach adopted by the UAE when it comes to deploying AI.

"Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation on AI, and many people are speaking about AI without fully understanding the technical perspective behind the technology. I think many of them have been watching too many movies and believe the implementation of AI is going to serve as a pathway to some sort of dystopian future. However, in the Middle East they have taken charge when it comes to AI, primarily because the people who run businesses have already made the decision that AI is going to help them and is going to give them a competitive edge. AI is quite simply a tool that is going to give you competitiveness, and if it is leveraged and used correctly then it will be a massive advantage for companies as it will add new revenue growth and generate new customers for them," said Overgaard.

Our dependency on technology and applications is immeasurable in the digital economy we now find ourselves in and that has resulted in some ICT analysts labelling this era as the 'experience economy' and again as Overgaard points out the use of AI can fuel better experiences for us as consumers.

"If you look at my generation versus the next generation then the big difference will be that they will all be searching for smarter alternatives, because if you want to do business then everything will be digital. The physical world will be something



of the past, and the physical world will play a very small part of the buying experience to any company, which essentially means that the buying experience with a digital platform must be giving you something new. Now to do that they need to profile you, so that when you engage with a digital platform the more that they know about you the better the buying experience will be and AI can empower businesses to do this without compromising GDPR rules and regulations," said Overgaard.

We know that data is the new oil and any company that wants to thrive and survive in the digital economy must have utilize its data to inform their decision making to be more efficient and cost-effective. What we also know is that all data in the future will be generated at the edge, but what does edge really mean?

"Edge is a platform for innovation. It is a new form factor that you can put into almost any environment. It can sit in full production environments, it can be solarpowered, and most importantly of all it has 5G connectivity, which means it can be anywhere everywhere. The conceptual idea

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of Lenovo's edge server is that it is another form factor that in some of our products has full enterprise security. When it comes to the data center itself, full enterprise security means that if you open the lid of the server then it will delete itself, and you won't be able to break into any parts of the company," said Overgaard.

In addition to this, the dynamic Lenovo executive said the edge also gives you different connectivity options depending on where and how the customers wants to use it.

"When people talk about the edge what they really mean is we have some scenarios where it makes sense for us to do something with the data we are picking up, or it makes sense to have a product that we can ship

Edge is a platform for innovation. It is a new form factor that you can put into almost any environment." anywhere without IT personnel being present. We have a solution in which we can package the server at our factory, and we can put a USB key with the server and can ship it anywhere in the world, you can then screw it into the wall, and put the USB key into the server and that gives you a connection into your IT infrastructure, now that's all done through the edge," said Overgaard.

Overgaard also said one of the biggest factors driving demand for edge solutions is the reality that you can't rely on hyperscalers due to issues such as latency, and he stresses you need another 'alternative'.

"To be honest the fact of the matter is that you can't depend on the hyper-scalers because of latency and the way we are going to treat everything in the future. We just can't rely on everything going into the cloud, so there must be an alternative, and that alternative is to take 5G and chop 5G up into smaller bits, so you can have different scenarios inside the edge server which gives you the flexibility and autonomy that empowers you to drive your business in the direction that you want to take it," said Overgaard.

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# A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

CNME Editor Mark Forker explores the incredible journey the UAE has undertaken as it since its formation as a nation in 1971 – and as its Golden Jubilee celebrations draws to a close, he looks at some of their major achievements over the last half a century.

hen I first

arrived in Dubai back in 2016, I must admit that I was slightly ignorant when it came to history of the UAE. I was taken aback to learn that this oasis of innovation and technology that I now called home was only at that stage 45-years old following the fusion of the 7 Emirates into the one nation.

it was hard not to be mesmerized by the Dubai skyline that was dotted with skyscrapers as far as I the eye could see. It was difficult for me to comprehend and digest how a country could have achieved so much in such a short space of time, but it was a testament to the phenomenal vision of the nations leaders that the UAE has developed into one of the most technologically advanced countries in the entire world.

It's fair to say that since the turn of the millennium, under the patronage and leadership of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Dubai has been turned into a truly global city.

Since 2000, the pace at which Dubai has developed has been supersonic, and the rapid growth at which the city expanded was not even derailed by the global economic crash that occurred in 2008.

As 2021 edges closer to the

end, and the UAE set to bring down the curtain on its Golden Jubilee celebrations, I felt it was fitting that the last cover story of CNME paid tribute to the phenomenal and incredible achievements that have been made by the UAE since 1971, whilst also pausing to imagine what the country will look like when celebrating its centennial year.

Now whilst the latter will be hard to predict, particularly given the disruptive nature of the new digital economy, but it is certainly not easy to pick which of the feats achieved by the UAE are most deserving of recognition, quite simply because there is so many.

However, I have decided to highlight two significant and historic achievements that the UAE has ironically pulled off in 2021, which are its groundbreaking mission to Mars – and EXPO 2020, which has become the most connected place on earth.

#### A message of 'Hope'

The idea for a UAE mission to Mars came from a UAE Cabinet retreat at the end of 2013, and the mission was officially announced by UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan in July 2014. At the time, the primary objective of the ambitious mission was to enrich the capabilities of Emirati engineers and to learn more about the Martian atmosphere.

The robotic probe to be sent to Mars for the Emirates Mars Mission was named "Hope" or in Arabic Al-Amal as it is intended to send out a message of optimism to millions of Arabs across the globe and encourage them towards innovation

In April 2015, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid invited the Arab world to name the probe. The name was selected after thousands of suggestions were received, as it describes the core objective of the mission. The name of the probe was announced in May 2015, and since then the mission is sometimes referred to as the Hope Mars Mission.

The Hope probe was launched from Japan on the 19th of July 2020 and arrived at Mars on the 9th of February 2021. It became the first mission to Mars by any West Asian, Arab, or Muslimmajority country and really served to reinforce how the UAE had become a major global force in relation to innovation and technology progress.

### The World's Greatest Show

Anybody that has flown on Emirates Airlines over the last few years will have seen the marketing campaign starring Hollywood star Chris Hemsworth in which he describes EXPO 2020 as the 'world's greatest show' – and since it opened in October, it's very difficult to argue with that assessment, with the event having a huge impact on those who have flocked to the EXPO in the months since it opened its doors.

The UAE managed to do a good job in terms of keeping a lot of information on EXPO 2020 under wraps, and whilst many analysts knew the UAE Government would go 'all out' to make this the greatest EXPO the world has seen, many were skeptical as to whether or not, they could pull it off, especially when you consider the backdrop of the event, which was pushed back its by twelve months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, it's fair to say even the most optimistic of onlookers could not have foreseen how successful the event has been thus far.

The event has so far attracted 6,358,464 visits since its opening on October 1, steered by shows, sporting events, UAE National Day celebrations, and sustained demand for the Expo 2020 Festive Pass.

US singer Alicia Keys saw crowds flocking to Al Wasl Plaza on December 10. At EXPO, the 15-time Grammy-winning singer-songwriter chose EXPO as the location to unveil her highlyanticipated new release because as she said, "It just felt so perfect to launch Keys in Dubai. EXPO 2020 Dubai knows no borders; it is envisioning a future we all want to create."

It's hard to only highlight the Emirates Mission to Mars and EXPO 2020 when attempting to illustrate the incredible of achievements of the UAE over the last 50 years, and of course it doesn't do it justice, but both events which occurred in the last 12 months serve as a glowing reminder of what can be achieved when a nation cultivates the right environment that foster innovation and technology.

It's hard to predict what the next 50 years has instore for the UAE - but based on the evidence of the last 50 years you'd be a fool to bet against them breaking even more boundaries in their quest to be the smartest and happiest nation in the world.

### VEEAM

# CONTAINING THE CLOUD

**Danny Allan**, CTO and SVP of Product Strategy at Veeam, and **Claude Schuck**, Regional Director Middle East at Veeam have given their technology predictions for 2022. Allan believes containers will become mainstream in a bid to support the explosion of cloud growth, whilst Schuck highlighted the ongoing threat posed by cybercriminals in the digital economy.

> ech Predictions 2022 - Danny Allan, Chief Technology Officer and Senior Vice President of Product Strategy at Veeam

### Acquisitions will stagnate as company valuations outstrip available assets

In 2021, global M&A activity reached new highs aided by low interest rates and high stock prices. In 2022, we will see that momentum shift. Larger acquisitions will be few and far between as company valuations continue to rise.

Only well-established, cash-rich companies will have the money required to make new purchases. The higher purchase threshold will make it harder for mediumand small-sized companies to grow and evolve, giving the advantage to larger, established firms.

### AI and automation will replace entry level jobs in the finance, healthcare, legal and software industries

The talent shortage will leave many jobs unfilled, making way for the advancement of artificial intelligence and automation to fill new roles. We have seen technology begin its takeover in the service industry with the introduction of robotic waiters during the pandemic.

In 2022, we will see AI and automation capable of filling positions in other hard-hit sectors like the finance, healthcare, legal and software industries. These developments will mostly affect entry level positions, like interns, making it harder for recent graduates entering the workforce to gain job experience in the future.

### CI/CD will stabilize and standardize to become an IT team requirement

The Bill Gates memo in 2001 became the industry standard in how to design, develop and deliver complex software systems – and today it feels like there has been no standard since then. IT teams and developers fell into habits of adopting "known" technology systems, and not standardizing in new spaces, like continuous integration and continuous delivery (CI/CD).

In 2022, we're going to see a shift towards more stability and standardization for CI/CD. IT leaders have an opportunity to capitalize on this highgrowth and high-valuation market to increase deployment activity and solve the "day two operations problem."

**Tech's labor market will be met with big money and big challenges** The COVID-19 economy –

**Danny Allan** CTO and SVP of Product Strategy at Veeam

and the subsequent great resignation – throughout the last two years certainly made its mark in the tech industry. As we continue to see turnover and lower employee retention, tech salaries will begin to grow in 2022 to incentivize talent to stay. I see this causing an interesting dynamic, presenting bigger challenges, especially to the folks in the startup and VC world.

The bigger tech giants are the ones who can meet the high dollar demand

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and deliver benefits for a competitive workforce. It will be interesting to see in the years ahead what this does for innovation, which tends to come from the hungry startups where people work for very little for a long time.

We could very well see a resurgence of tech talent returning to the "old guard" companies to meet their needs for stable (and large) salaries, forgoing the competitive, hardknocks of startups that could cause a skills and talent gap that lasts for years to come.

### New privacy-focused legislation will shift attention to data sovereignty clouds

With increased focus on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) regulating data protection and privacy in the EU and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) enhancing privacy rights and consumer protection for Californians, other states and countries are facing pressure to enact comprehensive data privacy legislation.

As this continues in 2022, I expect we'll see much more



focus on data sovereignty clouds to keep data within nations or within a certain physical location. This is a far more specified cloud model that we're starting to see in EMEA with Gaia-X. Some will see this as an obstacle, but once implemented, this will be a good thing as it puts consumer privacy at the core of business strategy.

### Containers will become mainstream to support the cloud explosion of 2021

Businesses wrongly predicted that employees would return to the office, as normal, in 2021. Instead, remote working continued, and companies were forced to develop long-term remote working strategies to ensure efficiency, sustainability and to retain employees seeking flexibility.

This remote work strategy demanded cloud-based solutions, resulting in an explosion of cloud service adoption. To meet this moment, containers will become mainstream in 2022, making the generational shift to cloud much easier and more streamlined for organizations.

### Tech Predictions 2022 -Claude Schuck, Regional Director, Middle East at Veeam

Every enterprise in the Middle East looking to build a strategy around Modern Data Protection should keep the three important pillars in mind – Cloud, Security and Containers. Businesses need to have a good

This remote work strategy demanded cloud-based solutions, resulting in an explosion of cloud service adoption."

understanding of what cloud brings to an organization and why it is important.

Secondly, before the pandemic, we had a centralized office where employees were all in one place. With decentralization now, the boundaries of the organization have become invisible. Data is all over the place, necessitating a need for a comprehensive security strategy to safeguard all entry points.

And finally, we see an increased interest in Kubernetes as a critical piece of an enterprise's cloud infrastructure. This has created a new area around containernative data protection that needs addressing.

### Accelerated adoption of Cloud technologies

Although cloud is not yet mainstream in the region, adoption is expected to witness significant growth in the Middle East as enterprises begin to "trust" in-country offerings with the big public cloud players like Microsoft Azure and Amazon Web Services having opened data



centers in the Middle East.

Gartner forecasts end user spending on public cloud services in the MENA region to grow 19% in 2022. Another big trend we see is that many governments across the Middle East are creating their own 'Government Cloud' in order to have control over their data and not letting it reside in the public realm. With this acceleration, Veeam is investing in more headcount in the region to be able to assist organizations as they transition to the cloud.

#### Security – cybercrime

In the Middle East, security will always be a top priority. Not only can cyberattacks affect day-to-day business, impact revenue, and create other problems, but above all, it affects the brand reputation and workforce.



Enterprises will continue to invest and safeguard themselves against the ever-growing increase in cyberattacks, especially ransomware. Although organizations in the Middle East in general spend a lot on security technologies, there is a huge gap when it comes to planning and executing a security strategy.

This mainly boils down to the complexity of the IT environment. There are still a lot of legacy systems. Protecting these complicated environments is a big challenge and becomes even more so in the transition phase of moving to the cloud.

Regional CISOs need to have a stringent security program in place which includes important elements like stress testing of IT Systems, backups, a disaster recovery strategy and educating employees to become a first line of defense for improving organizational resilience

## Security – data privacy and protection

In early September 2021, the UAE announced the introduction of a new federal data protection law. With this, data privacy and security are set to take centre stage as consumers demand transparency and their "right" to be forgotten.

By having the option of opting out, consumers can ensure that their data is being handled in a correct way and they are not targeted by organizations. But more importantly international corporations that are based in the UAE and the Middle East can be assured that policies are being applied when it comes to data in-country – whether it be in terms of the way data is stored, IP is managed or how customer and consumer data is protected

# Digital transformation powers ahead thanks to Containers

The rapid adoption of Containers in enterprises, the need for on-demand resources, and the flexibility of workloads will drive digital transformation. The Lack of skilled resources and understanding around the technology is a big challenge for enterprises in the Middle East.

Veeam, through its acquisition of Kasten, is simplifying container strategy and delivering the industry's leading Cloud Data Management platform that supports data protection for container-based applications built in Kubernetes environments.

### SERVICENOW

# THE KEY TO SUCCESS

**Mark Ackerman,** Area VP, Middle East & Africa at ServiceNow, has disclosed the key tips he believes businesses need to adopt to be successful in 2022.



ear end. It is a time for predictions, is it not? We are supposed to look at the horizon and tell others with confidence what lies beyond. The past two years have made this easier.

The pandemic closed off so many avenues to the region's businesses that we could almost taste the future. Digital transformation, followed by digital transformation, followed by more of the same.

Perhaps this year, we should take a step back. Perhaps we should look at where digital transformation has led us and concentrate on how we capitalise on our lessons and hone existing practices into new winning formulas. So instead of predictions, I offer four pieces of advice to optimise digital transformation and other business areas in 2022.

### 1. Focus on the employee experience to get the full benefit from hybrid work

Heading into 2021, arguably the safest prediction was "hybrid work is the future". Companies came to the gradual realisation that employees, eager for more flexibility in their work lives, would no longer tolerate environments where remote work was not a given and as a consequence, several trialed hybrid-working models.

As we head in to 2022, we will see which regional organisations will crumble and which will rise because of hybrid work. To ensure success of hybrid work models, companies should focus on the employee experience (EX) as much as the customer experience.

Those that do will prosper. Those that do not will hemorrhage talent to those that do. EX is about how people navigate the information and solutions they need to be engaged and productive. With one-click ease, employees should be able to interact with all functions of the business (not just IT) from a single pane of centralised access, while being relieved of their mundane tasks by automated workflows.

Loyal, motivated employees get support and guidance whenever they need it, wherever they are. Their employers meet them where they work, regardless of how they work. Their workplace is safe. And loyal, motivated employees deliver productive, innovative labor.

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2. Get ready for more low code

In July, the UAE government launched the National Program for Coders — a plan to train 100,000 software professionals, some of whom will go on to create 1,000 digital businesses. Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and other giants are involved, and annual investment in tech start-ups is expected to rise from US\$ 400 million to more than US\$ 1 billion.

Initiatives like this have captured the region's imagination. As ambitious as the idea may sound, it is achievable through the citizen developer.

These non-technical domain experts build digital solutions using low-code development platforms (LCDP). A wide range of digital workflows are open to them, and they can plug skills gaps with a lot less training than software developers get.

Their business knowledge means they can identify more problems, and LCDPs allow them to — under appropriate governance frameworks — deploy value-adding solutions very quickly. Meanwhile, technical staff can engage in innovation of their own, creating an environment significantly more agile than the one it replaces.

# 3. Prepare for a shift from automation to hyper-automation

In 2020, a McKinsey survey of organisations across the globe found 31% of them had fully automated at least one business process, and another 35% had pilot schemes in place. But while automation has a proven track-record of streamlining To ensure success of hybrid work models, companies should focus on the employee experience (EX) as much as the customer experience."

> workflows, the 2022 stakeholder should demand next-level visibility into processes.

Hyper-automation brings together base RPA with business intelligence and integration to create a digital transformation workflow that is laser-focused on optimisation. The methodology requires stepping back from one's automation instincts to examine the larger corporate picture and how each workflow incorporates people, processes, and systems. It calls for intelligence to be applied to identify processes for automation.

Meanwhile, integration allows visibility of the dependencies between systems. And critical thinking — by humans — will be pivotal in deciding whether you will automate a task, digitise a process, or submit an element of the business for further analysis. Adopt this approach and become more agile than ever.

### 4. Consider your ESG position

Throughout the region, consumers and employees are beginning to realise that they have power. Entire communities can be receptive or hostile to a brand because of its environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance. Since enterprises rely on these communities for custom and talent, pleasing them has become a shareholder concern.

A recent report from PwC showed 46% of Middle East CEOs to be planning an increase in investment in ESG over the next three years. Whether this takes the shape of environmental initiatives such as resource efficiency and netzero carbon goals, or a political stance on an emotive issue, companies today cannot remain on the sidelines waiting to see which way the wind will blow.

Perhaps the most important ESG sub-area right now is diversity, inclusion and belonging (DIB). This is an integral part of the employee experience, but also has the potential to derail good will with customers if employers do not pay attention to it. Corporates and NGOs are now convinced that DIB, especially as it relates to gender parity, brings real economic advantages. An estimate from PwC cited legal and social barriers to female participation in MENA workforces as the direct cause of an annual aggregate GDP loss of US\$575 billion.

### A final word

Each December, business leaders can only hope for one thing. That they have learned enough to be able to make the optimal calls in the year that follows. To know when to zig and when to zag. Stay goaloriented, and I am confident you will get it right.

### CYBEREASON

# THE NEXT NEW THREAT

**Lior Div,** CEO and co-founder of Cybereason gives us his predictions for the next 12 months - and reveals what trends he believes will emerge as key taking points across the security landscape in 2022.

> n the world of cybersecurity in particular, the end of the year brings an avalanche of predictions for what the threat landscape will look like in the year ahead. It's a fun end-of-year tradition, but it can also provide valuable insight into coming trends to help defenders be prepared for what's on the horizon.

#### Beyond the Buzzwords

As I review predictions from previous years and look at some of the 2022 predictions that are already hitting the internet, I have noticed that a lot of them are not really "predictions" — things like AI / ML, cloud computing, the cybersecurity skills gap, and ransomware, are blatantly obvious.

The attacks we have seen have been part of cyber espionage campaigns from nation-state adversaries." Of course, those things will continue to get attention and are important to keep in mind but looking ahead to what Cybereason and our customers need to be aware of for 2022, let us consider the broader threat landscape — and what we are seeing in terms of emerging attacks and current threat research — to identify key risks that defenders need to prepare for.

### RansomOps — The New Kill Chain

When it comes to ransomware, what we see today is not that simple. We now have ransomware cartels — like REvil, Conti, DarkSide, and others — and ransomware is not a piece of malware, but rather comprehensive ransomware operations, or RansomOps, where the execution of the ransomware itself is just the final piece of a much longer attack chain.

There is too much focus on the ransomware executable, or how to recover once an organization's servers and data are already encrypted. That's like fighting terrorism by focusing only on the explosive device or waiting to hear the "boom" to know where to focus resources.

RansomOps take a low and slow approach — infiltrating the network and spending time moving laterally and conducting reconnaissance to identify and exfiltrate valuable data. Threat actors might be in the network for days, or even weeks.

It's important to understand how RansomOps work and be able to recognize Indicators of Behavior (IOBs) that enable you to detect and stop the threat actor before the point of "detonation" when the data is actually encrypted, and a ransom demand is made.

## Supply Chain — Amplifying Reach of Attacks

This also doesn't feel like much of a "prediction" at face value. IT professionals are very familiar with the concept of a supply chain attack thanks to the SolarWinds attacks. You need to have a broader perspective on the concept of supply chain, though.

There is a growing trend of threat actors realizing the value of targeting a supplier or provider up the chain in order to compromise exponentially more targets downstream. Rather than attacking 100 or 1,000 separate organizations, they can successfully exploit one company that unlocks the door to all the rest. It is the path of least resistance.

The attacks we have seen have been part of cyber espionage campaigns from nation-state adversaries. Those attacks will likely continue, and we will see a rise in cybercriminals adopting the strategy as well. Companies that act as suppliers or providers need to be more vigilant, and all



organizations need to be aware of the potential risk posed from the companies they trust.

## Microsoft — Living with the Microsoft Risk

The simple truth is that one way or another, Microsoft products are directly involved in the vast majority of cyber attacks. Threat actors invest their time and effort identifying vulnerabilities and developing exploits for the platforms and applications their potential victims are using. Microsoft has a dominant role across operating systems, cloud platforms, and applications that make it fairly ubiquitous.

As such, Microsoft will continue to be the primary focus for cyber attacks in 2022. That isn't really a revelation. Defenders need to understand the risk of relying on Microsoft to protect them when they can't even protect themselves. Organizations that depend on Microsoft for security will find themselves making headlines for the wrong reasons.

I'm not suggesting that

organizations not use Microsoft products or services, but it is important to understand the risks and have a layered approach to defending those products and services against attacks.

#### Cybersecurity Is National Security

The line no longer exists between national security and cybersecurity. Sometimes a nation-state adversary attacks a private company as part of a broader campaign and sometimes cybercriminals launch attacks (think Colonial Pipeline) with national security implications.

What we need to be aware of as we go into 2022 is the increasing cooperation and collaboration between these threat actors. Nation-state adversaries are not directly controlling many of these operations, but a combination of state-sanctioned, statecondoned, and state-ignored attacks create an environment where failure to act is equivalent to tacit approval and indicates that even if they are not actively working together, their objectives are often aligned.

### XDR — Improving Protection with AI

With the shift to work-fromhome or hybrid work models, the rollout of 5G wireless, and the explosion of IoT (Internetof-Things) devices, virtually everything is connected today. This connectivity provides a variety of benefits in terms of productivity and convenience, but it also exposes organizations to significant risk which makes Extended Detection and Response (XDR) crucial.

The question is, "What is XDR?". Many vendors have an offering they are calling XDR, but not all XDR is created equally. There is almost universal agreement that XDR is the next thing, but the definition of what XDR is and the best way to achieve it is still being debated.

The industry will reach some consensus in 2022 and leaders will emerge as the dust settles in the XDR market. Regardless of how we define XDR, the scope and volume of threats demands that artificial intelligence (AI) play a central role in making it effective.

#### Get Ready for 2022

As you take time to gather with family and friends for the holidays, or just disconnect from work and recharge, hopefully these insights will help you prepare more effectively for the cybersecurity challenges you will face in 2022.

The threat landscape is constantly shifting but understanding how threat actors think and having insight into emerging trends enables you to stay ahead of the curve and defend more effectively.

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In my opinion, all organisations across the world need to consider risk from a digital perspective because businesses have never been so dependent on digital systems to function."

**Raj Samani** Fellow and Chief Scientist at McAfee Enterprise & FireEye
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#### **PROFESSIONAL RISK** CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Raj Samani**, Fellow and O scientist at McAfee Enterprise & EiroEve, to explore

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Raj Samani**, Fellow and Chief Scientist at McAfee Enterprise & FireEye, to explore some of the key findings that emerged from its recent research on cybersecurity trends, how ransomware attacks have become more professional – and what differentiates McAfee from other security vendors.



n a comprehensive report recently compiled by McAfee, the global security behemoth took a closer look at some of the cybersecurity challenges facing enterprises in the UAE – and the report was damning in its conclusion that organisations in the UAE need to place a greater emphasis on their cybersecurity architecture.

Some figures that jumped off the page of the report was that 87% of enterprises were impacted by cyberattacks., with a staggering 83% of those experiencing downtime as a result.

When asked was the UAE more vulnerable to attacks compared to other developed nations, Samani rejected the notion that the country was at greater risk than other countries, however, he did concede that many businesses do not have the ability to detect when they are under attack. 37

"I do not think the UAE is on its own when it comes to experiencing cyberattacks, and I think all organisations to an extent are impacted by cyberattacks. However, the challenge becomes does every organisation know that, and have they got the ability to be able to detect? The reality is we have seen a high volume of attacks coming directly off the back of the COVID-19 pandemic. Every fraudster ranging from the not so capable to a sophisticated threat actor are leveraging all the uncertainty that has been created for many businesses as a direct result of the global health crisis," said Samani.

Samani is one of the world's leading computer security experts and is a special advisor to the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) in The Hague, so there are few better placed to give their observations on the globally cybersecurity ecosystem.

Interestingly, he stressed that enterprises globally need to consider risk from a digital standpoint as we have never been more reliant on digital technologies as we are in today's current climate.

"In my opinion, all organisations across the world need to consider risk from a digital perspective because businesses have never been so dependent on digital systems to function. They need to consider digital risk and be fully aware of the damage and disruption a cyberattack can have on their business," said Samani.

I think the ways in which we spoke about ransomware attacks five years ago does not bear any resemblance to the ones that we hear about today."

Samani disclosed that he was recently engaged in a conversation with the CEO of a mutli-billion-dollar retail company that had just been hit by a DarkSide ransomware attack.

'He wanted to know how he could resolve the issue, but I said to have there is no decrypt for it and you need to recover your systems. But he said, 'Well we don't really care about the data being encrypted, our issue is that they have stolen our information and they are threatening to publish it'. I think that is very reflective of the way we are seeing threat actors evolve their tactics, which historically was based all around encrypting your data. However, now the threat is they are going to steal the data and publish all your information too," said Samani.

The Fellow at McAfee also highlighted how he observed a major change in the way cybercriminals operated and that they were investing in themselves to make them even more effective, hence why the attacks are always evolving.

"We are witnessing a big shift and change in the way that criminals operate, and that allows them to generate more revenue, and the money they make they put it back into innovation, which ultimately enables them to become better. In a game of cat and mouse you must keep up with your adversary, and that's fundamentally the biggest challenge facing companies. In the past, you could buy a security product, install it, and walk away, but now there is much more to consider if you want to protect yourself," said Samani.

Over the last 18 months we have seen some high-profile ransomware attacks such as

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Colonial Pipeline and JBS. The economic consequences for both businesses were huge, but Samani said that the actual volume of ransomware attacks had decreased, but what we are now witnessing a much more 'professional' approach to ransomware.

"We have the seen the introduction of a much more professional threat actor when it comes to ransomware attacks. We are seeing a reduction in the volume of what you would describe as run of the mill type of ransomware attacks. There is just a much professional approach nowadays, many of them would outsource a lot of the attack and find new tactics to extort higher demands and find new ways to get into the organisation," said Samani.

The cybersecurity expert also illustrated how ransomware attacks have drastically changed over the last 5 years, both in terms of the approach adopted by the attackers and the level of extortion being demanded from the companies that have been hit by a ransomware attack.

"I think the ways in which we spoke about ransomware attacks five years ago does not bear any resemblance to the ones that we hear about today. Historically, you were sent an e-mail, you would click on the link, and it encrypts your data. Whereas now they are essentially finding

ways to break into companies, they are gathering credentials and are learning more about the company - and once they determine what the businesses vulnerable points are they are going to extort the maximum payment from them. 5 years ago, the average ransomware was a couple of hundred pounds now companies are being asked in some instances for between \$20-30 million, and the reality is businesses are paying the ransom, so it really is a huge problem," said Samani.

When asked what he believes differentiates McAfee from other security vendors, Samani was reluctant to criticise other vendors, who he said where doing an excellent job, instead, he said his team are just fully focused on tackling the major challenges that currently exist in the security ecosystem, and they wanted to better understand the nature of the threats that were emerging.

"I run the advanced threat research division and our team focuses all our efforts on understanding the threat, and we actively work with law enforcement to disrupt criminal infrastructures and that's what we do. That is not a negative reflection on other companies and what they do, as they also do a terrific job. However, what we are very good at is understanding the nuanced nature of the different security threats emerging and the challenges that are facing businesses every single day," concluded Samani. come

#### INFOBIP

# DRIVING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

**Hussein Malhas**, VP Revenue MENA, Turkey & Pakistan at Infobip, tells CNME Editor Mark Forker about how the company is providing communication solutions that is empowering its customers to deliver unrivalled customer experiences, why some businesses are struggling with the demands of cloud transformation – and its goals and objectives for 2022.

an you outline to our readers how the tech landscape that exists in the UAE and across the Middle East cultivates and fosters an environment for digital transformation?

Infobip is present in multiple countries across the region, and we have witnessed firsthand the role that some existing policies play in driving industries towards digital transformation.

We have also noticed that the maturity level varies from one country to the next, for example the UAE, Qatar, Jordan, and Egypt, KSA are introducing policies related to public cloud adoption, AI usage, and additional elements contributing to digital transformation, whereas progress continues to be lagging for other countries.

The level of adoption additionally varies between private and public sector organisations. When it comes to the private sector, almost all countries are adopting digital transformation and are embracing a disruptive approach to cater to the evolving demands of their customers.

The landscape is slightly different for the public sector; some countries are investing a lot and are partnering with global companies to introduce policies and digital transformation/ AI enablement, but this observation does not apply to all. We have witnessed widespread transformation over the last 18 months, but in your opinion what trend has emerged that has really fueled the adoption and implementation of disruptive technologies and new business models?

In the absence of physical communication/interaction, the need for virtual communication and platforms transpired. Millennials further expedited the adoption of these trends and technologies, the disruption came much faster, for example retail moved into e-commerce, finance moved into fintech, and life shifted online completely, even in traditionally operated entities.

The past 18 months have undoubtedly changed things. In essence, the pandemic forced

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The past 18 months have undoubtedly changed things. In essence, the pandemic forced companies to adopt technology, including distant and virtual communication."

**Hussein Malhas** VP Revenue MENA, Turkey & Pakistan at Infobip 41

companies to adopt technology, including distant and virtual communication.

This really fueled the need for engagement platforms that utilise social media and OTT platforms among other communication channels, and it did the job for that time.

We have also witnessed a big push towards the adoption of virtual communication and collaboration platforms as well the introduction of social media for business (WhatsApp, Instagram, RCS, IMessage) meaning it evolved from being a means for social interaction to business interaction.

How has 2021 been from an Infobip perspective, have you been satisfied by the growth that you have enjoyed and which of your products have really struck a chord and resonated with the market? Infobip is based on engagement and customer experience, and these two categories in specific have witnessed exponential growth over the past two years on a global level.

Our business has also flourished in the region due to the high demand and significant transformation of companies, in addition to their willingness to quickly adapt to the latest communication trends to keep up with the pace globally and to communicate and engage with their customers.

Customers nowadays want a quick and simple response with no lag time. And this is where Infobip comes in, by providing communication channels and platforms that help bridge businesses with customers.

The company has also introduced new solutions that help companies take CX to the next level through the utilisation of AI and chatbot solutions; offering solutions that, for instance, provide customer segmentation and a 360 view to help better position the company.

#### Can you provide us with an example of a customer success story over the past 18 months?

We have witnessed many remarkable examples, and some of the most interesting to me were examples of traditional businesses who were bold enough to embrace digital transformation and reaped the benefits.

There's manufacturer who worked with wholesale and retailers in past who suddenly decided to open a direct channel of communications with their customers. They launched an entire marketing and communication campaign and launched a contact center.

Their business grew 20 percent business growth rapidly and unexpectedly. They were also able to reduce cost by eliminating two to three layers of commission.

The moral of the story is that when companies opt to transform, people are eager to opt in, even in the most traditional of industries such as manufacturing.



Cloud is the future. However, many enterprises have struggled to adapt to the demands presented by cloud transformation. Why do you think businesses are struggling – and what do they need to do to ensure the seamless transition of their processes and operations? Companies are in constant competition to gather data, yet the bigger the data, the bigger the infrastructure required to manage it, in essence, this is where the need for public cloud adoption started.

The faster companies adopt the public cloud, the faster they are in digital transformation game, which will help business growth. However, initially only a few were courageous enough

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to jump on the public cloud to build their momentum and solutions, and sadly the more conservative ended up lagging behind, some beyond the point of recovery.

Digital transformation depends largely on mindset and a willingness to change. This willingness usually comes from the CEO. To disrupt someone needs to be held accountable a risk and vision that is usually top drive.

Apart from that, a solid infrastructure needs to be in place for transformation that goes well beyond IT readiness. Tech culture and language needs to be inducted in all segments and verticals of the company and all heads of entities need to be pushed from sales and security to marketing and finance.

#### Can you tell us what your main goals and objectives are for 2022?

We are going to continue what we started for sure! We believe there is a huge demand for our



Our business has also flourished in the region due to the high demand and significant transformation of companies." solutions and companies need the differentiation that Infobip's solutions offer to stay ahead.

Differentiation comes with knowing your customer, getting the right channels of communication with customers, and providing your costumers with a personalised experience, these three factors define who we are and what we do as a company.

Speaking of differentiators, Infobip's is that we have people on the ground to help companies transform fast and to help them improve CX in all our offices, which will increase their revenue and reduce their cost. In terms of market development, we will focus on the GCC in addition to Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and Pakistan.

#### MEKDAM TECHNOLOGY

# A SEAMLESS NETWORK EXPERIENCE

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Vatan Sakhuja**, Business Head Unit, ICT at Mekdam Technology and **Rubeel Iqbal**, Head of IT at Blue Group, to find out more about the success of their recent collaboration through its partnership with Comstor, which is enabling them to provide seamless network experiences to their customers.

> ekdam Technology is one of the first technology conglomerates in Qatar. It is a system integrator which provides a wide spectrum of ICT services, audio-visual, safety & security systems, ELV, engineering, services & maintenance and mobile telephony.

The Blue Group (TBG) has enjoyed over 40 years of success. Initially established as a sports retailer, they have

The Cisco SD-WAN solution has enabled us to connect with our customers, employees and applications in any corner of the world." grown to include a diverse number of businesses. Their divisions include: Sports, Retail, Service and Fashion across 13 iconic brands.

TBG is a united business enterprise with over 600 employees and is committed to maintaining utmost quality, unparalleled customer service and continuous drive for innovation.

#### The Challenge

With lack of IT staff with network background, TBG needed to bring in all network aspects (VPN from retail Locations, VPN for customers, WIFI Management, centralised dashboard for all devices and firewall management. Cisco Meraki offered all this without having to implement management infrastructure as it is managed through the cloud.

Prior to the installation, service interruptions often froze the business. Without visibility, efforts to solve these individual problems often introduced problems in other areas. In their traditional WAN, TBG team was forced to travel on-site and hire specialists to service Cisco infrastructure which was both slow and expensive.

#### The Solution

For zero CAPEX, TBG enabled Cisco SD-WAN on their existing network infrastructure. During evaluation, TBG found that the Meraki Solution was easy, straightforward and provides an amazing network experience for customers, guest and employees.

Hence, TBG decided to deploy Meraki access points, switches, security appliances across the stores and datacenter.

The SD-WAN solution has eliminated operational silos in the workflow for the customer. The solution has enabled TBG to keep everything running on a consistent basis while meeting the stringent demands of executives, workers and consumers alike. With consistent network policies, segmented traffic, remotely managed sites and the ability to extend SD-WAN into even their harshest environments, Mekdam Technology has prepared TBG for the future.

#### **Role played by Comstor**

As a value-added distributor committed towards enabling Cisco's channel, Comstor worked closely with the team at Mekdam Technology on this requirement by

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designing the bill of quantities (BoQ), conducting the proof of concept (PoC) and ensuring timely supply of solutions and services.

#### Outcome

With Meraki MX Security Appliances, SD-WAN enhanced internet connectivity at each of the branches by dynamically sending traffic between locations based on set policies, defined types of traffic and optimal performance.

By leveraging business, broadband, 4G/LTE internet and the MX SD-WAN capabilities for the sites, TBG saved huge amount of cost over past three years.

Vatan Sakhuja, Business Head Unit, ICT at Mekdam Technology thanked TBG for the opportunity to collaborate and highlighted the role played by Comstor.

"I would like to thank Rubeel

Iqbal and his management team at The Blue Group for giving us the opportunity to work with them. We look forward to working with them again in the near future – and I would also like to thank the Comstor team for their phenomenal support in ensuring the successful completion of the project," said Sakhuja.

Rubeel Iqbal, Head of IT at Blue Group said that they had come a long way and stated that they were just getting started.

"Our growth will continue as we increase efficiency and optimise our investments. It all starts with the network. We needed a more robust, scalable and reliable network that could help us offer better services to our customers. We looked into the Cisco Meraki solution and saw that it captured everything we were trying to do. We quickly set up a test lab consisting of Cisco Meraki MX security appliance, MS switch and MR access points. The trial worked flawlessly," said Iqbal.

He added that they came from an environment where their field offices had legacy layer-2 switches with minimal visibility.

"Having layer-7 visibility is incredible. It's clear to anyone who is viewing the dashboard what is going on at each port. The Cisco SD-WAN solution has enabled us to connect with our customers, employees, and applications in any corner of the world. With solid experience and industry knowledge, Mekdam Technology has the right implementation skills and after-sales service to deliver the right blend of technology solutions. We are happy with the Cisco solution implemented and by the services offered by Mekdam Technology. We wish the Mekdam Team ongoing success," said Iqbal.

#### RACKSPACE TECHNOLOGY

# TIME TO GET UP TO SPEED

**Simon Bennett**, EMEA CTO, Rackspace Technology has declared that the new normal is now just the normal - and stressed that it is time for many businesses to get up to speed.

e've been talking about the new normal in the region for some time, but when will it just become the norm? I think it already has, and businesses need to start playing catch up in 2022.

This can be anything from restructuring the office or improving video calling to make hybrid working more seamless, to reassessing the pace of digital transformation to suit the current market or optimising the use of technology that was rushed during the pandemic. Now is the time to engage properly with our not-so-new norm, as the time for excuses is running out.

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Customers are fickle and user experience when it comes to business change is becoming a greater concern than when customers were more lenient throughout the pandemic."

#### Innovation without the traditional office

The full-time office is long gone for many of us. If businesses haven't embraced the flexibility of hybrid models yet, they'll soon have to in order to compete for the best talent.

Offsetting that is the reality that most of us do want some face-to-face interaction and have missed it, so coming into the office a couple of days a week at most will stay the norm. Meeting in person helps to reignite innovation and can enable us to bounce off one another with ideas and random thoughts, which is far harder to replicate at home or over a screen.

This means that when we go to the office, it's not to code or do work, but rather to collaborate and innovate, so the office set-up needs to reflect that – we don't need banks of desks for people to sit at, for example.

What's more, while flexibility is key, structure is also crucial. Businesses that coordinate office attendance and restructure the office will have much more success at enabling cross pollination across the company. Organisations simply can't rely on this to happen organically on a longterm basis.

Coordinating office attendance also allows employees to network with the wider business, instead of just their team who they speak with on a daily basis anyway. In the long term, this is crucial for their professional growth and improvement.

#### Let's solve video calls

Every business seems to use a different collaboration or video calling platform – whether it's Microsoft Teams, Slack, Zoom or Google Meet, in addition to those offered by local providers such as CloudTalk Meeting by UAE's Etisalat.

That's fine when collaborating internally, but what about when we need to connect with customers or stakeholders? We're left faffing around with multiple tools a day, switching between platforms that essentially perform the same function.

It often feels quite ridiculous, using up to five different tools a day just to have conversations with customers. And it is often clunky too, taking more time to join the calls and adding to frustrations.

Well, it's time to put a stop to it. 2022 must come with good news of a solution that enables all of these platforms to interact seamlessly and us all to join calls and meetings directly from our service of choice.

It's like phone networks. It doesn't matter what network you, your family or your friends are on, you can call anyone from whatever device you're using



and communicate seamlessly. It's time that businesses can do the same.

#### DX is about experience not speed

Digital transformation was vital for business continuity during the pandemic and organisations were willing to take risks in order to stay afloat.

This has consequently increased organisations' appetite for risk, but also altered expectations as leaders have realised that transformations which once took months can now be achieved in a matter of weeks or even days.

However, customers are fickle and user experience when it comes to business change is becoming a greater concern than when customers were more lenient throughout the pandemic. As such, Middle East businesses are coming to realise that they might have to sacrifice some of the pace of their digital transformation journeys to ensure the customers experience remains brilliant as ultimately this is more important.

Gartner is behind the curve – cloud native is so last year

Gartner has predicted a rise in the use of cloud native platforms for 2022, but the fact is it's already a reality for Middle East businesses, and the amount of cloud native work has increased a lot in the past 18 months for regional organizations.

Multicloud is ready and customers now don't want to, and simply won't, buy from just one provider. The best way to make a success of a multicloud environment and enjoy the most benefit from it is then to write apps that are portable.

The key now is to ensure these multicloud environments are constantly being optimised and that businesses are using the right platforms at the right time, and know what these are. Working with the right partner on this and benefitting from their expertise is crucial.

#### **Carbon neutrality**

While a hot talking point in the media for some time, COP26 has certainly focused people's attention on our collective climate responsibilities. Consumers as well as businesses in the Middle East are becoming much more environmentally aware and are now turning this awareness into active decision making.

For consumers, this means looking at the credentials of an organisation whey wish to purchase from, which is starting to have a noticeable impact on decisions and behaviours.

For local businesses, especially those which have made their own commitment toward carbon neutrality, the expectation is being placed upon their own supply chain to match these goals. This is already becoming a key requirement to engage, and will only increase over the next year.

One thing we've learned from the past 18 months or so is that the only thing we can predict in this world is time. As a new yearly cycle is about to restart, only time will tell whether the trends discussed here will come to light. ABU DHABI RESEARCH INSTITUTE

# KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

**Dr. Ray O. Johnson,** Chief Executive Officer, Technology Innovation Institute, has made the case for the creation of an R&D ecosystem in Abu Dhabi, stressing how knowledge is power and technology-driven knowledge ecosystems are the key to success in the new digital economy.



e live in unprecedented times that have brought with them significant opportunities to gain insights. While market economics and the pre-pandemic landscape had provided us with a glimpse of the global changes sweeping across our world, the pandemic has awakened us to an irrevocable truth.

Digitalisation is here to stay, and there is no returning to the previous normal because of the disruption that it has been set in motion. This digital transformation has helped many economies and sectors leapfrog into an era that is now dominated by advanced technology – decades ahead of what was believed possible.

Clearly, the importance of research and development (R&D) in the current environment cannot be underestimated. Knowledge is power, and this is never truer than at a time when the world's nations are engaged in shaping technology-driven knowledge ecosystems.

In an earlier era, especially for the oil producing economic countries (OPEC), fossil fuel and its derivatives marked the most important commodities of exchange – serving as the mainstay for local and regional communities.

In almost the twinkling of an eye, all of that has changed. From a 'nice to have' capability, research, advanced



Knowledge is power, and this is never truer than at a time when the world's nations are engaged in shaping technology-driven knowledge ecosystems."

> technologies, and digital competencies have joined the ranks of 'must have' solutions that support sustainable growth and prosperity for any country.

> Unsurprisingly, the countries that are global economic leaders today are also those that invest most heavily in R&D. According to R&D World, a leading multidimensional platform on all things R&D, more than US\$2.4 trillion will be invested in 2021 in R&D industries, government labs, and academic research centres in over 115 countries.

Furthermore, China is set to invest 1.98% of its US\$31.4 billion GDP in research, followed by the USA, that is allocating 2.88% of its US\$20.8 billion GDP to research spending. In third place is Japan, that is investing 3.50% of its US\$5.21 billion GDP on R&D.1

The R&D investment trends in China are clear. By the end of 2021, China, a country that has consistently invested heavily in R&D, will have outperformed the US with its R&D spending over a 20-year period (US\$622 billion for China vs US\$599 billion for the US).

The passing of the R&D torch that analysts estimated could not happen at least until 2023 has taken place a year or two earlier.

According to yet another report in the South China Morning Post in July 2021, new research reveals that China is set to overtake the US on annual research and development spending by 2025, with a steady increase in expenditure at an annual rate of 16 per cent.

Washington-based think tank, the Aspen Institute, has noted that the US on the other hand, has stagnated and underinvested in science and innovation, thereby possibly impairing people's standards of living, health, national competitiveness, and even the capacity to respond to crises.2

Recognising the vital need to invest in research and in building intellectual property, Abu Dhabi meticulously began putting the building blocks of a comprehensive advanced technology research ecosystem in place during the last few years.

R&D World points out that the Abu Dhabi leadership allocated approximately US\$1.5 billion for R&D, boosting the UAE's ranking to 24th globally in terms of R&D spending, with expenditure standing at 1.3 per cent of its total economy in 2018, according to the World Bank.

Furthermore, the Abu Dhabi Global Market is home to Hub71, a tech ecosystem that has attracted some 102 startups, many in the realm of fintech, health tech, and AI. These technopreneurs raised a total of more than US\$50 million since Hub71 launched in March 2019, thanks partly to the eight VC funds at the startup cluster. These numbers have grown, and they are poised to surge even further in the near term.

In addition to the UAE recognising the need for R&D funding, the pandemic has played a major role in stressing the need for increased spending. The pandemic has also demonstrated the ability of certain nations to make sizeable investments in R&D in the face of other important government priorities.

Even with investments like those being made in the UAE, now is a time of great challenges for the Middle East region. According to the same research referenced by R&D World, Africa, South America, and the Middle East regions are set to continue making limited investments in R&D spending. The combined total R&D investments of these three regions is just 5% of the total global R&D spending, despite creating more than 13% of the total global GDP.

There is today a clear business case for an R & D ecosystem that can ensure the much-needed reversal of fortunes this region urgently needs. Such an ecosystem, however, will only materialise



with the right vision and concerted action.

This is also a time of great opportunities. At a time when several countries are rethinking R&D budgets, others offer a glimmer of hope. Consider an environment where the world's most brilliant scientific minds collaborate with exceptional local student talent focused on STEM learning and collectively carry out breakthrough research to shape transformative impact.

This is the vision of the UAE leadership that has begun valiant efforts to shape a comprehensive advanced technology research ecosystem in Abu Dhabi. Innovation and technology solutions are already the preferred currencies of exchange – where oil once reigned supreme.

Undoubtedly, as is the case with most things today in our post-pandemic world, technology and research ecosystems are set to undergo a significant transformation, with traditional strongholds making way for newer and more agile national players with the political will and determination to succeed.

As we progress into the third decade of the 21st century, the signs are becoming clearer – Silicon Valley and others in that category will soon find themselves contending, or partnering, with new research hubs – Singapore, Japan, China, Estonia, India, and even the United Arab Emirates are vying for top honours in this space, with their strategic investments and meticulous approach to expanding their knowledge economies.

The R&D sector is increasingly perceived as the bedrock and the fundamental driver of sustainable innovation. Welcome to the brave new world.

### We speak your language.

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Everything we do starts with translating real-life work problems into productivity. For us, success comes from unlocking each industry's unique challenges, and with decades of hands-on industry experience built into our solutions, we speak distribution, industrial manufacturing, healthcare and more.

Visit the Infor<sup>®</sup> booth at Gitex<sup>®</sup> from 17-21st October in Hall 7, H7-E50 and let's talk







# Bedata ready.

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