## computer news middle east

ISSUE 358 | MARCH 2022 TAHAWULTECH.COM MEANS BUSINESS

**VIRSEC'S CEO** 

ORANGE'S HEAD OF SECURITY RESEARCH

**COHESITY'S CISO** 

## BUILDING BUSINESS RESILIENCY

CHERIF MORCOS, VICE PRESIDENT OF DIGITAL BUSINESS SOLUTIONS AT GBM STRESSES THE NEED FOR 'BUSINESS RESILIENCY' AS WE ENTER THE DECADE OF DIGITAL DISRUPTION.





**WVIrsec** 

## Deterministic Protection Platform



"The world has been far too patient with security vendors who claim to protect against the unyielding ransomware and remote code execution attacks crippling our businesses. Traditional approaches simply do not work. Any CISO or CIO needs to be able to walk into the CEO's office or the boardroom and confidently say that they can not only protect against these attacks but can stop them, within milliseconds, before they do any damage. Virsec is the only company that can give these tech leaders the confidence to say 'Yes!"

#### — John Chambers,

Former Chairman & CEO, Cisco, and CEO, JC2 Ventures

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International Women's Day was celebrated on March 8th, and we pay tribute to some of the female trailblazers from the IT ecosystem."

## THE IMPORTANCE **OF BEING EARNEST**

key theme that features prominently throughout March's edition of CNME is resiliency. However, resiliency comes in many, many different forms.

On the front cover of this month's magazine, we feature a wonderful interview with Cherif Morcos, Vice President, Digital Business Solutions at GBM, who stressed the importance of building business resiliency in the current 'digital first' economy we find ourselves operating in.

He cited examples of how some traditional industries are being transformed overnight by the advent of new disruptive technologies - and claimed that businesses who don't have business resiliency will simply not survive in what he described as the forthcoming 'decade of disruption'.

We also spoke to key leaders from the security industry, such as Virsec CEO Dave Furneaux and Cohesity CISO Brian Spanswick, who both talked about the importance of establishing cyber resilience, and in the face of ever evolving and sophisticated attacks, it is increasingly becoming more difficult for businesses to protect their data and their IT environments.

International Women's Day was celebrated on March 8th, and we pay tribute to some of the female trailblazers from the IT ecosystem, who have had to show incredible resilience to overcome the many obstacles they faced as they made their way up the corporate ladder in an industry that we know, historically, has been male-dominated and despite progress, remains unbalanced in 2022.

In the rest of the magazine, we have extensive coverage of our CIO Leadership Awards, which were held at the Ritz-Carlton in JBR, at the end of February. The awards were a phenomenal success as we celebrated the CIO's and key decision-makers that have been leveraging their knowledge and expertise to help their companies transform in Industry 4.0

In addition to this, we have brilliant interviews with ACI Worldwide, who shed more light on the introduction of a new IPP (Instant Payments Platform) that will be introduced in the UAE later this year, Head of Security Research at Orange Cyberdefense Charl van der Walt gives his view on the issues engulfing the cybersecurity industry over the last 18 months, Chinese smartphone vendor realme discusses their phenomenal global growth – and forget about the Metaverse, Huawei are fully focused on the Energyverse!

As I stated at the beginning of this editorial letter, the key theme of the magazine is resilience. However, resilience in business and our professional career is one thing, but in many ways, it pales into significance when compared to those that are suffering as a direct result of war.

We stand in solidarity with those oppressed all over the world, but our thoughts at this time are with our colleague Max Porechkin, who comes from the Ukraine, and we pray for an end to the current conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and we express our admiration on the strength, bravery, resolve, and resilience being shown at this time by the Ukrainian people.

Mark Forker Editor



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VIRSEC









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## NEWS

New Cisco Study Finds that Workers Across the UAE Consider High-Performance Broadband Essential to Economic Growth and Hybrid Work



Reem Asaad, Vice President in the Middle East and Africa, Cisco

### **Cisco's latest Broadband Index**

report reveals that over 70 percent of respondents in UAE state that the reliability and quality of their broadband connection are crucial to economic and societal growth.

According to the global survey of almost 60,000 workers across 30 countries about their home broadband access, quality, and usage, economic and societal growth will not happen without universal access to fast and reliable internet.

"Networks and digital technologies are at the heart of the big economic and social transformations happening in our region. Demand for broadband connectivity has increased exponentially since the beginning of the pandemic", said Reem Asaad, Vice President in the Middle East and Africa, Cisco. "With the rise in remote and hybrid working, businesses are required to enable the collaboration and effectiveness of all employees, regardless of location. We created the Broadband Index to understand how the pandemic has impacted the use of broadband and customers' expectations around the globe, including the Middle East and Africa".

## Rackspace Technology Expands Strategic Relationship with AWS

Rackspace Technology, a leading end-toend, multicloud technology solutions company is extending its Strategic Collaboration Agreement (SCA)



cloud projects enabling clients to fundamentally change how their businesses work", said Neil Emerson, Chief Commercial Officer at Rackspace Technology. "This

with Amazon Web Services (AWS) with an additional multi-year joint investment to drive customer value and innovation. The expanded agreement comes after Rackspace Technology's AWS business has grown by 250% over the past 3 years and was named 2021 AWS Migration Partner of the Year (US & Canada).

"AWS and Rackspace Technology have jointly launched over 1,000 agreement continues the commitment of both companies together to provide a full stack of cloud services to assist customers with becoming cloud-first businesses to accelerate their digital transformation, innovate faster, and create value. With AWS's renowned customer obsession and the Rackspace Fanatical Experience, we share a common culture of delivering the right outcomes for our clients".

## Assessing cybersecurity today to improve and protect tomorrow's manufacturing operations



**Process plant automation systems** are engineered over a long period to ensure repeatable, reliable, available, and safe operations. However, increased connectivity to business systems has also increased the vulnerability of control systems to cyber-attacks.

Organisations are now pushed to prioritise cybersecurity so that their systems remain secure, stable, and protected. But how and where do they even begin their cybersecurity journey?

Emerson recommends a cybersecurity risk assessment

to evaluate gaps in currently implemented strategies, technologies, and policies and procedures. The output of the assessment will provide a roadmap for identifying, prioritising, and eliminating vulnerabilities.

To begin, operations technology (OT) and information technology (IT) teams must be aware of three common missteps:

• Assuming the team already knows and understands all the risks

• Believing in a single solution to fix all risks and threats

• Assigning the cybersecurity program as a low priority with limited funding

A cyber risk assessment is one of the most practical ways to begin approaching cybersecurity. This lays the groundwork for a sustainable and robust cybersecurity system that can help future-proof businesses.



Hitesh Sheth, President and CEO, Vectra Al

#### Vectra AI, a leader in AI-driven threat

detection and response for hybrid and multi-cloud enterprises, today responded to the expanding Ukraine-Russia conflict by offering a slate of free cybersecurity tools and services to organisations who believe they may be targeted as a result of this conflict.

Bank websites and ATMs, as well as military computer networks, have been disabled in recent days by cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns meant to provoke panic have rippled across cellular networks.

"Escalating cyber conflict will lead to

## Vectra AI announces slate of free cybersecurity tools in response to expanding Ukraine-Russia conflict

unanticipated consequences", said Hitesh Sheth, President and CEO, Vectra AI. "No public or private organisation is assured of remaining a mere spectator".

The company is actively tracking new attack indicators associated with the conflict in Ukraine and Russia, as well as other conflicts around the world.

For immediate assistance in the current emergency, Vectra AI will offer the following services on a complimentary basis:

• Scan Microsoft Azure AD and M365 environments for signs of attack activities

• Monitor AWS infrastructure for signs of active attacks, in addition to the provision of detection and response tools for both the network and control plane of AWS accounts

• Surveil network infrastructure both in the cloud and on-premises for signs of attack, including deployment of Vectra sensors that are purpose-built to detect malicious behaviour

• Support the retention of

## response investigations based on indicators of compromise (IOCs) for specific attack variants

historical metadata to aid incident

Attacks previously attributed to Russian actors are known to disrupt the Microsoft Enterprise Cloud and gain access to critical information. With the acquisition of Siriux, Vectra AI is uniquely equipped to immediately discover malicious Microsoft Azure Active Directory activity that could lead to the compromise of Exchange Online mailboxes. Vectra AI also will provide a free Siriux scan to organisations that believe they could be targeted.

"As the conflict escalates and cyber risks mount, Vectra AI wants to be part of the solution", said Sheth. "We believe that together we can significantly reduce the risks associated with nation-state cyberattacks. By offering our products and services without charge during this crisis, we hope we can help more organisations protect themselves".

when delivered via ubiquitous Heads Up Displays (HUDs)

• Massive IoT (MIoT) environments attract sabotage and extortion attacks targeting manufacturing, logistics, transportation, healthcare, education, retail, and the home environment

• AI-powered confusion makes attribution virtually impossible, pushing the security industry's focus towards incident response and IAM at the edge

• 5G and 6G connectivity everywhere drive more sophisticated and precise attacks

• "Everything as a Service" turns cloud providers into hugely lucrative targets for cyber-attackers

• Grey markets emerge for those that want tools to confound workplace monitoring

• Techno-nationalism becomes a key geostrategic tool for some of the world's most powerful nations, with the gulf between them and the have-nots widening further

## Trend Micro provides a glimpse into the future of cybersecurity with Project 2030

#### **Trend Micro**

Incorporated, a global leader in cybersecurity solutions, released a visionary report and a dramatised video series articulating how the world might look at the start of the next decade – and how the security sector might respond to evolving cybercrime innovation.

By 2030, connectivity will affect every aspect of daily life, on both

the physical and psychological levels. Malicious threat actors will evolve to use and abuse technological innovation, which is expected in the consistent change of the threat landscape. The report itself



perspectives of a fictional citizen, a business, and a government. It offers a detailed analysis of evolving cyber threats and how these might impact security stakeholders. Among the predictions in the report are: • AI tools democratise

looks at the world

in 2030 through the

cybercrime on a whole new scale to individuals with no technical skill

• Attacks cause chaos with supply chains and physical harm to humans through their cyber-implants

• Social engineering and misinformation become more visceral and harder to ignore

## NEWS

## Qualys to put cybersecurity automation front and centre at GISEC 2022

Qualys, Inc., a pioneer and leading provider of disruptive cloud-based IT, security and compliance solutions, today announced it will participate at GISEC 2022 under the theme of "Securing Your Digital Transformation with Cybersecurity Automation".

Visitors to the Qualys booth will get a chance to speak with technical experts about Qualys' full solution portfolio, including:

Qualys CyberSecurity Asset Management (CSAM) — an asset management solution that enables security teams to reduce the 'threat debt' by continuously inventorying assets, applying business criticality and risk context, detecting security gaps



like unauthorised or EOL software and responding with appropriate actions to mitigate risk.

Qualys Vulnerability Management Detection and Response (VMDR) a single-console platform for the discovery, assessment, prioritisation, and patching of critical vulnerabilities in real time, across global hybrid-IT landscapes. This year, Qualys will be highlighting VMDR's recently added Advanced Remediation capability, which allows organisations to fix asset misconfigurations, patch operating systems and third-party applications, and deploy custom software.

Qualys Context XDR — the industry's first context-aware

The industry's first context-aware XDR solution that combines rich asset inventory and vulnerability context, network and endpoint telemetry from Qualys sensors, along with high-quality threat intelligence and third-party log data to identify threats quickly and reduce alert fatigue.

## Veeam Backup for Microsoft 365 v6 Provides Automation, Scalability, Enhanced Security and more



Danny Allan, CTO and SVP of Product Strategy at Veeam (L) and Claude Schuck, Regional Director, Middle East at Veeam (R)

Veeam Software, the leader in backup, recovery and data management solutions that deliver Modern Data Protection, today announced the general availability of the latest version of the company's fastest growing Software as a Service (SaaS) product — Veeam Backup for Microsoft 365 v6. The solution enables users to securely back up to any location, including on-premises, in a hyperscale cloud, or with a service provider. New features in v6 increase time savings for IT departments due to diminished burden for recovery requests and additional cost savings as a result of more efficient backups.

"Veeam Backup for Microsoft 365 reported 73% growth YoY, with 8.5 million users relying on Veeam to protect their Microsoft 365 data, including Exchange Online, SharePoint Online, OneDrive for Business and Microsoft Teams", said Danny Allan, CTO and SVP of Product Strategy at Veeam. "Within all SaaS platforms, including Microsoft 365, the organisation owns and controls their own data, and it's the organisation's responsibility to protect it. The growth and momentum of Veeam Backup for Microsoft 365 is an indication that more organisations are realising the importance of managing and securing their data, and consistently trust Veeam with critical business assets".



## Epson Awards TETCO to transform Saudi Arabia's education sector

#### Global technology leader, Epson,

awards Tatweer Educational Technologies (TETCO), the technological arm of the Saudi Ministry of Education, for adopting Epson's display solutions in Saudi Arabia, benefitting from innovative and immersive in-class technology solutions.

Epson's continuous commitment to transform the education sector strongly supports the strategic partnership with TETCO, helping promote hybrid education development and launch of smart classrooms.

With this strategic partnership, in line with initiatives including Saudi

Arabia's National Vision 2030, Epson successfully completed the supply and installation of 30K interactive projectors in 2019 as a part of Future Gate project. This will boost engagement and interactivity between students and teachers, enable hybrid learning, and strengthen the learning experience and outcomes for the youth.

Epson's interactive display projectors help deliver education for in-person, remote and hybrid learning, where students can engage and interact. For example, Epson's EB-1400 series have scalable screen sizes of up to 155 inches, helping every student get a clear view of the classroom.

means that

security software

running on

Intel-based

ransomware

protection.

"This

superior

PCs can deliver

ESET endpoint

## ESET partners with Intel to enhance with hardware-based ransomware detection

## ESET PARTNERS WITH INTEL

for software and hardware-based detection

(CSCT) Digta Tartetta

#### ESET, the leading endpoint protection

platform vendor headquartered in Europe, has set out to integrate Intel Threat Detection Technology (Intel TDT) into its multi-layered cybersecurity technology suite.

Recognising the complex and evolving nature of ransomware, an ever more formidable threat to customers' work and personal lives, ESET will enhance its software-based detection technologies with a ransomware detection only Intel hardware can deliver. With progress in technological innovations often bringing new tools for the sustained growth and security of SMBs, the integration of Intel TDT

### intel.

collaboration recognises the immediate boost in ransomware protection that integrating Intel's hardware-based ransomware detection technology can deliver. Tapping into telemetry at the CPU level is an effective step we can take to enable improved tracking of malicious encryption. Basically, for ESET this means exposing ransomware as it attempts to avoid detection in memory. ESET has always believed in the multilayered approach, and by adding the silicon layer we recognise that hardwarebased security is the next milestone in battling threats", shares Előd Kironský, Chief of Endpoint Solutions and Security Technologies at ESET.

# 5G's tremendous promise for the video surveillance industry



Ettiene van der Watt, Regional Director, Middle East & Africa, Axis

#### Axis Communications: a global

pioneer in network video and IoT solutions – hosted a highimpact technology conference at Dubai's Expo 2020. In a series of six insightful conferences, the fifth event highlighted the rapid development of 5G, the significant opportunities this transformative technology presents, and how Axis is leading the charge in the video surveillance industry by piloting 5G-powered solutions together with industry leaders, partners and end customers.

A panel of experts from Axis and its partners, Singtel, Boldly (Softbank), Ericsson, and Nokia, unpacked the immense opportunities 5G adoption offers enterprises across sectors and governments. For one, this latest generation of wireless technologies empower business leaders and government officials to build safer and smarter organisations and cities through enhanced network capabilities, more robust security, and lower latency.

"By 2025, 5G networks are likely to cover one-third of the world's population. While 3G and 4G LTE have primarily served the private subscriber, 5G will enable decision-makers and leaders to connect IoT devices at greater scale and improve decision-making with real-time data aggregation and analysis", explained Ettiene van der Watt, Regional Director – Middle East & Africa at Axis.

#### ORANGE CYBERDEFENSE

## UNDERSTANDING CYBERCRIMINALITY

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Charl van der Walt**, Head of Security Research at Orange Cyberdefense, to find out more about the key trends and new threats that emerged from their comprehensive Security Navigator Report 2022 - and has called for the cybersecurity community to review and reevaluate the way its thinks about the actual crime committed in cyber extortion.

harl van der Walt is undoubtedly one of the most revered and respected thought leaders in the global cybersecurity ecosystem, and in his position as Head of Security at Orange Cyberdefense, he has been able to leverage his knowledge and expertise to equip his customers with the ability to protect themselves amidst an increasingly unpredictable and constantly evolving threat landscape that we currently find ourselves immersed in.

In a candid and forthright interview with CNME Editor

It really strikes me as an extraordinary amount of work to have to respond to 42 incidents every month." Mark Forker, he fleshed out some of the key insights from his perspective that emerged from their Security Navigator Report 2022.

He described the sheer volume of attacks that are occurring every month as 'extraordinary'.

"One of the first things we attempt to do with the report is normalise the volume of incidents across our customers to determine if they are increasing or decreasing. In the end, we concluded that they have increased by 13%, and that essentially means that on a normalised basis each of our customers deal with 42 confirmed incidents per-month. Now that doesn't mean the incidents are necessarily a compromise, but it is a confirmed security failure. It really strikes me as an extraordinary amount of work to have to respond to 42 incidents every month," said Van der Walt.

He explained how the relationship between Orange Cyberdefense and its customers work, and again expressed his dismay at some of the findings and figures that came to light during the report.

"We have a very specific perspective because we are a service provider. We have these detection systems that are spread out across our customers and then they trigger, and then we proceed to triage them. It's our job to determine why did they trigger, was it a false positive, can we put it down to some benign thing - and only then when we are genuinely convinced that this is an indicator of an attack, or compromise, do we contact the customer. Those 42 incidents every month is only about 36% of the incidents that we deal with, so if the customer was doing it themselves then they would be dealing with three times that number, which also strikes me as extraordinary, and quite frankly I find it very disheartening," said Van der Walt.



Interestingly, Van der Walt also highlighted that despite the many technological advancements that have been made in cybersecurity in terms of detection techniques and practices, it still is extremely difficult to determine what sort of attack is going on within your IT environment.

"It really is difficult to know what you are looking at when you get these alerts, because despite applications like MITRE ATT&CK and all the other progress that we have made in this space, it remains very difficult to know whether a given indicator really represents an ongoing attack, a real attack, or just something benign," said Van der Walt.

He also criticised the industries overall approach to security, using the needle and the haystack analogy to describe an approach he deems largely ineffective and expensive.

"The sheer volume of energy that goes into trying to figure out was this supposed to happen or not is incredible, and part of that is due to the narrative that is being put forward by our industry, which is this view that we can't really defend ourselves, so we need to be able to detect, therefore let's put things down everywhere that tell us when something is going on. We spent a lot of time last year debating an observation on ''what we call the 'false positive ratio'. We found that in our bigger clients the false positive ration was much higher than our smaller clients, and my conclusion was that our bigger clients were putting more stuff

related to detection in, and as you put more in then your ROI starts to drop off. Essentially you are seeing more in total, so that's a security win, security win, but bad things and things that are actually benign are still very hard to tell apart." Said Van der Walt.

There were a range of interesting statistics to come from Orange's Security Navigator Report 2022, but another that jumped off the page for Van der Walt was the fact that over half of those recorded security failures every month were not caused by those with malicious intent.

"One other thing that I found hugely interesting from the report was the ratio between incidents and accidents. We discovered that a lot of these incidents do not originate with someone outside the business with malicious intent, they originate from someone inside the organisation and that's about a 50/50 split. What that means is basically half of those 42 incidents are not caused by something the attacker is doing, but instead your users making mistakes," said Van der Walt.

Van der Walt then talked about the way in which the cyber community talk about cybersecurity attacks, and he pointed out that we largely ignore the element of criminality within them. He revealed that as a company they underwent an exercise of trying to apply existing theories of crime to cybercrime – and revealed that they have had a lot of success in examining the problem of cybersecurity through the lens of these much older disciplines that consider why crimes happen and how you can counter it.

"One of the things that emerged is what criminologists describe as victim suitability, which means how suitable is the victim to the criminal and what factors come into play for a criminal when they are considering who they are going to steal from. There is an acronym they use to summarise what makes a victim suitable and it is called VVAIV. The first V stands for visibility, so how easy are you to see, and I believe that translates into the cyberspace in the shape of things like online presence and attack surface size, so effectively how many systems are you pushing online? The next V stands for vulnerability, which speaks to cyber hygiene in terms of patching and passwords, and the A stands for access, and basically what that means is the ease and time allowed to a criminal, and in the cyberspace that to us is detection and response and determining how capable are we in reducing the attackers dwell time," said Van der Walt.

According to Van der Walt he felt the first three letters of the acronyms and what they stood for were all instinctive and relatively obvious, but he found the final two letters

With cyber extortion one of the reasons it is very interesting and valuable to think about it as a crime, rather than a technical problem is that it forces you to think about the entire journey of that crime."



and their connotations very interesting.

"The next letter I stood for inertia, and what that basically that stands to say is big things are harder to steal than smaller things – and if you relate that to cyberspace then that would equate to the ease at which the attacker can not only exfiltrate stolen data, but also in the military sense of the word exploit that stolen data. The big question is can they really understand and interpret the value of something that they have stolen," said Van der Walt.

The final letter was V and that represented value, and Van der Walt linked this element of the acronym to the ongoing ransomware crisis that is engulfing the cybersecurity ecosystem on a global scale.

"Given that the dominant form of cybercrime right now is extortion, which we have seen in the form of ransomware attacks, the value that we are looking at is not the value of the stolen assets to the attacker, but instead the value of the stolen assets to the victim. You are more likely to be extorted if you really need what the attacker has taken from vou," said Van der Walt.

He outlined in more detail why it is valuable to view cyber extortion as a criminal act as opposed to a technical security failure of your IT system or environment.

"With cyber extortion one of the reasons it is very interesting and valuable to think about it as a crime, rather than a technical problem is that forces you to think about the entire journey of that crime. The crime typically starts with an initial access broker, who is hunting for vulnerable systems to compromise - then those compromised systems, or companies are traded with affiliates, who perform the lateral movement, encryption, and data exfiltration and then it passes to the so-called ransomware operator who does the extortion. The final crime is the extortion. It's in the negotiation between the criminal and the victim for something that the criminal has stolen, and the victim needs. That's the core and the essence of it, the essence of it is not in the deployment of malware to encrypt the data, it is all in the negotiation. Fundamentally, cyber extortion is first a problem of crime and ultimately has to be addressed as a crime. This means that every business that has something of value to them is a potential target. The good news is that businesses can take positive steps to make themselves less attractive to offenders and the frontline of defence is addressing the VVIVA variables. " said Van der Walt. **Cime** 

# NINTER STATE OF THE STATE OF TH

**Edwin Diender**, CIO of Global Energy Business Unit, Huawei, has revealed how their new concept energyverse is designed to prompt the energy sector to adapt and evolve to the future demands of the sector in a bid to halt climate change.

MARCH 2022

he metaverse is considered the next evolution of the internet. Is energyverse its equivalent in the energy space?

The idea behind the energyverse is energy that is as visible and as available as information and communications are. Energyverse lends itself to the notion that the energy sector must evolve to meet current and future needs. The defining trends driving this transformation are decarbonisation, digitalisation, and intelligence.

The energy sector faces several unique challenges. The traditional electricity market faces increased pressure from the rapid rise in renewable energy's share of the global electricity mix, particularly solar. Second is the increased integration of energy, information, and service flow in the energy sector. Operators also face challenges related to electricity marketisation and management of operations. It is therefore evident the industry needs to continue to improve competitiveness.

The solution to these challenges is to accelerate the digitisation of the power sector. This result will be the conventional grid, transformed via smart grid and intelligent connectivity into a worldwide web of energy or an internet of energy. In other words, an energyverse for the metaverse.

## These are trends that could revolutionise the energy sector. What is driving these developments? Three related concepts are at the



## Energyverse lends itself to the notion that the energy sector must evolve to meet current and future needs."

heart of energy sector operations today. The first is energy transition towards green energy, characterised by accelerated solar and wind power investments. The second is carbon neutrality, driven by global momentum to reduce carbon emissions. To date, 137 countries from the UN Climate Convention responsible for 80% of global emissions — have committed to net zero-emission targets.

The third is digital transformation in the energy sector, bringing together digital and power electronics technologies such as AI, cloud, and big data to help customers implement simple and efficient operation and maintenance while providing clean and stable power supplies.

These are three gears of the same engine that will drive us to a greener and sustainable future.

As a technology provider, what role do you see Huawei playing in this energy transformation? For energy transition, we aim for technological innovation as the critical enabler to promote clean, low-carbon, safe, efficient and modern energy systems. We will follow our successful 'Platform + Ecosystem' strategy and apply our "energy power ring". This will enable us all to seize the opportunities created by farreaching changes in the global energy landscape.

Our digital world already blurs the lines between digital and physical and brings up both challenges and opportunities for the energy industry. Applying innovative technologies is redefining the relationship between productivity and production. Therefore, the energy industry needs to actively embrace digital innovation to do better what we already do best.

In light of the carbon neutrality goal, we need to reverse the rapid growth of energy consumption and CO2 emissions and decouple economic growth from carbon emissions. Becoming low-carbon, electrified, and intelligent is the only way to achieve carbon neutrality, and technological advances are an engine that drives the process.

## It is clear the line between digital and power sectors will continue to blur. How does the Middle East fit into this convention?

The Middle East is both a major energy producer and a global pioneer in exploring alternative energy systems. To date, a greater focus on decarbonisation and green development is now part of many national development visions.

The technology foundation for the transition to green smart energy is already there. Middle East countries have been among the most progressive in adopting 5G, providing a solid foundation to build an intelligent power sector. VIRSEC

# JOIN THE MOVEMENT

**Dave Furneaux,** CEO of Virsec spoke passionately to CNME Editor Mark Forker, about his company's mission to create a movement of security partners that work together to make cyberattacks irrelevant, stressing that the current situation is now out of control. ave Furneaux needs no introduction to anyone in the global cybersecurity ecosystem having entered the field in the late 90s.

He has enjoyed a decorated career and came to prominence within the cybersecurity fraternity as the founding investor and chairman of the board at CyberSaint Security, which is comprised of a team of academics, technologists, and disruptors, that are motivated to make cybersecurity management scalable and secure.

However, it's in his role as CEO of Virsec that I was granted an exclusive interview opportunity with the charismatic American, and we began our conversation by going back to the beginning and finding out the purpose and vision behind the inception of Virsec.

Furneaux stressed that the company was established out of a necessity to find a protection capability that equipped businesses with the security

## 66

Virsec isn't coming into the market saying we are here now, so you don't need the other things, that's not the case at all." they needed to better protect their IT environments.

"Virsec is a very atypical cybersecurity company, and when I say it is an atypical company, I say that because the company was founded on a question of what do we need to do to really work on a new protection capability that will be stronger in the marketplace and allows companies, governments, and militaries to be more fully protected? It was a very provocative question that we started the company on, and it led to several years of working on the technology," said Furneaux.

He disclosed that Virsec have 113 patents and many trade secrets around their body of work and said that it ultimately led them to a first-principle way of thinking, and illustrated how important it was to better understand the software at play when attempting to protect it.

"What a first principle way of thinking essentially means if you apply it is thinking about complicated problems, and we had to break the problem down into its most basic form. In the world of digital it means you are breaking the problem down right in to the software, and you're saying that we have got to figure out and fully understand the software that needs to be protected if we are going to fully protect it. We spent 3 years building this technology, and then we spent a year testing it - and it was two years after that we came to market with

the product. We really learned in 2020 with about 10-12 customers what it needed to look like, how does it need to work and where does it need to go – and then last year we really started to figure it out, and we are now starting to scale the business out globally," said Furneaux.

Virsec have been an advocating for a deterministic approach to tackling cybersecurity problems versus the seemingly preferred probabilistic model being pursued by the industry. However, Furneaux stressed that Virsec is coming into market very humbly and is looking to complement the existing processes.

"Virsec isn't coming into the market saying we are here now, so you don't need the other things, that's not the case at all. We want to complement today's security programs and fit into their customers' existing security stack, and then over time the customer will undoubtedly see the ways in which they are getting efficiency out of this new protection approach because it automates, it is precise, and it is all done in real-time," said Furneaux.

The CEO of Virsec then explained the differences between a probabilistic and deterministic approach.

"If you break down the word probabilistic then it means probable. We've built an industry on detection and response, and right in the middle there is that word probable. We are analyzing data coming from the infrastructure and the software and we are trying to determine if an attack is occurring by detecting it in a probabilistic way, so we are probably protecting it, but we don't know. Then we are trying as quick as we can to respond to it, so the response part is threat hunting, but during the hunting process the damage is already done and that's what we call dwell time. Virsec comes in and we use the word determine, and our function is to determine whether the software that you want to protect is doing what it is intended to do and assure the security leader that the software is only doing what it was intended to do," said Furneaux.

Furneaux detailed the gains of this approach and highlighted that another attractive characteristic of their deterministic model is that fact that enterprises don't need to radically transform their operations to implement their solutions, but instead can integrate it in small stages.

"The benefits and gains are better protection, automated protection, and no need for fulltime people managing the tool. In summary, we are coming in to complement the existing environments, and we've worked very hard at trying to make that as approachable and easy as possible for companies to bring it in, so they don't need to make wholesale changes. They can start small and grow in confidence, and use the product more over time," said Furneaux.

Virsec have recently received capital investment to the tune

I see Virsec more like a movement. Yes, we are a company that is building a product and are solving a problem, but what we really want to do is encourage the industry to move in a first principle way towards protection."

of \$100m, but more significant is who the capital has been raised from.

John Chambers and Mike Ruettgers, two titans of the IT industry have given Virsec a ringing endorsement with their investment into the company, and as Furneaux revealed both are fully committed to helping Virsec achieve their mission statement.

"I see Virsec more like a movement. Yes, we are a company that is building a product and are solving a problem, but what we really want to do is encourage the industry to move in a first principle way towards protection. We would love nothing better than for all the major security companies to move in this direction too, because our mission is to help solve this problem, and gain more control out of the infrastructure we have today, because quite bluntly speaking it is out of control, and we can see that



every day. In relation to building the company you need capital as fuel to grow and scale – and make the right investments to mature the product and simplify how you come to market. We chose very carefully who we wanted to raise the capital from to support our mission. John Chambers is one of the leading businesspeople of the last generation in building Cisco into such a dominant company. Mike Ruttguers came into EMC as a small company and built it into a



billion-dollar company as the CEO, and he is now on our board. Both these gentlemen work with me on a day-to-day basis. We also went beyond that and built a growth advisory board of CIOs and CSOs, congressman and former CIA directors, and this group of people have accelerated and unlocked our growth and are on that mission with us to make cyberattacks irrelevant," said Furneaux.

The second ever customer of Virsec was based in the Middle

East, and Furneaux revealed that the company has ambitious aspirations in the region, and firmly believes they are well placed to become the go-to protection player in the region over the next 5 years.

"The Middle East is one of our priority regions. Early in the rollout of our product our second customer was based in the region, so that serves as a testament to how important a market it is for us. We have started selling more broadly in the Middle East, and we have spent the last two years building proof points and selling into five different countries, but with a real focus on the quality of engagements with the right partners. We are now at the point where we want to make an investment over the next 3-5 years to become the dominant protection capability provider in the region," said Furneaux. **CITES** 

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Companies are investing a lot of focus on protect controls, but I believe they need to apply the same level of focus on the controls that minimise the impact if they are breached."

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## COHESITY

# STEPPING INTO THE 'BREACH'

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with cybersecurity veteran **Brian Spanswick**, Chief Information Security Officer at Cohesity, to find out more about the unique element of his dual-role at the company, how enterprises need to focus more on minimising the impact of a breach – and how their solution is proving to be a gamechanger in the security industry.

Rian Spanswick has revealed that he has had a lot of 'fun' during his distinguished and decorated professional career that has seen him work with some of the world's biggest cybersecurity companies, but he has declared that he has had the most fun ever since moving from Splunk to Cohesity in April 2021.

It's been a whirlwind 11 months for Spanswick, and whilst he conceded that it was a difficult decision to leave Splunk, in the end he just couldn't reject the exciting opportunity that was being tabled by Cohesity CEO Mohit Aron.

"I joined the security team at Splunk shortly after we moved out from under IT, and we were just establishing the security function and capability inside the organisation. During my 3-year tenure working on the security side we built the team from around 7 to over 100 people, and it really was a world-class security organisation. I started working directly for the CISO and took on more and more responsibilities, and I was really enjoying the challenges that we were taking on, especially as we were a security product company. When the opportunity came around for Cohesity, I wasn't

really looking, so it was going to take something special to prize me away from Splunk, and that something special was firstly I really believed in the product, and how our CEO Mohit Aron has built the company," said Spanswick.

However, the aspect of the new job that was really compelling for Spanswick was the position itself.

"My role at Cohesity is to be the CISO, but I am also the head of IT, so essentially, I have got responsibility for the infrastructure team as well as the business applications team. Now, when you think about it, historically from a security perspective quite often companies work hard to break up those roles because they believe there is a conflict of interest, but really that is coming more from a compliance view of security as opposed to really thinking about security as a core function. We are not in the business to do infosec, we are the in the business of conducting business securely, so having responsibility for the IT services and ensuring those services are secure really makes a lot of sense. We are seeing more and more of this happening in the industry, but it is still quite unique," said Spanswick.

Spanswick expanded further on the nuanced nature of his new role and highlighted how both the CEO and CFO of Cohesity, really appreciated the importance

of merging and aligning the IT and security operations within the organisation.

"Cohesity really started to think about it as a CIO role fused with security responsibilities. Now remember, this was only 12 months ago, and it was around the time we started to launch our SaaS product, and we were looking for use cases for our core product that were more tied to infosec use-cases. From the conversations that I had with our CEO Mohit Aron and our CEO Robert O'Donovan, it became clear to me that they really understood the importance of switching that emphasis, so that security wasn't a secondary thought, but instead was a primary objective of the IT organisation," said Spanswick.

With that increased level of responsibility, it undoubtedly brings pressure, but Spanswick is unfazed by that, and admitted he relishes both the responsibility and pressure that naturally comes with the job.

"It is extremely exciting for me, now it certainly is a challenge, and the stakes are very high, but when I am accountable for both it's a better conversation when I speak to the executive staff, or the board, because I am not talking about investing in security, instead I am talking about investing in securely running the business and that's a whole different kind of conversation," said Spanswick.

Over the last 18 months, there has been an exponential increase in cyberattacks, with ransomware emerging as the preferred method of attack. High-profile ransomware attacks such as Colonial Pipeline and JBS in the United States, have had severe economic ramifications for those impacted, and the nature of these attacks carry the potential of putting enterprises completely out of business.

According to Spanswick, he believes there has been a mindset shift from some businesses – but has called for a greater emphasis to be placed on mitigating the impact of a breach, as opposed to focusing all attention and efforts on prevention.

"We are seeing a lot of companies invest in protect controls, which are obviously tools to try and prevent your business becoming the victim of a breach, and you should absolutely do that, but you also need to make sure that you make it as difficult as possible for these attackers to get access to your systems and your environments. However, let's be clear about it, nobody can be 100%. However, where this mindset shift really comes into play is not just thinking about the protect controls and trying to prevent the breach, which again you should continue to do, but instead how do you minimise the impact if you are breached?



We have a great solution that people who are responsible for infrastructure would consider."



One of the things that companies should be thinking about is how quickly can they recover from backup. If you think about it on those terms, and certainly we should still try to prevent the attack, but if we can take the potential impact of that attack down to its closest zero then the threat, or the leverage that the ransomware attacker has goes down considerably as a direct result. Companies are investing a lot of focus on protect controls, but I believe they need to apply the same level of focus on the controls that minimise the impact if they are breached," said Spanswick.

Spanswick then brought the conversation forward and highlighted the impact its solutions were having for its customers in terms of



empowering them with the cyber resilience they need to thrive and survive in the complex digital economy that we find ourselves immersed in.

He described their solution in the context of mitigating the impact of breaches as a 'gamechanger' in the cybersecurity ecosystem.

"We have a great solution that people who are responsible for infrastructure would consider. We have a brilliant data management back-up solution, but when you apply it to the use-case that I am describing then it really is a gamechanger. Historically, getting investments from the company in things like IT infrastructure such as backup solutions was a challenge, now you would get those investments, but they were not compelling. If the business is making decision between that and increasing quota carrying sales reps', then it's hard to compete. When we talk about how that backup mitigates the impact of a ransomware attack then again it is a different conversation at the board level. The value proposition that my organisation brings to the company changes considerably - when you talk about the infrastructure investments that are enabling that kind of business impact, and that really is powerful," said Spanswick.

We concluded a wonderfully candid and wide-ranging interview, by discussing how the role of a CISO has evolved over the years. "I think the position of a CISO is really becoming a business enablement role, and you have got to make sure that the business owns the risk and is comfortable with how the security posture aligns with their business outcomes. Security professionals have been talking about this for years, and with the urgency that now exists in this environment then it is quicker for those business partners to see," said Spanswick.

In terms of how the role compared to that of non-tech related jobs, the Cohesity CISO believes the main difference is how you position products.

"I have worked for both a non-tech company and a tech company, so I'm well positioned to comment on the nuances between the roles. I worked for a product distributor and a tech company, but one key difference especially between Cohesity and my role at Splunk is that we position products for security usecases. One of the things that is critically important within my organisation is to be an aggressive user of our product and provide that feedback and input into the product management organisation. I have got a full-time senior Cohesity solution architect working for me and his responsibility is how do we deploy Cohesity here that meets the use-cases that we are positioning in the field, just the way our customers would and that's another differentiator for us as a company," concluded Spanswick. come

GBM

# BUILDING BUSINESS RESILIENCY

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Cherif Morcos**, Vice President of Digital Business Solutions at Gulf Business Machines, to find out how his company is helping their customers become more resilient, the impact its Journey 2 Cloud (J2C) framework is having in the market – and why GBM remains a trusted partner for digital transformation across the region.

herif Morcos is undoubtedly one of the most respected and revered IT

executives in the Middle East. The popular tech business leader has enjoyed a distinguished career and is seen as a prominent thought leader in the IT ecosystem across the region.

In this month's edition of CNME, Morcos features as the subject of our front cover interview, and he doesn't disappoint, as he talks everything from cloud, to NFTs, to digital disruption in a candid conversation. We kickstarted the interview by talking about the disruptors that have forced many businesses across multiple industry verticals to completely transform their operating model.

Morcos was a keynote speaker at an event hosted by IDC, where GBM was a strategic partner. His presentation discussed how disruptive the pandemic has been for businesses globally, but he highlighted some other digital disruptors that are triggering changes in the digital world.

"I believe that prior to the onset of the pandemic businesses were already being disrupted by the adoption of new digital operations. A current example of this is through the advent of NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens). An NFT just sold for \$69m, and this digital piece of art has completely disrupted the traditional physical art industry in a way that nobody could ever have foreseen. Another example of disruption is in the form of quantum computing. The force that quantum computing is going to bring to businesses, and what it will allow them to do is a whole different world from what we see now. As these computing models mature, they will bring equip organisations with the ability to analyze data in ways they did not previously know about, but all these disruptions are inevitably impacting



Our J2C Framework is a tool that enables us to better support our clients, by transforming their key business challenges into Digital Solutions" the business resiliency of a company," said Morcos.

Morcos then defined what he believed was business resiliency and explained in detail the fundamental components that are required to achieve it in the ever evolving and complex digital economy we find ourselves immersed in.

"I believe business resilience to be the capacity of a company to adapt its operating model to whatever disruption it encounters, be it external, internal, competitive, or customer based. It shouldn't be an issue if they have an operating model that is capable to adapt fast enough to be ahead of the curve, and not completely fall off a cliff. If they can develop such an operating model, then in my opinion they are on the right path to achieve business resilience," said Morcos.

The VP of Digital Business Solutions at GBM said that it was simply not possible to achieve this level of resiliency without thinking about your company as being 'digital first' – and highlighted that businesses' need to be agile and resilient like never before.

"If you don't have the right systems, and the right access to data, and interconnected systems in your back-end environment to support your operations then you will not survive. If you don't have these digital capabilities, then you can't achieve business resilience, it really is becoming that black and white. One other important thing to note is that a lot of these disruptors are



digitally native, we know this is happening in the business world now and is going to continue to happen more and more in Industry 4.0, as we are living in a decade of disruption. We urge our clients, whom I like to call partners to accelerate their digital transformation and GBM is here to help. We offer AI and analytics and can accelerate the cloud journey in a decade of disruption," said Morcos.

GBM recently launched a comprehensive report that surveyed CIOs and business leaders from across the Middle East to find out what cloud model they preferred. More than half of those that participated in the report said they preferred a hybrid/multi-cloud approach. Morcos outlined why he believed this was the case.

"Organisations are increasingly adopting cloud platform-led investment strategies that help to instill a culture of innovation and continuous transformation, underpinned by cloud-native application deployment to deliver a digitally capable customer experience. From a GBM perspective we believe that the optimum model is a hybridmulti-cloud model. This model allows enterprises to have the scalability they need pertaining to the different workloads

they have. I think initially the viewpoint was that public cloud was going to be the answer to everything, but then obviously a lot of organisations specially in the region were constrained by a combination of regulatory and data sovereignty requirements," said Morcos.

However, he highlighted that 25% of those surveyed stated that they will still use private cloud, and as Morcos outlined they would have very good reasons to do so.

"Financial institutions for example can use cloud computing for certain workloads, but the data remains in-country, regulatory authorities might not be ready for certain types of data being shared in a public environment, so it helps them to have datacenters of hyperscalers across the region. This is where the hybrid model kicks-in because you have computational power that maximises public cloud and all the capacity that comes with it, but you can also run an onprem private cloud and merge them both," said Morcos.

GBM have crystalised years of customer experience to create the J2C framework, which takes into account the customers' individual business model and capabilities.

"It's a methodology and a model that we firmly believe in, and we encourage our customers to start the discussion from the very top with something that we call design thinking workshops. We take them through a comprehensive roadmap in terms of infrastructure, data, and the applications that they need to successful adopt their business model to the cloud. Since we launched the framework, we are starting to see a real uprise in adoption, and then are saying to us that they never thought about it as an overall plan, but the framework has prompted them to change their thinking

## Our customers trust that what we propose to them will work, and when it needs support, we will fix it.

in relation to cloud and their strategy. The J2C framework is going to bring us closer to them, and it will allow us to better understand their challenges" said Morcos.

GBM is one of the most reputable system integrator companies in the Middle East, and since its inception over 33 years ago, it has continued to enjoy fantastic success in what is an ultra-competitive market. According to Morcos, a key component in their success is the trust that customers have in GBM as a company.

"We have been in the region for 33 years and during that time we have built a reputation for being a trusted partner for the IT community here in the Middle East. We have helped our customers revolutionise their entire IT spectrum over the last 30 years. That gives us a phenomenal knowledge of their business and understanding as to how they have transformed over the decades. However, it is also very important to highlight that GBM has undertaken its own revolution over the years. We are in the middle of our own transformation and in many cases, we are applying what we preach to our customers," said Morcos.

Morcos concluded a wonderful and fascinating interview by conceding that whilst they may not be creating these technologies that are transforming industries, he reinforced the key role that GBM play as one of the region's top systems integrator in helping their customers leverage and harness the power of these disruptive technologies.

"GBM brings an unbiased profiling of IT solutions to it clients that better fit their needs. At GBM, we pride ourselves on the fact that whilst these large organisations that we represent create these technologies and applications, we believe the role of GBM in the region is adapting these technologies to the actual needs of the local markets and customers. We are locally owned, but we have the international and global maturity, knowledge and experience of these technologies and 1000+ SMEs in the region, and that us a major market differentiator for us. Our customers trust that what we propose to them will work, and if it needs support then we will fix it," concluded Morcos.

## DR. MOZA SUWAIDAN

## MAKING DUBAI DIGITAL

Nitya Ravi spoke to **Dr. Moza Suwaidan**, Director of Strategy and Innovation at Digital Dubai, who is responsible for managing and delivering strategic projects in the field of digital transformation on the Emirate level, such as the Dubai Paperless Strategy, ICT City Infrastructure initiatives, and building strategic platforms such as Invest in Dubai and others.

eing 'Digital First' is the need of the hour in a post-pandemic world. What is your take on the same?

We can all agree that the pandemic has shown the world the importance of cities and countries being digitally advanced. Nations such as the UAE who have always been working towards the future have been most resilient during the pandemic due to how digitally strong the country is.

Talking about Dubai in particular, ever since His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Prime Minister & Vice-President of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai launched the e-Government 20 years ago, our vision has been to embrace technology to its maximum potential to provide the highest standards of living and quality of life for the city's citizens and residents.

Our journey began with automation of services and internal digitisation of administrative operations such as finance, procurement, human resources and more which in 2018 with the launch of the Dubai Paperless Strategy focused on comprehensive digital service, promoting integration, and achieving full digitisation of internal government operations.

With the success of implementing Dubai Paperless Strategy across the entire Dubai government, as of the end of 2021, we have eliminated the use of over 325 million sheets of paper equating to over AED 1 billion in cost savings, 13 million Hours in time savings and 39,000 trees in environmental savings per year.

Achieving so much in the past two decades, it was now time to evaluate on how we take the city's digitisation to the next step. In June 2021, His Highness launched Digital Dubai. With our new identity, we not just want to digitise government services, but the entire city. We aim to build a globally leading digital economy. Over the past six months we have been hosting several stakeholder engagements workshops with the private sector, academia, startups and more to understand how we can build end-to-end digital experiences.

Though our primary goal for digitisation is better quality of life

for our people, through Digital Dubai's new mandate we also wish to reap the economic, social and environmental benefits for the city, making Dubai the digital capital of the world.

## With companies undergoing digital transformation, what do you think will be the new challenges they have to face in a digital ecosystem?

From a city government perspective, to be a truly holistic digital city we must conquer several challenges. These include:

• Creating value: Investing in ICT must result in creating value and improving the quality of life of the citizens. Technology is a great tool to make people's life simple and city experiences pleasant.

• Using data: To build endto-end digital experiences for the city's citizens and residents, we need to ensure that systems are interoperable and can speak to each other. For this we need collaborative efforts from both government sector and private sector to create data products that are of a value and utilised for decision making.

# Your mission sho

Your mission should always be to find ways to create value using technology as a tool."

• Building digital skills: The biggest challenge the industry is currently facing across the globe is the lack of talent. Technology is advancing at a much rapid pace than our educational systems. Accelerating the youths' digital skills across the city and working with educational institutes to embed courses and curriculums that will create talent ready for the future is of importance.

## Which technology do you foresee being widely adapted in 2022?

As the government, we decide on technology investment based on the problem that we are trying to solve as opposed to the technology itself. Our efforts should result in solving a challenge and making quality of life in Dubai better.

That said, AI, IoT, Blockchain and Data Science are key technologies that continue to see wider scale implementations and are rapidly being adapted across the globe. What has been the biggest challenge in this industry and how did you manage to overcome the same? The biggest challenge in this industry is staying relevant with the rapid changes in technology, frameworks, and operating models. It requires a professional working in this industry to always keep up with the change, to stay aware and educated about potential opportunities and to continuously learn or unlearn sometimes.

What advice would you give aspiring young women entering this profession, or what advice do you have for women looking to grow either their own business or within the company they work for?

Whether you are a young woman who is just starting to build a career in the technology sector or building a business that is based on technology provision, there are numerous opportunities available for you to grab in all technology domains. Your mission should always be to find ways to create value using technology as a tool. It's all about creating digital experiences that solve day to day life issues and elevate the quality of life of the citizens living in the city.

My second advice is to always stay ahead. This means that research and reading should be an integral part of what you do on regular basis. This allows you not only to obtain and grow your knowledge in different domains but also find opportunities where you can contribute.

My last advice is to listen. Listen to what your customers are telling you and get on the ground to truly understand their needs and expectations. Whether your customers are the public or other businesses they must be the cornerstone of design and development of technology powered products or services across all domains.



# THOSE WHO DARE WIN

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Madhav Sheth**, Vice President of realme and President of realme International Business group, to find out how the fastest growing smartphone manufacturer in the world is planning to scale and expand its operations across the Middle East and how the company lives by its Dare to Leap mission statement.

> here has been a lot of increased focused and media attention on realme since it became the fastest brand in the world to ship 100 million smartphones. What is it about your devices that have struck such a chord with so many users globally?

The success of our GT series and realme Number series both played significant roles contributing toThe high reputation that realme GT received from 2021, implied that users are happy to have more options in high-end market, even a better option which offers more tech features users expect, like world's first 2K AMOLED flat display, and world's first 150° ultrawide camera. When realme GT 2 series first launched in China, many users and media acknowledged that GT 2 is truly a "revolutionist in the flagship smartphone segment", while putting forth realme to be the only young spirited brand to venture in the high-end smartphone market. We see similar comments from Europe as well.

Without doubt, realme GT series success told us that users are the biggest beneficiary when more competitions emerge on highend market. Users are also keen on outstanding design and different materials like paper that generates ecofriendly effect while using smartphones. To match users' expectation, realme will bring more models featuring advanced performance, fashionable design, and innovative technology.

Another product line that hit a chord with global users is realme Number series, which had become one of the most successful series globally from the past three years. According to research company SA's report, realme Number series has reached 40 million units totally, entering top ten bestselling smartphone series in the world. We believed that make tech more accessible, camera innovation, and trendsetting design are the reasons that more users choose realme Number series.

Can you tell us what your target market demographic is - and do you position yourselves as a brand designed for millennials? In societies around the globe, our brand sees a spirit to continuously challenge oneself, to reject conformity and the traditional expectations of "being great", but rather to give one's own definition of it and go outside of expectations set by others. "Dare to Leap" is our brand spirit that resonates with users worldwide. Our brand communicates to everyone who welcomes this belief, so we don't consider the brand to be only for the young people, since age doesn't matter here, what matters is the attitude inside, that is having a youthful heart and open mindset.

Can you reveal more about some of the new products that you will be showcasing at Mobile World Congress in Barcelona later this month? We will showcase and launch two smartphone models at MWC, GT 2 and GT 2 Pro. GT 2 series is our most premium flagship ever, which aims to bring leap forward technologies accessible to tech lovers worldwide, as the mission of GT series is the next-gen flagship to redefine how the flagship should be. After debuting in Europe at MWC, this premium flagship will arrive to India, Middle East, Southeast Asia and Latin America soon.

To demonstrate what we mean by next-gen flagship, here are some specs of our GT 2 Pro. GT 2 Pro features latest snapdragon 8 Gen 1 processor, world's first 2K AMOLED flat display, and world's first 150 ° ultra-wide camera. With these equipped, the users

## Dare to Leap is our brand spirit that resonates with users worldwide."

can expect to have a distinctive and smooth experience on photography, game playing, video streaming. Moreover, the users will be given a special eco-friendly option with an unprecedented bio-based polymer design.

We also have a new charging architecture that we will launch and showcase at MWC. It will be world's first 100W-200W smart devices charging architecture, which consists of three technological advancements, including speed, safety, and battery life. We named the architecture UDCA, which stands for UltraDart Charging Architecture. What makes it different from the charging technology of other brands is that in the past, 150W/200W fast charging technology was just a concept for all smartphone brands, and no one applied this tech to the actual model, whereas this time, the coming realme Neo 3 will be the first smartphone that equips the 150W fast charging technology.

We live in the 'experience economy' - and we know that if companies don't deliver good experiences, then they will lose customers. How do you ensure that your devices and products deliver the experiences that your end-users desire?



This is actually a question that we ask ourselves every day. In realme, every employee is a user, that means our employees are the first batch of users of our devices, they can sign up for beta-test phase, and give feedback on anything that they find unpleasant, our engineer team will solve the issue instead of rush to market. Also, in the internet era, early adopters can send their feedback to us in a very timelymanner, when we launch to market, we follow closely the word-of-mouth from our fans, and make improvements based on their feedback. Finally, our sales team strives to ensure

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our customer satisfaction from end-to-end, a part of that process is the user experience of our products.

During the design phase of GT series, because we want to exceed our user expectations, so we asked ourselves the question: how do we make a product which is environmentally friendly, aesthetically pleasing, and durable? In answer to this, we adopted an unprecedented bio-based polymer design, which creates 35.5% less carbon emissions and a laser engraving replicating the pattern of paperbased products, which you'll be able to touch and feel the product in MWC.

As we mentioned above realme has enjoyed phenomenal success since its inception and is the No.5 smartphone brand in Europe. However, how do you plan on capturing more of that market share in Europe, what is your presence like in the Middle East – and what globally is your biggest market? As you probably already know that in 2021, realme became the 6th fastest-growing smartphone brand in the world. We accumulated more than 100 million users, and sold 60 million units in 2021 alone, which shows 50% YoY growth from 2020. According to research company Canalys in

2021 Q4, realme is ranked TOP 5 smartphone vendors in 30 global markets.

The similar rapid growth path also emerged in UAE. Based on Canalys report, realme was ranked in Top 4 smartphone brand in Q4 2021 with 858% growth. Our goal is to to become top 5 in Middle East this year, and to rank 3rd by 2023. With advanced performance, trendy design, and innovative technology, GT 2 series and realme 9 Pro series are products that we believe to fit the desire of the Middle East consumers. This year, we will also bring many featured models to KSA market.

As for growth in Europe, we will invest more in brand awareness and local sales force of GT 2 series. Europe is an important market for our high-end products, as it is our strategy to complete full price range product development. The sales volume of realme X and GT series, both realme's flagship product portfolio, in 2021 reached 5 million units in 2021 and we expect it to be doubled in 2022 with the joining of GT 2 Series.

Another strategy in Europe is to develop our lifestyle products through the "1+5+T Strategy". 1 refers to the core product, the smartphone, 5 signifies five major categories: TWS, wearables, TVs, pads and laptops, which are the most frequently used devices. T stands for other products under realme's AIoT brand realme TechLife<sup>®</sup>. We are going all out to transform realme from a pure smartphone player into a robust AIoT ecosystem platform. Europe is a vital market for us to accomplish this goal.

**EVENTS** 

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## LEADERSHIP AWARDS

## PUTTING ON-THE RITZ

LAAD

CPI hosted their annual CIO Leadership Awards at the Ritz-Carlton in JBR, which acknowledged the contributions made by CIOs across the region, who had demonstrated phenomenal vison and leadership to help transform their organisations over the last 12 months.

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### CNS **AGENTS OF** TRANSFORMATION

Asef Sleiman, CNS Abu Dhabi & ITP Sales Director at CNS Middle East spoke to CNME Editor Mark Forker about the company's expansion into the UAE capital, how its overall strategy is closely aligned with that of shifts fueling change in the local economy – and what he believes will be the key drivers of new growth and innovation over the next 12 months and beyond.

> NS has established itself as the go-to technology company in the region and are known for being agents of transformation. It has the knowledge and expertise to power the future by providing digital solutions that are essential to support all enterprise and human development in the fast-paced and ever-evolving digital economy.

As an IT service provider, our role in providing solutions for clients has shifted from communication tech to data tech."

CNS, is also one of the most trusted IT companies in the region, and whilst growing and managing a robust pool of supplier-partners for the benefit of their clients, they refuse to rest on their laurels and are constantly striving to re-inventing themselves and improve their business outcomes year-on-year.

Asef Sleiman is an extremely well-respected tech leader, and he has enjoyed a very fruitful career in the Middle East, and as seen by his peers as a thought leader in the IT ecosystem. He has been tasked with the responsibility of overseeing CNS's expansion into the Abu Dhabi marketplace, and it is one he is relishing.

In a candid interview with Mark Forker, he outlines their vision for their Abu Dhabi project, their growth strategy for the future - and what

technologies he believes will fuel change in the next digital decade across the Middle East.

Can you tell us more about your plans to expand CNS's market presence in Abu Dhabi and why the company has decided that now was the right time to do this in the capital?

As part of our expansion plan we decided to double down in Abu Dhabi to increase our business focus, we shifted our offices in Abu Dhabi to a new location with state-of-the-art facility with a fully-fledged Network Operations Center, we doubled our team there in both sales and operations, in addition to invest more in the new talent people to drive this in Abu Dhabi.

Why now, it is simply after pandemic and the shift in economy and the role of technology, there is commitment from Abu

MARCH 2022



Dhabi Government toward transforming most of the public services and development like government services, healthcare, banking and O&G.

We as CNS have always played a big role in the IT industry in Abu Dhabi, and we believe we can contribute hugely to the new era of business transformation, which is part of Abu Dhabi Vision.

Can you outline to our readers how your plans for future growth are aligned with the shift that has occurred in the economy here in the UAE? We observed the macro-level influence of Covid when our information technologies came to the rescue of many businesses.

The popularity of Expo2020 has practically made 'Digital Innovation' a business fundamental. Irrational (skepticism) and rational (switching costs) entry barriers have crumbled as leaders have witnessed the benefits of the technology and gained an understanding of the costs incurred against promised ROIs.

As a result, Abu Dhabi markets are opening up to the idea of digitalisation, so qualified IT specialists who can lead their journey to a digital business environment successfully, with minimal disruption or costs, will be first to step through newly-opened doors for business.

After successfully transforming our banking clients' customer-userexperience with cutting-edge technologies, we have a much

### As part of our expansion plan, we decided to double down in Abu Dhabi to increase our business focus."

more receptive audience. As an integration partner, our goal is to leverage the increased access we have with our clients to understand their business needs better and push the envelope of innovation.

Essentially, as the UAE economy grows, it will rely more heavily on the power of automation and AI to deal with increasing volumes of data effectively.

This means putting more trust in the digitalisation journey. CNS has already responded to this shift by updating our company infrastructure, devoting an entirely new Digital Transformation department to keep abreast of developing technologies that we might use to enhance our clients' speed, accuracy, efficiency, and economies.

In your expert opinion, what do you believe will be the key trends driving new innovations in the IT ecosystem in 2022? Helping clients unlock the value in their data will become a significant priority for CNS in



the coming decade.

As an IT service provider, our role in providing solutions for clients has shifted from communication tech to data tech. Now that the work-fromhome culture has become nearfully embedded and everyone is comfortably connected, everyone is catching up with previously-emerging techs such as AI, IoT and Blockchain. All of these hinge significantly on automation, and that's where we come in.



Businesses might be aware of these systems' advantages, but you need someone to put them all together, so they work autonomously to realise the absolute value of the technology. Consumers are happily handing over vast amounts of personal data with the impression that in return, they will enjoy a personalised experience – companies that can't live up to that expectation will quickly become irrelevant. For this purpose, setting up

an infrastructure that allows a business to mine data from a broad network of information sources is firstly a complicated process (the simple truth is that very few companies employ people with the skills-sets to implement or manage these high-level systems) and secondly presents a significant financial outlay. With an IT partner that already has the resources and experience, such as CNS, one can mitigate both limitations and start reaping the benefits almost immediately.

#### Can you reveal some of the major projects that CNS will be leading in the UAE over the next 12 months?

We are engaged in many initiatives in the market, but I cannot disclose the details of the project. However, I can share we are investing our focus in the public sector, oil & gas, Healthcare and transportation industries, as we see huge scope for growth all those industry verticals in the coming years.

#### ACI WORLDWIDE

# TIME TO GET 'REAL'

**Craig Ramsey,** global head of real-time payments at ACI Worldwide, tells CNME Editor Mark Forker what impact he believes the decision by the UAE Central Bank to launch a domestic real-time payments scheme will have for both consumers and the banking ecosystem when it sweeps into effect in October 2022.

> he UAE is a fastmoving economy, and in a bid to keep up to speed with the evolving demands of the market and consumers then it is crucial that you have the infrastructure required to support that environment. As part of its National Payments Systems Strategy, the UAE formally announced through the Central Bank that it was introducing an IPP (Instant Payments Platform) to support financial inclusion across the Emirate.

ACI Worldwide are a global leader when it comes to realtime digital payment software and solutions – and has already spearheaded and led similar schemes in Europe and the United States to name a few. They have been enlisted to leverage their knowledge and expertise to help banks across the UAE to connect to the UAE's central real-time payments infrastructure that is designed to add another layer to the UAE's burgeoning economy.

CNME Editor Mark Forker caught up with Craig Ramsey from ACI Worldwide to find out more about the IPP system that will be introduced to the UAE in October of this year.

Ramsey kickstarted the conversation by outlining what his definition of a realtime payment was, and he highlighted how there are several different terms to describe real-time payments which is dependent on location.

"The UAE isn't the first country to drive real-time payments, and there has been a huge amount of success with them around the world. However, firstly I'd like to qualify what a real-time payment is. They go by four different names, just to add an extra layer of confusion to the market. In the United States and across parts of Europe they are referred to as instant payments,

the UK calls them faster payments, but many around the world calls them realtime payments. Albeit there is also term called immediate payments, which ACI tends to use to really identify this type of instruction – and as the name suggests it is an immediate and instant way of moving funds between two accounts. In most instances it comes with a set of rules that the beneficiary of the funds should be able to get access to those funds and immediately be able to reuse them," said Ramsey.

We know that we now live in an experience economy, which at its core is ultimately fueled by convenience. We want access to cash, and we want it instantly. We no longer have the tolerance to wait 24 hours to access that cash and use those funds after being set up as a beneficiary. Interestingly, Ramsey pointed out that rather inadvertently the hospitality industry was now serving as an accelerator for real-time payments.

"Restaurants globally are pushing back on spilt bills due to an increase in fees for the merchant, so take for example, if one person picks up the bill for a meal with friends, then we know the traditional way has been to pay them back in cash. and less people are carrying cash, but what we do have is access to electronic money, so you can now send the money instantly to your friend when They has Picked up the bill and the'll receive that money instantaneously, and they won't have to wait a day to access it," said Ramsey.

The global head of real-time payments at ACI Worldwide noted that each country that implements an IPP (Instant Payments Platform) can govern the system by their own set of rules, and he stressed that it remained unclear as to what the IPP system will look like in the UAE, but he drew on his experience in the UK.

"The rulebook for how the work is yet to come out, but if I draw on my own experience in the UK, then it allows me to set up a beneficiary and pay them instantly. It will take less than a second for most banking providers to process real-time payments within their payments' estate. ACI has been supporting banks with their payments needs for debit and credit cards for decades, and one of the things that we solved a long time ago was enabling ATMs to be working 24/7, and that 24/7 nature is at the core of real-time payments, as they need to operate 24/7 for 365 days of the year," said Ramsey.

Ramsey reinforced how the current digital economy is shaped by human behaviors and expectations, and as he rightly pointed out advancements in technology have led to us living in a world where everything is done instantly. He added that the main factors fueling realtime payments was both driven by consumers and progressive governments pursuing transformational fiscal policies to modernise their financial and banking systems.

"The acceleration towards real-time instant payments has been primarily driven by a

combination of governments and consumers. We are living in an instant world. If we order items from Amazon, or another e-commerce platform then we expect to receive those goods rapidly. We also expect to see information on everything we do, and we expect to be able do it on a smartphone, and a payment is no different. I want to be able to make a payment using my smartphone, and I want to know that it has happened instantly - because it makes absolutely no sense that the payment takes longer to move electronically, which can still take up to 3-days in some traditional systems, than the goods take to be physically shipped," said Ramsey.

In addition to this, Ramsey also stressed how real-time payments represents the evolution of how the banking system will operate for the next 30 years.

"Real-time payments are not the next evolution of what the current payment systems do, real-time payments are the evolution of how banking works with customers, consumers, and merchants for the next 30 years. We see around the world that real-time payments are having a big impact on cash and cheque usage and if we look at schemes pre-pandemic then cash and cheque was already being reduced in favor of using real-time payments. Once the pandemic occurred then there was an exponential growth and acceleration in real-time payments - and it has undoubtedly accelerated customer adoption," said Ramsey.

Ramsey then went into forensic detail in relation to the mechanics of how payments

Real-time payments are not the next evolution of what the current payment systems do, real-time payments are the evolution of how banking works with customers, consumers, and merchants for the next 30 years."

> work and compared the processes at play between credit and debit card payments versus that of real-time transactions.

"In every payment there is a clearing cycle and a settlement cycle. Clearing happens at the point of payment, and it assures the beneficiary that they are going to get paid. However, with a card payment there could still be a dispute that results in that payment not happening, with an ACH payment then it could still be clawed back if a direct debit is disputed, but with real-time payments they are irrevocable, when it happens it's done. With an RTGS payment the clearing and settlement happens at the same time, but with an ACH payment the clearing happens, but the settlement potentially doesn't happen until days later," said Ramsey.

Ramsey also pointed out that with a real-time payment you can also split the clearing and settlement, and that allows you to increase your customer base.

'You can do instant clearing with the payment that has been executed on their smartphone, and the account settlement can happen through a digital wallet, or some other mechanism that doesn't require the consumer themselves to be the account holder, so there are many ways to extend these payments and that ultimately promotes financial inclusion," said Ramsey.

In a fascinating interview Ramsey concluded our discussion by stressing that FinTech companies are not a threat to traditional banks, and that they can coexist together in financial harmony.

To move money then you've got a choice you either use the banking system, or you take money out of the banking system and use it in some sort of private digital wallet and those essentially are your two ways to move money. The banking system has traditionally been only open to banks, and so therefore has been a closed system. However, FinTech companies have come along and have had to work out how they can move money, and again they are left with the same choice. That's where we have seen open banking come to fruition across Europe through the implementation of APIs. I think when that was first announced there was a belief that the FinTech companies would come and steal the business away from the banks, but that's not how it works. Open banking fundamentally means that you're easier to do business with, so when a FinTech is looking for a payment proposition many of them don't want to have the settlement risk, so they will want to use a banking partner, and the partner that they use will be the one that is most open and has a set of APIs that are easy to onboard to," said Ramsey.

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# TAKING BACK CONTROL OF YOUR DATA

Nitya Ravi, spoke to **Michelle Jeannette Gervais**, Vice President & Head of Data Science for the CEMEA region at Visa. Her role involves supporting Visa's relationships with banks, acquirers, and merchants to extract value from unique global data assets. She also talks about the importance of data, data planning, data capture and digital transformation.

nternational Women's Day was celebrated on March 8th, and in March's edition of CNME, we have increased and enhanced our scope on the female leaders that are continuing to inspire in the IT ecosystem across the Middle East.

Nitya Ravi spoke to one of those inspiring female leaders, Michelle Jeannette Gervais from Visa, in the latest in our series of Women in Tech interviews.

"It's interesting how during the pandemic, there were these companies that struggled to survive and had to make a quick shift to the digital space. It did not necessarily allow them the time to sit back and plan a digital transformation. It was more of survival versus a planned transition. What companies missed during such a transition was being thoughtful about what they could do with the data and how they could use digital to craft a better end-toend customer experience, "said Gervais.

"Therefore now, there is a lot of pressure for companies to figure out holes in their data model and to plan accordingly because if you don't plan to capture data, the consumer experience happens and there won't be any data available for the same. It's gone. In a digital first economy, its essential to ensure that you are capturing every scrap of priority data about the customer experience because that's where the value is. I believe, moving forward, there will be focus on experimentation where user data has been appropriately captured and stored, doing basic analytics on the data like – what have the customers been doing and what do we want them to do ,experimentation like AV testing, letting consumers pull and show you what they want to do, being creative and thoughtful about how can we vary the experience for our consumers to better understand what they want to do by just seeing it in the data . This type of experimentations really helps companies to leap forward."

Talking about data breaches becoming more commonplace, Gervais has this to say about combating the same, "There are some great ways by which you can leverage, exploit and make use of data however as much as data can be an incredible asset, it must be said that if data is not given proper controls and proper privacy standards can

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In a digital first economy, its essential to ensure that you are capturing every scrap of priority data about the customer experience, because that's where the value is."

also be a massive liability for a business. Data breaches where data has been mishandled or improperly governed can end up being a nightmare and even sink a company just like it can be the one thing that can be a critical success factor for a company." "One of the interesting developments in our field is privacy enhancing technologies. It aims to help end users have more control over their data and data usage. An example is the tokens that you use a lot in payments. When you make a payment using a tokenised transaction, it's not the card number that is getting transferred between parties but a tokenised version of the card number which is a random encrypted form of the card number. In this way we are thoughtful about privacy by design and strategic about planning on how we want our data to be safe and secure," said

### Gervais.

She goes on to add about how a company can be digitally resilient with regards to data, "One of the important things a company can do is recognising different aspects of the business that a data must cross. It's not just about having a data science and analytics team, it's not just about having an IT team that is controlling the data platforms, it's not just about having a legal team with data privacy experience. You end up adding together all the aspects of the business that have a threat of data through them. It's important to try and give some visibility to data as

a practice area unto itself. So, it's interesting to see now many companies adopting the Chief Data Officer role particularly post the 2008 financial crisis. It's a nice way of giving the executive presence around data and getting the synergies across to all these different business areas. When you look at unicorn companies, many of them have some form of a data function that directly reports to CEO's, not put under IT, not put under operations but often as a function directly pointing into the CEO. There is a lot of advantage to that. It gives a highlight on data that can really help business a lot."

Talking about disruptive technology and trends emerging in the commerce and payments industry, she said, "There has been a lot of hype about machine learning for a long period of time. One of the interesting trends I see is how for some unicorn companies, there have been times when company valuation discussions even in the public media focuses on the value of algorithm as being the key differentiator. It's such a departure from talking about other fields in other industries. Here it's almost like saying the defensible thing this company has that makes them have a barrier to entry into an industry is the algorithm or algorithms they hold that helps them understand the consumer behaviour. It's fascinating. What it signals in my point of view is that in a long time, in this field, there has been a focus on trying

Sometimes you can't replace back-end processes that quickly and while you are working towards a transition, RPA is an often-undervalued way for more established businesses to catch up."

to get past experimentation and trying to get models into production."

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According to Gervais, the statics around production models has always been lacklustre.

"Lot of times people are doing great and interesting machine learning models but to get them into production where the model is helping to run the business is still far away for a lot of companies. What is eye opening about seeing this trend, even valuing the algorithm is that it's now time to get the machine learning models that companies have been toying with as an R and D exercise and operationalise it. Iam curious to see how that develops and creates some positive pressure. Another one, that is a trend is Robotic Process Automation (RPA). I believe it is most beneficial for companies that have been in business for a long time -the bricks and mortar kind of established players whose

core operations were set up during a time when digital first was not of parlance. For them, it's hard to compete with digital first businesses. RPA allows such companies to string together multi step processes which engages different tools, systems, and users seamlessly and make it feel like one single step process. Sometimes you can't replace back-end processes that quickly and while you are working towards a transition, RPA is an often-undervalued way for more established business to catch up."

Talking about overcoming challenges in her industry, Gervais concluded the interview by saying, "In the payment's space you can't afford to be not secure. During Covid, according to statistics, there has been an increase in cyber-attacks and the challenge of staying always on and secure was difficult. It however has been a healthy move for companies and industries to figure out how to respond to that, rethinking some of the core infrastructure pieces, whether be it disaster recovery, thinking past active-passive, moving finally into active-active. Also, being thoughtful and stepping back to look at company operations and establish a view on where are the likely holes and gaps, to think creatively, what the back-up plan would be. For us at Visa, in the payment space, it has been interesting to consider that on behalf of our client and to then use AI and machine learning as ways to help service them." **cnme** 



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