computer news n

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NIDAL ABOU-LTAIF, PRESIDENT AT AVAYA INTERNATIONAL, OUTLINES HOW ITS AVAYA ONECLOUD PLATFORM IS EMPOWERING ENTERPRISES TO DELIVER A 'TOTAL EXPERIENCE'.

DU'S CTO

MICROSOFT'S CORPORATE VP

SALESFORCE AREA VICE PRESIDENT



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66

If we are able to understand and measure how differently models treat different groups, then we can make progress on developing more equitable and inclusive AI."

THE GREATER GOOD

he role played by AI in our society has been a contentious one over the last decade. There is no doubting that the technology has helped to completely transform many industries on a global scale. Artificial Intelligence facilitates the decision-making process to be much faster and smarter, it reduces human error,

and can operate 24/7 without interruption or downtime. Despite the many benefits of artificial intelligence there are many that remain skeptical of AI in relation to its ethics, with critics pointing to its glaring failures in facial recognition and biometrics technology, whilst it also came in for stinging criticism for mitigating bias in the recruitment process.

However, there are many that see technology as a tool for making our society a much better place, a society that is more inclusive and fairer, and that removes the biases that still exist in 2022.

CNME spoke to Angela Fan, an AI researcher at Meta, to find out more about how her team are attempting to leverage AI to ensure there is greater inclusion for marginalized and underrepresented groups.

In an excellent interview, the AI expert said, "If we are able to understand and measure how differently models treat different groups, then we can make progress on developing more equitable and inclusive AI."

On the front cover of April's edition of CNME is a blockbuster interview with Nidal Abou-Ltaif, President, Avaya International.

In a wide-ranging and punchy interview, Abou-Ltaif talked about how its Avaya OneCloud platform was empowering enterprises to deliver a 'total experience' that their customers now crave and demand in the digital economy.

In one part of the interview, Abou-Ltaif reinforces this viewpoint by saying, "Today, customers value, and judge brands on, end-to-end experiences,". It's a superb interview, so do make sure to check it out!

In addition to this, CNME spoke to Saleem AlBlooshi, CTO at du, to find out how the UAE operator has invested significantly in its Security Operations Center in its bid to safeguard digital enterprises from cyberattacks – and in terms of the cyber trends he sees emerging over the next 12 months, he pleaded with industry stakeholders to improve their BYOD security in the 'work from anywhere' world we now find ourselves immersed in.

Remaining on the topic of security, we also spoke to Kathleen Mitford, Corporate Vice President Azure Marketing at Microsoft, who revealed how the US tech powerbroker was investing an eye-watering \$1 billion every year in security R&D.

She also declared that Microsoft's mission was to empower every person and business on the planet to be able to achieve more. We also had terrific interviews with Coursera, Zoom,

SolarWinds and Salesforce to name a few.

It's a bumper edition, with lots of exclusive content, so we hope you enjoy this month's edition of CNME! $\stackrel{\rm oo}{=}$

Mark Forker Editor

zendesk

INTERACTIVE REPORT CX Trends 2022

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CONTENTS

cnme



6 News

CNME rounds up the biggest regional and global developments in enterprise technology, which includes the news Help AG has become the managed services security provider of Microsoft in the GCC, Oracle announces their new complete employee experience platform – and Vectra AI appoints Taj EI-khayat as their new managing director.



Dina AlNasser, Regional Manager at Zoom Video Communications, said that education is key in addressing the gender disparity that exists in the global IT ecosystem. 28 Thierry Nicault, Area Vice President, UAE – Middle East at

President, UAE – Middle East at Salesforce, tells CNME how the company is fully committed to building a sustainable future with its net zero cloud application.

- **32** Andrew Rose, Resident CISO at Proofpoint, discusses how the ongoing conflict between Russian and Ukraine has the potential to completely change the landscape when it comes to ransomware attacks.
- **36** Dr. Betty Vandenbosch, Chief Content Officer at Coursera, talks about how the COVID-19 pandemic forced women globally to pursue STEM skills in a bid to safeguard their futures.
- **46** Fesjal Čelebić, Product Sales Expert at Infobip, believes that customers in today's experience eeconomy' demand a seamless, consistent, and personalised touch when they engage with a product or brand.











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NEWS

Genetec unveils Streamvault Edge to simplify migration of existing security equipment to a hybridcloud architecture



Genetec Inc. ("Genetec"), a leading technology provider of unified security, public safety, operations, and business intelligence solutions, will unveil Streamvault Edge at ISC West (Genetec booth #13062). The Edge is an innovative new line of connected appliances that enables the easy transition to a hybridcloud infrastructure and marks the beginning of a new edge platform strategy for Genetec.

Ideally suited for multi-site operations such as banking, retail, or businesses with remote or unmanned sites, Streamvault Edge enables organisations to modernise their security infrastructure while leveraging existing legacy sensor infrastructure. The Edge enables the gradual migration of security systems to a hybrid architecture without disrupting operations. The appliance is also a low-maintenance, easy to install edge device that makes the commissioning, deployment, and management of connected remote sites simple and straightforward without the need of specialised IT expertise.

At its initial launch, Streamvault Edge will focus on delivering a hybrid cloud architecture for enterprise-grade video surveillance, with more security and IoT devices to be supported in the coming months.

Logicom Signs Strategic Distribution Partnership with VAST DATA in Middle East and Africa

Logicom, a leading regional distributor of technology solutions and services in the Middle East and North Africa, today announced a new distribution partnership with



VAST Data, the data platform company for the AI-powered world, as it continues international expansion.

Under the agreement, Logicom will help VAST Data accelerate adoption of its high-performance Universal Data storage platform by broadening reach with key channel partners and markets in Middle East and North Africa.

With the data storage market in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) expected to grow with a CAGR of 14.3% in the next three years, and a projected of the region supporting VAST Data's aggressive international expansion utilising Logicom's extensive experience and highly sought-after network.

valuation of market

according to Future

size of \$8.43

billion by 2025

Market Insights,

the distribution

agreement seeks

growth potential

to leverage the

VAST Data works with key companies across the enterprise ecosystem to deliver a high-performance data platform. VAST's disaggregated and shared everything architecture allows customers to scale compute and storage resources independently. VAST Data's Universal Storage ships as a productionready, integrated appliance.

Alteryx Launches Updated Partner Program to help achieve business breakthroughs



Barb Huelskamp, SVP, Global Partners and Alliances, Alteryx

Alteryx, Inc., the Analytics Automation

company, today announced its updated partner program powering its partnercentric growth strategy focused on maximising customer value. The expanded partner program is a key driver towards Alteryx's mission to democratise analytics across organisations; it enables partners with both deep technical knowledge and business domain expertise to help their customers achieve business breakthroughs. This new program allows customers to inject analytics into everyday business processes with a complete set of partner capabilities, including professional services and custom solutions powered by Alteryx, to make data-driven decisions.

"Our approach with the partner program redesign acknowledges that partners want to invest their resources in organisations that reward activities such as opportunity registration, training, certifications, co-marketing, and joint business planning", said Barb Huelskamp, SVP, Global Partners and Alliances, Alteryx. "We want our enhanced partner program to reflect our mission and values and adhere to industry best practices, driving value for our partners and enhancing business outcomes for our customers".

Huawei highlights secure digital transformation solutions and strategies for Middle East enterprises at GISEC 2022



At GISEC 2022, Huawei, a leading global provider of information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and smart devices, is showcasing its latest cuttingedge, secure digital transformation solutions, demonstrating use cases and discussing best strategies to protect Middle Eastern enterprises in the current digital era.

Huawei will demonstrate its resilient communications networks, 5GtoB solutions, scenarios and latest use cases in enabling industrial digitisation, intelligent cloud solutions, smart low-carbon datacentre, smart campus solutions, end-to-end cyber security assurance system, 5G security, cloud security, secure digital power solutions, and secure networks at the leading cybersecurity event.

During the event, Huawei regional and global experts will participate in various panel discussions and deliver keynotes on trending security topics. On day one, Aloysius Cheang, Chief Security Officer of Huawei UAE, will deliver a keynote speech discussing Huawei's Projects of the 50 to enable the UAE to become a global cybersecurity hub, and Emaad Ahmed, Principal Solution Architect & Network Architecture Transformation Chief Expert, Huawei UAE, will deliver a keynote address on the 5GtoB Hype around slicing. Also taking place on day one is a keynote address by the Huawei Middle East Digital Power department on the latest trends in solar power generation on the X-Labs Stage.

Help AG Becomes Managed Security Services Provider Partner of Microsoft in the GCC

Help AG, the cybersecurity arm of e&

enterprise (formerly known as Etisalat Digital) and the region's trusted security advisor, has been named as the Managed Security Services Provider (MSSP) Partner of Microsoft in the GCC. To mark their collaboration, Help AG and Microsoft signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the 2022 edition of Gulf Information Security Expo & Conference (GISEC), the Arab world's largest cybersecurity event held in Dubai.

By partnering with Microsoft, Help AG will be able to provide services based on all Microsoft security products, including Microsoft Sentinel and Microsoft Defender, covering the domains of security management and identity, information, and threat protection.

Commenting on the partnership, Stephan Berner, Chief Executive Officer at Help AG, said: "We are delighted to be named the MSSP Partner of Microsoft, the global leader in software. The partnership is a testament to our position as the leading Managed Security Service Provider in the region, and our continued efforts to provide the full spectrum of tailored cybersecurity services".

Sayed Hashish, General Manager, Microsoft UAE, said: "We are pleased to welcome Help AG as our MSSP Partner. According to research, the UAE experienced a 250% surge in cyberattacks in 2020, compared



Sayed Hashish, General Manager, Microsoft UAE & Stephan Berner, Chief Executive Officer at Help AG

with the previous year. This included around 1.1 million phishing attacks. In the same year, almost half (49%) the country>s organisations experienced a ransomware attack. By joining forces with Help AG, we are combining our world-class products and solutions with Help AG's technical expertise and services, to offer our customers superior threat protection solutions".



Kim Grauer, Director of Research at Chainalysis

With the popularity of non-

fungible tokens (NFTs) skyrocketing in 2021, Chainalysis tracked a minimum of USD 44.2 billion worth of cryptocurrency sent to NFT-related smart contracts last year, up from just USD 106 million in 2020.

However, according to Chainalysis, this surge in popularity has attracted the attention of cybercriminals, with a

Chainalysis Research Shines Spotlight on Potential of NFTs Being Used for Illicit Activities

limited but growing number now using NFTs for money laundering and wash trading, in particular. In an analysis of money laundering, the company found the value sent to NFT marketplaces by illicit addresses jumped significantly in the third quarter of 2021, crossing USD 1 million worth of cryptocurrency. The figure grew again in the fourth quarter, topping out at just under USD 1.4 million. Roughly USD 284,000 worth was related to sanctions risk.

"While limited today, money laundering, and in particular transfers from sanctioned cryptocurrency businesses, represents a large risk to building trust in NFTs, and should be monitored more closely by marketplaces, regulators, and law enforcement", commented Kim Grauer, Director of Research at Chainalysis. "We're keeping an eye on this activity going into 2022 as the NFT markets continue to grow".

Wash trading — the execution of a transaction in which the seller is on both sides of the trade in order to paint a misleading picture of an asset's value and liquidity — proved a highly successful modus operandi for a select group of 110 malicious actors who collectively made over USD 8.8 million in profits. However, this tactic wasn't without financial risks for operators of the scam as another group of 152 traders collectively lost USD 417k in this endeavour, on account of amounts they had to spend on associated gas fees.

ESET Research discovers scheme to steal cryptocurrency from Android and iPhone users



ESET Research discovered and

backtracked a sophisticated malicious cryptocurrency scheme that targets mobile devices using Android or iOS operating systems (iPhones). Malicious apps are distributed through fake websites, mimicking legitimate wallet services such as Metamask, Coinbase, Trust Wallet, TokenPocket, Bitpie, imToken, and OneKey. These fake websites are promoted with ads placed on legitimate sites using misleading articles. Furthermore, the threat actors are recruiting intermediaries through Telegram and Facebook groups to further distribute this malicious scheme. The main goal of the malicious apps is to steal users' funds and until now ESET Research has seen this scheme mainly targeting Chinese users. As cryptocurrencies are gaining popularity, ESET expects these techniques to spread to other markets.

Starting in May 2021, our research uncovered dozens of trojanised cryptocurrency wallet apps. This is a sophisticated attack vector since the malware's author carried out an in-depth analysis of the legitimate applications misused in this scheme, enabling the insertion of their own malicious code into places where it would be hard to detect while also making sure that such crafted apps had the same functionality as the originals. At this point, ESET Research believes that this is likely the work of one criminal group.

APRIL 2022

8

Oracle Launches Complete Employee Experience Platform for Evolving Workforce Needs



Yvette Cameron, Senior Vice President of Global Product Strategy, Oracle Cloud HCM

Oracle today announced Oracle ME, a

complete employee experience platform to help organisations increase employee engagement and ensure employee success. Part of Oracle Fusion Cloud Human Capital Management (HCM), Oracle ME enables HR and business leaders to streamline communications across the organisation, increase productivity by guiding employees through complex tasks, and improve talent retention by developing a more supportive and trusted environment at work.

"Employees want to feel heard, empowered, and part of a culture they believe in. To meet these expectations, organisations need to step up and design experiences that meet the unique needs of their talent—or risk losing them to competitors that do", said Yvette Cameron, Senior Vice President of Global Product Strategy, Oracle Cloud HCM. "Part of designing better experiences involves seeing employees as unique individuals with their own needs, goals, and ways of getting things done. Oracle ME is all about converging workers' information, critical insights, workflows, and preferences with a technology-enabled solution to give each individual something they can call 'my experience'. It's the only complete employee experience platform focused on understanding the 'me' behind every worker, providing organisations new ways to listen to, communicate with, support, and develop their hybrid workforce".

Vectra Appoints Taj El-khayat as Managing Director for Growth Markets



Taj El-khayat, new Managing Director for Growth Markets at Vectra Al

Vectra AI, a leader in AI-driven threat detection and response for hybrid and multi-cloud enterprises, today announced the appointment of Taj Elkhayat as Managing Director for Growth Markets. Taj has more than two decades of experience bringing high-value technology platforms and solutions to market through a keen eye for the future of digitisation and human support.

"Momentum and demand for advanced threat detection and response in this region has accelerated exponentially, as enterprises face a mounting number of new threats and risks", said Taj. "With Vectra's leadership in security technology and customer service as well as a talented pool of security experts, the company is uniquely positioned to help organisations in this region protect their critical infrastructure and most valuable assets, and I am looking forward to leading and executing our market penetration strategy in this region along with our Vectra Channel Ecosystems and the Vectra teams in the region".

Cybersecurity Leaders Launch Operational Technology Cybersecurity Coalition



Marty Edwards, Vice President, Operational Technology Security, Tenable

Today, a diverse group of

cybersecurity leaders joined together to launch the Operational Technology Cybersecurity Coalition (OT Cyber Coalition). Founding members include Claroty, Forescout, Honeywell, Nozomi Networks, and Tenable, each with decades of experience in building, protecting, and defending our nation's industrial control systems and critical infrastructure assets.

The OT Cyber Coalition advocates for vendor-neutral, interoperable, and standards-based cybersecurity solutions and works collaboratively with industry and government stakeholders on how to best deploy data-sharing solutions that enhance our country's collective defence. Its efforts support the notion that competitive solutions promote innovation and strengthen our national security.

"Our companies represent the entire OT lifecycle and can be leveraged strategically by the U.S. Government in an advisory capacity and by critical infrastructure operators to protect themselves and improve our national preparedness", said Marty Edwards, Vice President, Operational Technology Security, Tenable. "We look forward to working together to promote these goals". DU

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Saleem AlBlooshi**, Chief Technology Officer at UAE telecommunications behemoth du, to find out how the investments made by the company in its SOC (Security Operations Center) is helping to safeguard digital enterprises from cyberattacks.

> ver the last 18 months, the threat landscape has radically evolved, and many enterprises on a global scale have become victim to cyberattacks. What do enterprises need to do to become more cyber resilient in the new digital economy? Cybercrime both globally and in the UAE has matured and with new threats are emerging every day. Enterprises need to ensure they have strong security practices followed across the organisation and that they employ state of the art security tools and services.

Our Security Operations Centre (SOC) uses some of the most innovative and advanced cyber security platforms hosted in the UAE that have been built to adapt, learn and evolve with new security threats." We have chosen to deploy next generation cyber security services with our enterprise Security Operations Centre (SOC) in order to safeguard digital enterprises against cyber-attacks with end-to-end advisory, protection and security monitoring services. This gives our customers a secure and reliable IT environment to roll out new services, adopt new ways of work and grow their businesses with confidence.

How are you leveraging your product portfolio and knowledge to help enterprises better protect their IT infrastructure and key assets amidst a backdrop of cybercrime?

The du Enterprise Security Operations Centre (SOC) uses some of the most innovative and advanced cyber security platforms hosted in the UAE that have been built to adapt, learn and evolve with new security threats. The SOC is operated by a dedicated team of security experts and provides 24x7 Security Monitoring, Incident Detection and Response. du has combined leading technologies with highly skilled security analysts to deliver a proactive and predictive approach to securing and managing critical areas of users, applications, endpoints and infrastructure. du enterprise SOC is able to rapidly detect and respond to security events with a proven processdriven approach to detecting, qualifying, investigating and mitigating threats.

Many cybersecurity analysts believe that it's not a question of if, but instead when in relation to cyberattacks. Do you think the industry needs to do more from the perspective of minimising the impact that is caused by a breach, instead of focusing solely on detection and prevention? Ransomware and other cybersecurity threats have become more prevalent in recent years and cyberattacks plague both businesses and individuals without discrimination. In an increasingly complex digital world, organisations of all kinds want effective security services that help them to protect their business operations.

Our enterprise SOC supports



a portfolio of next generation cyber security services that enable customers to achieve their strategic objectives securely and efficiently. Rather than building in-house solutions, they rely on trusted experts and our innovative tools to protect both their profits and reputations.

How important was last month's GISEC for du – and how critical is it that security stakeholders come together to

try and tackle the cybersecurity problem in a collaborative way? Under the theme – "Enabling

Under the theme – "Enabling
Future Cybercities: Everything
Enabling, Everything Secure"

GISEC Global focused on
ethical hacking through several
onsite features and activations.

GISEC Global leads in driving
strategic collaborations and
disseminating new-age
cybersecurity capabilities, and
the telecommunications sector is
a key stakeholder in this process.

Considering the digital transformation under which telcos are submitted has seen du emerge as a regional point of referral for governments, enterprises and more desiring to take up a 5G journey. The latter is predicted to blow up data centers which are already experiencing an AI shift away from Malware as a reliable tool for cyber security.

What do you believe will be the major challenges in the cybersecurity ecosystem over the next 12 months?

In the face of massive disruption brought about by the COVIDdriven social, economic, and technological shifts in the past two years, adversaries have become even more sophisticated – exploiting vulnerabilities and architectural limitations in legacy systems. With resource working remote and using various devices, they are at an increased risk of falling victim to the threat actors.

Organisations need to focus on endpoint security to protect employees when working remotely. For organisation working with BYOD models, BYOD security needs to be enhanced.

While these issues will ultimately lead to strength and innovation in organisations around the world, they will also create new risks and vulnerabilities that can be exploited. With the increase in digital transformation and more organisations going towards digitalisation we would need more digitally secure ecosystems and cyber security adoption and readiness will be required at a faster speed.

META NO MARGIN FOR ERROR

Angela Fan, Meta researcher and Artificial Intelligence expert spoke to CNME Editor Mark Forker about how she is trying to use AI to ensure there is greater inclusion for marginalised and underrepresented groups on websites such as Wikipedia.

12

If we are able to understand and measure how differently models treat different groups, then we can make progress on developing more equitable and inclusive AI."

an you outline to our readers how vou are leveraging AI technology to improve gender representation on information-gathering websites like Wikipedia? How does the model you are deploying work?

To be clear, we are not deploying any model. We view our work as a starting point. We focus on mimicking the human writing process.

The human writer would decide which person to write a biography about and provide information about their occupation, and then the AI can read various articles on the web, predict the structure of the Wikipedia article, and write paragraph by paragraph the article. We then append which

reference articles the AI used as citations to these paragraphs.

Your primary objective is to use AI to ensure that there is greater inclusion on Wikipedia, but in your opinion, and based on the comprehensive research you conducted why is there such social bias towards women and marginalised groups on prominent websites like Wikipedia - and what does that tell us about the claim that these social biases are fundamentally embedded in a lot of the hierarchical structures in which our society functions?

Fundamentally, there is bias in society. We don't live in a world where everyone gets the recognition for their achievements that they deserve. Wikipedia is based on credible,



third party sources from the web, meaning that to have a Wikipedia article, there needs to be sufficient information available about that individual.

This makes it very susceptible to societal influence. Furthermore, the Wikipedia editing community is not reflective of society at large, which impacts the kinds of articles that are created. An easy area to recognise is that most Wikipedia articles are written in English, even though English is not the largest first language.

Many people have claimed that AI technology has only served to exacerbate racial and gender inequities, and that bias is baked into the outcomes that AI is asked to predict. Many feel the data used is being 'discriminatory' towards marginalised groups. How can you be sure that the AI you use will alleviate the challenges facing AI when it comes to levelling the playing field?

It's extremely important that AI is developed in a representative way. Looking at facial recognition technology, for instance, it's clear that some populations are not represented as well as others. This has a lot of impact on how that technology is used when deployed.

Thus, as a community, the first thing that we should be focusing on is measurement and understanding: how can we realise that the models we create are not representative? The dataset that we contribute in this paper is towards that goal. If we are able to understand and measure how differently models treat different groups, then we can make progress on developing more equitable and inclusive AI.

Despite some of the negativity that has been aimed at AI, we know that it is a force for good. How do you see the technology developing in terms of helping to create a society that better promotes inclusion and greater representations for those that are underrepresented?

I envision a world where people are recognised equally for what they have achieved, regardless of their gender or race or ethnicity or other aspects and if they are notable enough to have a Wikipedia article, they should have one.

HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY DUBAI

PART OF THE PROCESS

Talal Shaikh, Associate Professor, Director of Undergraduate Studies for the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences, Heriot-Watt University Dubai, sheds light on the different ways AI can further employee well-being and the efficiency of the recruitment process.

> here's no question that the demand for AI is growing exponentially. In recent years, there has been an unprecedented demand for AI solutions across a broad range of industries. With worldwide funding of AI start-ups reaching \$20bn in Q2 of 2021 as shown in a report by CB insights, a number that's more than double the total for the same quarter in the previous year, there are exciting opportunities ahead for multiple industries.

> HR is one of the industries that have been transformed by AI. This is because finding the right candidate involves data such as a candidate's details and search processes conducted by organisations. The use of AI in managing and optimising this data has become very valuable due to its role in facilitating the efficiency of the recruitment process. It is noteworthy that the use of AI is not merely confined to talent acquisition, but also

in employee retention and communication.

In fact, employee turnover is one of the major concerns of companies worldwide. There has been a global trend of employees rethinking their career options since the onset of COVID-19. According to a survey by Robert Walters, two thirds of professionals in the MENA region were looking to move jobs in the first half of 2022.

As such, the role of AI in facilitating communication with employees and hiring the right candidates has become more pressing than ever before.

Recruitment

Alleviating the load of sifting through countless applications can help HR personnel allocate time to improve communication with existing employees and seek the right talents. According to Capterra, a software research service, 75% percent of companies use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS), a software that acts as a database for job applicants as it helps the application process. In fact, many applications are rejected by the ATS before reaching recruitment professionals.

This is because AI-powered scanning can collect and sort applications through scanning keywords to assess the suitability of applicants for the role. Additionally, ATS solutions can help companies find the right candidates at the right time by helping companies keeping track of potential candidates. Overall, these innovative technologies allow for more efficiency in the hiring process with optimal results while leveraging the human element to connect with candidates.

Automating employee communications

AI-backed chatbots can enable HR teams to ensure efficiency of internal communications by keeping the engagement and conversation going with employees going all year long. Chatbots can ensure that all information relating to policy changes, announcements, leave approvals and more are conveyed to employees. This serves to save time for HR teams and reduces the possibility of communication errors.

Currently, chatbots are also advanced enough to provide natural, humanlike communication that has the capacity to engage in personalised conversation. This data can also be used in addressing specific concerns that employees have, which



in turn helps HR practitioners understand overall sentiment, find necessary action points, and consequently boost engagement and reduce turnover.

Candidate Resumes on Smart Digital Forms

AI provides HR departments and prospective candidates

Overall, these innovative technologies allow for more efficiency in the hiring process with optimal results while leveraging the human element to connect with candidates." with the opportunity to automate repetitive tasks and focus on more strategic and creative work. Automating steps of the onboarding processes can free time spent on overseeing every step thus allowing HR employees to allocate their time on more important tasks such as mentoring and connecting with new employees.

Traditionally, new applicants are required to re-enter their details multiple times during the hiring process. To ensure candidates are not left with a poor impression of the company and to facilitate the efficiency of the process, AI can help candidates transfer information to smart digital platforms that can store this information and facilitate completing applications in less time. As such, AI can automatically recognise relevant information as required and insert it where relevant in future forms.

Finally, as companies are realising the need to invest in candidate experience during the recruitment process, AI is increasingly being used to analyse the previous experiences and interests of candidates to match them with the roles they are better suited for.

Employee Development programmes and training

With AI-powered HR training modules, employees can study and learn about their roles and responsibilities. For employees to progress in their careers, AI-powered systems can recommend relevant skill sets based on their job description. AI applications in HR technology can analyse employee data and alert HR staff to training needs.

Despite the benefits of AI for both candidates and HR personnel, it is important that organisations invest effort in promoting responsibility in the use of AI-based tools. Companies should ensure that HR teams have a good understanding of AI ethics and data protection. Most importantly, trainings about how to optimise the use of AI and interpret data is essential to streamline the HR process. Developing a thorough understanding of the use of AI helps to fully leverage its full potential and alleviate distrust of AI systems.

MICROSOFT

OPERATION TRANSFORMATION

Kathleen Mitford, Corporate Vice President, Azure Marketing at Microsoft believes that digital transformation cannot happen without security transformation – and highlighted how the US tech leader invests \$1 billion every year on security R&D in a compelling interview with CNME Editor Mark Forker.

wimportant has Microsoft datacenters been in fuelling the country's nationwide digitisation program?

Microsoft made the decision to launch datacenters in the UAE because they are pivotal to accelerating digital transformation across the nation and the region. By expanding access to both scalable and resilient cloud services, companies can accelerate their ability to innovate at the rapid pace required in today's business environment.

These datacenters further position UAE as a digital and innovation hub for the region, increasing the country's competitiveness.

Even before the pandemic,

Microsoft's mission is

Microsoft's mission is to empower every person and every organisation on the planet to achieve more." we were seeing an acceleration of digital transformation in the UAE, and during the crisis, it understandably heightened. We've also seen that while business continuity tools such as Microsoft Teams may have been the catalyst for cloud migration in many cases, organisations have begun experimenting with other digital transformation technologies such as AI and IoT.

Throughout this transitional period, the country's leading organisations such as DP World and Abu Dhabi Digital Authority have optimised their operations by scaling remote working for their employees safely and securely.

Between 2020 and 2024, it is estimated that the Microsoft Cloud ecosystem, including the activities of our partners and cloud customers, will create 69,000 jobs in the UAE, including 16,000 skilled IT jobs, all while generating around \$27 billion U.S. dollars in revenue for the economy.

Microsoft plans continued investment in the Middle East with new services, expansion, and the launch of an Availability Zone, which will allow greater reach and opportunities for organisations to improve their cloud capabilities.

Can you tell us more about the investments Microsoft are making to ensure their datacenters are resilient and secure?

Microsoft believes digital transformation cannot happen without security transformation. Security is top of mind for us – we spend over \$1 billion a year on security R&D and employ over 8,500 security professionals – and we're committed to partnering closely with our customers to address any security concerns.

We also encourage every organisation to adopt Zero Trust approaches, implement leastprivilege access, and prepare for a password-less future.

In acknowledgment of the pervasive regional skills gap in the cybersecurity field, Microsoft introduced new skilling programs last year. And on the technology side, we analyse more than 75 trillion threat signals daily, engage with hundreds of thousands of customers, and employ thousands of security experts.

We are the only multi-cloud security provider, having extended the native capabilities of Microsoft Defender for Cloud, to offer protection for the industry's top three platforms: Azure, AWS and GCP. Microsoft Defender for Business helps SMEs defend against cybersecurity threats; our Surface devices are designed to keep workers safe in hybrid-work environments, and we continue to invest billions of dollars annually in security.

What do you foresee to be the next evolution when it comes to cloud technology and datacenters?

When the pandemic forced organisations to accelerate cloud migration, it was all about, 'how do we keep our businesses operating and productive while remote?' As companies have stabilised and stakeholders have an increased confidence in the cloud, they are now able to ask, 'how do we use the cloud to transform how we do business?'

This is where the possibilities of using the cloud to reinvent business models and explore new technologies emerge, such as 5G with IoT and AIpowered predictive analytics or using mixed-reality devices such as HoloLens 2 to enhance collaboration in field services.

On the datacenter side specifically, hyperscale datacenters are hyper-efficient and for Microsoft, that also translates into significant environmental sustainability benefits. We will be not just carbon neutral, but carbon negative by 2030. By then we expect 100% of our energy, 100% of the time, will be from zero carbon sources, we will replenish more water than we use, and our datacenters will achieve our zero waste goals. In fact, we expect to be so efficient that by 2050 we will remove from the environment all the carbon the company has emitted directly or by electrical consumption since Microsoft was founded in 1975.

How excited are Microsoft by the opportunities that exist in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia?

Microsoft's mission is to empower every person and every organisation on the planet to achieve more. Our broad approaches to skilling, digital transformation, cybersecurity, and support for start-ups, as well as our work on the ground with specific industries, is all part of our commitment to sustainable economic growth that leaves no one behind.

In Saudi Arabia, we see boundless ambition in Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Programme and are encouraged by how prominently digital technology is featured in the economic visions of the regional governments. We see ongoing smart

city initiatives like Neom and the Red Sea project and recognise the almost limitless potential for digital solutions within their scope. And we see the government's commitment to sustainability, an urgent challenge that is not only good for the planet but good for business. ZOOM

EDUCATION IS POWER

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Dina AlNasser**, Regional Manager at Zoom Video Communications to find out more about the barriers she has had to overcome in the IT industry in the Middle East, what needs to be done to further reduce the gender disparity that exists in STEM-related fields – and what advice she would give young women considering a career in IT.

an you outline to our readers some of the challenges and obstacles you have had to overcome during your career in the IT industry here in the Middle East?

I have had some challenges and obstacles during my career in the IT industry, some were cultural norms of what jobs and career paths were "appropriate" for women to work in, others were related to obtaining the required skills and expertise to excel and advance in a career in the IT industry. And of course, the challenges that women face worldwide on different degrees working in a maledominated industry.

I found myself in a position that if I wanted to make a change for myself and others, then I will have to start with myself. Therefore, I encouraged myself not to conform to the stereotypes and some cultural norms and have done so respectfully as I advance in my career. Also, to recognise and seize suitable opportunities that would empower me within the industry. In addition to this, I wanted to surround myself with supportive leaders, colleagues, mentors and being in contact with an inspiring network of professional Saudi women.

We know that despite progress being made in the ICT sector, it remains a male-dominated industry and gender disparity within most organisations is the norm. In your opinion, what do organisations in the IT industry need to do to level the playing field and promote greater inclusion and diversity?

The gender gap is a well-known challenge in the ICT sector worldwide. Although many companies realise the need to bridge that gap, we see the efforts moving slowly. Diversity and inclusion do not suddenly happen, commitments and investments must be made to see results and benefits. For starters, leaders and managers should realise the gap and make conscious efforts to demonstrate inclusiveness in their daily interactions. This will help to set the overall culture and tone in an organisation for inclusion and respect of gender differences.

I believe that the Saudi Arabia has made great progress in decreasing the gap in a relatively short period of time, not just in the ICT industry, but for women in the workforce in general. Hiring Saudi women for leadership positions in the public sectors has set an example for young Saudi women to aspire to. Also, implementing a regulation to incentivize companies to hire Saudi Women which was met by the private sector's gender diversity efforts was a recipe for success.

As a result, more and more talented Saudi women were hired in the ICT sector as organisations realised the added value of a gender diverse workforce.



We know that many enterprises are being proactive in a bid to bridge the gap when it comes to gender inequality. Can you tell our readers about some of the equality programs and initiatives being spearheaded by Zoom?

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team are passionate about ensuring all employees have the best experience at the company. Moreover, to develop, advance and celebrate women at the workforce is one of their main missions. Education and the continuous learning of new skills are very important as the IT industry is always changing and developing at a very fast pace." How important is education when it comes to encouraging young women to pursue a career in STEM-related fields – and as someone that has achieved great success in the IT industry, what advice would you give to aspiring young women that are considering a career in IT?

Education and the continuous learning of new skills are very important as the IT industry is always changing and developing at a very fast pace.

However, they are not all the parts of the equation as one of the great leaders in the beginning of my career taught me.

Knowledge and skill are important to have and are relatively easily attainable in general. Nonetheless, the key part of the equation is attitude, when you have the right attitude and mindset you can overcome any obstacle you may face on your journey.

My advice is to always be mindful about your thoughts, lead with confidence, take a leap of faith even in moments of intimidation and self-doubt that you may face especially in the beginning of your career.

Surround yourself with supportive colleagues, leaders and mentors who are great at what they do.

Lastly, do not be afraid to step up to challenges and demonstrate your what you can do. 19

DR. MOZA SUWAIDAN

EXPLORING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

UAE based ExploreTECH is a marketplace designed to connect hospitality and travel professionals together with technology providers in the Middle East and Africa. Nitya Ravi, contributing Editor at CPI talks to **Mona Faraj**, co-founder of ExploreTECH in the latest in our series of Women in Tech features.

ona Faraj is a true business activist; her unrelenting energy and passion are the fundamental driving forces behind ExploreTECH.

The platform allows professionals to get guidance from subject matter experts on managing problems and developing long-term strategies to improve business procedures and profitability.

"During 2020, businesses were being forced to adapt to different technologies, add new revenue streams and manage more for less. When it comes to technology, the decision-making processes are very complex, often involving decision makers who do not come from a technology background. Investing in tech and choosing the right solutions and providers should be a thorough and wellstudied decision that requires the right skill sets however this is not always the case. With all this in mind, we wanted to create a real solution to help both the Hospitality and Travel industry better navigate, explore, choose,

communicate & select through a single go-to platform. This was how the idea of Exploretech was born.' said Faraj.

Industry professionals now have a single go-to source to find and compare technology solutions that they need and receive subject matter expert advice to improve their businesses.

"The hotel & travel industry are missing out on innovative solutions which could hugely benefit their businesses due to the sheer volume of information shared and the many providers present who may not have an active footprint in the MEA region. The way in which this information is presented makes it extremely difficult for businesses to follow, explore and verify the exact nature of the solutions they need.Additionally, being able to automate the vendor / product comparison and the very complex RFI/RFP process, that today is an advantage to those that can afford it, would open a totally different arena to both the buyers and vendors. This is where ExploreTECH comes in. By creating a new kind of

marketplace, we create a Blue Ocean opportunity for these two parties to come together within a new arena and transform the industry" added Faraj.

Mona is extremely well respected in the industry for her over 25 years of experience, foresight, and profound professional research.

Her knowledge is all embracing, ranging from her passion for hotel opening and start-ups, commercial management, to her in-depth market understanding across the Middle East and she emphasizes the importance of automation and digital transformation in the Hospitality and Travel industry and the challenges faced.

"The COVID-19 crisis has brought about years of change in the way companies in all sectors and regions do business and to stay competitive in this new business and economic environment, we require new strategies and practices. According to a new McKinsey Global Survey of executives, their companies have accelerated the digitisation of their customer and supply-chain interactions and of

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Deploying automation and digital transformation means one can manage more with less and make better use of resources and expertise."

their internal operations by three to four years."

As with any other industry, Hospitality and Travel must also continue to innovate to stay relevant in the modern world. As is well known, during the pandemic, this industry was impacted the most and lost many of its talented executives to other industries and that's a global fact.

"Whilst our region may have more advantages in attracting & retaining talent, shortage still looms. Deploying automation and digital transformation means one can manage more with less and make better use of resources and expertise," said Faraj.

Today, users and decision makers are struggling with knowledge and resources to discover all required solutions to optimise their businesses. They rely on legacy knowledge, "comfort zones" and infrastructure which halts innovation and new technology adoption in the industry. Then comes the user challenges, optimising the investment made and ensuring maximum utilisation of tech stack deployed. Knowledge gap and the speed of adoption of solutions is also among the many challenges faced by companies.

"The global pandemic demonstrated the need for a new kind of business resiliency and hence the need for an organisation to rapidly adapt & adopt to business disruptions by leveraging digital capabilities to not only restore business operations, but also capitalise on the changed conditions. Technology is a critical supporting component of this business imperative. Leadership with a change mindset, ready to embrace new technologies, willingness to try new solutions, ability to adapt with the changing times and to lead by example.

This is what we have learnt from living in a country like UAE and why it was simply the perfect place to launch our start up."added Faraj.

With a far-reaching network of key industry leaders, Mona is admired for her forthright opinions and desire to provide real, honest and productive feedback and work. She has this to say to all aspiring women out there looking to start their own business or grow in their company,

"Wheresoever you go, go with all your heart', this is my deepest belief. Passion, energy, and strong belief in value proposition comes naturally for women who have always multi tasked and balanced between the heart and the mind. We live in a dynamic world and more a dynamic industry, hence learning, and development must never stop. And finally, never ever be scared to fail, its simply part of the journey," said Faraj. INFOBLOX

FINDING THE RIGHT TALENT

The talent acquisition problem that currently exists in the cybersecurity ecosystem globally has been well documented. **Allen McNaughton**, Systems Engineering Director for Infoblox Public Sector, has penned an exclusive op-ed for April's edition of CNME, which examines what businesses can do to meet and overcome the current jobs challenge head on.

> t's no secret that the cybersecurity industry is in something of a talent crisis. The need for cybersecurity experts greatly outpaces the supply.

These professionals underpin the security and integrity of networks and data, manage a company's security stack, and have the skills to identify, react to and remediate security risks.

Over the past year, this talent pool has faced unprecedented demands as the pandemic forced understaffed cybersecurity teams to extend security to cover the blending of corporate and home technologies as millions of employees worked remotely—all while adjusting to the challenges of remote work themselves. To compound these difficulties, malicious actors have pounced, preying on these new work arrangements, hastily set-up network architectures, and fears of the pandemic to launch a growing number of cyber-attacks.

All of this has culminated in a cybersecurity workforce that is stretched out, overburdened, and burnt out.

The novelty of this situation has forced organisations to rethink how they attract talent, train employees, and educate those inside and outside the organisation to better understand the different threats they face. Organisations are raising pay, recruiting from underserved communities, and making cybersecurity careers more accessible to students without a traditional degree.

These solutions are helping but not filling the entire gap. This challenge did not arise overnight and will require long-term strategic thinking to overcome.

And unfortunately, time is a luxury. Malicious actors are not good sports, waiting for the cybersecurity community to transform itself before launching an attack.

The cybersecurity industry needs to act now and follow the lead of the fast food industry and small businesses that have addressed skill shortages by leveraging technology to help manage work, increase productivity, and reduce burnout.

Here's how:

First, look for technology solutions that prioritise automation. Technology that automates lower-order tasks is relatively easy to deploy, frees up workers' valuable time and also removes the potential for any human error combing through different risks.

Second, recognise the power of context. In cybersecurity, context can help workers better understand the threats they face and enable them to make better, more accurate, and faster decisions.

Not all threats are the same, so it's important that context follows automation so that security teams do not waste hours chasing down the most basic of threats that can easily be remediated via technology.

Third, look for technology solutions that leverage the expertise you already



have. While context is key for understanding a single threat, it's also valuable for cybersecurity teams who need to make decisions about which threats to prioritise. Workflow prioritisation can help identify and remediate the most dangerous, time-consuming threats instead of randomly remediating threats based on when they're discovered.

Many solutions already exist that can provide this kind of

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This challenge did not arise overnight and will require long-term strategic thinking to overcome." automation, orchestration and context. For example, if you are monitoring the DNS traffic of your network and your DNS Firewall blocks a request to a malicious site, solutions that can automatically trigger a response to the Network Access Control system to quarantine that user into a sandbox until it can be further researched by an analyst can dramatically reduce the time and effort needed to track down and isolate infected devices. At the same time, systems that automatically send additional context about that user and the request (Who is the user? What kind of machine are they using? Where was the request sent?) to the analyst can give them a head start into researching and ultimately mitigating the threat.

Vulnerability scanners are also a point of note. Oftentimes,

they only scan networks at a given interval (once a day, week, or even month. Yes, monthly scans are a thing). Organisations can quickly, easily, and automatically improve their security posture by scanning a device as soon as it connects to the network by leveraging an orchestration flow where the DHCP server automatically identifies the new machine and triggers the scan.

These and other technology solutions that leverage automation, context, and the skills your team already has are not merely a bridge between now and a fully-staffed cybersecurity industry of the future. They are a critical part of a robust cybersecurity platform today, one that both improves network security and extends the capabilities of the team you already have. 23

AVAYA **ENABLING A TOTAL EXPERIENCE**

CNME Editor Mark Forker sits down with Nidal Abou-Ltaif, President, Avava International, to find out how the Avaya OneCloud platform is enabling organisations to deliver a 'Total Experience' in the new experience economy we now live in.

> ver the last realisation:

few years, businesses have been waking up to a sudden

Their customers and employees are more demanding than ever. Putting aside conversations around price sensitivity for products or services, or workplace salaries, what people today value more than anything is the experiences that they're provided. And they gravitate to the companies that can deliver the experiences they demand.

How do you anticipate those demands? And how can you go about serving them when the idea of a 'good' experience is always in flux?

According to Avaya, the way to make sure everyone has everything they need before they ask is by adopting Total Experience. This is the interconnection of customer, employee, user, and multiexperience, and the vendor says it's a state of being that cannot be achieved using monolithic apps.

Instead, it requires treating the cloud as a platform so that you can create the experiences you need in the moment.

To be precise, the vendor suggests Avaya OneCloud as the platform with which to do this. To see what that means, we sat down with Nidal Abou-Ltaif, President, Avaya International, to find out how the company can enable Total Experience with its approach to technology.

We know that 'experiences' are the only currency that really matter in the business landscape today. Avaya were one of the first companies to coin the term the experience economy. Avaya have also said that within the parameters of the new experience economy is 'where feelings matter most'. However, in your expert opinion what do businesses need to establish in terms of best practices that will allow them to compete in the experience economy?

Let's give the 'Experience Economy' a little context here. The term actually goes back to the late 1990s, but it's only now that businesses are really catching up to the realities of competing in

this kind of economy. It was first used the author Joseph Pine, who used it to describe the next big driver of global business.

He argued that, initially, farming was the biggest economic driver of a society. Then industrial prowess took farming's place, and then it services. Today, we're in an era where experiences power the economies we live in.

If you look around, you can see this reality playing out in real-time - the world has completely changed. How we live has changed as we stay fit with connected, remote workouts. How we eat has changed as we order from food aggregators. How we travel has changed thanks to peer-to-peer property rentals. And where we travel to has changed based on what we see on community mapping applications. Banking has changed dramatically if you can't do everything through a mobile banking app, you're frustrated as a consumer.

In the face of all these changes, today's customers value, and judge brands on, end-to-end experiences - far more than the stand-alone products and services that they

Today's customers value, and judge brands on, end-to-end experiences."

consume. That's the experience economy. You could argue that the change was accelerated by the pandemic, but it's clear that this has been a long time in the making, and it's not going away.

New expectations even apply to experiences that you would previously have considered challenging, boring, or unappealing – like paying a bill, or booking car service. Instead, consumers want everything to be effortless, exciting, and rewarding – and they'll even trade their personal information to enable better personal experiences. And, by the way, employees feel the same way about their work.

That's the experience economy in a nutshell. Now, with all this change I've just described, you would imagine that businesses need to make significant changes to compete in this economy. And you'd be right. The rate of pace with which businesses are adapting is incredible to see, and much of the catalyst was indeed brought on by the pandemic as organisations sought new ways to connect their employees, customers and everything in between. But there's still

25

a long way to go. While many organisations are doing a great job serving their customers in new, unique ways, or enabling their employees to work from anywhere, few are truly able to compose any experience that a customer or employee demands, at the exact moment they need it. Delivering this requires a Total Experience mindset, where there's an interconnection of customer–, employee–, user– and multi–experience.

Can you tell our readers more about how Avaya is able to leverage its technologies to deliver what you've just described as 'Total Experience'? Which one of these experience disciplines is the most important component in terms of ensuring that you provide the Total Experience that businesses require to ensure they achieve their business outcomes?

To start with, we can't single out any one of these experience disciplines as the most important, because they all build and depend on each other to give the customer a holistic, end-toend experience.

As I mentioned before, some businesses are doing great work delivering stand-out employee experiences, enabling hybrid work and workstream collaboration. But is that helping the customer experience? It's difficult to say. Likewise, another company could be celebrating fantastic Net Promoter Scores, but are the employees enabling that as effective as they can be? Is there high churn, for example? And are they really driving longterm brand loyalty?

That's why, to really move



forward, you need to look at the entire experience spectrum. And when you do that, you quickly realise that you need to adopt a platform approach to the technology you're using to enable communications.

The traditional, monolithic applications of the past were designed to deliver horizontal communication capabilities. Then communications were moved to the cloud and these applications became a bit more extensible, but they were still designed to serve quite generic use cases. Today, businesses need a platform that enables them to compose experiences that address very specific use cases, very quickly.

That's where Avaya OneCloud, our experience platform, comes in. It uses a common, cloudbased media platform that works across both SaaS and on-prem apps. It empowers businesses with the tools they need by enabling them to compose the experiences they need, in the moment, and orchestrate a Total Experience for their employees and customers.

I want to dig a little deeper on something you've mentioned there about a common, cloudbased media platform. How does that technology work, and how does it help with bringing together every experience for customers and employees across every touchpoint?

This is a great question and it gets to the heart of why we're taking the approach that we are with Avaya OneCloud.

Let's be clear: The importance of media and media processing in delivering experiences cannot be overstated. Back in the days of voice-centric apps, you had businesses adding many other types of media to their interaction capabilities. First, and most obviously, it was text, and then later came video. But it was very complex, and difficult to master. It meant many separate media streams being sent to the edge of the network for processing by the app or device. Plus, each of these apps only provided a set of generic user and customer experiences to address broad use cases.

In a world where personalised experiences are demanded, and you need to create very specific use cases, you cannot take that old approach. It just wouldn't be cost- or time-effective, so you need to look to the cloud. And that's what we're enabling organisations to do with Avaya OneCloud.

First, the underlying foundation for Avaya OneCloud's platform architecture is what we call "Core plus Four". At the 'core' is the Avaya Media Processing Core, which abstracts the media communications layer and moves media processing from edge devices to the cloud. And that enables the 'plus Four' technology portfolios of UCaaS, CCaaS, CPaaS and Workstream Collaboration to act together as one.

So, what this means if you're looking to deliver those in-themoment experiences we've been talking about, is you can use Avaya OneCloud to quickly realise speed to value, compose the experiences you need in the moment, and take advantage of cloud economics.

What we're really doing here is transforming the cloud from

a "service" to an "experience" – one that not only reduces cost, time and effort but also provides the toolset required for businesses to compete in the experience economy.

We know that disruptive technologies like AI are constantly evolving and maturing all the time. How important is it that companies add and integrate AI into their existing workflows to transform and enhance the way it conducts its day-to-day operations? You know, AI is still picking up speed, but it's getting better almost daily. And some of the

The importance of media and media processing in delivering experiences cannot be overstated."

best applications for AI live in the customer experience world.

A few years ago, we used to talk about how, if you're looking at AI, define your use case early – or else you won't see success. Today, AI support is pretty much expected when it comes to customer experience technologies because so many great use cases have been developed and AI is, in many cases, the only way you can deliver the experiences that people want.

As examples of some of those use cases, it's now pretty much expected that, as a vendor in our field, you're able to deliver chatbots that can handle routine interactions. It's also expected that you can deliver AI-powered analytics to give contact center agents in-the-moment and contextual information on the interactions they've having with customers. And of course, as the number one contact center vendor in the world, we've been leading on that front.

But we're also making AI much more accessible to our customers and delivering new use cases every day. If you'll allow me to go back to the Avaya OneCloud architecture, let me quickly talk you through how we're enabling things like AI Noise removal at entirely new types of scale. Now, this is a great feature. With it, Avaya users no longer have to worry about a dog barking in the background, or loud outside noises like lawn services or construction, or kids giggling across the room.

But what's really interesting is how it's delivered. Instead of keeping the AI at the edge, and needing all sorts of compute power to enable it, we're delivering this feature from the cloud with the Avaya Media Processing Core. The AI technology continuously monitors the audio signal and removes any unwanted noises, and it's all done in the cloud, meaning you get a consistent experience whether you're using your super-powerful gaming laptop, or your average phone.

Our ability to infuse AI into every experience, wherever it's needed, is unique in this industry, and we're very excited about the new use cases that it will enable us to deliver for our customers. SALESFORCE

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Thierry Nicault**, Area Vice President – UAE, Middle East at Salesforce, to find out more about the dynamic growth and expansion the global CRM leader is enjoying across the region, the impact its net zero cloud application will have in helping enterprises achieve their sustainability goals – and how it nurtures its famous company culture in a work from anywhere world.

> hierry Nicault was back in Dubai for Salesforce Live 2022, which was once again an incredibly successful event for the global CRM leader – and he caught up with CNME Editor Mark Forker.

The Middle East is the fastest-growing region for Salesforce - and the Salesforce ecosystem of partners in the UAE, for instance, will create 20,300 new jobs and USD 3.9 billion in new business revenues by 2026, with an aim for continued expansion both locally and regionally.

The last time CNME was in conversation with Nicault was

September 2019. However, the world we now live in has changed irreversibly since then. The way we live, work, and learn was completely transformed as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The one constant in the time that has lapsed since we last spoke has been the continued success of Salesforce, amidst all the disruption and uncertainty, the company has gone from strength-to-strength.

We began the conversation by touching on how the pandemic had accelerated digital transformation on a global scale, and how that had fundamentally changed the terms and conditions, so to speak, when it comes to the way Salesforce conducts its business and interacts with their customers.

According to Nicault, the topic of digital transformation has now become a key priority for the C-Suite as businesses scramble to meet the evolving demands of their customers.

"Digital transformation is now becoming a hot topic at board level, and it is becoming a critical component of a CEO's strategic agenda. What has become very evident over the last 18 months is the fact that companies need to become resilient, and the way to achieve

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Digital transformation is now becoming a hot topic at board level, and it is becoming a critical component of a CEO's strategic agenda."

> Nicault referenced that Salesforce champion the concept of having a 'Digital HQ', and said it is something that they advocate to their customers. He explained that a Digital HQ essentially means that whilst a physical presence is still necessary and important, businesses need to be agile enough to work even if you don't have a physical presence.

During the pandemic the growth enjoyed by Salesforce skyrocketed, which was fueled primarily by the exponential demand for digital transformation. However, innovation is embedded deep into their DNA, and they developed solutions that were needed as industries and cities were engulfed in crisis in the early days and months of the pandemic.

"We continued to grow at a phenomenal rate during the pandemic as the demand for digital transformation was just off the charts. We also developed and built a lot of new solutions, and one of them was our health cloud solution.

resiliency is to ensure that all customer engagement is at the heart of everything they do," said Nicault.

Nicault added that some other key trends that have bubbled to the surface during the pandemic include the importance of empowering your employees in a 'work from anywhere world' – and an increased focus on your customer when it comes to your strategy.

"From the onset of the pandemic it quickly became clear that businesses needed to be operational wherever their employees were located. Businesses needed to provide them with the access, tools, and solutions required to do their job effectively, efficiently, and securely. In the postpandemic world that we now find ourselves in, we see a couple of pertinent factors that are critically important to the executive board. The first one is customer-centricity. The customer needs to influence every decision you make, it must form your strategic direction as an entity. The landscape has changed dramatically and that has resulted in businesses needing to 'wow' their customers every time the opportunity presents itself," said Nicault.

29

It is an application that we built out of our platform, and it ultimately allowed our customers to engage in shift management, contact tracing and vaccine management. Take the city of New York as an example, they adopted our health cloud solution to manage their vaccination campaign and rollout across the entire New York area, which they achieved to great effect. We are extremely proud of the fact that are solutions enabled government agencies and healthcare providers to have business continuity during the pandemic," said Nicault.

Sustainability is a key issue as fears continue to grow over climate change and the challenges facing our planet. Many multinational entities are fully committed to reducing their carbon emissions and are putting measures in place to achieve that.

What has become very evident over the last 18 months is the fact that companies need to become resilient, and the way to achieve resiliency is to ensure that all customer engagement is at the heart of everything they do,"



One of these multinationals is Mastercard, who has a longstanding partnership with Salesforce – and the global payments leader is now on a mission to become sustainable.

Nicault highlighted how they are leveraging their net zero cloud application to help Mastercard achieve their longterm sustainability aspirations.

"Sustainability is a key KPI now for enterprises on a global scale. We have developed an application called 'Net Zero' cloud. It allows end-users to track, monitor and analyze their carbon emissions and report it. Mastercard came to us and told us that they needed to become more sustainable, so we worked with them closely to help them meet their objectives. Once we informed them about the capabilities provided by our net zero cloud it was exactly in line with what the Mastercard board members needed to do. They need to be carbon free in the coming years and they have adopted our net zero cloud application to enable them to do this," said Nicault.

One of the key components of the success enjoyed by Salesforce is the 'culture' that it has cultivated over the years, and the environment that it has fostered has allowed creativity and innovation to flourish.

However, with so many of its workforce now working



remotely, and with many new employees being onboarded outside of the traditional parameters that existed prepandemic, how does Salesforce ensure it retains and nurtures that culture in this 'work from anywhere' world?

"We are a company that is drinking its own champagne, and what we mean by that is the concept of Digital HQ that we strongly recommend to our customers is something that we apply to ourselves, we created the concept of a Digital HQ. I had just returned from South Africa at the end of February 2020, when all business travel was halted by our CEO. He then told us that we needed to think

about how my team and our extended team would be able to continue to run our business activities and functions, because we are no longer working in the same world as we were before. I'll be honest though, the onboarding experience in a virtual world was not the same for us. The onboarding process pre-pandemic was we would conduct training that was locally based, and then we would have what we call a 'bootcamp' for two-weeks in San Francisco for every newcomer. We transformed the process to be fully remote and digital through collaboration tools like Zoom, but it was not the same. However, the

foundation of our training and the strength of our culture in our onboarding process was good enough to successfully onboard 22,000 people during this period, which is quite remarkable," said Nicault.

Many analysts have attributed a lot of the success of Salesforce to its canny ability to make the right acquisitions at the right time. Nicault highlighted the key role played by Salesforce Ventures, but also stressed that the company only makes acquisitions that make sense.

"We have an entity called Salesforce Ventures that is investing in technology startups that have great potential, and it also examines trends that are emerging across different markets. It is part of our DNA to look at what is going to be important down the track in a bid to capitalise on that opportunity. However, if you look back at our past acquisitions, we always make acquisitions that makes sense for our overall portfolio. We are always motivated to find ways that enhance and increase our customer engagement across the portfolio of products and solutions that we have. Internal innovation and organic development are part of our makeup as a company, but we always look at that external development as well because it could really help accelerate our product cycle and helps us to be more relevant and again as I said earlier help us improve our customer engagement," said Nicault. come

PROOFPOINT

STRAIGHT TO THE POINT

Andrew Rose, Resident CISO for EMEA at Proofpoint, tells CNME Editor Mark Forker how the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine could completely transform ransomware attacks – and stresses the importance of deploying effective cyber resilience to prevent digital attacks on your business operations and infrastructure.

an you tell our readers how the ongoing conflict between Russia and the Ukraine has once again realtered the threat landscape and how can it revolutionise the ransomware threat? The pandemic provided an opportunity for cybercriminals to target people and organisations with a variety of social engineering-driven threats, using COVID-19 lures, such as vaccination campaigns and infection warnings, to push phishing emails, ransomware and identity theft. In a similar manner, global conflicts create an opportunity for cybercriminals to take advantage of information gaps, and sensitive political situations to play on a potential victim's heightened sense of fear and vulnerability.

The ongoing Russia and Ukraine conflict is an example of this and is unfolding in real time across our highly connected digital society. We see this in the attacks. As an example, Proofpoint's threat research team identified a number of campaigns capitalising on the conflict, such as activity from the China-aligned actor TA416 in which they target European diplomatic entities, using lures related to refugee and migrant services, which are obviously very topical.

This conflict also has the potential to escalate the frequency and sophistication of digital attacks, as state sponsored actors, and supportive vigilantes, on both sides become involved in attacks to increase political pressure and disrupt activities.

Cyber resilience becomes imperative in this situation, and we can expect to see governments and businesses prioritising this. I know that many CISOs are already creating multi-level fallback plans to protect their core value proposition, including identifying the different positions and controls they can adopt to increasingly isolate from any global threat, while still operating core services.

Ransomware is one of the biggest threats facing organisations today, and Ukraine is driving a narrative that must surely create an associated policy change. To date, governments and regulators have tolerated significant payments being made to threat actors such as REvil to enable businesses to recover and operate. When such funds are likely

Ransomware is one of the biggest threats facing organisations today, and Ukraine is driving a narrative that must surely create an associated policy change." flowing into a clearly hostile jurisdiction—one under international economic sanctions, and incentivised to turn to illegal methods to bypass such restrictions - the Western governments must surely draw a legislative line.

In your op-ed, you believe cyber resilience will become as important to an enterprise as its balance sheet. However, in your expert opinion, what practices and policies do companies need to deploy to become cyber resilient? Technology is embedded in every part of a modern enterprise, and the resilience of those functions is imperative to continuing operation and profitability – but it's a complex topic.

Without effective cyber resilience, digital attacks can seriously impact business operations and national infrastructure. We've already seen how the Colonial Pipeline attack triggered panic purchasing that emptied most gas stations in parts of the US. Meanwhile, a separate attack on meat processing company JBS USA Holdings, Inc., sparked fears about a domestic beef supply shortage. Both attacks were ransomware, and both resulted in large ransom payments.

Resilience, however, is a wide topic – in includes the ability to prevent incidents happening, keep operating despite attacks, and recover rapidly from any impactful event. Most attacks target staff and start via email, so putting in place effective email filtering and a strong security culture are both vital. Similarly, having effective incident detection and response, contingency working methods, secondary communication channels, and offline backups are all critical aspects of a strong resilience programme.

It is essential that Boards fully understand the systemic risks inherent in complex digital systems, and how investment in cybersecurity translates into business value. They will have to adopt a top-down approach to cyber resilience. This includes identifying vulnerabilities, educating all resources and developing a comprehensive response plan.

Some security analysts that I have spoken to believe that companies should not pay the ransom, as it creates a marketplace, whilst others argue that many enterprises don't have any other option.

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Most ransomware attacks begin with malware or downloaders. Therefore, preventing ransomware via email by blocking the downloader is effective."

What is your viewpoint on paying the ransom?

Ransomware often begins with a simple click on an inconspicuous email or link that can result in a complete shutdown of business operations until ransoms are paid. It is one of the most active and profound threats facing organisations today. A recent Proofpoint survey found that 27% of CISOs in KSA and 22% in UAE expected to face a ransomware attack in the past year.

Every firm has a "we will not pay" policy however statistics show that, when confronted with the reality, almost 60% actually pay. That reality may include a total shut down of operations, massive data theft and, more worryingly, an absence of backups – deleted by attackers who have been on your network for weeks with admin permissions.

Paying the ransom is no simple solution, however. For one, there has been a clear trend toward 'double dipping' in terms of ransom demands, with 42% of firms finding that their ransom payment is actually followed by a second demand, not the unlock key they were expecting. Secondly, organisations have to ask how much they can trust their recovered infrastructure and data, knowing that malicious attackers have had full access to it for a period of time. How



can you be sure there are no backdoors, no data poisoning, no malicious time bombs planted away? A rebuild from the hardware up is the only way to be sure – but that is an overwhelming concept for many firms.

We believe that prevention is better than cure. This means securing your most vulnerable entry points. Because email is the key attack vector, it's important to invest in advanced email threat detection to identify threats early. Most ransomware attacks begin with malware or downloaders. Therefore, preventing ransomware via email by blocking the downloader is effective. Email detection tools can also stop downloaders early and give you



visibility into ransomwarelinked malware campaigns. Email isolation is another layer of security that protects the click by providing safe access to content while preventing first-stage downloaders and credential theft.

Can you outline to us how the role of the CISO has evolved during what has been labelled as a decade of digital disruption?

There's no question that the past decade has been challenging from a cybersecurity standpoint, but the past two years in particular have ramped up the pressure for CISOs globally. Security leaders around the world were challenged to shore up their security posture in this new and changing environment, some overnight. They attempted to pull off a balancing act between supporting remote work and avoiding business interruption, all while keeping their businesses secure.

This is not behind us, the number of priorities that CISOs have will continue to grow, in line with the ever-evolving threat landscape and the growing recognition of the criticality of technology to every firm's ultimate value proposition.

Although cyber shifts from the pandemic feel largely behind us now, CISOs continue to feel the pressure. In fact, 67% of UAE CISOs agree that the expectations placed upon them are excessive and more than half (57%) do not think their board sees eye-to-eye with them on cybersecurity issues. This represents another unwanted challenge for CISOs as only by fully understanding the style, tactics, and motives of the attacks we face and achieving boardroom buy-in can we equip those on the front line to defend our organisations.

Despite the unprecedented disruption of the past couple of years, there are many positives to take forward. CISOs understand that hybrid working is here to stay and are now better able to accommodate it securely full term. Many also believe that they will have the budget to achieve this goal, with the majority of UAE CISOs expecting their cybersecurity budgets to increase.




CHANGING COURSE

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Dr. Betty Vandenbosch**, Chief Content Officer at Coursera, to explore more about some of the key trends and insights that emerged from their Women and Skills report in relation to online learning, and why so many women globally have recognised that they need to pursue STEM skills to secure their future in the new digital economy.

r. Betty Vandenbosch joined Coursera in 2020 and has been charged with the responsibility of overseeing the company's content and credential strategy and partner relationships.

She has enjoyed a distinguished career in academia, but she began her working life as a programme and systems analyst before she decided it was time to change course with her own career.

The underlying theme of our conversation was focused primarily on the exponential growth in women globally learning online, and the factors that have fueled that shift.

We know that the pandemic has served as an accelerator for many things, one of which has been the ability to work remotely, which has led to the 'work from anywhere' model now being adopted by companies worldwide.

That new workplace flexibility has created new opportunities for women that previously didn't exist, but as Vandenbosch highlights, women suffered much more during the pandemic than men, with many realising that they needed to switch to a career that was digitised in order to have more job security in Industry 4.0.

"In terms of trends that emerged from our report, in retrospect, there wasn't that many surprises. I think the reason we witnessed such an uptake and surge in women engaging in online learning and upskilling was primarily driven by the fact that the pandemic

I think the reason we witnessed such an uptake and surge in women engaging in online learning and upskilling was primarily driven by the fact that the pandemic was much harder on women than men." was much harder on women than men. On a global scale more women lost their jobs, and even those that didn't lose their jobs, it became clear that their jobs were under real threat. The jobs that were digitising the most quickly were in industries such as retail, which is traditionally a sector dominated by women, and which is increasingly going online. The urgency for women to move into jobs that are more digitally secure is much higher than that urgency for men, and part of that reason is typically men work in roles like construction, which is not going to digitise tomorrow," said Vandenbosch.

According to Vandenbosch, another key factor fueling the growth of online learning amongst women was the fact that so many companies were allowing their employees to work remotely.

However, if you need to work in a physical retail store, or work in the hospitality service industry to make a living, then the option to work remotely does not exist.

"When I started at Coursera I was going to come into the office, but now I don't go to the office and work exclusively from home. We know that this has happened at many, many levels across the world. What that does is give people flexibility, so women can now work from home, and they can keep half an eye on the household and still be very productive at work. But if they are employed in the service industry, or in a client facing role, then they can't work from home. They can only work from home if they are employed in a digital profession, so that's why so many of them realised it's time to change track here and pursue STEM skills because they need digital careers," said Vandenbosch.

The pandemic also provided women with the ability to learn from home, and Vandenbosch believes the way the courses are designed by Coursera makes it more accessible and easier for women to learn online, as they have both the autonomy to engage with the online material how they wish, and more importantly when they engage with it.

"At Coursera, we make sure that all our coursework has low digital download weight, so it's easy to get it off the internet. One of the things that was really fascinating for me that emerged from the report was the fact that women use mobile much more than men. The primary reason for that is they have so many different things to do, so they could be learning for 10 minutes, whilst the potatoes are cooking, or they have just put their children down for a nap. Online



learning that is chunked is much easier for them to consume than the format of online learning where you go and sit in a room and must listen and watch someone talk at you for 2 hours," said Vandenbosch.

The Chief Content Officer at Coursera expanded more on the level of certificates that are being pursued by women globally, and the types of professions that they are seeking employment in.

"We have entry-level professional certificates, and those certificates enable people over a relatively short period of time (3-6 months) to learn the skills that are required to attain an entry-level position in a digital field. For example, let's say a woman has a degree in English, but she can't work anymore, well now with our online courses, over a period of 3-6 months, she can now apply for an entry-level position in data analysis, data science, or user experience design, as all those jobs can be done remotely and that now gives her a pivot. The proportion of women that started learning entry-level positions grew measurably during the pandemic, as they fundamentally recognised they had to change and they did," said Vandenbosch.

Vandenbosch acknowledged that gender disparity in the IT and other STEM-related fields has improved significantly over the years and used her own journey as a barometer of that progress.

"When I went to university to study Computer Science, I did not have a single female teacher. When I got my first job there



...

were two women in the entire organisation, so I was quite alone. However, over the years that has lessened and lessened, and earlier I was in a meeting with some of my Coursera colleagues and it was all women – and on our executive staff at Coursera there are five women and five men, so we have come a long, long way, but there is still work to be done," said Vandenbosch.

In terms of what she believes needs to be done to continue to bridge the gender divide that still exists within the global IT ecosystem, Vandenbosch believes the best tool at our disposal is female empowerment and visibility.

"In my estimation what I firmly believe will help women more than anything else is seeing other women and that is starting The proportion of women that started learning entry-level positions grew measurably during the pandemic, as they fundamentally recognised they had to change and they did."

> to happen. It's incumbent on all of us to make sure that women see women and can talk with women. On Coursera, we have found that women complete courses that are taught by women at a much higher rate than men complete those courses. Women also do better when we adopt good teaching practices, which is not just yack at someone, but instead have more interactive experiences. Research conducted by Cambridge University has shown that women tend not to speak up in a classroom, but in an online classroom everyone is much more equal, and ultimately that gives them the confidence they need to move into the workplace

knowing that they have been successful," said Vandenbosch.

Vandenbosch concluded a wonderful interview by reinforcing the fact that your professional career is a long one, and that once you make a career choice you don't have to necessarily settle for that and stressed that if you want to do something else with your career then you can, as it's never too late to retrain and reskill.

"I think what is very important for women to recognise is that you have a long work career, and you don't have to stay in that one job for the rest of your life when you first start out. I think some of the stress that people feel comes from the fact that they believe that they can only do this one job. However, the advent of these introductory certificates coupled with the fact that on Coursera you can now stack your education, so you don't lose what you have already done, allows you to build it in to the next step of your journey. We have an introductory certificate on our platform that allows you to transfer real university credit into a Bachelor of Computer Science degree at the University of London, and once you have got that you are then ready to do a master's degree without any entrance work. It's a beautiful path once you're on it, and you can step off it and get back on it depending on what works for you, and that is the beauty of working on Coursera to accomplish your goals you dictate your own path and can reshape your future," said Vandenbosch. Come

SPECTRUM NETWORKS

THE CODE TO SUCCESS

Navin Tyagi, Senior Trainer & Consultant at Spectrum Networks an IT and Training Consultancy company headquartered in Dubai, tells CNME more about how Low Code Application Development gives enterprises the agility needed to thrive in the new digital economy – and explains in forensic detail why it is beneficial for organisations in the Middle East to adopt it.

hat is Low Code Application Development

(LCAD)?

Low Code Application Development (LCAD) is the practice of developing software without having to do the traditional programming or coding (as we know it). Power users and business users, with the help of the visual development tool, with easy drag and drop options, can develop rich applications. This reduces the development time and increases the productivity. There are many companies that are offering a rich set of tools and services for Low Code Application Development (LCAD).

What is the need for Low Code Application Development (LCAD)? How can organisations in the MENA region benefit from this?

There is always a shortage of developers and programmers across various organisations and traditional development using developers takes up more time and budgets. At the same time, IT budgets are getting curtailed, while companies are looking for more applications and automations.

Low Code Application Development removes dependencies on costly developers so that we can employ them in other major enterprise projects. What's more, the costing for LCAD, as compared to traditional programming development, is 74% less. The future looks fantastic, it is heading towards no code and low code. And since this seems to be the global trend, even the Middle East region will greatly benefit from this.

What are the benefits of Low Code Application Development platforms for organisations?

The most important aspect is that it improves agility. It takes very little time to develop applications and then further reduces time for production. It increases productivity and can be used across a variety of devices such as mobile phones,



Navin Tyagi Sr. Trainer & Consultant, Spectrum Networks

tablets, or even by non-IT employees, whom we refer to as citizen developers those who understand just the business process-they can also develop business applications for their organisations.

The third and most important aspect is that it doesn't require complex development and large- scale development teams, so it helps organisations save costs.

How has the post-pandemic situation further contributed to the demand for Low Code Application Development?

The pandemic has imposed lots of constraints on businesses and the way organisations use using IT and communicate with each other. Post the pandemic, there is constraint on manpower, there's shortage of skills, budget constraints, resource constraints-you see these patterns everywhere.

However, at the same time, companies also want the solutions to their applications to be delivered quickly. On top of this, with remote work gaining traction, there are rising expectations from customers for a strong IT business partnership. Organisations wish to reduce their paperwork, they wish to go digital, but at the same time, they don't want to compromise on security and compliance needs, and this is the perfect case for Low Code Application Development.

How is Spectrum Networks involved in the area of Low Code Application Development?

Spectrum Networks provides scaling for medium as well as large enterprises, including government entities and public sector organisations, and we do provide trainings on Microsoft Power Platform.

I've been a certified Microsoft certified trainer for over 15 years, and I've done regular trainings on Power Platforms and Cloud. In the last two to three years as an organisation, we've conducted hundreds of programs on Power Platforms - we have trained thousands of employees across the Middle East, and we conduct



regular free workshops on power platforms.

What is Microsoft Power Platform? And what makes Power Apps ideal for developing innovative apps? Power Platform is Microsoft's low code application development platform which consists primarily of four key services: Power Apps, which allows you to create apps very quickly without any programming background,

66

Low Code Application Development removes dependencies on costly developers so that we can employ them in other major enterprise projects." Power Automate, which lets you automate complex business workflows, Power BI which is good at visualisation, dashboarding and data analytics and the Power Virtual agent, which lets you create chatbots without coding experience.

In addition to this, we have three shared services: AI Builder, which lets you utilise the artificial intelligence in Power Apps and power platform without any AI background, Data Warsverse, Dataverse which is a managed database and the connectors which lets you connect to hundreds of data sources.

There are three key benefits of Power Apps: the first one is that it's easy to use. It lets you create apps very quickly with no coding background with simple drag and drop features. Secondly, it utilises tons of data sources without any programming background. Third, it allows you to utilise Artificial Intelligence inside Power Apps and Power Automate.

What are some of the common use cases for businesses and organisations to develop applications using Microsoft Power Platform? Power Platform finds its use cases in multiple line of business applications with great customer experience. It helps business users connect various Office 365 services like one Drive, Outlook, SharePoint, to name a few.

We can also use it in employee onboarding applications, image processing tools, service request applications and if we talk about power automate, we can automate complex business processes including UI automation. We can create apps using the using the Power Platform for automating tasks and reducing manual paperbased work.



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SOLARWINDS

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

Sascha Giese, Head Geek at SolarWinds, has revealed the best practices that enterprises should adopt when backing up all their mission-critical data, especially amidst the backdrop of a constantly evolving threat landscape.

n 2021, the number of ransomware attacks doubled compared to 2019. Data is the latest industry driver and is becoming a recurring target of ransomware attacks. Protecting mission-critical data is a top priority. But what if the digital firewall fails or you get hit by a worst-case scenario attack? Then only a backup can help.

One year ago, in Strasbourg on the Rhine, a data center was hit by a worst-case attack, and the cloud provider lost the data of thousands of customers. Unlike a ransomware attack, this data can't be recovered by paying a ransom—it's gone unless you have a backup.

Backups aren't only a simple copy of mission-critical data—they're a guarantee you'll be able to resume operations as quickly as possible in the event of a failure." If you haven't considered it before, on World Backup Day it's time to think about how you're backing up your data and keeping your information safe from digital thieves.

Who Takes Care of the Backup?

Ransomware is a malicious file that infiltrates systems and encrypts files. Access to these files is then denied, and, like a digital hostage situation, the data can be ransomed. An attack like this is less of a problem with a functioning backup as it's relatively easy to restore the files from the backup and paying a ransom isn't required.

It doesn't hurt to create a backup yourself even if your provider offers a backup service. Consider the following points when it comes to protecting your data with a backup:

• Never rely on your chosen cloud provider to automatically back up your data.

• Beware of cheap cloud offers—these usually don't include a backup.

• When it comes to backups, the cloud provider and customer

usually share the responsibility. The provider guarantees the security of the data; however, the backup of the data is up to the customer.

Consider a Multi-Layered Approach

Consider a multi-layered approach when planning your backup strategy. This starts with a file system that uses copy on write—if you change something somewhere, then a copy is automatically made. You can also create snapshots using certain video management systems. These save the status quo of the edit and archive it. If you change something during video editing, or if the changes you made are not what you expected, you can simply fall back on the snapshot—a mini backup designed to simplify your work considerably.

Hot, Cold, Offsite Backup—Better Safe Than Sorry

There are two main differences when dealing with backed-up data: hot backups and cold backups. A hot backup is always actively connected to the system and continuously mirrors data.

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This makes it easy to roll out the backup in the event of a system failure. However, in the event of a ransomware attack, this hot backup might also be encrypted. This paralyzes the operation because you have no data to fall back on.

This is when you'd consider creating a cold backup. A cold backup isn't permanently connected to the system. It's connected once a week, for example, recorded with the backed-up data, and then disconnected after. Where there is no connection, no harmful encryption can take place. If you want to be on the safe side, consider an offsite backup. In this case, the backed-up data is located at a different site, completely separated from all systems.

The High Value of Backup

Backups should be subject to the same security rules as main data. This includes sharing processes, permissions, and physical and digital security measures. Backups aren't only a simple copy of mission-critical data—they're a guarantee you'll be able to resume operations as quickly as possible in the event of a failure. This makes backups equally, if not more, valuable than the actual data. Therefore, you should generally give them a high priority.

Thanks to digitalisation and remote working environments, organisations' business practices are shifting more to digital environments. But this is where greater and more dangerous activities lurk. It's become necessary to resolutely counter data theft and digital hostage-taking resulting from ransomware.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Fejsal Čelebić, Product Sales Expert at Infobip, believes that customers in today's 'experience economy' demand a seamless, consistent, and personalised touch when they engage with a product or brand. In his exclusive op-ed he outlines why omnichannel solutions are so critical to fueling those digital experiences.

> mnichannel Communications' Role in Cultivating the B2C Relationship:

It is a well-known fact that in order for a business to claim customer journey success, CX must be dynamic and accessible continuously.

After all, from a customer standpoint, it is often experiences, not expectations, that are compared. As a result, everyone from Disney and Starzplay to Uber and Swvl now have fully integrated omnichannel solutions to provide greater connectivity and seamless communications for their clients.

For those who have not yet embraced change, here is why it is truly the right time to join.

Why Omnichannel solutions are essential:

To begin with, this is your chance to create experiences at bar-to-none levels for your customers and your team. By creating an integrated omnichannel experience you are establishing multiple touchpoints (based on customer personal preferences - interest, channel, device, time, etc.), and you are ensuring that you are there for them 24/7with consistent investment in understanding insights to build a strong relationship and deliver a seamless experience.

Since the service is completely digitised, think of how much time, energy, and cost you will be saving your team and company.

Empowered Customers & Brands:

My favorite trait for omnichannel solutions is its innate ability to empower your customers. You are giving them the option to reach you on their channel of choice, at a time and place convenient for them. What's more, by evolving to accommodate customer needs, you too as a business (or a brand) are evolving.

Knowing Your Customer:

Providing a personalised buying and serving experience will not only result in higher customer satisfaction rates, but it is also a key contributing factor to "knowing your customer," which will help you sell, sell.



ROI:

There is a significant impact on ROI. Omnichannel communications provide improved customer retention and sales in addition to be being a gateway to upselling because of superior visibility into the customer journey. The more you engage with your customers the more time you will have to present ancillary products and services. So, ROI is guaranteed by delivering personalised messaging, consistent experience, continuity of communication, and enhanced customer

77

My favorite trait for omnichannel solutions is its innate ability to empower your customers." journey integrated with a datadriven approach.

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

So, now that we've answered why cloud communication, we move on to the fun part, which is shopping for the right partner to help elevate your CX. Here's what you need to assess:

Is the service scalable?

A cloud communication service provider must, as a start, display the ability to adapt to change, i.e. give you access to the channels your customers use now and the channels they might want to use in the future.

Does it provide a 360 view?

The implementation of 360 view will enable a greater level of automation of managed services, which will enable brands and enterprises to deliver a better customer experience through advanced data mining and more granular insights into consumer preferences.

How many direct carrier connections do they have with mobile operators?

You want a provider that can give you true global reach, high delivery speed open rates, and the ability to reach a large number of users with a high level of security, reliability, and performance.

Will I get the right support?

From assistance with testing and integration to advice on messaging best practices, a supportive team with a high level of technical expertise makes all the difference.

AMAZON WEB SERVICES

WAKE-UP CALL

Phil Le-Brun, Enterprise Strategist at Amazon Web Services, has declared that the COVID-19 crisis was the 'wake-up' call that many enterprises in the travel and hospitality sector needed to meet the new expectations of consumers in the customer-driven experience economy.

> nnovations, born out of disruption, will impact and improve the way we fly, sleep, eat, and experience the world in the years ahead. COVID-19 proved to be a generational disruptor, and for travel and hospitality, survival was the order of the day. Companies grappled to preserve liquidity while attempting to navigate the crisis.

While companies vied with cost control, customers didn't relax their expectations. No, they demanded fast responses from airlines, restaurants, and hotels on such specific needs as refunds, deliveries, and clarification on changing rules. Whilst too early to draw a line under this tumultuous period, we can look back on what we've learned, and forward to what we can achieve. Success will belong to those who capitalise on these learnings and grab the future with vigour and agility.

Yes, the cloud features here, but it is a combination of culture, leadership, and technology which has differentiated companies' progression through the pandemic.

The crisis was a wake-up call to many that customerobsessed decision-making triumphs over slow, introspective organisations. It's not just about reacting to crises, but about continually responding to and delighting your customers.

Finding Common Threads of Success in Enterprise Leadership

We have been privileged to talk to thousands of C-Suite leaders during the pandemic. Their ability to rapidly deliver solutions was amazing. In the industry I have the most affinity to, restaurants, the pivot to delivery was notable.

Examples abound: Domino's Pizza Enterprises' Project 3TEN using Machine Learning to predict and rapidly delivery pizzas safely to their customers, McDonald's brisk scaling of home delivery to over 30,000 restaurants, and Taco Bell enabling delivery using AWS serverless technology to minimise unnecessary infrastructure work and cost.

The use of technology was impressive, but another theme also caught my attention: a different style of leadership, one that liberates employee potential, promotes customercentricity, and sets bold goals. These are the hallmark characteristics we look for in our own leaders at AWS.

These leaders are ones who understand that the solution to uncertainty and volatility is a stubborn vision executed through experimentation. They are leaders who get that value is delivered despite the organisational silos, not because of them. They have discovered through planning or circumstance that pushing decisions deeper down into their companies acted as an organisational force multiplier and a motivator for their employees.

They showed a deep level of concern for their customers and employees not just through the words they spoke, but through the actions they took. This could be seen at Meliá Hotels International with an innovative zerocontact check-in experience and Korean Air who went the extra mile to reassure customers about their health on flights. The mantra of "it takes a crisis to trigger change" held true, but what can we learn from the past to more deliberately power the future? Here are a few thoughts from talking to our customers.

Innovate to Meet Evolving Customer Expectations and Needs

There is no returning to normal with your customers. A new bar on convenience has been set. Personalised, frictionless eCommerce is being embraced by demographics previously not engaged online. While we all hunger to get back to the physical world, much of this online uptick will remain such as premium meal delivery from restaurants and hotel's support of hybrid virtual-physical. What do your customers and employees really want? Not what do you really want them to want?

If you survived and thrived during the pandemic, you have likely adopted some

The crisis was a wake-up call to many that customerobsessed decision-making triumphs over slow, introspective organisations." element of a digital DNA whether consciously or not. The enforced move to remote work is a common example, prompting companies to rethink how they engage with their own staff. These operating model changes need to be nurtured and embedded in your culture, fighting that desire to return to the status quo.

This is natural segue to the cloud. Electricity is critical to our businesses, but I haven't heard a single company make the case for why they need to generate their own electricity. The same is true with the cloud. Leaders who believe differently are more than likely a little confused about the business they are in and what the cloud actually is.

I've heard stories of companies who couldn't get into their data centre during the pandemic or suffered from the lack of investment in business continuity and compute elasticity. This doesn't need to be you. Recognising the cloud as a business enabler allows you to more focus on your guests and their needs.

This isn't just about stopping doing things; it's also about taking different approaches. For instance, talent will be at a premium as life returns to some semblance of normality. We are already seeing difficulties in recruitment as businesses reopen, just like before the pandemic. 49

OPINION



Where there aren't physical workplace constraints, look for talent in places you haven't looked before. Invest in automation whether in your functional departments or physical outlets to free

6

Whether you are a restaurateur, hotelier, airliner, create related technology, or play another role altogether, you can reinvent the customer experience and your company in some of the most people-centric industries." up your employees to focus on the most valuable, differentiated activities. Look for opportunities to bring together data for machine learning experiments to reimagine areas of your business and embed a continual improvement mindset. Opportunities such as predictive maintenance and inventory forecasting can improve resilience, improve cash flow, and reduce manual processes. "I don't have time" is not a phrase customers are willing to accept from a company that lags their demands.

All of this comes together with bold, customer-led goals from leadership, clearly and regularly communicated. I've taken heart from how leaders have made communication a higher priority, not wrapped in ceremonies of formal gatherings to hear words of wisdom, but more in the genuine desire to regularly connect with employees at all levels.

This inclusiveness is the new norm. The imposition of multiple management layers makes it difficult to tap into our employees' motivation and passion. The last year gave us no choice here, treating many more employees as leaders, giving them a voice in how work needed to get done.

Whether you are a restaurateur, hotelier, airliner, create related technology, or play another role altogether, you can reinvent the customer experience and your company in some of the most peoplecentric industries. Don't predict the future or wait for it to happen to you: create it.





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