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THE NEXT DIGITAL UNIVERSE

NAIM YAZBECK, GENERAL MANAGER OF MICROSOFT UAE, TELLS CNME ABOUT ITS METAVERSE MISSION THAT IS TAILORED TO HELP THEM CULTIVATE NEW INNOVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES IN THE NEXT DIGITAL UNIVERSE.

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Yazbeck was hired last vear, and his enthusiasm for his job at Microsoft is infectious, and that is something that comes across strongly throughout our in-depth conversation."

THE NEXT DIGITAL **UNIVERSE**

icrosoft certainly need no introduction to our readers – as the US behemoth is one of the most innovative companies on the planet. However, it is a company known for not resting on the burgeoning Metaverse space shows its intent on continuing to be a leader for an era described by many tech analysts as the 'next digital

On the front cover of January's edition of CNME, is Naim Yazbeck, General Manager of Microsoft UAE.

Yazbeck was hired last year, and his enthusiasm for his job at Microsoft is infectious, and that is something that comes across strongly throughout our in-depth conversation.

Yazbeck believes the steps taken by Microsoft, such as its acquisition of Activision Blizzard, will serve as the building blocks in their bid to cultivate an environment that will allow them to continue to drive innovation and technological

He explained their Metaverse strategy in the below excerpt from our conversation.

Our approach to the Metaverse is that it is an immersive world enabled by a distinctive set of technologies, including AI, IoT and digital twin technology, which allow for persistent, digital representations connected to aspects of the real world."

It is a wide-ranging interview with Yazbeck, who has been tasked with the responsibility of executing Microsoft's goals in the UAE, and we also discuss the trends in the datacenter space, issues around security – and how Microsoft is helping to drive digital transformation across the Middle East.

ChatGPT is a new topic that has really garnered attention of late, especially since going public in November 2022.

The Open AI platform has become hugely popular on a global scale. However, many IT experts fear that the tool could be used by cybercriminals as another form of

CNME spoke to executives from Trellix and Freshworks to find out more about the ChatGPT phenomenon.

Samer Al Jayyusi, Regional Director for Datacenters at Dell Technologies believes that servers hold the key for igniting the 'innovation engines' that exist within many businesses. In a compelling interview he declared that servers would act as the 'bedrock of the new digital journey'.

CNME also secured excellent interviews with Asif Khan from Mitel, and Naser Darwazeh, General Manager at GCG

Khan disclosed the huge changes that have occurred within the global distribution model – and the opportunities that now exist in Distribution 2.0.

Naser Darwazeh explained how the Managed Print Services company was facilitating digital transformation – and used their motto of 'business made easy' as a guiding light. In addition to this, we have interviews with Edgio and

YouGotaGift, as well as a whole host of insightful thought leadership articles on a vast range of different topics from ServiceNow, Kissflow, Cloudflare and contributing editor at tahawultech.com Veronica Martin, who wrote about the rise of chatbots in the retail sector.

Our CIO Leadership Awards will take place on February 16th at The Taj Exotica Resort & Spa – and we are looking forward to hosting our first event of 2023.

Our award ceremonies always provide a great opportunity for us to network, meet and exchange new ideas with all our partners and clients under the one roof.

I'd like to take this opportunity to wish all our customers, partners and clients a hugely successful 2023.

Mark Forker Editor



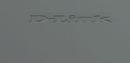


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PLUG AND PLAY



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6 **News**

> CNME rounds up the biggest regional and global developments in enterprise technology, which includes the news that RedHat has launched a new toolkit designed to help enterprises migrate, a new report shows that businesses are employees are at odds over workplace innovation - and Starlink inks a new distribution agreement with Rapid7.

Husain Makiya, CEO of YouGotaGift, reveals how its decision to pivot to the B2B space generated a whole swathe of new opportunities for the online gifting company.

18 Richard Yew. Senior Director. Product Management - Security at Edgio believes their holistic approach to security has struck a chord with the cybersecurity ecosystem.

32 Cathy Mauzaize, VP - EMEA South at ServiceNow believes the continued adoption of nascent technologies will foster an environment for enterprises to focus on 'business agility'.

36 Asif Khan, Channel Director, Middle East & Africa at Mitel, talks about the new trends and opportunities emerging from the new era of Distribution 2.0.

48 Sooho Choi, Managing Director at Alvarez & Marsal, has expressed his concern that rigid data protection laws could stall the development of 'smart destinations' across the Middle East.

FOUNDER, CPI Dominic De Sousa (1959-2015)

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Red Hat helps enterprises modernise at scale with new migration toolkit

Red Hat, Inc., the world's

leading provider of open-source solutions, today announced the general availability of Migration Toolkit for Applications 6, based on the open-source project Konveyor, aimed at helping customers accelerate large-scale application modernisation efforts. The toolkit enables customers to better assess, prioritise and modernise their applications across hybrid cloud environments on Red Hat OpenShift, the industry's leading Kubernetes platform.

James Labocki, Senior Director, product management, Red Hat said, "Hybrid cloud isn't just the future of computing—it's here now, and Red Hat is determined to give our customers the tools, direction, and intelligence to help them bring their applications to this new world. We know that transformation doesn't happen overnight, which is why Red Hat Modernisation Toolkit for Applications is designed to accelerate modernisation, not stifle it, by easing the process of bringing traditional applications to a hybrid cloud-ready platform with analysis and automation".



James Labocki, Senior Director, Product Management, Red Hat.

Businesses and employees at odds over workplace innovation

Almost all (81%) of survey

respondents in the Middle East believe their organisation is more innovative if employees are in the office, according to research unveiled today by VMware Inc., a leading innovator in enterprise software.

"Greater economic uncertainty is propelling businesses to become even more focused on innovation and productivity, but this shouldn't be at the expense of all the progress made in developing more flexible working practices", said Shankar Iyer, Senior Vice President and General Manager, End-User Computing, VMware. "Research has shown that allowing hybrid work creates happier, more engaged, and more collaborative teams, which can naturally lead to increased productivity. Employees believe they can achieve their best



Shankar Iyer, Senior Vice President and General Manager, End-User Computing, VMware.

work when given the choice of hybrid working, combined with the tools to support this, yet business leaders believe the office is where innovation is driven. Our research suggests that more companies need to deploy formal metrics to measure impact to ensure perception does not outweighing reality. Those with hybrid working policies are clearly taking this very seriously".

WS02 closes yet another successful year

WSO2, a global leader in digital

transformation technologies, today announced that it is on track to close this financial year with 30% year-over-year (YoY) growth. Contributing to customer adoption was WSO2's participation in several of the world's most influential tech and software development conferences visited by over 500,000 industry experts in 2022. More than 800 customers in over 90 countries—including government agencies and global leaders in financial services, communications, healthcare, and technology—now rely on WSO2's products and solutions.

"For a company founded in Sri Lanka to stand side by side at leading global events with technology giants like Microsoft, Google, and Intel is an impressive feat. It demonstrates the company's, and our people's, standing within the industry", said Radhik Colombage, Vice President of Corporate Marketing at WSO2. "In the past year alone, we've presented at over 100 events, speaking to thousands on diverse platforms and stages. These events attract the who's who, the movers-and-shakers, and thought leaders of next-generation industries. That is a massive accomplishment, showing how much we've grown as a company over the past two decades".



Radhik Colombage, Vice President of Corporate Marketing at WSO2.

StarLink signs up with Rapid7 for Middle East distribution

StarLink, an Infinigate Group

Company, today announced expansion of its Risk and Compliance portfolio with the onboarding of Rapid7, a leader in cloud risk and threat detection. This partnership will cater to the Middle East distribution of the Rapid7 portfolio.

Today's threat landscape is boundaryless and the attack techniques are novel, which can come as a nasty surprise. With enterprises transitioning to the cloud, cloudfocused threats are on the rise and the need to detect risks and respond in real-time is becoming a high priority across various industries. With a very strong combination of cloud risk management and threat detection capabilities, Rapid7 empowers enterprises to secure their businesses by reducing the attack surface and eliminating threats with zero compromise.

Ahmed Diab, COO, StarLink



(L-R) Ahmed Diab, COO, StarLink and David Howorth, Vice President EMEA Sales, Rapid7.

commented, "The SecOps teams are weighed down by the enormous load and velocity of threats and are under tremendous pressure to ensure their organisation's data and assets are secure. The two comprehensive offers by Rapid7 - Threat Complete and Cloud Risk Complete - empower the teams to contain advanced threats and deliver world class cloud security. Rapid7 strengthens our Risk and Compliance portfolio and jointly we look forward to providing an innovative experience to enterprises and keeping their

businesses secure and protected".

"We are delighted to have forged this strategic partnership with StarLink, which reaffirms our commitment to helping our customers and channel partners across the Middle East", said David Howorth, Vice President EMEA Sales, Rapid7. "With the adoption of cloud technologies increasing rapidly across the

region, we believe that StarLink shares our vision to simplify the complex by providing a relevant platform of security solutions to support their extensive partner network".

As a value-added distributor, StarLink will support the partnership with technical, marketing and onground expertise as well as open up StarLink's extensive channel network to generate new business opportunities for Rapid7 in the region and to meet with the roadmap that has been jointly put in place for 2023.

Data collaboration is fundamental to tackle humanitarian challenges

Lenovo has announced the results of

the 'Data for Humanity' report, which cites a collaborative approach to data as fundamental to improving global stability and security. The research indicates that companies successfully using data across several business areas are more likely than others to be taking action against humanitarian challenges. This same group, dubbed Data Leaders, are already benefitting financially too, with over three-quarters (78%) having increased their revenues over the past 12 months, compared to only half (50%) of those not fully harnessing their data. With an expectation to increase their revenues by 50%, the study also finds that companies will invest an average of \$3million in data technology and

initiatives over the next 12 months. But while profit is undoubtedly important in these turbulent times, purpose is equally front of mind for business leaders.

"Data has the potential to help tackle a multitude of business and

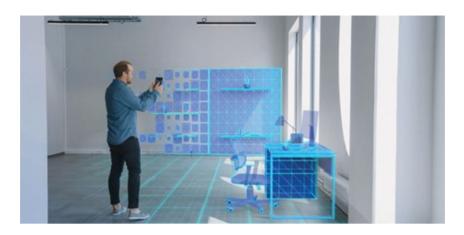


Giovanni Di Filippo, EMEA President, Lenovo Infrastructure Solutions Group.

humanitarian challenges while boosting profits in the process, so it's a win-win for today's organisations who are actively harnessing the value of the data they have", comments **Giovanni Di Filippo, EMEA President, Lenovo Infrastructure Solutions Group**.

"It's clear that leaders at companies large enough to make a difference to the world are recognising this as they look to increase investments in capabilities like artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, and data storage. The optimism shown through this research demonstrates executives' strong confidence in the capabilities of data — particularly when we consider the challenging economic backdrop that many companies are experiencing".

Ensuring the future of corporate environments



Companies will need to adapt to

new models of corporate office environments, and for this digital pathway it is paramount to ensure several essentials – digital safety and inclusion.

Digital inclusion

While augmentation technologies aim to replace parts of the human body with an artificial implant, they've been also considered for improving quality of life. According to Kaspersky research, people considered improvements of physical

health (40%) or eyesight (33%). Moreover, augmentation brings individuals' skills to the new level providing benefits to the companies too as it helps address the workforce gaps the world foresees.

So, a company's approach to "metaoffices" should eliminate such negative scenarios as enhancement of cognitive and physical abilities that lead to the division of "superhumans" and those people who decided not to augment themselves. An enterprise should consider the work environment is a

comfortable and inclusive place for such people, and social support for those employees who aim to augment themselves.

Digital security

To mitigate security risks, creation of a safe corporate environment is needed. The first and foremost solution is a comprehensive cybersecurity policy for bionic devices. Presenting color-coded zones approach, it is designed to secure workspace for everyone and everywhere depending on the maturity of internal IT infrastructure.

From light "green" and "yellow" zones covering public areas (parking, loading and unloading zones or lobbies), to sensitive "red" zones where such facilities as data centres and server rooms can be located. This policy offers a range of standardisation processes and enhances security granting better inclusion of employees using bionic devices into the corporate affairs when in the office.

APT actor disguises malware as venture capital funds

Kaspersky researchers have discovered

that the infamous Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) actor BlueNoroff added new sophisticated malware strains to its arsenal. BlueNoroff is known as the threat actor that targets financial entities' cryptocurrency around the world, specifically aiming at venture capital firms, crypto startups, and banks. Now the BlueNoroff actor is experimenting with new file types to convey their malware more efficiently and has created more than 70 fake domains of venture capital firms and banks to lure the employees of startups into a trap.

BlueNoroff is part of a larger Lazarus group and uses their sophisticated malicious technologies to attack organisations that, by the nature of their work, deal with smart contracts, DeFi, Blockchain, and the FinTech industry. In 2022, Kaspersky experts already reported about the series of attacks detected on cryptocurrency startups worldwide conducted by BlueNoroff, but afterwards there was a lull. However, based on Kaspersky's telemetry, this autumn the threat actor returned to attack – and now it is to be even more sophisticated and active than ever before.

Imagine that you are an employee in the sales department of a large financial entity. You receive a letter with doc file - a contract from a client. You think: "we should quickly open this file and also send it to the boss!" But, as you open the file, the malware was immediately downloaded to your corporate device. Now the attackers will track all your daily operations and, while they are planning an attack strategy for theft. The very moment that someone from the infected company tries to transfer a large amount cryptocurrency, the attackers intercept the transaction, change the recipient's address, and push the amount of currency to the limit, essentially draining the account in one move.

Jedox recognised for financial planning software

Jedox, the world's most adaptable

planning and performance management platform serving the integrated business planning needs of organisations across the world, was recently recognised in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for Financial Planning Software1. Additionally, Gartner Critical Capabilities research shows Jedox performance in Use Cases across categories for Efficiency, Improved Operational Visibility and Management, and Complex Business Environment.

"Jedox powers businesses to achieve a culture of decisiveness and confidence. Customers can model virtually any scenario, integrate practically any data, and simplify cross-organisational planning to harness the insights that inform sharp decisions", says Florian



(L-R) Florian Winterstein, Jedox CEO and Dr. Rolf Gegenmantel, Chief Product Officer at Jedox.

Winterstein, Jedox CEO. "For us, being recognised by Gartner is an enlivening confirmation of our contributions to the market".

"We believe the analysis by Gartner confirms there is a widening separation of capabilities within the financial planning software market", says Dr. Rolf Gegenmantel, Chief Product Officer at Jedox. "With continued investments in solutions for sales performance management, workforce planning, and ESG initiatives, we're confident Jedox will remain a vendor of choice for organisations who need to see the big picture and tie planning to strategic analysis, reporting, and investments".

GoDaddy reveals that UAE small businesses are optimistic about growth in 2023

GoDaddy, the company that helps

entrepreneurs thrive, announced the results of its MENA Small Business Survey showing most small businesses are optimistic about growth in their business sector in 2023. The report also stated that nearly half of respondents intend to grow their small business substantially in 2023 by increasing online efforts including their online marketing (21%) and developing an online presence (19%).

Selina Bieber, Commercial Strategy **Senior Director**, International Markets at GoDaddy said: "As we slowly recover from a global pandemic, we are starting to see increased online activity and growth among start-up businesses in the UAE and wider region. The GoDaddy MENA Small Business Survey shows optimism with more sector growth in the UAE, and more and more small businesses investing in an online presence and digital tools to help acquire new customers. GoDaddy is there to support the region's entrepreneurs and small business owners every step of the way".



Selina Bieber, Commercial Strategy Senior Director, International Markets at GoDaddy.

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ESET Research discovers espionage campaign targeting Android users

ESET researchers identified an active

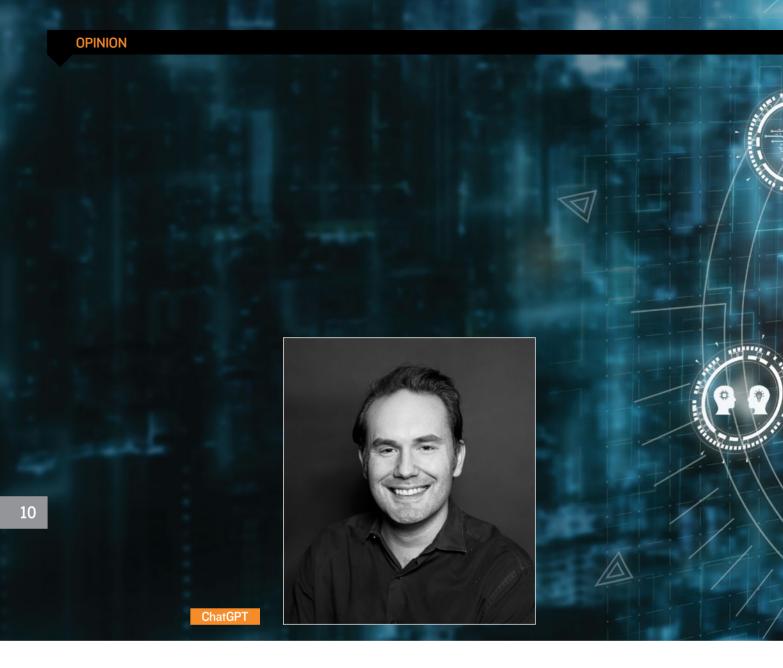
StrongPity APT group campaign leveraging a fully functional but trojanised version of the legitimate Telegram app, which despite being non-existent, has been repackaged as the "Shagle" app. This StrongPity backdoor has various spying features: its 11 dynamically triggered modules are responsible for recording phone calls, collecting SMS messages, collecting lists of call logs, and contact lists, and much more. These modules are being documented publicly for the very first time. If the victim grants the malicious StrongPity app notification access and

accessibility services, the app will also have access to incoming notifications from 17 apps such as Viber, Skype, Gmail, Messenger, and Tinder, and will be able to exfiltrate chat communication from other apps. The campaign is likely very narrowly targeted, since ESET telemetry still hasn't identify any victims.

Unlike the entirely web-based, genuine Shagle site, which doesn't offer an official mobile app to access its services, the copycat site only provides an Android app to download, with no web-based streaming possible. This trojanised Telegram app has never been made available from the Google Play store.

Code analysis revealed that the backdoor is modular and additional binary modules are downloaded from the C&C server. This means that

the number and type of modules used can be changed at any time to fit the campaign requests when operated by the StrongPity group.



WESTEDIO ChatGPT exploded into the public domain in November last year, and since then has continued to dominate column inches

globally. CNME heard the thoughts of Colin Crowley, CX Advisor at Freshworks and Steve Povolny, Principal Engineer and Director at Trellix in a bid to find out more about ChatGPT.

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penAI that announced ChatGPT, the viral AI-powered chatbot that can write essays, emails, poems and even computer code is making waves in the news.

In the same context,
Colin Crowley - CX
Advisor for Freshworks
Inc, a software company
empowering the people
who power businesses has
offered some exclusive
thoughts on how chatbots
is going to change the
business landscape.

/7/7

Chatbots and Their benefits for businesses going forward?

The main benefit will be in the enhanced natural language processing (NLP) of chatbots where chatbots would be able to understand the nuances of customer questions and

ChatGPT could create a stark, two-tier system of chatbots, with wealthy companies adopting ChatGPT and smaller companies stuck with more traditional bots." provide extremely tactical and specific answers.

A bot that operates on such a robust level could potentially revolutionize help centers/knowledge bases by removing them all together and reducing all or most knowledge-searching into bot conversations.

All of this could lead to an extensive increase in self-service capabilities among customers and the further trend towards only very complex issues being left for increasingly smaller groups of agents.



Key Concerns in Using Automated Tools

There are definitely two main concerns.

Downside #1 to ChatGPT is that its advanced AI-based logic could make business leaders overconfident in what chatbots can deliver and result in an over-reliance on chatbots. (Right now, it is easier to understand where chatbots don't add value because they aren't as advanced as the ChatGPT version – but ChatGPT could make the limits of chatbots much less obvious.)

To counterbalance this, businesses will likely have to get a lot better at understanding. – which is to say metricizing and monetizing – the value of the

human component in customer interactions.

Currently, most businesses only guess at this or define it anecdotally – but more discipline would be needed in putting data behind it and strategically guiding where to inject human beings into engagements. Simply having a human connection in some cases may be a branding opportunity for business or may be tied to higher long-term lifetime customer value or retention.

Downside #2 to ChatGPT is that, if they become more widespread, one wonders how much they will cost – especially considering that current chatbots, with all their faults, are still very pricey for companies – potentially hurting small business.

ChatGPT could create a stark, two-tier system of chatbots, with wealthy companies adopting ChatGPT and smaller companies stuck with more traditional bots.

This is still an issue now, but less so, since there are still many common benefits both small and large companies can gain from chatbots, even with current chatbot limitations.

Impact on the broader chatbot/conversational Al industry

I believe this type of technology will help get more companies on board with chatbot adoption, where adoption now can be significantly challenged by ambiguities about how to calculate ROI, concerns about poor chatbot experiences, and a lack of institutional knowledge of how to build chatbots (especially where we still live in a menu-based world where chatbots need to be built).

ChatGPT solves many of these issues by clearly being a superior experience, maximizing ROI through deflection, and also involving less building (since the chatbot is NLP-powered, so you're relying on internal learning rather than building complicated decision trees).

Therefore, I feel ChatGPT will help to increase chatbot adoption among skeptics – but again, this has to be taken with the downside of overobsessing on chatbots.

Al set to permanently change marketing

One major area is that the extremely conversational and intelligent nature of chatbots like ChatGPT — especially when combined with data on customers or prospects — could greatly increase the use cases where chatbots autonomously engage prospects and customers for marketing purposes.

You could imagine a world where ChatGPT could manage an entire sales-related conversation with a prospect from start to finish (especially as sales conversations are typically much more pattern-based and regulated than support conversations).

Looking at AI more broadly we will likely see the increased personalization of everything and more and more diversified channels for delivering that personalization (like chatbots). This will make companies a lot savvier and more successful in how they position themselves to customers and make it more incumbent on them to tighten in how they form their brand.

Steve Povolny, Principal Engineer and Director at Trellix, has expressed his concerns that the capabilities of ChatGPT could be harnessed by cybercriminals attempting to use it for new forms of phishing attacks.

Below is his commentary of the potential threats posed by ChatGPT.

ChatGPT is a term that has seemingly graduated to dinner table conversation status over the last month. While its predecessors garnered interest in the data science industry, very few had realized practical uses for the average consumer.

That can be put to rest now, as the "smartest text bot ever made" has inspired thousands of innovative use cases, applicable across nearly every industry.

In the cyber realm, examples range from email generation to code creation and auditing, vulnerability discovery and much more.

However, with breakthrough advances in technology, the inevitable security concerns

While ChatGPT attempts to limit malicious input and output, the reality is that cyber criminals are already looking at unique ways to leverage the tool for nefarious purposes."

are never far behind.

While ChatGPT attempts to limit malicious input and output, the reality is that cyber criminals are already looking at unique ways to leverage the tool for nefarious purposes.

It isn't hard to create hyper realistic phishing emails or exploit code, for example, simply by changing the user input or slightly adapting the output generated.

While text-based attacks such as phishing continue to dominate social engineering, the evolution of data science-based tools will inevitably lead to other mediums, including audio, video and other forms of media that could be equally effective.

Furthermore, threat actors may look to refine data processing engines to emulate ChatGPT, while removing restrictions and even enhancing these tools' abilities to create malicious output.

While cyber security concerns have manifested, it's important to remember that this tool has even greater potential to be used for good. It can be effective at spotting critical coding errors, describing complex technical concepts in simplistic language, and even developing script and resilient code, among other examples.

Researchers, practitioners, academia, and businesses in the cybersecurity industry can harness the power of ChatGPT for innovation and collaboration.

It will be interesting to follow this emerging battleground for computergenerated content as it enhances capabilities for both benign and malicious intent.

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YouGotaGift

THE 'GIFT' THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Husain Makiya**, CEO of YouGotaGift, to find out how the company has completely revolutionised the gifting industry across the MENA region.

ouGotaGift, has established itself as the leading marketplace for digital gift cards in the Middle East since its inception in 2013.

Remarkably, if the company's CEO Husain Makiya, had not encountered difficulties when he went online to buy his friend a gift card back 9 years ago, then YouGotaGift, might never have been conceptualised.

However, YouGotaGift was launched by Makiya, and it has enjoyed phenomenal success in the convening years that have lapsed.

CNME spoke to Makiya to learn more about the company's incredible journey, it's continued evolution – and the significance of its new partnership with payments platform Tabby.

Makiya began the conversation by documenting the success enjoyed by YouGotaGift, – and outlining the primary objective of the company.

"The primary objective of the YouGotaGift is to connect the top retail brands with consumers and businesses. Our pre-paid gift cards are entirely digital, which means you can buy them online and have them delivered by email or SMS. We work with about 700+ popular brands, such as Noon, Amazon, Carrefour and Jarir Bookstore, across 20 categories that range from online shopping, retail, hypermarkets and digital products, and we serve about 2,000 corporates across the region, with a reach of just over 5 million users overall," said Makiya.

Makiya explained that the YOUGotaGift, business is divided into 3 components, the first of which is the consumer business, which he labels as consumer gifting.

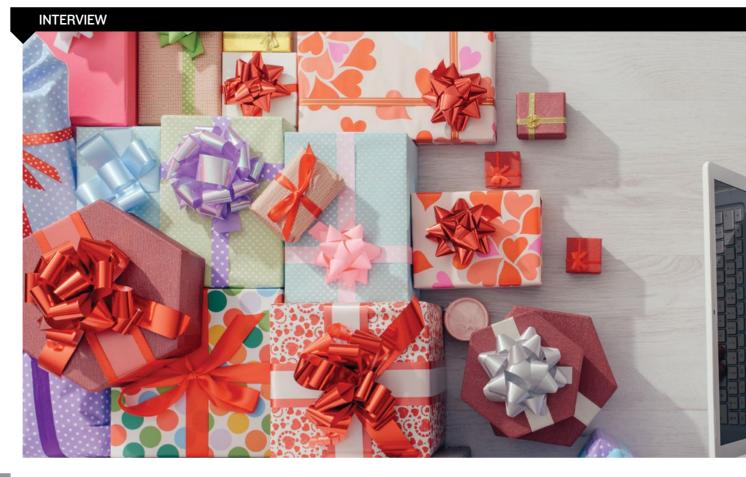
"Our consumer business segment is all about e-commerce for gift cards, where users can go online, buy a gift card, and really personalise that card and send it to their friends or family instantly. It's a fun experience with convenience embedded into it, but the experience element is

Essentially, what we do is act as a last mile redemption partner for big loyalty programs."

very important to us. In addition to this, group gifting is another feature of our overall consumer business. It is very popular amongst parents when it comes to teacher gifting, and it's also generated huge popularity within large organisations for farewells and retirements," said Makiya.

The CEO of YouGotaGift, explained the second part of their business, which he described as the first part of their B2B business, in the form of loyalty rewards.

"Essentially, what we do in this space is act as a last mile redemption partner for big loyalty programs. So, typically the loyalty programs we deal with are with banks, telcos, and airlines. A great example of this in the UAE is Etisalat's Smiles program, a hugely popular loyalty program in the country. When it comes to swapping your points, you are given the option of swapping the points you have accumulated for shopping vouchers, and we enable and power that shopping voucher category within that program. It's very much API-driven, and we have around 40 banking/ telecommunication partners



with loyalty programs that we support in terms of points redemption," said Makiya.

The third element of the YouGotaGift, operations is what they call employee and customer rewards, which, as Makiya highlighted, is predominantly focused on corporates.

"Typically, corporates will place bulk orders to reward and recognise their employees for their performance or use it if they want to engage with their customers for a new promotion or an acquisition campaign. It is a very useful product driven by a self-service portal where corporates can place their orders and customise their gift cards. In addition to this, they can also have it distributed across the organisation, or to their customers in real time. It is a very simple and lean way of sourcing gift cards and having them delivered," said Makiya.

Makiya added that YouGotaGift, operates in both the B2B and the B2C space, and have a proposition for both sides of the market, and is focused on growing its footprint across the region, where they are present in the UAE, KSA, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and Egypt.

As aforementioned above, the inspiration behind YouGotaGift, came from Makiya's own shopping experience, but as he points out below, the company has really evolved over the years and very quickly moved away from its initial plans to capitalise on other opportunities they saw emerging within the industry.

"I went online to buy a gift card for a friend, but I couldn't find a destination for gift cards, which led me to begin research to find out how big the industry was on a global scale and to find out how nascent an industry it was across the MENA region. Today, the gift card industry is worth \$800bn, and that's expected to hit \$1.4 trillion in 2026, so it's a fast-growth market. When we first started, we began as a pure consumer player, we felt that the region was very popular with retailers, and internet penetration was phenomenally high. We started by launching a website and listed some of the best popular brands in the region, and then we just expected people to come and help themselves, but what we didn't account for was that the adoption would be slow. However, in a very short space of time, we pivoted to the B2B space, and we quickly realised that there was a much bigger opportunity in the B2B space, especially when a company like Etisalat identified and discovered our digital solution for their needs," said Makiya.

When telecommunications behemoth Etisalat was taking



its first steps into repositioning itself as a digital player, YouGotaGift, was in the right place at the right time to service their needs.

"There were at a juncture where they were in the process of switching their loyalty programs from merchandise to a digital experience. The banks quickly followed Etisalat's lead, so we quickly identified the opportunity. We built solutions, products, and APIs that immediately fitted into this new ecosystem, and what gave us a real edge was how early we moved into these programs; we were in many ways almost entrenched into these programs. We grew these accounts by adding more brands and valueadded services because when you deliver such a volume of services to large organisations you have to ensure that your technology is up to scratch," said Makiya.

Makiya also reiterated the importance of delivering a seamless 'experience' in our new digital world, as we know that customers have zero tolerance for bad experiences or interactions with applications or businesses.

"We deliberately built the technology from the start to be able to deal with such large programs, and we did a lot of training on the ground with the merchants and the brands, so the acceptance would be high when a customer walks into the store, and our customer support was second to none. Our focus is all about the end-user, and gifting is a very emotional and sensitive act, so if the experience is poor, everything fails," said Makiya.

The focus of the conversation then shifted to the partnership announcement between YouGotaGift, and the shopping and payments application Tabby.

YouGotaGift, has teamed up with Tabby, to extend the ability for consumers to use Tabby's flexible payment solutions to spread out the cost of their purchases into interest-free payments.

Shoppers in UAE and KSA can buy now and pay later through Tabby on the YouGotaGift, mobile app – and this functionality will soon be available on the YouGotaGift website.

Makiya believes the partnership will allow

We pivoted to the B2B space, and we quickly realised that there was a much bigger opportunity in the B2B space."

YouGotaGift, to unlock even greater value from their portfolio of products.

"This partnership allows us to unlock even greater value for our gifting and payment products. Beyond gifting, customers are increasingly utilising eGift Cards for budgeting or accessing offers. By combining flexible payment options with our multi-brand e-gift cards, customers will be more engaged to purchase for themselves and unlock tactical offers from their favorite brands."

Makiya concluded a wonderfully candid and insightful discussion that outlined what really differentiates the company from other market rivals.

"We have evolved our business, and our first entry into the B2B space was with our loyalty rewards program, which was very much driven through APIs – but then we moved into the corporate rewards program, so we have adopted a very productcentric approach, and that has led us to success. That focus has allowed us to build great relationships in the ecosystem, and we undoubtedly have the broadest catalogue of brands in the region now, and we also have a fantastic distribution network, That distribution network really is key because retailers want to sell their gift cards, and we are here to help them sell it, and our network of clients and loyalty programs is a very interesting distribution network that every retailer wants to be part of today," concluded Makiya.

EDGIO

HOLISTIC SECURITY

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Richard Yew**, Senior Director, Product Management – Security at Edgio, to find out how their 'holistic' approach to security is really striking a chord with users on a global scale.

ichard Yew has enjoyed a fruitful career in the cybersecurity sector and is recognised as an industry thought leader by many of his peers.

In a decorated career to date, Yew worked with major content delivery players such as Akamai and Edgecast.

In June 2022, Edgecast was acquired by Limelight to create Edgio where Richard has been tasked with the responsibility of helping the content delivery network service provider expand its market presence worldwide.

CNME spoke to the dynamic security professional to find out how the company has been able to make such a positive impact in what is an ultracompetitive marketplace.

He began the conversation by highlighting how the company pursued a 'holistic' approach in terms of the way they tackle security.

"When it comes to security, at Edgio, we pride ourselves on our holistic approach. We

provide end-to-end solutions from the basic infrastructure security standpoint right through to data encryption, DDoS and application layer protection. I believe it's important to always go back to the basics and look at things objectively - and a good starting point is to ask what is the definition of security? Security for me, is what we do to help ensure that a system maintains the confidentiality, integrity and availability required to ensure that you are protected at all times," said Yew.

Yew used the example of the crippling DDoS attacks that happened in airports across the United States in October 2022, as the perfect illustration of the devastating impact DDoS attacks can have.

"Those airports were shut down by DDoS attacks,

When it comes to security, at Edgio, we pride ourselves on our holistic approach."

now granted it was only brief, but all those airports had sophisticated security solutions, so the question becomes all about how where they penetrated? What organisations have a habit of doing is focusing solely on one area, so what they do is put the best DDoS solutions on the edge, which is their web applications, but they forgot to protect the rest of their systems and origin infrastructure." said Yew.

In an effort to avoid that oversight, Yew said Edgio was fully committed to giving their customers 'complete visibility' with access to cutting-edge solutions that provide them with robust and resilient security offerings.

"Our goal at Edgio is to provide our customers with access to the most advanced solutions, but also to ensure that we provide them with 360-degree protection across their network and applications, because essentially everything that is exposed to the internet needs to be protected, not just your log-in page, your API, or your end-point — everything needs to be protected at all times," said Yew.

Edgio's diverse security solution offering has certainly resonated with users, but what is it that differentiates the company from other cybersecurity providers?

According to Yew, it's nuanced, and incorporates a combination of factors, but he highlighted how some organisations are guilty of emphasising far too much focus solely on prevention.

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"Most organisations will allocate the majority of their budgets to the prevention of an attack, at the expense of the other two components of security: the detection of an attack and the response to an attack. I like to use this analogy - despite the preventative measures we all take to stay healthy, we will still get sick at some point, it's inevitable. So, it's just as important to detect any illness quickly and to apply the appropriate remedy. The same for organisations - they need to really invest their resources on security detections in addition to their response," said Yew.

Yew said one of the key capabilities that they equip their customers with is visibility and insights on the traffic coming in and out of their networks.

"We provide a lot of capability that enables businesses to really get a better understanding and comprehensive overview of the detections across all of their network traffic, using our sophisticated edge platform and our web application and API protection (WAAP). We strive to ensure that we equip our customers with the ability to respond to Zero-day vulnerability in the quickest time. To summarise, what we do better than our competitors is ensure that the security operations teams of our customers get things done fast, and when it really counts. You need to equip customers with the tools they need, so they know that Zero-Day exploits are mitigated in the



shortest possible time," said

Edgio's Applications Platform has drawn widespread acclaim – and again, Yew stressed how the platform was designed and engineered with a 'holistic' mindset and approach.

"We want to provide our users with access to the most holistic application platform, one that is edge-enabled

Our goal at Edgio is to provide our customers with access to the most advanced solutions, but also to ensure that we provide them with 360-degree protection across their network and applications."

and has the capabilities to allow users to scale in order for them to protect their sites, accelerate their web applications - and improve their development velocity. Edgio Applications is a pioneer of web application performance by implementing a next-generation, headless platform that lets users decouple their frontend and their backend and build CDN logic into the code," said Yew.

From a performance perspective, Yew disclosed how the application performance platform is a next-generation CDN.

"The Edgio Performance solution allows us to do predictive pre-fetching, which utilises the capabilities of advanced machine learning

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derived from data from the client side. For example, when users browse a page online our technology can predict and fetch the next page that the user is most likely to click onto. This is a way in which we can achieve instant page load time and improve the Google Core Web Vitals score. This is a great example of what a next-generation CDN can do for you, and can help you improve your overall performance and revenue," said Yew.

Data from a number of comprehensive reports show that almost half of traffic on the internet is generated by bots.

As Yew pointed out, 42% of the entire internet traffic is generated by bots. It's a

huge challenge for many organisations as it can be exhaustive on resources. Edgio understands the challenge and to tackle this Edgio's Bot Management is a practical and easy to implement solution.

"A large proportion of that 42% figure is what we describe as bad bots, and that is a significant waste of bandwidth and resources in terms of the needless consumption of many businesses' infrastructure, their cloud and network resources, and all it serves to do is increase their costs," said Yew.

However, according to Yew, there can be more severe implications when it comes to bad bots.

"Unfortunately, a lot of these bad bots are performing real and harmful attacks, like account takeover, fake account creation, and fraud. Edgio handles about 5% of the internet, so we have a lot of data, and we see a lot of the traffic coming in and out of our platforms, and what we do is utilise machine learning technology on the server side to look at the traffic to, not only identify those bots, but to also categorise those bots," said Yew.

Yew conceded that there are a lot of good bots within that internet traffic, like Google Bot and SEO Bot — and cited that many partners could be running bots to ensure that they get the most business critical information from you. That's why customers need an intelligent bot solution. This is a key differentiator about Edgio bot management of good and bad bots, and not just bot mitigations like many of their competitors.

"Edgio can give users the ability to determine who are the good bots, and who are the bad bots - and that is a gamechanger for a lot of organisations. We call this bot management, but a lot of industry providers call it bot mitigation, but we are not just doing bot mitigations, we are doing bot management. Bot mitigation is just a subset of bot management, bot management provides the mitigations of bad bots, but also gives organisations the visibility and control they need for all types of bots, both good and bad," concluded Yew.

DELL TECHNOLOGIES

IGNITE YOUR INNOVATION

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Samer Al Jayyusi**, Regional Director for Datacenters at Dell Technologies, to find out how servers can be the key component in driving businesses IT innovation engines in the new digital economy.

top tips for the region's IT managers as they chart their organisation's success into the new year?

In the digital era, IT is the

In the digital era, IT is the driving force behind business success. Being ready for the future doesn't require a road or even a map, but rather an adaptable, scalable and secure IT innovation engine made up of servers, networking, storage and systems management that work together seamlessly to drive the business in whatever direction makes sense today — and be ready to shift gears quickly when the next opportunity is illuminated.

The engine you use to drive your business forward should be designed to help you innovate, adapt and grow, and this is where servers come in.

IT managers need to look at servers to address unique challenges and needs, as they are the bedrock of the digital journey.

Applications and workplaces are becoming more complex, so it is becoming imperative, now



than ever, to have end-to-end solutions that work together seamlessly.

In order to continue to innovate and lead with technology, it is essential to have an agile, reliable, future-ready server infrastructure with an array of innovations that

enhance performance, and allow organisations to grow, scale and evolve.

This will help organisations in adapting to the digital era, and responding quickly to a changing environment, as servers can provide high performance for a diverse set of applications from the edge to the cloud to the core.

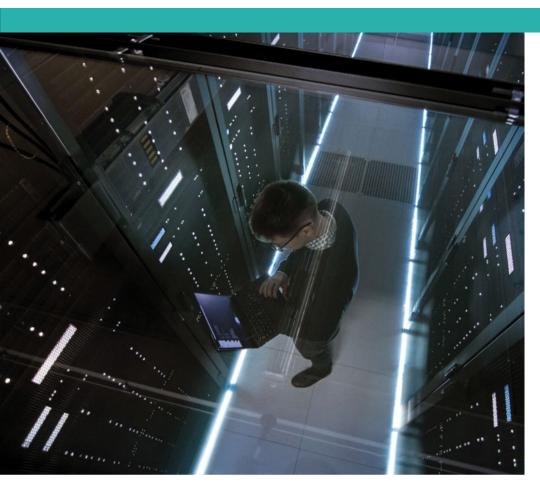
What are the benefits of proactively maintaining a modern server infrastructure? What are some of the challenges that servers help businesses solve?

Legacy infrastructure and applications increase IT complexity while a growing data landscape makes it difficult for IT to keep up — let alone drive innovation, with increasingly pervasive data requiring decentralised compute.

Servers can help enable organisations to harness advanced capabilities like AI and predictive data analytics to illuminate data driven insights, while simplifying management and strengthening security.

Additionally, the rapid

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pace of change means that organisations need to be ready to keep up with demands and stay successful.

However, growing demands on infrastructure make managing and securing technology more challenging. Through server solutions, organisations can add new technologies and modernise with scalable compute resources that support evolving business goals.

Servers can also support organisations to accelerate the implementation of complex, data centric workloads with faster development, testing and deployment to hybrid cloud infrastructure, integrating many processes into one system.

New workloads and emerging technologies require organisations to adopt the latest technology without disruption, but most IT teams are already stretched thin just "keeping the lights on."

Servers can help organisations adapt for future requirements while enhancing security and compliance and handling growing data, to deliver faster time to insights — without increasing headcounts or budgets.

What are the organisational benefits of timely server replacements and upgrades?

A server refresh can often be delayed or undervalued, but it is one of the most crucial components of an organisation's IT.

According to IDC, upgrading server infrastructure on a regular schedule improves relative performance, consolidation, management efficiency and reliability.

This means that organisations can save a lot in capital and

operating costs annually, as well as improve performance and business agility, allowing organisations to focus less on maintenance and more on innovation.

Just because a server seems to be running fine, doesn't mean it is running optimally. On average, server performance erodes by 14% annually. By the fifth year, a server has only 40% of the performance it had when it was new.

Lower performance and higher failure rates can increase unplanned downtime. At the same time, higher maintenance costs require additional investment in aging systems.

However, optimised systems can accelerate performance, and modern features can enhance asset management.

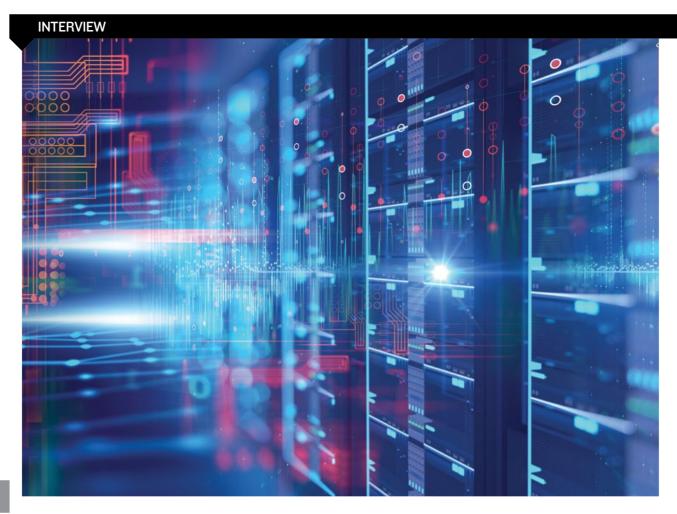
As businesses scale quickly, modern management tools allow better workload tracking and performance analysis. Upgraded servers have the latest firmware and patching updates, keeping devices secure and in compliance with enterprise specifications.

Modern servers also improve the capability for higher virtual machine density and larger virtual machines. This allows high-end business applications to migrate and run in a virtualised environment.

Fewer, more powerful systems can also reduce energy and cooling costs, data center space requirements, maintenance time and licensing costs.

Can you tell us more about Dell's server solutions?

To help organisations adapt to the digital era, Dell PowerEdge servers provide high



performance for a diverse set of applications from the edge to the cloud to the core.

The company attained the number one position in UAE, with 30.8% of share, as well as number one in Gulf, with 56% of share, as per IDC's Servers Market category tracker for the third quarter of FY2023.

Dell's performance for its server portfolio reflects the company's focus on innovation and drive to empower regional customers to address pressing business demands.

Dell Technologies PowerEdge portfolio includes rack servers, tower servers, modular infrastructure, industrialgrade OEM rugged servers, and specialty servers that are purpose-built for complex, harsh and compute-intensive workloads at the network edge.

Dell Technologies also offers

management solutions, that can help automate the full IT lifecycle with the OpenManage portfolio, increasing the productivity, reliability and cost effectiveness of servers while making IT operations more efficient.

Additionally, the Dell PowerEdge server portfolio has been segmented specifically to deliver the right combination of technology and capabilities to address unique needs for adaptive compute.

These naturally encompass a wide range of use cases, such as building a private cloud, adding

IT managers need to look at servers to address unique challenges and needs, as they are the bedrock of the digital journey." new capabilities to enable AI, refreshing infrastructure to take advantage of the cost savings and the benefits of the new PowerEdge portfolio advancements, and much more.

Some of the benefits also include autonomous compute infrastructure with intelligent systems that work together and independently to deliver outcomes aligned with business priorities, and proactive resilience designed for secure interactions and the capability to predict potential threats.

Moreover, the PowerEdge is our most sustainable server portfolio yet. Engineering advancements have helped us reduce our energy intensity in PowerEdge by 83% since 2013, and we increased our energy efficiency by 29% from the previous generation.

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DLLTechnologies

Cyber and ransomware attacks are the enemy of today's data-driven business



Immutability

Preserve data integrity and confidentiality with layers of security and controls



Isolation

Physical and logical separation of data within a vault



Intelligence

Machine learning and analytics help ensure recoverability

D LLPowerProtect Cyber Recovery



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MICROSOFT

BELIEVE THE HYPE

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Naim Yazbeck**, General Manager at Microsoft UAE, to find out more about its Metaverse ambitions, its security portfolio – and the role its datacentres are playing in terms of fostering new growth and accelerating digital transformation across the region.

he relatively new concept of the Metaverse has been dubbed by many industry experts as the 'next evolution of the internet'. However, what is Microsoft UAE's view on the Metaverse – and what do you believe the most prominent use–cases for the Metaverse is going to be to really accelerate the new Metaverse ecosystem?

I believe Microsoft's this year's theme at GITEX 2022 said it all: "Believe the hype, it's real. Enter the next digital universe".

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution got underway and we began to blend our physical and digital worlds, we were always heading towards the Metaverse.

When we think of a metaverse at Microsoft, we envision a suite of technologies that enable persistent, digital representations of aspects of our real world. This is a nascent concept but the shapes it is taking are very exciting.

We see individual mixedreality experiences, but we also see collaborative experiences. Imagine if we could bring back the office meeting without going to the office.

Meanwhile, digital twins and AI-enabled edge computing are changing the way industries behave. And of course, in the field of entertainment, we increasingly get to live our games rather than just play them.

The Microsoft Cloud will be a key enabler in this latest technology journey. We are investing in IoT and digital twin solutions at scale. We are investing in AI deployments. We continually update the presence functions within Teams.

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When we think of a Metaverse at Microsoft, we envision a suite of technologies that enable persistent, digital representations of aspects of our real world."



And we offer Metaverse-ready technologies such as Mesh and HoloLens 2. We have long had one foot in the virtual world. With the metaverse, we shall jump in with both.

In January 2022, Microsoft began its acquisition of video game behemoth Activision Blizzard in a mega billiondollar deal. The company has said the decision to acquire the company was made to allow Microsoft to become a market leader in the Metaverse. How does this acquisition strengthen Microsoft's position in this new marketplace - and specifically in relation to the UAE, what is Microsoft planning to do to become a leader in the Metaverse across the Middle East?

Microsoft has long been building towards the metaverse through our work on the Microsoft Cloud to enable the bridge between the physical and digital worlds.

Our approach to the metaverse is that it is an immersive world enabled by a distinctive set of technologies, including AI, IoT and digital twin technology, which allow for persistent, digital representations connected to aspects of the real world.

Today, we see early stages of this in scenarios such as individual mixed reality experiences, collaborative experiences, digital twins and AI-enabled edge computing.

Immersive gaming is another major area we are seeing the metaverse play out. Hence, prior to our announcement that we'd be acquiring Activatision Blizzard, we had also acquired ZeniMax Media, which owns Bethesda – creator of the "Elder Scrolls" and "Fallout" series, which are both massive virtual worlds and have recently begun offering extensive open-world multiplayer experiences.

There was also our acquisition of Mojang, maker of "Minecraft", which we leveraged to create new classroom experiences as part of our ongoing commitment to education and skilling.

In terms of our plans for the metaverse, it remains aligned to our broader mission: To empower every person and organisation in both the physical and blended worlds to achieve more through technology.

That's why earlier this year, we brought a taste of what the future of mixed reality will look like when we exclusively debuted our new HoloLens 2 device at GITEX 2022.

The mixed reality device is the next generation of wearable holographic computer — with an integrated suite of new mixed reality services, out-of-the-box apps for businesses and sensors with the capacity to perceive and predict.

It can be used across a wide number of industries and use cases and empower professionals across the realm,

Windows II is the most secure version of Windows ever, designed with hybrid-world security in mind."

from educators over doctors to manufacturers to achieve more.

The impact both economically and in terms of brand reputation can be devastating if a company is the victim of a cybersecurity attack, and we have witnessed that over the last number of years. We have also talked a lot about digital transformation over the last few years, but rarely talk about them both in the same context. However, in your opinion how important a component is 'security' in a company's digital transformation journey?

We now live and work in a multi-cloud world where cybersecurity is more important than ever. New technologies such as blockchain, the Metaverse and IoT are sending us back to the drawing board to rethink our threat postures.

The industrialisation of cyberattacks is lowering entry barriers and multiplying the number of bad actors. At the same time, our mass migration to the cloud has expanded our attack surface through stay-athome employees' vulnerable personal devices.

Our cybersecurity tools and talent should be expanding to match these twin surges, but instead we see understaffed, under-resourced, overworked SOCs.

All these factors and more have led Microsoft to invest US\$20 billion in cybersecurity over the next five years. Windows 11 is the most secure version of Windows ever, designed with hybrid-world security in mind.

www.tahawultech.com



With Microsoft Cloud
Defender, organisations can
easily visualise and manage
their security across clouds.
We are the only company
that brings together security,
compliance, identity, and
management under one roof
– a holistic approach that
addresses the most challenging
problems, such as passwords,
decentralised identification,
and data regulations.

Can you outline to our readers what role Microsoft is playing in terms of leveraging its expertise and knowledge to help secure the digital estates of businesses across the Middle East region?

Microsoft analyses 43 trillion

signals a day with sophisticated AI to understand digital threats, attack methodologies, and the psychology of the threat actor.

We employ more than 8,500 engineers, researchers, data scientists, cybersecurity experts, threat hunters, geopolitical analysts, investigators, and frontline responders in 77 countries to leverage our threat intelligence in defence of our customers.

And we maintain a network of more than 15,000 security partners who further enhance that resilience.

We continue to advise a zero-trust approach to cybersecurity that does not consider any process to be safe. We leverage legal and technological means to protect, detect, mitigate, and respond to threats in real time, and we counsel strong continuity and resilience measures for our customers.

We remain vigilant. Between July 1 2021 and June 30, 2022, we blocked 37 billion email threats and thwarted 34.7 billion attempts to compromise identities.

It is evident from the headlines that attackers are having many successes. They move with purpose and confidence through our networks and so we shall continue to invest and learn and keep our customers safe.

Microsoft recently published a comprehensive Digital Defense Report 2022, but from your perspective, what where the key takeaways from the report - and where you surprised by any of its findings?

Microsoft's Digital Defence Report 2022 shows the scope and scale of the current threat landscape. We found that the number of password attacks had risen to an estimated 921 per second, which is a 74% increase over the previous year.

We also found that 93% of our ransomware incidentresponse engagements stemmed from insufficient controls for privileged access and lateral movement.

We advocate for the principle of least privilege, where credentials are provisioned on a need-to-see basis. Every human and machine identity should only have the access level needed to perform the task at hand.

No more, no less. And those credentials should expire as soon as they are no longer needed.

Microsoft has also been able to dismantle a lot of the apparatus used by cybergangs. As of now, we have shut down more than 10,000 of their domains and around 600 used by nation-state actors.

But we know there is work left to do. The mushrooming volumes of breach attempts shows that we can never take our eye off the ball.

It is our hope that working with our security partners, governments, and customers, we can keep making progress on blocking, mitigating, and remedying cyber incidents.

Since their launch, our UAE data centres have accelerated digital transformation across the region."

In terms of nascent technologies, how important have UAE datacenters been in terms of empowering businesses to accelerate the adoption of these new technologies into their day-to-day business operations? Since their launch, our UAE data centres have accelerated digital transformation across the region.

They have allowed governments, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and a range of businesses spanning all industries to endure a parade of external shocks and emerge stronger than ever.

The trusted, versatile Microsoft Cloud delivered remote work. It allowed enterprises, both public and private, to take a fresh look at their sustainability stances and enhance their approaches.

And it allowed many businesses to reimagine their operations and thrive in the new normal.

An IDC study released at GITEX Global 2022 revealed that our Dubai and Abu Dhabi cloud locations will generate US\$8 for our partners for every dollar earned by us.

Our cloud ecosystem will bring about an estimated US\$39 billion over the next four years and create close to 100,000 jobs.

These revenue figures are a combined achievement attributed to Microsoft, its partners, and its cloud customers.

They are evidence that our commitment to the government, business community, citizens, and residents of the UAE is yielding tangible returns.



SERVICENOW

erviceNow, a leading

cloud-based digital

workflow company,

vectors that will shape the future

of business strategies in 2023.

provider, ServiceNow has long

observed and analysed which

objectives in the near future,

the complex macroeconomic

backdrop will drive business

transformation for efficiency

In an exclusive op-ed for

Cathy Mauzaize, ServiceNow's

2023 will be primarily focused

VP South EMEA believes that

on companies continuing to

implement technologies that

will enable them to prioritise

business agility.

January's edition of CNME,

and return on investment,

while growth in emerging

technologies will slow.

and its experts say that in 2023,

technology priorities will drive organisations' strategic

As an enterprise cloud

platform and services

has identified five key

EVOLUTION OF BUSINESS

Cathy Mauzaize, VP South EMEA at ServiceNow, has said that the adoption of nascent technologies will allow companies to prioritise 'business agility' which will shape the evolution of enterprise



In fact, according to an IDC survey, 95% of senior executives are already implementing a "digital first" strategy in their business model, because it is proven that digital companies' revenue growth is twice that of traditional companies.

employee engagement in an increasingly challenging and hybrid macro-environment," said Mauzaize. Below are the five key trends Mauzaize has identified for

on the path of growth.

In addition, the focus on

introducing new technologies,

such as the metaverse, will

continue to grow, to help

cultivate and maintain

Redeployment of

2023:

budgets for efficiency

In the face of runaway inflation, investments in smart digital assets will be a huge deflationary force.

Evolution of ESG as an integral part of business strategy

By 2023, ESG will be an integral part of business strategy — a new way of doing business, not just a list of frameworks, standards and guidelines that are far removed from an organisation's objectives.

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According to ServiceNow's experts, companies that continue to treat ESG criteria as external to their organisation will face a constant lack of resources and difficulty in delivering responses in line with the growing expectations of customers, employees and investors.

Datafication: a driver of business transformation

Amid continued economic turmoil, artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics will become more prominent in 2023, with businesses looking to invest to streamline processes, automate and increase efficiency levels. In areas such as information and document categorisation, AI and machine learning can turn a simple, routine task into a source of high business value by extracting and automating information flows and

processes to deliver valueadded information and save employees' time.

In addition, we will increasingly see a "feedback" loop that will promote new investments as companies that have invested in these technologies see a positive return that drives them to innovate further.

The war for talent will be more pronounced

Several surveys show that even in times of economic uncertainty, the war for talent is far from over. This means that, for both employees and companies, having the new skills demanded by the market

Starting in 2023, managerial interest in emerging technologies, in particular the metaverse, will increase steadily."

will become increasingly important.

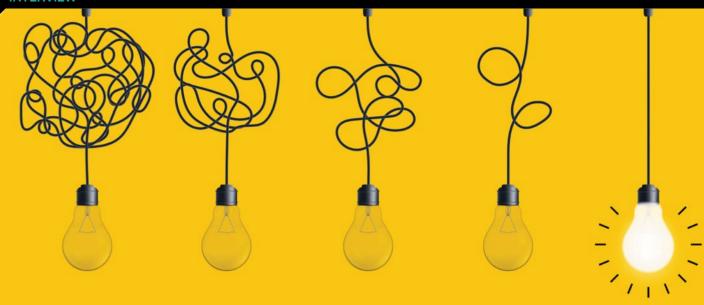
Companies will have to become more aware and invest in training and improving the hard and soft skills of their professionals. This aspect is particularly relevant for retaining the talent of Generation Z, which is very demanding in terms of being able to update its knowledge and skills in order to perform its work and strengthen its professional career.

The metaverse for creating hyperpersonalised experiences at work

Starting in 2023, managerial interest in emerging technologies, in particular the metaverse, will increase steadily.

While the complex macroeconomic context may slow down the adoption of these new technologies, the future will be increasingly virtual and the metaverse will play a key role in retaining talent in an increasingly hybrid and challenging environment, where immersive and 3D experiences will help foster social connections between workers connected from different locations and reinforce the creation of a more efficient organisational culture.

As the metaverse evolves, companies will look for digital platforms that connect metaverses to each other and to the real world, so that the two universes, physical and virtual, are not isolated and continuity of data and experiences can be maintained across platforms, systems and worlds.



GCG ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS

BUSINESS MADE

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Naser Darwazeh**, General Manager, GCG Enterprise Solutions, to find out how the company has positioned itself as the market incumbent in Managed Print Services (MPS) – and how it has leveraged their portfolio to facilitate digital transformation for their clients with its 'business made easy' motto.

CG is a major regional player in the print industry. Can you tell us how you managed to position GCG amongst the top players?

GCG has built a lengthy track record of achievements ever since its establishment in the UAE in 1982.

We started off as printer distributors, with a firm grasp on delivering to the evergrowing needs of our clients.

I believe, this customer centric approach has served as the greatest catalyst to our evolution. Along the line, we witnessed steady growth and transitioned to become a printing service provider, before moving into the MDS (managed document services) space.

As one of the earliest providers of Enterprise Information Management solutions, we take great pride in being pioneers. GCG has never followed trends, but remains focused on creating them instead. In doing so, we have contributed to shaping the digital transformation landscape.

I would say another major turning point for us was roughly 5 years ago, when we anticipated the massive boom in digitalisation, which the Covid-19 pandemic ended up accelerating.

Today, with offices across the UAE (Headquarters), Oman and most recently KSA, GCG is one of the top 3 players in the UAE and we are constantly strengthening our leadership within the region.

It's very interesting how everyone is now talking about paperless and digitalisation. How does GCG cope with this development and support its clients?

Yes, while we do have a

lengthy and strong legacy in the print sector, we were also early adopters and one of the pioneering players to introduce comprehensive digitalisation roadmaps, aimed at supporting our clients.

I don't believe that paper will completely disappear, but instead, clients will continue to become more conscious users of paper. At GCG, our goal is to help them accomplish that and towards this goal we have partnered with global players from the enterprise information management landscape.

Aligned with our motto of "business made easy", we believe that by offering different digital technologies ranging from process automation and smart building solutions, to digital experiences and AV solutions, we end up better serving our clients' needs and aspirations.

Our goal is to become a comprehensive regional turnkey solutions provider which will continue to help businesses across the private and government sectors to achieve their vision and ambitions faster, with reduced risks.

How is the current global situation impacting the technology industry in the UAE?

While the Covid-19
Pandemic's impact on the industry has been significant, our perspective is that it has also served as a catalyst for many companies to diversify their portfolio and increase their focus on digitalisation.

I also believe that the

As one of the earliest providers of Enterprise Information Management solutions, we take great pride in being pioneers."

Ukraine and Russia conflict could prove to be problematic, bearing in mind that we live in a digital connected society and cyber security is at stake.

This means that we need to be prepared for any potential cyber-attacks and should remain vigilant and ready to counter any threat with the right solutions in order to protect our clients' businesses.

I also strongly believe that global crises trigger a heightened need for innovation amongst people and businesses. The UAE is a resilient country with a highly progressive vision (top 5 on the global innovation index) which aims to serve as a model for global innovators.

There is no doubt about the capability of this country to lead the tech industry. As a local operating company, we are well aligned to support and achieve this vision.

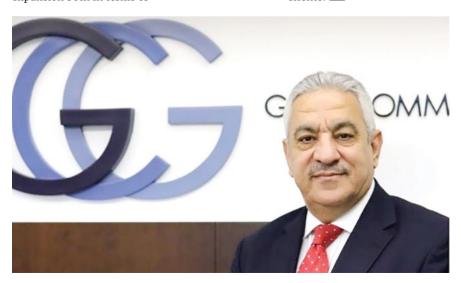
What are GCG Enterprise Solutions' future ambitions?

Looking ahead, we will continue to pursue market expansion both in terms of

our penetration, as well as our geographic reach and presence across the Middle East. Our successful entry into the KSA market in the recent past (under the GBS banner) has been extremely positive and will remain a focal point in the years ahead.

We will also be continuing to strengthen our position, capabilities and leadership across the digitalisation market, by building on our existing, as well as new partnerships with the best-of-breed international brands, products and solution providers, to deliver the cutting-edge of technological innovation to our clients.

We are also gearing up to cater to growing complexities and creating our own set of solutions for the benefit of our clients.



MITEL

GOING 'VERTICAL'

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Asif Khan**, Channel Director, Middle East & Africa at Mitel to find out how the unified communications leader is growing their business across the region, the factors driving the conceptualisation of Distribution 2.0 – and the changing priorities and demands coming from the channel ecosystem as we adapt to life in a post-COVID world.



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sif Khan is one of the most respected IT leaders in the channel ecosystem across the Middle East.

Khan joined Mitel in 2019, having spent time at Atos Unify and Westcon and has worked in the IT and telecommunications industry for the part of 20 years.

Khan has played a key role in fundamentally reshaping Mitel's go-to market strategy for their channel and distribution partners – and his unique and transformative approach has yielded phenomenal results for the company as a result.

He kickstarted the conversation by outlining in detail what his own roles and responsibilities are for Mitel.

The company's Middle East operations are headquartered in Dubai, but they are present all across the GCC, Turkey, Africa and now South Asia.

"I am the Director of Channels at Mitel, which essentially means that I am responsible for managing the relationships and partnerships we have with our channel and distribution partner ecosystem. My primary responsibility is to grow and expand our channel business and to work on our go-to market strategy. Over the last 4-5 years the Middle East region has been growing yearon-year, with the exception being 2020, when our operations were affected by the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic – but over the last few years we have enjoyed double-digit growth across the region," said Khan.

Khan believes the primary reason Mitel has been able to enjoy so much market success has been down to the fact that it has 'verticalized' its strategy.

"I firmly believe that one of the fundamental reasons for our continued success in the Middle East has been the verticalization of our strategy. We decided to build a twofold strategy in the region, and one part of that was the verticalization of the segments and industries that we are focused on - and the second part of our strategy involved a horizontal approach, which is essentially focused solely on our channel partners," said Khan.

Khan said that Mitel's Middle East operations and direction is aligned with the company's overall approach when it comes to hospitality being a key focus area for the company to generate new growth.

"Mitel have identified the hospitality sector as a key industry vertical, not only here in the Middle East, but also globally. We are one of the largest manufacturers of hospitality solutions in the META and South Asia region. We are driving the same strategy in hospitality that we have deployed in other verticals that helped garner success, and that approach

Mitel have identified the hospitality sector as a key industry vertical, not only here in the Middle East, but also globally."

means we are touching the end-customer relationship directly, the operators, contractors and consultants," said Khan.

One other key focus area for Mitel is the Government and Defense sector.

"It is very strong area for us, and I believe that the combination of our legacy with Ericsson, and the acquisition of Aastra in 2014, has given us a very strong foothold in this sector, and when we began offering solutions to the government and defense sector our products and services really resonated with them, and inevitably that has led us to have a lot of success in this space," said Khan.

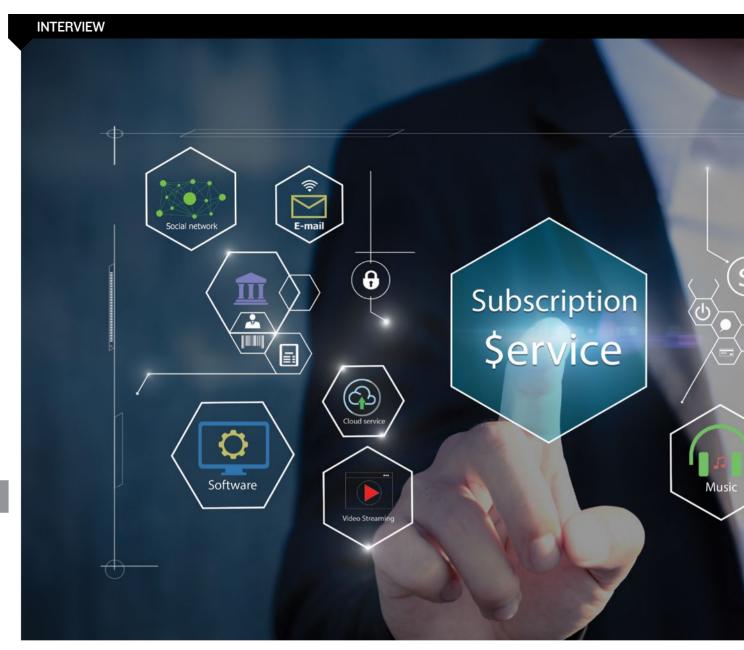
Mitel are also focusing on increasing their presence in the contact center space in the Middle East region.

"Mitel has not established itself as a major player in the Middle East market when it comes contact center space, despite the fact that we are one of the largest manufacturers of contact centers globally. A lot of businesses are blissfully unaware of our contact center expertise, so this is another technology vertical that we are building, and since we have increased our focus in this area, we have enjoyed a lot of success in the last few years," said Khan.

Khan disclosed that in the last few years Mitel has entered the subscription and hosting space.

"We entered the subscription and hosting model vertical a couple of years ago, and are building steadily. We are

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planning to identify specific countries where we will be launching our hosted model, and when I say hosted model, I mean our solutions and services will be available on a subscription basis. That gives users the ability to opt for voice services, or contact center spaces on a subscription plan. We will soon launch in 5 countries, and we have already cultivated some fantastic partnerships, and it's a vertical that represents huge opportunity and potential for us," said Khan.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has been well documented in terms of the impact it has had business models.

Khan stressed that in a post-COVID world the landscape and the shift has drastically changed.

I firmly believe that one of the fundamental reasons for our continued success in the Middle East has been the verticalization of our strategy."

"The technology has shifted in the post-COVID world. The classical infrastructure is on the decline. Classical IT infrastructure is not growing and as a result of this shift, businesses are now actively looking for subscription models as it better suits the demands of their business. All these technologies existed before COVID-19, but it has accelerated these technologies into the mainstream," said Khan.

Khan said partners and vendors unable to equip their customer base with the tools

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they need to transform will not survive in the 'new normal'.

"The demands are changing from the customers to the partners, and it is imperative that partners are able to meet these changes and deliver. If vendors are not aligned with these nascent technologies, and they are not ready in terms of offering end-to-end solutions, which meets their infrastructure and application demands and can't provide security then they are in big trouble and bluntly put they won't survive," said Khan.

A new term 'Distribution 2.0' has been coined of late, but what exactly is occurring in the global distribution industry.

Khan was univocal in his assessment, declaring that there is a major shift underway.

"I'm very passionate about Distribution 2.0. I've been following very closely what has been happening globally in the distribution landscape, and what the relevance of those changes are to the META region. There has been a major, major shift within the distribution ecosystem, but people are not talking about it, but it's going to have a huge impact on vendors who operate under a Tier 2 model. The IT distributor is a business, which is basically an intermediary between the vendor and value-added reseller - and it serves system integrators and resellers and they have a Tier 2 model, which essentially means they are adding value through a linear process. A linear process means they buy from the supplier and they give it to the reseller – but the distribution model has completely changed. Classical IT infrastructure is in the decline, and technology is becoming more and more commodified and ultimately margins are becoming tight for distributors," said Khan.

Khan believes that there will be a different layer of channel partners emerging in Distribution 2.0 – and explained what exactly the new term means.

"The channel partners that are working with you

on the traditional lines of business are very different, and it's important to have that distinction. Then on the other hand you have these new channel partners that work on subscription and hosted models only – but both these elements are going to be fused into the one platform, and that platform is Distribution 2.0," said Khan.

Khan concluded a wonderfully candid and informative conversation by reemphasizing how critical it is that distributors look at their commercial structure.

"The reason I say they need to look at their commercial structure is because many companies are not ready when it comes to this. When I say commercial structure, what I mean is are we ready with the subscription-based models for our channel partners? They need to start building the infrastructure like the billing software and really create that marketplace for channel partners. To get into the subscription model you need to have a very different sort of logistics and operations business model. I believe the most important part is the creation of managed services layers – because distribution is no longer going to be a linear process. They need to add more value and create a new ecosystem, the Tier 2 model is archaic and outdated - and by creating managed services distributors can offer a lot of professional and support services to their end-users which only serves to empower them and add real tangible value," said Khan.

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KISSFLOW

GOOD CITIZENS

Dinesh Varadhharajan, Chief Product Officer at Kissflow, believes that the advent of Citizen developers is going to play a key role in the next digital decade as businesses continue to grapple with the demands of rapid digital transformation.

he UAE is a leading force for digital transformation, with companies in the region quick to adopt new technologies and steadily further their aspirations on the journey to digitisation.

This transformation is supported by ambitious government initiatives and strategies such as the new Higher Committee for Government Digital Transformation and the UAE Digital Government Strategy 2025.

In fact, the UAE was ranked among the world's best countries for government digital transformation.

With the rising demand for software, technology, and applications to support this digitisation, many IT departments are struggling to keep the pace.

This, coupled with increased access to no-code and low-code tools, is changing the way businesses create software and opening up a whole new way of working — coined citizen developers.

A fundamental change

As companies strive for digitisation, there is an unprecedented demand for skilled developers.

But a major stumbling block



on the digitisation journey is the availability of experienced talent able to meet this growing requirement. Nocode and low-code tools have an important role to play in addressing this ongoing supply/demand problem, with citizen developers able to pick up the slack.

Recent Gartner research

indicates that by 2023, citizen developers will outnumber professional developers by four to one1. This will fundamentally change the way businesses and IT teams work together, with other employees carrying out projects that normally belonged to their IT colleagues.

Particularly in the early stages of a transition like this, there is likely to be conflict and friction as the roles of two previously separate business sections overlap.

Citizen developers and IT professionals must find new ways of working together as they adapt to the new norm.

For a smooth transition, it is important to have clearly defined responsibilities and roles, enabling the organisation to improve operations, build new efficiencies and meet shared goals.

The role of citizen developers

In business, it's often the case that those who are particularly affected by a problem will be the ones to find the answer.

So, although citizen developers will not be as skilled or experienced as those in the IT department, they will have a more indepth understanding of the challenges and issues they come across each day.

So as companies begin to use citizen developers and are defining their responsibilities, it is sensible to give them the opportunity to create smart solutions to the issues that matter to them on a daily basis.

As they identify areas for improvement, citizen developers can develop apps using no-code or low-code tools to automate time-consuming or tiresome tasks.

This kind of development optimises processes, improves functions, and boosts

employee output – delivering considerable value for the company.

IT teams adapt

IT professionals are likely to take some time to adjust to the idea of a business colleague building software solutions, and this can be a point of friction. However, there are actually many positives of a shift to this approach.

IT teams can swap from a focus on smaller process tweaks and upgrades to complex technical advancements that have a bigger impact on the business and ongoing operational improvements – and are also more rewarding for the employee.

Not only that, there are plenty of technical areas and advancements which can only remain the domain of skilled IT professionals. A good example is cybersecurity, which is simply too complex, risky, and important for a citizen developer to take on.

Citizen developers and IT professionals must find new ways of working together as they adapt to the new norm."

IT teams will also need to work with citizen developers to guide and support their efforts – and to ensure careful levels of control.

Systems will need to be created to allow citizen developers some level of creative freedom, while at the same time implementing prudent controls and guards.

Common goals and teamwork

Ideally, companies would build an efficient framework within which citizen and professional developers can work together towards shared goals, guided, and controlled by a system of checks and balances.

Identifying the shared goals and defining each type of developer's responsibilities from the beginning helps meet your company's digital innovation aims, while removing potential for conflict.

There are lots of ways to work together to help achieve success in the journey to digitisation as companies begin to use citizen developers.

Particularly in smaller organisations, an IT mentorship programme can work well, where IT professionals team up with citizen developers to help them achieve their goals.

And in bigger companies, IT team members could run training sessions to help others get to grips with low-code tools.

As barriers are broken down between different facets of the business, citizen developers and IT teams must find new ways to work together, boost innovation and achieve common goals.

This way of working is an excellent opportunity for companies to enhance growth, embrace agility and continue their digital journeys.

So as the pace of digitalisation accelerates in the UAE and across the region, enterprises will need to find ways to enable different ways of working between citizen developers and IT for the benefit of all.

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THE MASK OF ZERO

Cybercrime is on the rise, and as a result businesses need to be extra vigilant in an effort to protect their key assets. **John Engates**, Field CTO at Cloudflare, believes the current landscape has called for the creation of a 'Chief Zero Trust Officer' within organisations in a bid to beat the bad guys!

The Rise of Chief Zero Trust Officer:

ver the last several years, ransomware, data breaches, and other cyber campaigns have been hugely disruptive and cost

organisations and governments millions.

In response, the Biden administration issued an executive order in May of 2021 to implement a Zero Trust security architecture across the federal government. While recent reports from the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) show some agencies are on track, others appear to be falling behind.

When governments need to move quickly and cut across organisational boundaries, they often appoint a czar to take charge of a particular program and see it through to implementation or execution.

As private sector organisations embrace digital transformation and move their operations to the cloud, they too are looking to zero trust to help provide a robust and secure network infrastructure.

Secure Access Service Edge (SASE) has emerged as a cloud-delivered convergence of network access and security services and is a common

approach for enterprise zero trust adoption.

The challenge however is that in many organisations, responsibility for networking and security live in different parts of the organisation and these groups often rely on different vendors in their respective areas.

Breaking down the silos between security and networking teams and choosing the right tools, products, and vendors to align with desired business outcomes is critical to implement zero trust in larger enterprises.

As pressure to implement zero trust intensifies, I predict that a role analogous to a "Chief Zero Trust Officer" will emerge within some large organisations.

This person will be the zero trust czar for the enterprise and will be the individual responsible for driving a company on its zero trust journey.

Their job will be to bring together siloed organisations and vendors and ensure that all teams and departments are aligned and working toward the same goal.

If resistance is encountered, the zero trust czar should have the backing of senior leadership (CIO, CISO, CEO, Board of Directors) to make decisions quickly and cut across organisational boundaries to keep the process moving ahead.

Whether the very bold title of Chief Zero Trust Officer becomes reality or not, an empowered individual with a clear mandate and a singular focus may just be the key to getting zero trust across the finish line in 2023.

2023 Sees the Death of "The Password"

Phishing attacks continue to be a significant problem for companies around the world. Even with regular security awareness training, users will eventually click a wrong link and fall victim to an attack.

And unfortunately most cyber attacks begin with a phishing email.

Cloudflare itself was attacked this year by a sophisticated, targeted SMS-based phishing attack. A total of 76 Cloudflare employees received the phishing link in text messages on their phones.

Three employees fell for the attack and clicked the link and entered their credentials. But unphishable, multi-factor authentication in the form of

As pressure to implement zero trust intensifies, I predict that a role analogous to a "Chief Zero Trust Officer" will emerge within some large organisations."

FIDO2-compliant security keys in conjunction with zero trust access prevented the attacker from breaching our systems.

Other companies that used less secure time-based one-time passwords (TOTP) weren't as lucky, and many were breached by the same attackers.

Username and password authentication even when combined with common forms of multi-factor authentication is just not enough anymore.

Enterprises can enable stronger FIDO2-compliant security keys along with zero trust access today if they're using a system like Cloudflare's to make it much tougher on attackers.

But the best way to protect most users and their credentials may be to remove the burden on the end user altogether.

The FIDO alliance envisions passwordless sign-in everywhere. Logins will use your face or fingerprint instead of the old username-password combo.

A FIDO sign-in credential, sometimes called a "passkey", will make it easier on users and harder on the attackers. If there's no password to steal, hackers won't be able to harvest credentials to carry out their attacks.



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We predict many websites and applications will adopt passwordless login using the FIDO Alliance passkey standard beginning in 2023.

The Cloud Takes on Compliance

Governments around the world are rolling out new privacy regulations. In Europe, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which became enforceable in 2018 gives individuals more control over their personal data and how it's used.

Other countries worldwide are following suit and using GDPR as a model. In the US, there are five states with new consumer privacy laws that take effect in 2023 and more states are considering legislation.

And at the federal level, lawmakers are slowly putting forward their own privacy regulations with the American Data and Privacy Protection Act ("ADPPA") which is an online privacy bill that aims to regulate the gathering and storing of consumer data.

Companies must now understand and comply with this patchwork of regulations as they do business globally. How can organisations hope to stay current and build compliance into their applications and IT systems?

We believe the majority of cloud services will soon come with compliance features built in. The cloud itself should take the compliance burden off companies.

Developers shouldn't be required to know exactly how and where their data can be legally stored or processed. The burden of compliance should largely be handled by the cloud services and tools developers are building with.

Networking services should route traffic efficiently and securely while complying with all data sovereignty laws. Storage services should inherently comply with data residency regulations. And processing should adhere to relevant data localisation standards.

Remote Browsers Resolve Device Complaints

Security policies, privacy laws, and regulations require all companies to protect their sensitive data; from where it's stored and processed, to where it's consumed in end-user applications.

In the past, it was relatively straightforward to fully control end-user devices because they were often issued by and dedicated to company use only. But with the increasing use of personal smartphones and tablets, the bring-your-own-device (BYOD) trend has been picking up steam for several years and was even more readily embraced during the various stages of the global pandemic.

Looking ahead, it's our belief that this pendulum of BYOD will swing back toward tighter security and more control by the IT organisation. The need to consistently enforce security policies and privacy controls will begin to outweigh the sense of urgency and demand for convenience we encountered during the last few years.

But because so much of our digital lives live in a web

browser, this control may take a different form than in the past. This new form will mean more control for IT administrators AND a better user experience for employees.

Browser Isolation is a clever piece of technology that essentially provides security through physical isolation.

This technique creates a "gap" between a user's web browser and the endpoint device thereby protecting the device (and the enterprise network) from exploits and attacks. Remote browser isolation (RBI) takes this a step further by moving the browser to a remote service in the cloud. Cloud-based remote browsing isolates the end-user device from the enterprise's network while fully enabling IT control and compliance solutions.

Some say in this remote browsing model that "the browser is the device." Instead of BYOD, it might be appropriate to call this "BYOB" or Bring Your Own Browser.

Most companies are looking to better balance the security and privacy needs of the company with the user experience and convenience for employees.

At Cloudflare, we use our remote browser isolation in conjunction with zero trust access to protect our users and devices. It's completely transparent to users and strikes a perfect balance between security and user experience.

We believe remote browser isolation will be embraced broadly as IT leaders become more aware of the benefit and just how well it works.

Solar Powered Camera



Powered by solar energy, this kit sets up without any electrical wiring.

Easy installation

Easy set up without mechanical equipment-reducing the installation costs and time.

Can withstand bad weather

Prone to extreme weather such as strong wind and rainstorms.



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A LITTLE LESS CONVERSATION

Following the digital transformation that ensued as a direct result of the global pandemic, many companies have looked at implementing conversational engagement technology, such as chatbots, to increase productivity and meet the demands of their customers. Deputy Editor at tahawultech **Veronica Martin** takes a closer look at the topic.



n its current form, artificial intelligence is still not smart enough to provide every answer or find every solution.

However, chatbots are becoming more human-like thanks to developments in Internet-connected devices and clever algorithms. They are capable of comprehending spoken language, giving logical responses in return, and even picking up on human discussions to get a better understanding of us.

It is now possible to modify chatbots to meet a brand and business plan. You can design a chatbot that captures the essence of your company and gives customers the impression that they are interacting with real people by using a little imagination and creativity.

They can be trained to perform certain activities in accordance with the demands of a company's operations and programmed with a brand's distinct personality. In order to become more effective over time,

they can even draw lessons from earlier interactions with clients.

Furthermore, chatbots are accessible around-the-clock, so there's no need to pass up possible sales opportunities because you are unavailable at particular times of the day. You can relax knowing that a chatbot that is knowledgeable about your goods and services will always respond promptly to any queries your clients may have.

Chatbots have revolutionised many industries, such as hospitality where many businesses are using them as digital concierges.

As guests demand 24-hour service and hoteliers are pressed for time, chatbots are becoming more essential due to less staff. The Stayntouch/NYU Tisch Centre of Hospitality Report predicts that by the end of 2022, 29.2% of hotels will have chatbots available on their websites, up from 14.5% in 2019.

Aloft Hotels, a division of Marriott International, has developed ChatBotlr to let customers make requests through their mobile phones, such as getting amenity deliveries or early morning wake-up calls.

You can receive a response instantly without contacting the front desk thanks to the integration of chatbots into a hotel property management system.

If online payment is possible, you could speed up the checkout procedure and avoid standing in line again, as well as get recommendations for goods or services as you converse with a virtual concierge using a targeted and individualised sales procedure.

All interaction data can be stored by virtual concierges, which can help you better understand your guests' demands, provide a better guest experience, and boost hotel revenue.

On top, customers will more likely want to repeat the experience and will not mind spending a little bit more if they feel like they are receiving the best attention and individualised treatment.

Some of the most famous hotels in the world are already using chatbots with great results. The Cosmopolitan Hotel at Las Vegas uses a chatbot called Rose that converses with guests and keeps them engaged on the website. Some of Rose's main features include interacting with visitors, giving customers the details about the hotel, assisting them with the reservation and stay and suggesting activities, causing them to spend more at the

Another example is Velma, an AI-powered chatbot used at Zafiro Hotel in Madrid that can easily handle 80% of guest requests in more than 20 languages, generate leads by sending an instant notification to the sales team, and develop maximum engagement with guests by sharing the best available deals and offers.

However, brands must

perfect their omnichannel consumer conversational engagement experiences and should constantly improve the conversational skills of their omnichannel chatbots.

Conversational capabilities and the chatbot's capacity to manage multi-turn discussions with all the depth and empathy a human agent gives are crucial to converting visitors into paying clients. The AI chatbots must be trained continuously in natural language processing (NLP) and data management in order to provide an accurate and timely answer.

In every conversation, they must also pinpoint the demands of the customer and gain deeper insights. Chatbots can be programmed to recognise unseen demand signals, analyse them, and suggest the best course of action, assisting brands in promoting better engagement and proactive communication.

Intelligent chatbots driven by AI may soon be able to accurately predict customer purchasing trends, enable intent recognition, and make conversational flows more human. Most of brands will soon be able to provide chatbots to serve as their customers' personal digital assistants.

Besides, AI chatbots can automatically gather nonpersonal data about customer behaviour, such as the time of day, what they were

Chatbots have revolutionised many industries, such as hospitality where many businesses are using them as digital concierges."

looking for (through clicks and questions), how long they spent in the chatbot, the most popular information cards and questions, the forms that were sent, how often and from where (city), and other general information.

Businesses can improve current products and services and create new ones based on customer searches in the chatbot by analysing this data to better understand their clients and give them exactly what they want.

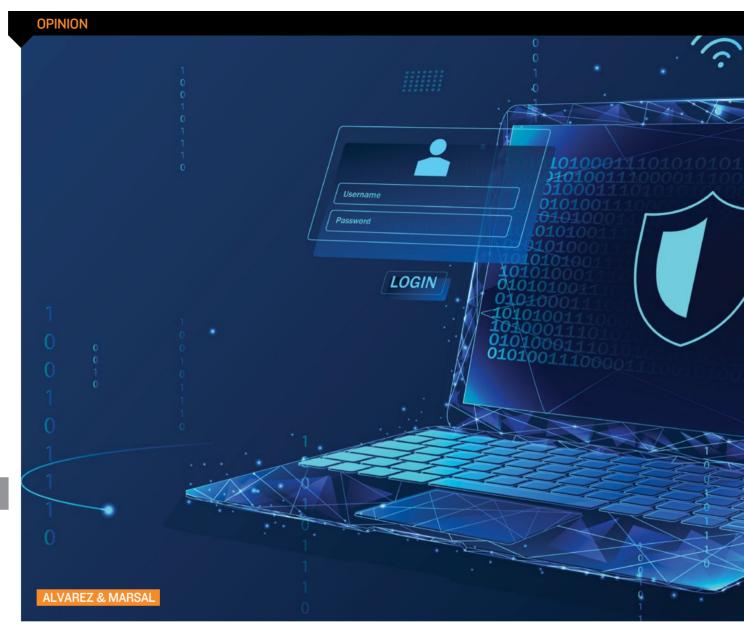
There is no denying the growing popularity of chatbots. For both brands and their front-line/customer-facing workers, chatbots are a powerful tool for customer interaction.

They are also a terrific way to make sure that business keep up with the most recent innovations to stay competitive in the modern world of customer care.

By offering quick access to information and support, they have the potential to enhance customer service. Most importantly, chatbots are swiftly establishing themselves as trustworthy tools for consumers and organisations to complete tasks more quickly and efficiently, giving us more time to focus on the things that are essential to us.

In our digital age, chatbots are very significant and they represent a fresh marketing approach for hotels. Any platform that gives visitors access to hotel information, including websites and social media, should have a chatbot, so it's time to install a chatbot if you don't already have one.

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BESMART WITH YOUR DATA

Sooho Choi, Managing Director at Alvarez & Marsal outlines how rigid data protection laws could impact the pursuit of 'smart destinations' – and how preparation is the key to success.

hen it comes to luxury travel, service providers rely on technology to store and act upon personal data to provide the outstanding experience their customers expect.

A challenge for the industry in the Middle East lies in offering the high-level of service guests are used to elsewhere in the world while complying with laws that can prevent data crossing borders and require it to be localised.

As Saudi Arabia works to build an economy based on



A precedent exists in the UAE where free zones with specific data legislation operate, such as the Dubai International Financial Centre.

Earlier this year Saudi
Arabia's Ministry of
Communications and
Information Technology
launched a multi-billion dollar
plan to build a network of largescale data centers with an aim
to become the main data center
hub for the Middle East, and
localise content and services.

Despite concerns from digital rights groups, Google will be joining the likes of Chinese firms Huawei and Alibaba in building a selfcontained "Cloud-Region" in the Kingdom as part of that network.

According to the Oxford Business Group, Saudi Arabia is also pushing for user data to be kept and stored in the country to increase security and ensure data ownership. However there are also concerns about the ability to transfer customer data outside of the country.

technology and knowledge as laid out in its Vision 2030, managed services such as cloud computing, data centers and IoT will be central to these efforts.

Private cloud facilities will also be required for mega projects with tourism and leisure elements such as Neom, Qiddiya, the Red Sea Project and Amaala. Certainly for Neom there are already plans to build three hyperscale data centers.

Whether exemptions will be made for these projects to help tourism providers get around data laws remains to be seen.

As a well-known international tourism destination the UAE's data laws are better understood than those of Saudi Arabia."

Data Localisation Challenges

In the Middle East, new data laws mean that travel and hospitality service providers will have to adapt their processes when they operate in certain countries.

This includes Saudi Arabia whose Personal Data Protection Law regulates the collection, processing and use of data. While the law is in line with wider international practices which protect the privacy of individuals and personal data, like the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), it differs in one key way – restrictions on transferring data across borders.

The law provides for tight controls on cross-border data transfer outside of the country. If exceptions are not made, providers must consider local storage options to fulfill data localisation requirements.

Even so, the practical challenge for global organisations of marrying incountry and centrally managed customer data still needs to be overcome.

Both the Saudi Arabian and UAE data protection laws also have extra-territorial reach, similar to GDPR.

The UAE law applies to any organisation established in the Emirates that processes personal data of subjects inside or outside the UAE, as well as any organisation established outside the country that processes data inside it.

As a well-known international tourism destination the UAE's data laws are better understood than those of Saudi Arabia. Providers

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should look to get advice as part of building and scaling operations in the geography.

It could be worse. Anything in the Middle East pales in comparison to China's Personal Information Protection Law which priorities national security over individual rights.

The law states that if personal information being handled by a data handler reaches a certain threshold, a data localisation requirement may be triggered.

Companies in possession of a large volume of personal data must also complete a mandatory security review led by the Cyberspace Administration of China before transmitting it overseas.

Preparation is Key

There is optimism that service providers who don't process government data in Saudi Arabia will be immune to data localisation requirements. However, this is a grey area.

Those looking to establish themselves in Vision 2030 projects will be processing government data as many of the major developments operate under the government's oversight — already brands under Marriott, InterContinental and Hyatt banners are setting up hotels

at the Red Sea Project while American theme park Six Flags is establishing a park at Qiddiya.

As there may be a need to localise their data, these brands should be prepared to navigate the complex requirements.

In fact, all international tourism and leisure providers with significant amounts of global customer data should consider how they set up in the Middle East.

They are used to existing in a world where data passes relatively freely between borders, so each one will have to adapt their standards and ask questions. What suppliers should process their data? What deployment and storage approaches are compliant? What systems and processes need customisation to comply? Even the common scenario of a central reservations system synchronising with an inmarket property management system at a hotel raises basic questions that need to be addressed, especially if more sensitive personal data crosses borders.

As the use cases extend to address differentiated customer experiences, the question of speed bubbles up to the top of the list. Large amounts of data associated with a customer must be matched and activated, in many cases in real time, to

deliver a unique experience for the traveler.

If different data sets are stored in different locations in order to comply with data storage and transfer regulations, how does a supplier deliver real-time customised experiences?

Weighing Up the Options

To avoid problems, providers looking to operate in the Kingdom should seek advice to plan out their technology architecture. In a situation where things are not black and white, how does an organisation interpret and decide what level of compliance is sufficient?

And to what extend is a modest amount of risk appropriate to sufficiently allow for incremental increases to capabilities as data protection regulations evolve?

Getting expert advice will help providers answer these questions while they establish a brand presence and assess their options.

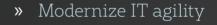
While there are difficult obstacles to navigate, there is reason to be positive. If Middle Eastern nations want to diversify their economies away from oil to become leading tourism destinations then they will need to find a compromise.

So, despite Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund recently denying reports that Neom will be treated as a "country within a country" with special privileges and regulations, nothing is 100% and how the government treats data may change to become more consistent with international standards.



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