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CNME EDITOR MARK FORKER EXAMINES WHAT THE INCOMING TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND THE ESCALATION OF ECONOMIC TENSIONS BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND BEIJING IS GOING TO HAVE ON THE TECHNOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE ACROSS THE UAE, AND THE REST OF THE GULF.

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> **2025 will be the technology equivalent of the 'big bang' - with the rise of Agentic AI infrastructure becoming particularly prevalent."**

EDITORIAL

THE BIG BANG

It's the last issue of CNME for 2024, and what a year it has been!

2024 will be remembered for many things, but it's hard to ignore the impact Generative AI has had across the global technology ecosystem, and especially here across the Middle East.

At GITEX Global 2024, which is always a highlight of the year for us at CPI Media Group, AI was the prevalent theme of the Middle East's flagship IT symposium.

And since GITEX in October, there have been some mega AI-infrastructure projects announced, particularly in the KSA.

The Public Investment Fund (PIF) and Google Cloud announced their plans to build an AI-hub, which is projected to grow the Kingdom's GDP by $71bn over the next eight years.

Bloomberg also reported that the KSA is planning to launch 'Project Transcendence', a 100bn AI initiative, which is ultimately designed to make Saudi Arabia the regional's AI and technology powerhouse, but the UAE is also pursuing AI on several different fronts.

This year, US technology behemoth Microsoft announced an investment of $1.5bn in AI powerhouse G42.

During GITEX, Microsoft revealed its intentions to upskill 100,000 government employees in AI, and by 2027, will upskill 1 million UAE residents in AI.

However, it feels like in 2025, the hype, buzz and scale of investment in AI is only going to escalate.

In this month's edition of CNME, as always, we have some top-class interviews and thought leadership on what to expect in 2025.

On the front cover feature of December's magazine, I take a bit of a deep dive into what sort of impact Donald Trump's sweeping return to power is going to have on the technology landscape in the UAE, and across the rest of the Gulf region.

The US has been on a collision course with China for some time, but the return of Trump, and his uncompromising approach to overseas trade, means it is highly likely that diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing will deteriorate further when he returns to the Oval Office in January, 2025.

The decision by G42 to sever ties with its Chinese partners following an investment from Microsoft in April, shows that the US can pressure the UAE to follow their lead, and whilst it's likely the UAE will feel squeezed by the Chinese-American arm wrestling, they have plenty of negotiating power.

In addition to the front cover, I'd like to guide readers to a brilliant thought leadership piece from Dell Technologies executive John Roese.

He's the Global Chief Technology Officer and Chief AI Officer at Dell, and he believes that 2025 will be the technology equivalent of the 'big bang' - with the rise of Agentic AI infrastructure becoming particularly prevalent.

I had a brilliant conversation with David Ashford, the charismatic and dynamic force behind cashback rewards application Mimojo.

Mimojo has enjoyed plenty of traction since its inception in 2022, and he articulated how the company is redefining the way merchants both think and deliver customer loyalty.

CNME Deputy Editor Daniel Shepherd travelled to Riyadh, for the official opening of their new regional headquarters in Riyadh.

He spoke to Giordano Albertazzi, CEO of Vertiv, to find out how the significance of the new HQ in the heart of the KSA, and the scale of their ambitions across the Kingdom.

I also caught up with Lothar Renner, Managing Director, Security Sales and Engineering at Cisco EMEA, to learn more about why the company is advising its plethora of customers to adopt an 'identity-first' approach to cybersecurity in an effort to tackle some of the most complex challenges facing the security industry globally.

There is also a whole host of thought leadership articles in December's issue of CNME, so make sure to check them all out.

I'd also like to welcome Sandhya D'Mello to the CPI Media Group team.

Sandhya spent the best part of two decades at Khaleej Times, and is a hugely respected and revered business and technology journalist here in the UAE, and across the Middle East.

We are delighted she is now part of the CPI Media Group family.

Finally, I'd like to wish all our partners, customers and readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

See you all in 2025! 😊🎄

Mark Forker
Editor

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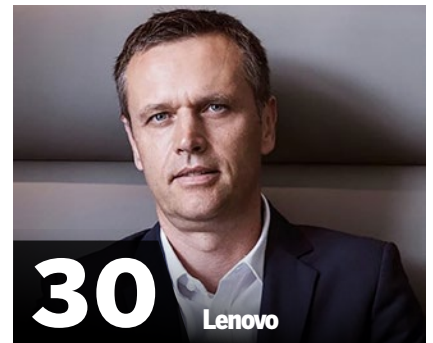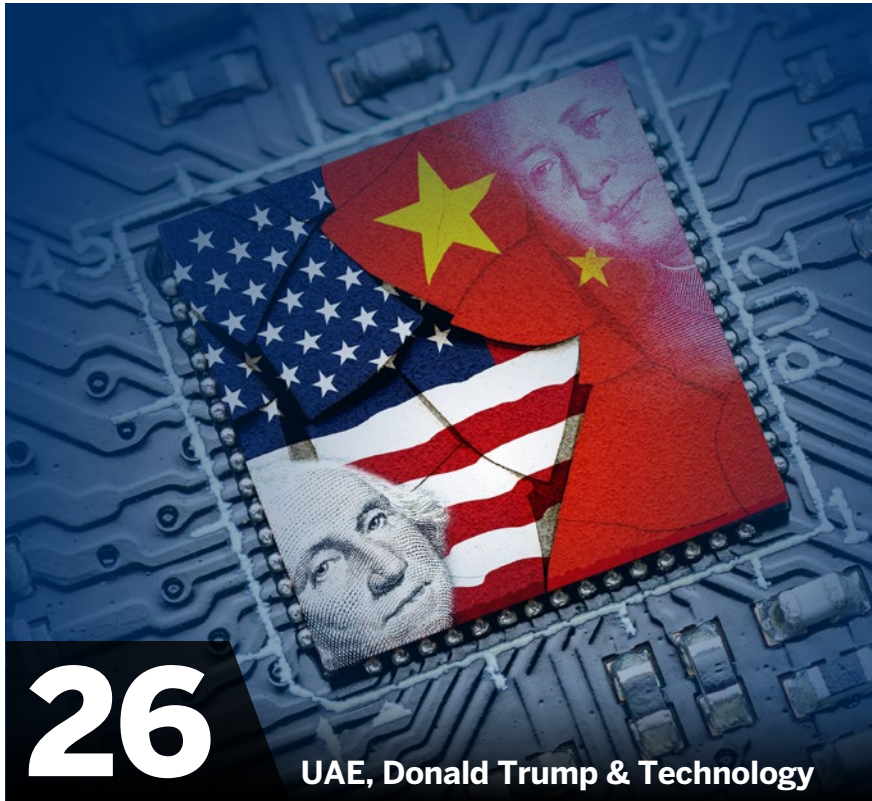
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cnme
computer news middle east

26
UAE, Donald Trump & Technology

14
Cisco

18
Mimojo

30
Lenovo

48
Dell Technologies

10
Vertiv

Kaspersky partner with UAE cybersecurity council for a report designed to tackle the complexities of 'digital parenting'

Kaspersky, in collaboration with the UAE Cyber Security Council, has released a report entitled *"Growing Up Online"*, exploring the nuances of children's online behavior and offering guidance to parents navigating the complexities of digital parenting.

The report dives into several important factors, including time spent online, social networking and the psychological impact of children using gadgets. It also addresses significant concerns related to online threats including privacy issues and cyberbullying.

Seifallah Jedidi, Head of Consumer Channel for META at Kaspersky.

Seifallah Jedidi, Head of Consumer Channel for META at Kaspersky, said "It is important for parents to be aware of the impact of the time their children may have spent online during the holiday. Given the fact that education is also becoming digitized in today's constantly evolving world, it is crucial to promote a healthy balance between the online and offline world. Children are often overly-accustomed to life online, largely using gadgets for entertainment purposes. However, just like adults, they are also prone to the dangers of the internet, like cyberbullying or sharing private information online. In order for parents to reduce the risk of digital addiction, technology must be implemented to manage the content consumed and the time that kids spend online, encouraging positive digital behaviour and habits."

Positive Technologies partners with a major cybersecurity solutions provider in Middle East and Africa

Positive Technologies has signed a distribution agreement with Mideast Communication Systems (MCS), a leading provider of information technology and cybersecurity solutions headquartered in Cairo for Middle East and Africa markets.

The partnership will focus on sharing cybersecurity expertise and jointly promoting products and services in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Africa for result-driven cybersecurity.

Ilya Leonov, Regional Director for MENA, Positive Technologies, stated that Positive Technologies has been working in the Middle East for several years and is excited to expand its partner network in Africa.

"MCS has a wealth of experience with public sector and financial institutions,

Ilya Leonov, Regional Director for MENA, Positive Technologies.

which we see targeted in more than half of all cyberattacks in Africa. We're ready to share our extensive expertise, experience, and practical knowledge with our partners. Our collaboration with MCS will stretch beyond Egypt and include other countries in Middle East and Africa. Priority will be given to industrial safety, DevSecOps, red team services, and ATM security assessment," noted Ilya Leonov.

Microsoft shares strong progress on datacentre region in Saudi Arabia

Microsoft recently shared updates on the progress of its datacentre region in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, following a recent site visit by a delegation of government officials from the Saudi Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) as well as Microsoft executives from the company's headquarters and Saudi Arabia.

The new datacentre region in Saudi Arabia will offer enterprise-grade reliability and performance combined with customer privacy, data residency, and high-speed latency standards on par with the rest of Microsoft's global cloud infrastructure of more than 60 Azure regions – one of the largest and most secure in the world. The investments are consistent with Microsoft's commitment to empowering every person and organisation on the planet to achieve more and include a focus on responsible cloud practices including security, digital safety, privacy, compliance, and transparency, as well as adherence to Microsoft's core values and ethical principles.

Turki Badhris, President of Microsoft Arabia, commented: "Public and private sector organisations in Saudi Arabia have demonstrated a remarkable appetite to leverage the latest cutting-edge technologies such as AI to thrive in the new digital age and are already relying on Microsoft's trusted cloud to accelerate their business growth and AI innovation. Now, together with the MCIT, we are excited to share these latest updates on our Saudi Arabia datacentre region, which demonstrate the significant progress we're making and our commitment to strengthening the Kingdom's position as a global innovation hub, in line with Saudi Vision 2030".

Tenable forecasts Data Security in the Cloud to take centre stage in 2025

As 2025 approaches, Tenable, the exposure management company, is highlighting the critical need for organisations to prioritise data security in the cloud amid the rapid rise of AI adoption.

In the coming year, companies will face mounting pressure to secure AI initiatives at scale while safeguarding a growing range of data assets from cyber threats.

"Organisations must understand that data is the fuel driving their business—it enables insights, fosters collaboration, and powers innovation", said Liat Hayun, VP of Product Management and Cloud Security Research at Tenable. "As AI adoption skyrockets and data storage demands grow, safeguarding distributed data has never been more

Liat Hayun, VP of Product Management and Cloud Security Research at Tenable.

critical. As we head into 2025, business leaders and security teams must strike a careful balance between innovation and security, ensuring that AI initiatives do not inadvertently open new doors for cyberattackers".

Trend Micro recognised as a Leader in 2024 Gartner Peer Insights Report

Dr. Moataz BinAli, Regional Vice President & Managing Director, MMEA, Trend Micro.

Trend Micro Incorporated, a global cybersecurity leader, has earned a customers' choice badge for the Midsize Enterprise in the 2024 Gartner Peer Insights™ Voice of the Customer for Network Detection and Response (NDR).

This recognition underscores Trend Micro's exceptional product performance and unwavering commitment to customer satisfaction.

Trend Micro has been recognized as one of only 9 vendors out of 53 considered and is among just 2 of 53 vendors to receive the "Midsize

Enterprise Voice of the Customer" distinction for the $50M to $1 billion market segment. This honour reflects a substantial volume of positive reviews, a remarkable "Willingness to Recommend" score of 95%, and high satisfaction with Trend Micro's product capabilities and support experience.

"Our recognition with the customer choice badge from Gartner Peer Insights is more than just an accolade; it is a heartfelt affirmation of the dedication and expertise our team has invested in Trend Vision One", said Dr. Moataz BinAli, Regional Vice President & Managing Director, MMEA, Trend Micro. "This recognition not only validates our relentless pursuit of innovation but also drives us to further push the boundaries of excellence. It fuels our commitment to advancing our solutions and setting new benchmarks in cybersecurity, continuously evolving to meet the dynamic challenges of the digital world".

Infoblox introduces NIOS-X as a service for the modern enterprise

In today's fast-paced, hybrid and multi-cloud business environments, enterprises face increasing pressure to deliver critical network services like DNS and DHCP seamlessly across both on-premises and cloud infrastructures.

The complexity of deploying and managing these services at scale has made it a daunting task for IT teams. Infoblox, a leader in network control solutions, has introduced NIOS-X as a Service, a cutting-edge, cloud-native solution designed to address these challenges and transform how businesses manage their DNS and DHCP services.

"Enterprise IT leaders are grappling with the complexity of distributed network services across multi-cloud and on-prem environments", said Mohammed Al-Moneer, Senior Regional Director, META at Infoblox. "With NIOS-X as a Service, we've created a game-changing solution that not only simplifies these deployments but also offers businesses the agility, scalability, and cost efficiency they need to thrive in today's rapidly evolving landscape".
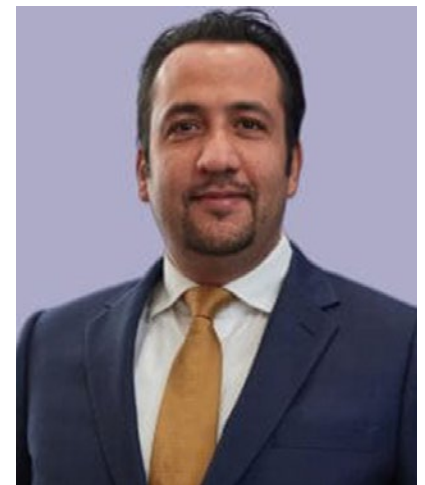
Mohammed Al-Moneer, Senior Regional Director, META at Infoblox.

Cloudflare report unveils record high government-directed internet shutdowns in 2024

Cloudflare, Inc. the leading connectivity cloud company, today published its fifth annual Year in Review, exploring global Internet insights and security trends during 2024, accompanied by a deeper dive on the most popular Internet services.

Cloudflare's 2024 Year in Review underscores how every year, as more people and devices connect to the Internet, global traffic surges (up 17% YoY), generating new trends that showcase our global dependence on its capabilities.

"We rely on the Internet almost constantly, yet many still see it merely as a collection of web pages.

Matthew Prince, CEO and co-founder at Cloudflare

But the Internet is everywhere, woven throughout almost all of the daily activities of modern life – how we interact and connect on social media, use our smart refrigerators and vacuums, travel from one place to another through rideshare apps, connect to our banks and more," said Matthew Prince, CEO and co-founder at Cloudflare. "All of these interactions we often take for granted, behind the scenes, are connected to the Internet in one way or another, with a huge percentage running through Cloudflare's network every second of every day. And as one of the largest in the world, Cloudflare's global network has an unmatched comprehensive view into usage, and overall quality and connectivity across the web."

UAE-founded Revibe raises US$7 Million Series A to expand sustainable tech business

In less than two years since its launch, UAE-founded Revibe, the leader in guarantee-backed refurbished tech, has marked another milestone, having recently closed its Series A of US$7 million in a round co-led by ISAI and Resonance, and featuring prominent investors such as Kima Ventures and Edouard Mendy.

This follows a year of strong revenue growth for the company. The fresh infusion of funds now strongly positions Revibe as the leader in the MENA region's US$6 billion refurbished consumer electronics segment.

Commenting on the drivers of the company's success, Revibe Co-Founder, Abdessamad Benzakour said,

"Buoyed by clear and commendable government visions and initiatives, an increasingly sustainability-oriented society, and cost-conscious consumerism, the market for pre-loved tech is set to accelerate to US$20 billion within a decade. While our ability to deliver like-new devices at 30% to 70% below their retail price points is undoubtedly appealing, it is our unmatched quality assurance that sets us apart, earning us a loyal and ever-expanding customer base".

8

New 2025 Genetec State of Physical Security Report reveals evolving trends in the META

Firas Jadalla, Regional Director – Middle East, Türkiye and Africa (META) at Genetec.

Genetec Inc. ("Genetec"), the global leader in enterprise physical security software, today shared the results of its 2025 State of the Physical Security Report.

Based on insights from more than 600 physical security leaders, including end users, channel partners, systems integrators, and consultants based in the Middle East, Türkiye and Africa (MEA) markets, the report offers a comprehensive analysis of evolving trends in physical security operations.

"In the META market, where digital transformation and operational resilience are top priorities, the evolving role of physical security is critical. By placing IT at the centre of hybrid and cloud implementations, businesses can make security operations more resilient, data-driven, and adaptable to the region's dynamic threat landscape, safeguarding both people and digital assets effectively", said Firas Jadalla, Regional Director – Middle East, Türkiye and Africa (META) at Genetec.

Ericsson enables efficient transformation to cloud native with new Compact Packet Core

The new Ericsson Compact Packet Core includes the cloud-native Packet Core Controller (PCC) and Packet Core Gateway (PCG) network functions on top of a compact, one rack, version of Ericsson's Cloud-Native Infrastructure Solution (CNIS).

It is a global solution with pre-defined parameter settings and streamlined migration procedures that simplifies transition to cloud-native and maximises efficient return on investment in this key network infrastructure. Compact Packet Core fully supports 4G, 5G Non-Standalone (NSA), and 5G Standalone (SA) networks, providing CSPs with the capabilities needed to meet their strategic and operational needs.

Compact Packet Core is launched with solution lifecycle management service where Ericsson oversees automated upgrades of the network. This brings benefits such as seamless upgrades, and networks that are always up to date with the latest software innovation and security.

Monica Zethzon, Head of Solution Area Core Networks, Ericsson says: "With this solution we are providing a new approach for upgrading to cloud native and introducing 5G Core, built on our deep experience with the world's most advanced networks. It significantly simplifies modernisation while unlocking the full potential of our world-class cloud-native software. We are proud to introduce the Ericsson Compact Packet Core for CSPs looking to accelerate their cloud-native journey and manage capacity growth".

9

10

EXPANDING THEIR KINGDOM

Daniel Shepherd, Deputy Editor of CNME, engaged in an insightful conversation with **Giordano Albertazzi**, CEO of Vertiv, to discuss the company's ambitious vision for the future, their strategic expansion into Riyadh, and the transformative plans they have set in motion for 2025 and beyond.

Would you like to tell our readers a little bit about yourself and your role within Vertiv?

I'm Giordano Albertazzi, the CEO of Vertiv, a publicly traded global leader in critical digital infrastructure and continuity solutions. I have been with the company for over 20 years, during which we have evolved significantly.

Vertiv, as it is known today, was established on December 1, 2016, following our spin-off from Emerson Electric. Since February 2020, we have proudly traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

At Vertiv, our expertise lies in powering and cooling critical digital infrastructure across the globe. While our operations extend beyond data centers, this sector remains a core focus.

In fact, as shared with our investors during a recent investor and earnings event in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, we anticipate that approximately 80% of our revenue will come from the data center market in 2024. This encompasses a broad spectrum including hyperscale facilities, core enterprise locations, and distributed IT.

The remaining portion of our business caters to the telecommunications and commercial industries, further demonstrating our diverse capabilities and commitment to innovation in critical digital infrastructure solutions.

Congratulations on the new office inauguration! How significant is the fact that Vertiv is establishing an office in Riyadh – can you outline the importance and significance of this decision, and what are your primary goals and objectives over the next 12 months in the KSA?

This office holds both practical and symbolic importance for us. The Middle Eastern market, particularly Saudi Arabia, is brimming with potential and dynamism, and we are deeply committed to its growth and development.

Establishing our regional headquarters here underscores our confidence in the Kingdom's robust market and the region's overall economic strength.

There is no better way to truly engage with, and serve a market than, by maintaining a direct presence through a regional headquarters. This step aligns with our clear and well-defined strategic vision for the Kingdom and the broader region.

For over three decades, we have successfully conducted business in Saudi Arabia through our trusted partners, MMR. This partnership goes beyond mere business transactions—it is built on a foundation of enduring personal relationships cultivated over many years. Together, we are poised to embrace new opportunities and strengthen our legacy in this thriving market.

You mention the partnership with MMR. How has this partnership contributed to your success in Saudi Arabia?

MMR's excellent market expertise, their pivotal role

11

in the digital infrastructure sector, and their exceptional ability to adapt and integrate our solutions within the Saudi Arabian landscape is truly unparalleled.

It is this powerful combination of Vertiv's innovation and MMR's localized insight and execution that creates a unique partnership, driving strength and success for both organizations. Together, we are uniquely positioned to lead and thrive in this dynamic market.

Vertiv was in the news last week for all the right reasons when its stock price skyrocketed after a very successful Investor Event in the United States. Traders were buoyed by its long-term outlook for the datacenter infrastructure marketplace. Can you tell us more about what Vertiv has planned for 2025?

This investors event was built on a similar one we held last year, where we outlined our five-year strategic outlook.

Our updated forecast reflects improvements in key areas such as growth and profitability, highlighting a stronger position relative to last year.

The market itself has shown significant resilience and momentum.

As highlighted at the investor event, previously, our five-year market growth (CAGR) outlook ranged between 9-12%, with our strategy consistently focused on outpacing the market. Now, we are projecting growth of 12-14% within five years, a testament to both market strength and our strategic execution.

We are optimistic about the opportunities ahead. We are making significant investments in our R&D and engineering departments to ensure we stay ahead of the curve when it comes to enabling the technologies of today and tomorrow.

As further noted at the event, looking towards 2025, we anticipate initial growth rates of 16-18%, further underscoring our confidence in our ability to exceed market expectations and deliver exceptional results.

What innovations is Vertiv bringing to support emerging AI and cloud trends in the region? In addition, what do you think are the biggest challenges facing data center providers in the region, and how can Vertiv's product portfolio help them to overcome these challenges?
Our primary objective is to bring the latest global technological advancements to the region, ensuring our cutting-edge innovations are readily accessible.

As a global leader, we have cultivated robust relationships within the industry ecosystem, which includes the most prominent chip technology companies, leading hyperscalers, and co-location providers.

Together, we collaborate to shape the future of technology. Equally important to us are our regional partnerships, which we deeply value. In an industry evolving at such a rapid pace, fostering a collaborative ecosystem is essential for sustainable growth and innovation.

We see ourselves as the vital connective tissue linking the silicon sector, delivering advancements like enhanced power density and IT performance with the hyperscale and enterprise worlds, which rely on highly efficient infrastructure to unlock this performance.

Our role is to bridge these domains, enabling seamless synergy and driving the industry forward.

The synergy between data center owners, IT innovators, and Vertiv is pivotal in shaping the power and cooling infrastructure for modern data centers.

Given their 20-year lifecycle, data centers must be designed to be future-ready to accommodate evolving IT demands. At Vertiv, our mission is to enable these advanced technologies to be accessible in the region, empowering industries globally.

"Establishing our regional headquarters here underscores our confidence in the Kingdom's robust market and the region's overall economic strength."

We are proud to lead the way with innovations like our expanded Vertiv™ CoolChip CDU portfolio, including our latest 2.3-Megawatt capacity unit, offering what we believe to be the highest power density per square meter in the industry.

Additionally, we continue to enhance our liquid cooling solutions, such as the Vertiv CoolChip CDU 330 liquid-to-air system to support data center retrofits. For facilities transitioning from air-cooled systems, our solutions enable seamless upgrades for improved efficiency.

On the thermal front, our Vertiv™ CoolPhase Flex product exemplifies our customer-centric innovation.

Developed in collaboration with a top client, this solution is now available to the broader market. It minimizes installation costs by allowing the unit to be placed outside the data center, optimizing space usage.

With integrated heat rejection, air cooling, and liquid cooling capabilities, this product provides unmatched flexibility. It enables clients to dynamically adapt to unpredictable thermal demands over the data center's lifecycle, ensuring energy and cost efficiency.

We've also observed rapid advancements in power infrastructure, driven by skyrocketing rack densities—in some cases increasing a hundredfold.

To address this, we developed the Vertiv™ PowerNexus product, a comprehensive solution that integrates UPS, power switchgear, and battery energy storage into a single system. This innovation not only reduces installation costs but also delivers exceptional modularity and footprint efficiency.

All of these cutting-edge solutions are readily available in the region, reinforcing our commitment to supporting local industries with the most advanced data center infrastructure technologies.

The industry is increasingly shifting toward higher levels of prefabrication, recognizing the critical importance of speed in infrastructure availability. For our customers, time is a significant competitive advantage, and our commitment to prefabrication enables them to realize that advantage by reducing construction timelines by an impressive 30-50%.

Additionally, the availability of skilled labor on-site is often limited, which can pose challenges in maintaining consistent quality and efficiency. Prefabrication addresses this issue by streamlining processes and minimizing on-site complexity, providing a higher standard of quality control and faster deployment.

This approach not only accelerates project delivery but also simplifies operations, empowering our customers to achieve their goals with greater efficiency and confidence.

Is there anything you would like to say to our readers before we finish?
The industry is at an exhilarating juncture, characterized by unprecedented growth and a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Addressing these dual aspects requires a strategic, forward-thinking approach.

One key strategy lies in expanding capacity to meet rising demands. Our robust growth projections are underpinned by meticulously planned capacity expansions, allowing us to remain agile and responsive to market dynamics. This proactive approach enables our objective of exceeding the expectations of our customers and stakeholders.

Equally, technology is at the core of everything we do. We have made a firm commitment to our investors and customers to elevate our R&D and capacity investment, with a planned incremental investment of ~$150M – $200M in 2025, as highlighted at our investor day. This dedication underscores our mission to lead the way in innovation.

In collaboration with industry leaders like NVIDIA, we are bringing innovative technology to the region, empowering industries to thrive in this transformative era. This unwavering commitment to growth and technological excellence solidifies our position as a driving force in the industry.

13

Cisco

KNOW YOUR IDENTITY

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Lothar Renner**, Managing Director, Security Sales and Engineering at Cisco EMEA, ahead of their participation at Black Hat MEA in Riyadh last month, to learn more about why the US technology behemoth is advocating for an 'identity-first approach to security, the new variants emerging within ransomware, the important role the Cisco Networking Academy will play in addressing the glaring skills gap globally – and the role of Gen AI in the cybersecurity landscape.

Lothar Renner is one of the most respected and revered sales leaders in the cybersecurity ecosystem globally having spent almost a quarter of century at Cisco.

CNME Editor Mark Forker caught up with Lothar Renner for the first time since the pair spoke face-to-face at GISEC 2024 in April.

Such is the nature of the technology sector, there has been huge changes across the industry in the six months that have elapsed since the pair last spoke.

Renner was in Riyadh for Black Hat MEA, which is the region's flagship cybersecurity conference.

So, there was no better time to pick Renner's brains on the challenges currently engulfing the cybersecurity world.

Ahead of the interview, Cisco's Talos IR Trends Report for Q3 had just been published, and that's where we kickstarted our conversation.

Renner stressed the need for enterprises to adopt an 'identity-first' approach to security.

"Identity is the fabric that connects humans, devices and applications in the workplace, and has become an easy target for modern cybersecurity attacks. Organizations need to adopt an identity-first approach to security, which among other things allows them to evolve from just asking 'can' a user access a system to continuously assessing whether a user 'should' be able to do what

they are doing once they are authenticated. That really is the key, the mindset needs to shift, businesses really need to determine regardless of authentication processes, who really needs the access to their systems," said Renner.

There are many reasons why Cisco has sustained its success over such a long period of time, but one of the key market differentiators over the years for them has been their ability to simplify.

When it comes to security, Cisco are in the business of simplification.

"That's why in Cisco Live EMEA last year, we unveiled new innovations within the Cisco Security Cloud to simplify security: Cisco Identity Intelligence and continued innovation in AI capabilities are the latest milestones towards its vision of a unified, AI-driven, cross-domain security platform. Cisco Identity Intelligence brings together identity, networking and security to better protect organizations' complex identity stack against increasingly sophisticated attacker techniques," said Renner.

Identity attacks may be in vogue when it comes to cybersecurity, but ransomware remains a huge problem, and as Renner points out the report from Cisco Talos indicates that new variants of ransomware attacks have emerged.

"As part of a years-long trend in greater democratization of

ransomware adversaries, we continue to see new variants and ransomware operations emerge. A third of these engagements involved exploitation of known vulnerabilities that are consistently leveraged by ransomware operators/affiliates to deploy ransomware, according to public reporting. Some of those vulnerabilities carried CVE numbers from 2023 – which means we in the industry need to get better at vulnerability management and patching. At the same time, we need to prepare ourselves for the incident to happen, which is why we need the creation of incident response plans and playbooks," said Renner.

The issue when it comes to the skills shortage is a huge problem that many business leaders across the global IT and technology industry have been bemoaning over the last number of years.

Unfortunately, it appears that the situation will likely become more of a challenge before it gets better.

A lack of skills in relation to AI has been well documented, but there is a real crisis when it comes to talent in the cybersecurity industry globally.

However, Renner believes Cisco's Networking Academy can go a long way to plugging the gaps that currently exist.

It is a global problem. Four million professionals are urgently needed to plug the talent gap in the global cybersecurity industry. Attracting, training and retraining cybersecurity professionals is key to helping organizations and society stay safe online. At Cisco, we are dedicated to equipping professionals with the skills necessary to enhance their careers and bridge the skills gap. Cisco Networking Academy is one of the world's longest standing IT-skills-to-jobs programs that partners with learning institutions worldwide. Specifically in the Middle East and Africa region, since the inception of Cisco Networking Academy, we have trained more than 4.3 million learners on digital skills, with focus on cybersecurity and networking. In Cisco's 2024 fiscal year alone, more than 1.1 million students were trained across 2,000+ academies in the region," said Renner.

There have been seismic changes across the Middle East region when it comes to digitalization.

The sheers speed and

> **Organizations need to adopt an identity-first approach to security, which among other things allows them to evolve from just asking 'can' a user access a system to continuously assessing whether a user 'should' be able to do what they are doing once they are authenticated."**

scale of the transformation programs, particularly in the UAE and the KSA are unprecedented globally.

However, as a consequence of all of that transformation, the term 'cybersecurity readiness' has come under the microscope more and more across the Middle East.

In order to help nations across the Gulf accelerate their transformation, Cisco is leveraging their expertise in security to help them protect their key assets.

Renner highlighted how their One Platform vision was taking shape.

"For security to be both simplified and strengthened, it needs an AI-driven, comprehensive platform that seamlessly integrates with an organization's IT infrastructure. This vision aims to address the complexities of modern cybersecurity challenges by providing a holistic, intelligent, and automated approach to threat detection, response, and management. We are increasing our focus on cybersecurity in the region with the acceleration of digitization we're witnessing in most of the Middle East nations. Early this year, we have launched a new local cloud data centre in the UAE for our Duo multifactor authentication (MFA) and secure access solution, that support businesses of all sizes in strengthening their cybersecurity posture and improving connection performance," said Renner.

Cisco's cybersecurity readiness index for the UAE and the KSA showed that a high number of respondents have suffered a cyberattack.

Renner highlighted his belief that a multi-layered approach is the best tactic to adopt to combat modern cyberattacks.

"According to Cisco's Cybersecurity Readiness Index in UAE and KSA: 65% of UAE respondents and 67% of KSA respondents already experienced a cybersecurity incident in the past year. In today's rapidly evolving threat landscape solely relying on human-scale defence is no longer enough. Comprehensive security calls for machine-scale capabilities. Cisco employs a multi-layered approach that integrates advanced automation capabilities with strategic human intervention to ensure robust and effective incident management," said Renner.

In relation to Gen AI, Renner concluded a brilliant exchange by declaring that attackers are constantly developing new strategies and tools – whilst he stressed the need for organizations to stay ahead of these threats by enhancing their cybersecurity posture.

"Our latest innovation, the Cisco Hypershield: is designed to power and protect the engine of the AI revolution, which is AI-scale data centres and clouds. Backed by Talos – Threat Intelligence: 800 billion security events observed per day, 200+ vulnerabilities discovered per year. Cisco is committed to equipping our customers with the tools, products, solutions and services they need to stay protected at all times, amidst a threat landscape that is continually evolving," said Renner. ⬛

"

Cisco employs a multi-layered approach that integrates advanced automation capabilities with strategic human intervention to ensure robust and effective incident management."

Mimojo

STAYING LOYAL

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down with **David Ashford**, Chief Product Officer at mimojo, to find out how the revolutionary cashback rewards app is redefining how merchants across the UAE deliver customer loyalty.

David Ashford is a serial entrepreneur, and one of the most respected technology leaders in the e-business space across the Middle East region.

Ashford has enjoyed a stellar professional career in digital product and tech to date, one that began back in the United Kingdom 35 years ago, when he worked for a management information and billing company, before becoming Head of Information Systems at Publicis. He went on to work as an e-business consultant for a private equity firm, as well as co-founding several startups and investing in others. He relocated to Abu Dhabi in 2009, when he was appointed the General Manager of AppsArabia.

Ashford's most notable role was CIO at The Entertainer. He joined the company in 2012, and was one of the key figures in driving their astounding success and growth, before leaving in 2020.

Whilst The Entertainer's star has waned somewhat, Ashford is now the driving force behind mimojo, branded as a reward and loyalty technology company

that is delivering seamless experiences for both consumers and merchants.

Ashford began our conversation by detailing the factors that drove the inception of mimojo.

The starting point was to determine the major pain points facing both consumers and merchants when it came to the loyalty and rewards space in the UAE.

"We directly engaged with consumers and merchants, and asked them what problems they faced when it

came to the current rewards and incentives programmes in the market. The single biggest challenge, from a merchant perspective, was lack of flexibility. Merchants told us they wanted to be able to choose what type of offer they were going to fund, and to choose the tenure of their commitment against that offer. They told us they wanted to choose different offers for peak and off-peak, to be able to increase the richness of their offer when they had spare capacity. The redemption process was another heavily vocalised friction point, due to the amount of staff training required for one programme to the next," said Ashford.

It's been well documented that we live in a digital world, labelled by many as the 'experience economy'. However, Ashford explains the 'experience' for the majority of consumers, when it came to rewards and loyalty programmes, on the market left a lot to be desired.

"The key pain point that consistently arose during our consumer research was the redemption process. Consumers detest the arduous, socially awkward

and cumbersome processes that loyalty programmes have in place. In addition, consumers were frustrated that in a digital world where everything is automated, loyalty is still completely manual, meaning often consumers 'forget' to make their redemption and miss out on the reward or saving. Another key point for consumers, which also aligned with merchants, was flexibility. Consumers took issue with programmes that don't offer flexibility around their spending habits and frequency. These were the key insights that drove the creation of the mimojo product you see today," said Ashford.

Ashford believes that mimojo has developed a product that can not only alleviate these pain points, but actually eradicate them.

The key technology mimojo is using to drive their application is not something new, in fact, it's a technology that has been around for decades. And no, it's not AI, it's card-linked technology.

Ashford explained card-linked technology in more detail, and outlined how some merchants were using the card-linked technology in the UAE, but were doing it in a way that created a lot of friction for consumers.

"Card linked technology is not new, it's a product built by the card schemes, Visa and Mastercard, that has been around for decades. It is widely used in Europe and North America, but is relatively new to the Middle
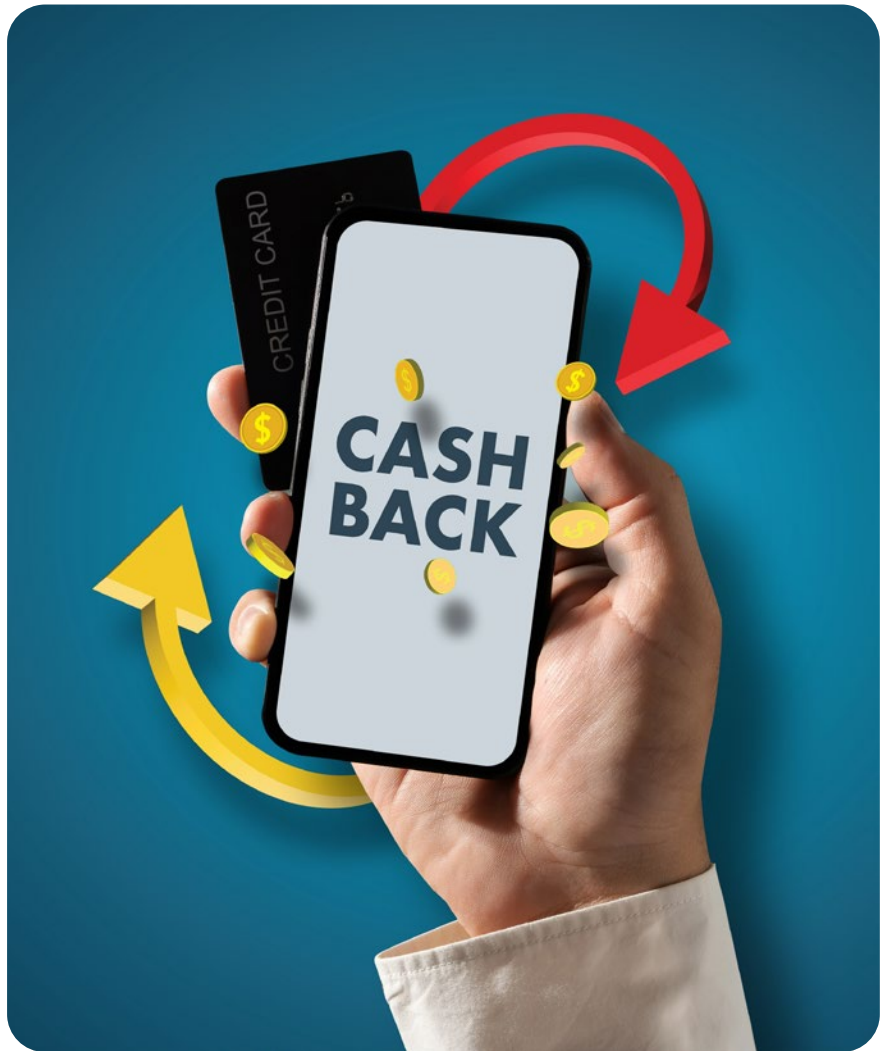
East region. A handful of businesses are using card-linked technology locally, but they are using it very differently to us. For example, they use the transaction to reward points, and then the customer has to confirm when they want to change those points into a currency, or stored value, and then burn their rewards as part payment within a closed network – still

There are countless benefits to card linked offer technology. The simplicity of the product has led some key decision makers to believe it's too good to be true, but we truly have created a product that delivers a frictionless, addictive experience for consumers and merchants."

creating friction. We set out to build something that was completely frictionless, so there's no need for the consumer to do anything," said Ashford.

Ashford then outlined how the mimojo programme actually functions, and how the entire value chain proposition works from both a merchant and consumer perspective.

"Our onboarding process with merchants sees us agree the commercial offer they want to fund, and then we enrol their outlet information with Visa and Mastercard. Consumers then download our app and enrol their credit and debit cards. And that's it! The consumer then automatically earns cashback when they pay with their enrolled Visa or Mastercard cards in any of our enrolled outlets. You simply pay in the normal way – Apple Pay, Samsung Pay, Google Pay, or with your physical card. You'll get a near-real-time push notification when you've earned cashback – often this is a delightful surprise for people. mimojo accumulates all cashback earned, and then on the 15th of every month, which we call mimojo payday, we deposit all your cashback as cold hard cash onto your card. The steps really are that simple; download, enrol your cards and then go and live your life! You'll be delighted to earn cashback in places you didn't know and you'll never miss out on an opportunity to earn cashback. But really what we want people to do, and this is part of our value proposition to merchants, is we want people to use our app to discover where they can earn cashback and to change their behaviours as a result," said Ashford.

Despite its relative infancy as a company, mimojo has enjoyed a lot of success, and that's evidenced by the impressive portfolio of brands on the app.

mimojo boasts businesses ranging from laundrettes to florists, to ride-hailing services to Zofeur, the safe driver app, and much, much more. But again, as Ashford reiterates, they are in the business of influencing consumers to choose mimojo merchant partners over any other.

"For example, Dubai residents have a wide choice, and use a wide selection of laundry collection services. mimojo members have the incentive of automatic cashback from our participating laundry collection services, to actively influence their choice. mimojo members can earn significantly lucrative cashback, be it through high frequency usage with merchants like Zofeur, a safe driver app, or through some of our high value purchase merchants. A mimojo member saved over AED 1,000 in cashback on one transaction because he had to get his car fixed up, including a new battery and four new tyres. Someone else earned over AED 800 cashback when buying a top-end bicycle. You can literally earn cashback on everything imaginable with mimojo – and it's this automatic cashback proposition which will drive addictive loyalty and behaviour change," said Ashford.

The CPO at mimojo, conceded that they faced two challenges.

"The first challenge

we face is to attract more consumers, and obviously it's a marketplace, so the more consumers we have the easier it is to get better merchants; and the better merchants we have then the easier it is to get more consumers. The second challenge we have is to inform the consumers about the great merchant partners that we have – 'choose these guys and you'll earn significant cashback, effortlessly'," said Ashford.

Ashford said the company's 'sweet spot' was undoubtedly e-commerce.

"Our sweet spot at mimojo is e-commerce because, when you think about it, whenever you've used another programme, no matter what that programme it is, there is always a redemption process of some sort. And in e-commerce, that's difficult. At mimojo, there's no special affiliate link or promo code, there's no need for any of that. You can go directly to their website, or through Google, or from our app... you pay and you earn instant cashback, it's really that simple. When your payment is successful, you'll immediately receive a push notification from mimojo informing you that you've just earned cashback. Everybody is telling us that this all sounds too good to be true," said Ashford.

Ashford stressed that a major problem is that some merchants don't understand card-linked technology.

"We explain to merchants that our project is powered by card-linked, and we're frequently hit with the response 'what's that?'. Our sales pitch to merchants starts with that educational piece on the technology itself. Once merchants understand the frictionless experience, they immediately see and value the benefits it brings. For example, the technology means that there is no front of house staff training required, which frees up service time. But the frictionless commitment doesn't stop at the technology, as part of our commercial infrastructure, we extend flexibility on tenure and merchants can manage varying cashback value for on-peak vs. off-peak hours. To support our merchants looking to increase Average Transaction Value, we introduced tiered offers; for example, consumers receive 10% cashback below a certain spending threshold, and then the cashback jumps to 20% cashback when they spend over that threshold. There are so many benefits, and it's a no-brainer in all reality," said Ashford.

Banks often fund offers themselves but these are of course less generous and are capped. Because these offers are not funded by the merchant, the customer benefits from a double whammy: they get some cashback from their card issuer as well as uncapped automatic cashback from mimojo.

One of the more overused terms of the last decade has been the declaration that 'data is the new oil' but, whilst that terms has become somewhat tedious, the truth still rings true that data is so important in relation to empowering businesses to make better decisions in a much faster fashion.

"We're driving footfall to our merchant partners, and we're giving them access to unprecedented data, and easy-to-digest visualisations of that data, so they can learn more about their customers and start to understand their business trends," said Ashford.

Ashford said that mimojo will never give PII (Personal Identity Information) data to the merchants, as that's a data protection right that all consumers have. However, they do give a merchant information on customer demographics and patterns in relation to spending behaviours.

However, like we hear across so many industries, having the data is one thing, but ensuring you have the talent to decipher and apply the technology is another.

One way that mimojo tries to plug that hole for their

> ## What we wanted to do was provide something that was automatic and frictionless, so there is no need for the consumer to do anything."

merchants is through their own data portal.

"There is a wide variety of data analysis skillsets out there, and a varying appetite to explore and apply data insights; some merchants embrace it, some merchants struggle with it. We bridge this gap for our merchants through our data portal. Merchants can review their transactions real-time in the portal via desktop or a purpose built app, which removes the admin for them later in the process. mimojo user transactions appear instantly on their personalised dashboard, and each merchant has 14 days to accept or decline each transaction. A scenario where a merchant may decline an offer would be if another offer has already been redeemed by that user; that could be a meal deal, happy hour or a competitor

offer. If merchants don't decline a transaction within 14 days, then it's automatically approved." said Ashford.

Another key differentiator for mimojo is the fact that merchants can deal directly with dedicated account managers, who can help them to understand datasets and make recommendations that can drive more traffic and revenue.

Ashford also pointed out that in the future the company will incorporate AI into its consumer app and its merchant portal, especially when it comes to recommending actionable insights.

Ashford concluded a brilliantly fascinating insight into mimojo, by outlining the payment model adopted by the revolutionary cashback app.

"We offer the merchants that we onboard some flexibility in payment options: float, card-on-file, and direct debit. The key is for us to be cashflow positive – this benefits our merchant partners as well as us because we can focus on adding value to our merchants instead of chasing cash."

"Our primary focus at the moment us is to establish our core ecosystem; onboard more merchants and acquire more consumers. From there, the mimojo magic kicks into action; we educate and influence our consumers to proactively choose products and services from our participating merchants, creating incremental revenue for the merchant and delivering uncapped seamless cashback for the consumer," concluded Ashford.

mimojo is just at the start of their journey, but it's hard to see the company not having huge success, and with the experienced Ashford providing a safe pair of hands, it's only a matter of time before mimojo becomes a household name in Dubai, and across the UAE.

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In the future, we'll be using AI to recommend actionable commercial insights through machine learning. We're not at that scale yet, but we're only at the beginning of our journey."

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PROVEN Robotics

BUILDING SMART BOTS

Mohammed Aldousari, Regional Robotics Lead at PROVEN Robotics, discusses the traits of the ideal software model that one should use whilst building smart robots, in an exclusive thought leadership feature for December's edition of CNME.

The idea of smart robots might seem paradoxical at first, as robots are known as marvels of machinery and revolutionary inventions designed to simplify human tasks. However, the transition from a mere robot to an intelligent and smart one is a complex journey. Consider humans as an analogy. We're often hailed as the 'smartest' primates. However, a segment of us outshines others by reaching the pinnacle of success and gaining worldwide recognition because they have truly made a difference.

Statistics revealed that the annual production of robots is between 370,000 and 517,000 units. So, the journey to creating the smartest robot is as much about perseverance as it is about innovation. One may wonder what the ideal software model should be while building a robot that will ultimately add great value to our daily lives. To answer this question, we must look at some defining factors to design an intelligent robot that requires careful planning and execution.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROBOT'S PURPOSE

The first step in building an intelligent robot is to understand its purpose. Start by identifying the specific tasks the robot should perform and the problems it aims to solve. A clear understanding of the robot's purpose is essential, whether assisting in healthcare, manufacturing, or personal services.

Pro Tip: The journey to build the ultimate smart robot starts by activating its "learn by experience" mode. Challenge it with tasks that stretch its problem-solving skills to their limits. Start off manageable but gradually ramp up the difficulty over the years.

Monitor the robot to determine if it's reached the desired level of intelligence. Repeat the process with a different set of tasks for another robot. Keep this cycle going until you've tested at least a few robots. Somewhere along the way, one of these mechanical marvels might just attain the coveted pinnacle of smartness you're aiming for.

To avoid the huge expenses, consider using a model instead of a real robot to cut costs. Concerned about the time it takes? Simulate the entire scenario on a computer for quicker results. And if things don't go according to plan? Just return to square one and start afresh.

24

DESIGNING AN INTUITIVE USER INTERFACE

The user interface (UI) is crucial to any intelligent robot. Design an intuitive and user-friendly interface to ensure that operators can easily control the robot. Use graphical representations, touch screens, and voice commands to interact with the robot. A well-designed UI can significantly enhance the user experience, making the robot more accessible to a broader range of users.

IMPLEMENTING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is at the core of smart and intelligent robots. Implementing AI techniques such as machine learning, natural language processing, and computer vision allows the robot to understand and respond to its environment. These technologies enable the robot to adapt and learn from experience, improving its performance over time. Incorporating AI into the software model is essential for creating an intelligent robot with customised services.

DEVELOPING CUSTOMISED SERVICES

Customisation is critical to making a robot truly smart and intelligent. Tailoring the robot's services to meet the specific needs of the user or industry allows for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness. For example, in a healthcare setting, the robot can be programmed to perform tasks like monitoring patients, dispensing medication, or even providing emotional support. Customisation ensures that the robot can provide personalised services that are relevant to your user's requirements.

INTEGRATION OF SENSORS AND CONNECTIVITY

A smart robot relies on sensors to perceive and understand its surroundings. Sensors such as cameras, proximity sensors, and thermal sensors provide the robot with valuable data about its environment. Integration of these sensors into the software model allows the robot to make informed decisions and carry out tasks with precision. Additionally, connectivity to the internet or cloud-based services enables the robot to access vast amounts of information, further enhancing its capabilities.

ENSURING PRIVACY AND SECURITY

With the advanced features of smart and intelligent robots comes the need for robust privacy and security measures. As these robots handle sensitive data and perform critical tasks, it is crucial to protect both the user's privacy and the integrity of the system. Implement encryption, authentication, and authorisation protocols to prevent unauthorized access to the robot's software and data. Regular updates and patches should also be applied to address any vulnerabilities that may arise.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Building a smart and intelligent robot with customised services is a complex but rewarding endeavour. Crafting a software model for such a robot requires a blend of innovation, meticulous planning, and a deep understanding of user needs. By following the steps outlined in this guide, developers can create a genuinely remarkable robotic companion.

Moreover, embracing flexibility and adaptability in the design process is key, as it allows for the incorporation of evolving technologies and user feedback, ensuring that the final product remains relevant and effective in meeting users' demands.

As we venture into an era where robotics play an increasingly prominent role in our daily lives, the potential for creating intelligent robots with customised services is limitless. With dedication, creativity, and a commitment to excellence, developers can make significant strides towards realising this vision, ushering in a future where robots seamlessly integrate into our world, enriching our lives in ways we never imagined possible.

The first step in building an intelligent robot is to understand its purpose. Start by identifying the specific tasks the robot should perform and the problems it aims to solve."

26

DOES THE UAE HAVE A 'TRUMP' CARD

CNME Editor Mark Forker examines what impact the return of **US President Donald Trump** will have on the technology landscape in the UAE, and across the Middle East region.

THE AI ERA:

Earlier this week, Japanese tycoon Masayoshi Son, the Group CEO of Softbank, announced his intentions to invest $100bn into AI projects in the United States over the next 4 years.

Son announced the details of his investment alongside President-elect Donald Trump during a new conference at Mar-a-Lago.

Trump claimed that the investment into building AI infrastructure across the United States, would create 100,000 jobs.

The declaration of intent in AI from Son is just the latest in a long list of mega-investments in AI that have been announced in the last number of months.

Last month, Bloomberg reported that Saudi Arabia was launching Project Transcendence, a $100bn AI project that was being spearheaded by the Public Investment Fund, as part of their efforts to outmuscle the UAE, and become the region's AI powerhouse.

The sheer volume and scale in AI investments globally has triggered a frenzy of activity on Wall Street.

There is no doubt that AI represents the future, so it should come as no surprise that the battle for dominance and control in relation to AI is now being played out

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G42 CEO Peng Xiao described the decision to 'sever ties' with Chinese companies as very difficult during the World Government Summit in Dubai."

quite publicly between global economic superpowers China and the United States.

THE X-FACTOR

Technology became a key feature of Trump's presidential campaign following the very public, and at times controversial support being provided by Elon Musk.

The owner of X, formerly known as Twitter, and the head of SpaceX and Tesla was giving away millions of dollars to attendees during Trump's infamous MAGA rallies.

Regardless of your political allegiance, and your personal opinion of Musk, he's a powerful figure in the world of technology, and the fact he now has the ear of the President-elect means that technology and AI in particular is going to be a huge part of Trump's administration.

Following his election victory, Trump wasted no time in appointing Musk as the head of a new advisory group called the 'Department of Government Efficiency'.

Musk along with other prominent figures from the US will head up the taskforce, in which technology will be the central component.

Another element of Trump's rhetoric that was indirectly related to the technology sector was his war on tariffs, especially products and goods coming from China.

However, what does the 'return of the Donald' actually mean for the UAE when it comes to their own aspirations and ambitions to become a global hub for AI.

TRADE WAR

Examining how a Trump administration is going to impact the UAE, either in a positive, or negative way is hard to predict in many ways.

However, what is evident is that the US is putting huge pressure on the UAE to cut ties with China's technology community.

The best illustration of this came back in April of this year, when Microsoft agreed to invest $1.5bn into the Abu-Dhabi based artificial intelligence company G42.

One of the stipulations of that deal was for G42 to significantly scale back their investments in Chinese technology companies.

G42 CEO Peng Xiao described the decision to 'sever ties' with Chinese companies as very difficult during the World Government Summit in Dubai.

Essentially, G42 accepted constraints imposed on it to work with US companies as part of their efforts to what they said was a need to safeguard their technology.

G42 sold all its stakes in Chinese companies, including that of TikTok owner ByteDance.

In addition to this, the 42X Fund, which is the $10bn investment arm of G42, has divested from all its investments in China.

It was the perfect example

of a power play from the US – in the fact that they ultimately gave G42 an 'us or them' ultimatum.

Despite G42 itself cutting ties with Chinese partners, numerous companies within the Emirati tech ecosystem have continued their collaborations with Chinese technology companies, engineers and data centres.

Historically, the UAE has enjoyed a brilliant relationship with Chinese tech companies, and Huawei has enjoyed phenomenal success across the Middle East region over the last 20 years.

Chinese ICT behemoth Huawei has been the victim of smear campaigns by the US for years.

The US feared Huawei would become the global market incumbent when it came to 5G, and set about derailing its impact, which resulted in the telecommunications company being banned from 5G projects in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan and Australia.

Inevitably, that has done significant damage to Huawei, but now attentions have turned away from 5G, and the new fight is now over semiconductor intellectual property and manufacturing.

Even though the G42 decision was made during

> **Washington fears Beijing could use US-made semiconductors to make the next generation of weapons and artificial intelligence systems."**

the Biden administration, the return of Donald Trump to the Oval Office is not going to improve diplomatic relations with China, in fact, in all reality it will only get worse, which inadvertently will mean in many regards that Chinese companies will continue to feel the squeeze in traditionally-friendly markets such as the UAE, KSA and Qatar, as Washington looks to wrestle back control of the chips that are central to the acceleration of large-scale AI infrastructure projects.

PUT ALL YOUR 'CHIPS' ON THE TABLE

The AI-arms race is heating up and as we know it's a two-way battle between East versus West.

Earlier this week, the Chinese government lambasted America's introduction of fresh export controls on US-made semiconductors.

Washington fears Beijing could use US-made semiconductors to make the next generation of weapons and artificial intelligence systems.

China described the new measures implemented by the outgoing Biden administration as draconian.

Diplomatic tensions are always contemptuous to say the least between Washington and Beijing, but it's fair to say these new measures have raised the political temperature between the world's top two economies ahead of the imminent inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping has made no secret of the fact that self-sufficiency will be a major pillar of his economic strategy to make China a tech superpower.

On Monday, the US Commerce Department announced curbs on the sale of two dozen types of semiconductor-making equipment and restrictions on numerous Chinese companies from accessing American technology.

In the current climate the US has had to adopt a tactile approach in relation to increasing the GCC uptake of its chips and software, whilst at the same time also ensuring that that Middle East does not become some sort of technological back door for China.

As a result, the UAE has become a very important player in what is a highly interconnected tech ecosystem that, for now, lacks any single dominant player.

STUCK IN THE MIDDLE WITH YOU

You don't need to well-versed in geo-politics to understand that in the new incoming Trump administration, it is very likely to pressure and push partners harder than previous administrations for a complete strategic disentanglement from China, particularly regarding critical national infrastructure and technology.

Trump is renowned and revered in many circles for his direct and straightforward rhetoric, which certainly goes against the grain in political circles.

His 'America First' message plays to his base domestically, whilst on the international front part of his diplomatic strategy is to tell allies they are either with the US, or against them when trying to be persuasive.

These binary choices may clash with the UAE's overall vision, as they see there tech investments are part of a broader strategy to create interdependence.

Some economic analysts and political commentators believe that Trump is likely to encounter resistance from Abu Dhabi's leaders, despite the G42 U-turn on China.

Abu Dhabi's leadership are acutely cognisant of their leverage within this interconnected ecosystem.

The UAE wields substantial financial resources to invest in AI and data technology ventures, not only in Silicon Valley, but also across Asia, including China.

There is no doubting that the UAE has an impressive and rock-solid track record of bargaining with major powers. It may choose to leverage its position to pivot further toward China, if Washington proves inflexible.

The UAE are certainly going to feel the squeeze as economic tensions between the US and China inevitably escalate, but the UAE, are no longer a Gulf state on the periphery of global affairs, and have much more bargaining power than perhaps Trump, or Washington would like.

2025, and the return of the Donald, is going to be very, very interesting to say the least. ▄▄▄

Lenovo

TRAINING DAY

Thibault Dousson, Director, META, Solutions and Services Group, Lenovo, has highlighted some key trends from their Global CIO report for 2024, in an exclusive thought leadership feature for December's edition of CNME. Some of the key trends that have emerged from the report is the fact that employees from across the Gulf region want training in Gen AI.

Across the Middle East, businesses are navigating productivity challenges, prompting leaders to seek innovative solutions. Increasingly, the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) based solutions is recognized as a key driver in addressing these issues.

For instance, AI is projected to contribute up to $320 billion to the region's economy by 2030, according to PWC. IT leaders are at the forefront of these advancements, facilitating the integration of AI technologies.

According to Boston Consulting Group, rather than focusing solely on individual employee efficiency, businesses are leveraging AI to streamline processes and enhance overall productivity. Notably, 61% of Middle Eastern executives anticipate productivity gains of over 10% from AI and generative AI by 2024.

Today, 80% of CIOs are optimistic about the impact AI can have, feeling that breakthroughs and developments in the technology will have a significant impact on their business. Additionally, 84% believe it will boost productivity in the next year or two.

The rapid adoption of Generative AI (GenAI) and Large Language Models (LLMs) has revolutionised tasks that once took hours reducing them to just a fraction of the time. These tools, designed to be user-friendly, allow employees to interact with data through natural language, leading many businesses to assume that once deployed, these systems will be seamlessly adopted and drive immediate results.

However, this assumption can be risky. Even seemingly simple tools, often require training and support for widespread, effective use.

THE TRAINING BLIND SPOT

The reality is that GenAI isn't as "plug and play" as it might seem and using LLM systems will require users to develop new skills to use them effectively. However, these advancements are evolving so rapidly that many businesses overlook essential aspects, such as understanding how

As AI transforms the workplace, employees increasingly expect support in mastering these tools. Workers understand that AI has the potential to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness, but they also recognise that without proper training, they may not be able to fully leverage its capabilities."

the technology works and the importance of providing proper training and user guides.

Without adequate support, even easy-to-use technology might not be easily picked up. For example, dual monitors can increase productivity by, 9% to 50% but even today many employees don't use them because they've never been taught how to set them up correctly.

With tools that utilise natural language input, employees first need to learn how to correctly input information into these solutions by writing well-structured prompts and understanding how to guide AI output through an iterative process. Training employees to refine their requests with specific details is crucial for generating more accurate results.

It's equally important to understand the limitations of GenAI and LLMs. While these tools excel at processing large amounts of data and generating quick insights, they often struggle with context, nuance, and accuracy. For example, an AI model may produce results that sound convincing but are factually incorrect or miss cultural or industry-specific details.

Employees need be aware of these shortcomings and know how to critically evaluate AI-generated outputs. AI is not infallible and relying on it blindly can lead to errors.

EMPLOYEES WANT TO BE TRAINED

Unsurprisingly, as AI transforms the workplace, employees increasingly expect support in mastering these tools. Workers understand that AI has the potential to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness, but they also recognise that without proper training, they may not be able to fully leverage its capabilities.

In fact, 61% of employees want formal training in using Generative AI, showing the need for businesses to offer comprehensive training programs. Despite 73% of European organisations reporting that their staff use AI at work, only 30% provide limited training to employees in tech-related positions, while 40% offer no training at all.

Comprehensive training is essential to help workers fully leverage these technologies and avoid missed opportunities for efficiency and innovation. Structured training is a necessity, not a luxury.

THE ROLE OF IT IN SUCCESSFUL ADOPTION

To further ensure a smooth rollout, partnering with experienced technology service providers who provide end-to-end support can make a significant difference.

This is where Lenovo's Advisory Services, part of its suite of DWS solutions, comes in. Lenovo has extensive experience helping customers around the globe implement AI services, and having deployed its own AI solutions internally, Lenovo brings a wealth of knowledge to the table.

The Advisory Services team can help businesses develop tailored AI implementation strategies, ensuring both technology and the workforce are prepared for success. Lenovo SSG's expertise makes it a valuable partner for IT departments, providing strategic support and training to help new technologies be fully embraced, driving productivity and maximising return-on-investment.

Not only has Lenovo been supporting companies around the globe in implementing AI solutions, Lenovo has also implemented AI internally, meaning that teams have experience both as partners and as end-users themselves.

Lenovo's Advisory Services can provide reliable insight to guide your business toward future-proof solutions. By leveraging Lenovo's expert professionals, you can untangle complex IT challenges and ensure your systems are optimised to meet your business goals. Explore Lenovo's Advisory Services to unlock the full potential of AI and future-proof your IT. cnme

YOU CAN 'BANK' ON TECHNOLOGY

Aladdin Al Deesi, EVP – Head of Mashreq Gold, Emirati & Distribution at Mashreq, discusses how technology rests at the heart of the modern financial landscape in an exclusive thought leadership feature for December's edition of CNME.

From the days of basic valuables storage and rudimentary lending to today's sophisticated landscape – banking has evolved in leaps and bounds.

And at the core of this evolution is innovation, with technology as the key driver of progress; whether in enhancing security, supporting the development of trust or enabling the most advanced of banking solutions, technology has been at the heart of this sophisticated financial landscape.

THE DYNAMIC HISTORY OF BANKING

Mesopotamian temples acted as the first examples of bank safe-keeping, with early financial services being basic loans extended – with interest – and recorded on clay tablets. Greek and Roman civilizations developed this nascent banking system with the addition of deposits and money-changing, and money-lenders present in marketplaces.

Medieval societies further refined the landscape, shaping the beginning of banking ethics, and the early 1600s saw the establishment of the first central banks in Sweden and England, stabilising currency and funding governments.

Industrialisation in the 18- and 1900s accelerated development of the banking industry, with the globalisation of the 1900s and the ongoing digital revolution resulting in the sophisticated financial landscape of today.

FROM ATMS TO AI-BACKED SERVICES

Although an automated teller machine (ATM) seems the most basic of self-service banking options these days, the introduction of such machines in the 1960s could be considered the start of the redefinition of the banking industry.

The launch of online and

> **The evolution of banking has been, and continues to be, profoundly influenced by technology. As the landscape continues to evolve, financial institutions must stay ahead of the technological curve and continue to adapt to changing consumer preferences.”**

32

mobile banking in the 1990s continued the revolution – particularly for branch banking – by rendering many paper-based, labour-intensive processes redundant. And artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning in recent years has catapulted the industry into a futuristic phase that includes vastly enhanced customer experience, greater levels of cybersecurity than ever before and extreme hyper-personalization.

WITH NEW CHANGES, COME NEW CHALLENGES

With the development of sophisticated technology comes a unique set of challenges the banking industry must address to remain on the rapid upward trajectory.

Banks themselves, in adopting new technology, must ensure their employees and partners are adequately educated about and trained on the use of such technology. The rapid pace of change dictates that banks must continuously adapt, and invest in new technologies and systems, creating a need for ongoing training, upskilling and development.

Alongside increased reliance on digital platforms comes a need for superior security measures to counter cyberthreats and protect sensitive financial data. It also calls for the highest levels of transparency to engender trust.

As banks increasingly rely on technology, customers may be wary of sharing their personal and financial information. Therefore, building and maintaining trust is essential, and banks must prioritise

transparency in their operations and data handling practices.

THE EVOLVING REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

As technology has transformed banking operations, regulatory frameworks have had to adapt. Governments and financial regulatory bodies have recognised the need to ensure consumer protection, data privacy, and the stability of the financial system, introducing policies and regulations to ensure compliance and transparency.

These regulations have driven a need for banks to invest in compliance measures and adjust their operational processes.

On the other hand, they have helped foster innovation, as financial institutions seek to leverage technology to meet regulatory requirements more efficiently. For example, RegTech (regulatory technology) solutions have emerged, utilising AI and machine learning to automate compliance processes and reduce costs.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

The financial landscape of the 2020s involves digital-only banks, hyper-personalization, open banking, embedded finance, and ESG- and sustainability-linked finance, all supported by the very latest cutting-edge, state-of-the-art technology.

Digital-only banks, featuring the most sophisticated of platforms, enable customers to take care of all their financial needs without ever setting foot in a branch, while hyper-personalization – enabled by technology such as generative

AI and data analytics – results in the most intuitive, empathetic, tailor-made customer interactions.

Open banking and embedded finance, also enabled by technology such as AI, offer access to seamless payment solutions without the need to input sensitive financial information each time a payment is required. And ESG- and sustainability-linked finance, also supported by technology, enables customers to choose financial options that align with their personal priorities.

WHAT NEXT?

The evolution of banking has been, and continues to be, profoundly influenced by technology. As the landscape continues to evolve, financial institutions must stay ahead of the technological curve and continue to adapt to changing consumer preferences.

Ongoing research and development will yield new innovations that will further transform how banks operate and serve their customers. In parallel, developments in cybersecurity must keep pace.

As we move forward, the role of technology in banking will only become more pronounced. The further integration of advanced technologies such as AI, data analytics, and blockchain, will shape a future where banking is not only more accessible, but also more aligned with the needs and values of consumers.

The evolution of banking is testament to the industry's resilience and adaptability, and its future promises to be as dynamic as its past. ▪

33

Veeam

TIME FOR RESILIENCE

Veeam's senior global and regional executives share their views on next year's top technology trends in the Data Resilience space, in an exclusive 2025 prediction feature for December's edition of CNME.

IN 2025, WE'LL BE WAITING FOR THE NIS2 HAMMER TO FALL

"It almost goes without saying that leaders will continue to wrestle with regulation in 2025, especially with the arrival of DORA for the finance sector. However, next year's biggest regulation story will be the first major NIS2 penalty.

National regulators will give organizations time to become compliant – many countries have even extended their deadline – but expect to see the first big statement fine for noncompliance towards the end of next year.

"We saw this with Google in 2019, a year after the GDPR came into effect. National regulators will want to set a precedent and show they mean business. If geopolitical tensions continue on the same course next year, the EU will want to ensure Critical National Infrastructure is as resilient to cyber threats as possible.

They've got the regulation in place, so they will want to show they're not afraid to swing the hammer for noncompliance."

Andre Troskie,
EMEA Field CISO, Veeam

LOOK OUT FOR RANSOMWARE-AS-A-DISTRACTION IN 2025

"Ransomware has been a consistent blight on businesses in recent years, but it has been fairly consistent at least. I believe this will change next year, with ransomware evolving beyond its current model.

Expect to see more attacks using encryption as a distraction, while more sophisticated attacks target data integrity or siphon sensitive information. Ransomware incidents demand attention and resources, but this creates an opportunity for hidden threats to infiltrate deeper systems."

"Equally concerning, we could see more and more attackers skip the encryption phase altogether, simply stealing data through exfiltration and then sending a ransom demand. While this doesn't disrupt operations in the same way, it is much harder to detect and protect against. Often after a successful theft, only then will attackers encrypt data, to serve as a distraction to buy them time to sell what they've stolen."

"Finally, what keeps me up at night is not the worry of data encryption or theft but of attackers injecting malicious code into a healthy data set to render it worthless all of a sudden. As organizations become increasingly data-driven, this could be dire, not least because it would be incredibly hard to detect. Data resilience must include multi-layered detection to identify concurrent threats and prevent hidden breaches".

Edwin Weijdema,
EMEA Field CTO, Veeam

35

THE RISE OF THE CLOUD DATA LAKEHOUSE

"As demand for storing and utilizing data grows, enterprise IT architecture will continue to evolve. Specifically, I expect the Cloud Data Lakehouse to become a popular choice next year – combining the scalability of a data lake with the more structured data management capabilities of a data warehouse. It addresses the demand for a unified data management approach while delivering the analytic capabilities that are gradually becoming non-negotiable for the modern enterprise."

"As with most trends in the cloud space, cost and scalability are going to be key drivers. However, the pressure to be AI/ML-ready and compliant with evolving data regulations will be what moves the needle. By hook or by crook, enterprises will be working towards being more data-centric in 2025, so expect to hear the term Data Lakehouse more and more next year."

Michael Cade,
Global Field CTO Cloud Strategy, Veeam

"RESILIENCE DRILLS" WILL TAKE OFF IN 2025

"I think most organizations have moved on from just looking at their cybersecurity and now have broadened their scope to the wider concern of cyber resilience. Because of this, expect to see much more attention given to "Resilience Drills" next year.

It's not enough to just test your security. You must test how your organization responds and recovers "right of bang". Much like fire drills, resilience drills will become a more regular practice next year, simulating ransomware and cyber threat scenarios to test and refine an organization's data resilience measures. These exercises will involve both IT and executive teams to ensure rapid, coordinated response and seamless recovery. As threats grow more sophisticated, resilience drills will be essential for keeping data resilience strategies agile and effective."

Mena Migally,
Regional VP - EMEA East, Veeam

THE RISE OF SOVEREIGN CLOUDS AND DATA PORTABILITY

"Evolving regulatory requirements and geopolitical pressures will force enterprises to re-think where their cloud data really 'sits'. Expect an increased focus on data residency, ensuring backups or Large Language Model (LLM) training data, where those are being kept, and what risk is present. It's a familiar story– the cloud gives businesses more options and flexibility, but taking advantage of these securely and sustainably will require some joined-up thinking." **anme**

> **Much like fire drills, resilience drills will become a more regular practice next year, simulating ransomware and cyber threat scenarios to test and refine an organization's data resilience measures."**

data stays within specific national or regional borders. As part of this shift, we'll see more demand for sovereign clouds – localized cloud environments that keep data within specific jurisdictions to support compliance and mitigate risk."

"This, in turn, will highlight the need for data portability across hybrid environments. Enterprises might find out too late in the game that moving data between clouds isn't easy. They'll also need to consider 'related' data like

Mohamad Rizk, Senior
Regional Sales Director - Middle East & CIS, Veeam

38

CREATING A 'BUZZ'

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down with **Bell Beh**, Group CEO and Co-Founder of BuzzAR, to find out how their unique platform is digitising people, places and payments - and how the company is on a mission to replicate the phenomenal success they have enjoyed in Singapore across the MENA region.

It became very evident early on in my conversation with Bell Beh, that she is an individual that was born to innovate.

Her entrepreneurial spirit is palpable, and as she begins to document the incredible rise of BuzzAR, it feels to me that in many way she is pursuing her own destiny.

Her story, like so many of her contemporaries that came before her was not straightforward.

She left the comfort and security of a high-profile and well-remunerated corporate legal job to start BuzzAR, which showed remarkable bravery, but since she took that big step in 2018, she has never looked back.

Beh revealed that her creativity was unlocked during her job as a compliance counsel at the iconic Marina Bay Sands Hotel, which is the jewel in the crown of the Singapore skyline.

"I was very fortunate to receive a scholarship to study at UC Berkely. During my time in California I studied law and technology, and that rather naturally led me to pursue a career in corporate law. However, it was a part-time job as a compliance counsel that I had at Marina Bay Sands that triggered this entrepreneurial and innovative spirit inside of me that until then had been dormant," said Beh.

Beh said that her CTO at Marina Bay Sands actively encouraged her to create interfaces for the landmark location in Singapore, that attracts thousands of tourists every year, in a bid to enhance the experiences it delivers for their guests.

Beh admitted that the exposure she had in terms of building things from scratch at Marina Bay Sands Hotel, lit the torch-paper and she knew deep down that it was time for her to walkway from a career in corporate law.

"I always loved to design and build things, and my CTO at Marina Bay Sands, who's background was in gaming design, proactively requested me to build these interactive interfaces for the hotel in order to improve our customer experience. What I discovered very quickly during this process was that I loved building things, and I got much more satisfaction out of doing this than my job in corporate law. The two jobs were at two different ends of the spectrum totally. I liked corporate law, don't get me wrong, but the thrill of building something from scratch really excited me, and stirred something within me, and I knew that this is what I wanted to do with my life every day," said Beh.

Beh acknowledged that despite her instinct telling her she was doing the right thing, it was still a big risk to walk away from a secure job.

Following a very fruitful meeting with the Singaporean tourism board in San Francisco, BuzzAR was born.

"Look I followed my

"

In the KSA, we have a payment license strategy with Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA) to make sure that we have the local wallet for any tourist to pay seamlessly when interacting with our platform, and that really is a hugely significant and important partnership for us."

39

heart, but it wasn't a straightforward decision either, it was nuanced, because corporate law is a very good job, with a lot of stability, and you can earn good money in that profession, but again, it was clear to me that I needed to follow my gut instinct and that was guiding me towards setting up my own business, which we now know as BuzzAR. I met the Singaporean tourism board in San Francisco, and that was essentially the starting point for BuzzAR. Our concept was put on a Singaporean accelerator program, and as the say the rest is history," said Beh.

Beh then went into more detail on what services BuzzAR actually provides for customers in the enterprise space.

Essentially, they created a digital twin that incorporated disruptive technologies such as AI, AR and VR to not only deliver better experiences for those interacting with the interface, but they could also

use their platform to directly target consumers.

Having secured a 5-year contract with Marina Bay Sands, BuzzAR was tasked with the responsibility of driving consumers to the hotel, and the consumers in this case were Chinese tourists.

"My former employer, Marina Bay Sands were our first enterprise customer at BuzzAR and they gave us a 5-year contract. Their No.1 demographic target was Chinese tourists, so they wanted us to design a system that would help drive more tourism from China to Marina Bay Sands. What we did was construct a digital twin, which was infused with various technologies such as AI, AR and VR, in order to create a better customer experience

platform for consumers to engage with. The digital twin enabled them to play around with the platform and see what Marina Bay Sands could provide them with if they were planning to visit Singapore. We used a number of social media platforms in China to help us market our product. These social media channels would constantly show content that promoted Marina Bay Sands, and the primary objective was to get prospective consumers to consume our content, and get them to think not only do I want to go to Singapore, but I want to go and stay in the Marina Bay Sands hotel," said Beh.

Beh highlighted the broad range of capabilities that is embedded across the BuzzAR platform and pointed to its ability to drive 'traffic' to were their enterprise customers wanted them to.

"It's a combination of tourism technology and marketing technology that is ultimately designed to drive better experiences and create content that projects Singapore as a destination that people want to visit. One of our core capabilities as a company is to drive traffic, and that is what we do for tourism boards, governments and large hospitality groups such as Marina Bay Sands," added Beh.

> ## Chinese tourists represent a market cap of $5.7 trillion in terms of spending, so the opportunity is huge and if you want to tap into that then you need BuzzAR."

The endorsement of BuzzAR by a global brand like Marina Bay Sands certainly caused others to sit up and take the notice, and as Beh pointed out, there was a domino effect across the market, with other enterprises, particularly those operating in the hospitality space wanting to work with BuzzAR.

"After the success we had at Marina Bay Sands, other entities stood up and took notice of what our platform was capable of achieving for those who deployed it. Global hospitality chain Millenium Hotels Group reached out to us and we engaged in a very successful campaign with them. We saw people from over 100 different countries engaging with that campaign and Millenium Hotels were so happy with our platform because we drove almost 100x ROI for them. When they crunched the numbers at the end of our campaign, we had delivered six digits for them in terms of bookings, and they couldn't believe the value that our BuzzAR platform yielded for them," said Beh.

Meta, formerly known as Facebook, along with Google has dominated the ad space online, but LinkedIn and X are also seen as effective mediums for driving traffic and consumers to your website to access and purchase your goods and services.

But Meta and Google adverts are not cheap, and if you rely solely on them to drive traffic and revenue to your business, then inevitably you can become beholden to them.

However, according to Beh, a key market differentiator for BuzzAR, and what ultimately makes them stand out from the crowd is the fact that they can facilitate the discovery process, but also enable the booking and payment processes, all at the fraction of the cost of the big social media players.

"It's not just a price war where we gain an advantage, we are very specialized, and a perfect illustration of that is in relation to how we can drive traffic from the Chinese tourism marketplace to Singapore, or the Middle East. Chinese tourists represent a market cap of $5.7 trillion in terms of spending, so the opportunity is huge and if you want to tap into that then you need BuzzAR. We can help you with the discovery, booking and payment process, we can be your unilateral end-to-end partner. In the current climate, you'll find companies that will help you with the discovery element, whilst others will assist with the booking and procurement process, but none of them can provide you with discovery, booking and payment all-in-one, but BuzzAR can, and that's a key market differentiator for us," said Beh.

BuzzAR have enjoyed remarkable success in Singapore, but now their attentions have turned to the MENA region, and in particular the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who are now really trying to ramp up their tourism economy.

BuzzAR received funding of $1.16 million from HSBC, which will provide them with the platform they need to roll out their operations in Saudi Arabia.

The Group CEO of BuzzAR, highlighted how their go-to-market strategy differs from the one they adopted in the Singaporean marketplace, and said the company was looking 'beyond' tourism when it comes to gaining market share across the Kingdom.

"The support we have received from HSBC has been pivotal to us in terms of making headway into the KSA tourism sector. In addition to their unwavering support, they have also helped us open a lot of doors in relation to partnerships across the Kingdom. However, what is different about our go-to-market approach in the KSA compared with Singapore, is that we are less focused on hospitality, and are actually looking at how we can use our platform to drive better experiences and outcomes in the FinTech and banking sectors. In terms of the financing that we received from HSBC, it is predominantly being used to hire local Saudi talent, because the on-the-ground integration of BuzzAR in the KSA is critical to our success. One of the ways we differentiate ourselves from the booking platforms in China is our on-the-ground integration strategy. In the KSA, we have a payment license strategy with Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA) to make sure that we have the local wallet for

42

any tourist to pay seamlessly when interacting with our platform, and that really is a hugely significant and important partnership for us," said Beh.

Another key component in the early initial success of BuzzAR in the KSA, has been its BuzzPay solution.

In a market saturated with FinTech companies, BuzzAR has identified a way that once again enables them to have a competitive advantage on the rest of its market rivals.

"By targeting the tourism industry in the way that we do, we are inadvertently providing incremental volume to the FinTech sector. There are 216 FinTech companies currently operating in the KSA, so it is a saturated marketplace. Typically, they are focused locally, but if you look at our business model at BuzzAR

then you can see that we are proactively bringing people into the local economy through our platform. We bring external people through the MENA region and these people are spending, and the extra volume we are bringing in is inevitably contributing hugely to the growth of the GDP of all nations across the Gulf region. We are also divesting funds from investment we have received from HSBC towards hiring experts in the FinTech and business development space in order to enable us to integrate effectively into the local economy. We view tourism and FinTech as standing side-by-side, you can't have one without the other, it doesn't work if the two are not aligned," said Beh.

The dynamic and charismatic figurehead

of BuzzAR concluded a wonderful interview by highlighting the unique capabilities of Bae, it's AI-powered companion that she believes will become your 'must-have' travel buddy.

"BAE stands for before anyone else. We like that name and we felt it was quirky, and the concept behind it is when you travel to a foreign country it can be hard to navigate yourself around when you don't speak the local language. I remember arriving a few years ago in Riyadh, and it sort of dawned on me that everyone is speaking Arabic here, and a lot of the locals don't have any English. I felt like I needed a travel buddy, a companion, somebody that was close to me, and it doesn't need to be someone physical, it can be digital, like an AI companion, and this essentially is where BAE was born. BAE can recommend places for me to visit, help me get a taxi to where I want to go, essentially BAE is a technology that is ultimately designed to make your travelling experience a seamless one and that is devoid of friction. We want users to view BAE from a relational standpoint, traditionally in technology it has always been very transactional, but we want users to really have a relationship with BAE and view them as a companion, and see them as human. We want to make AI an integral part of lives. BAE can be useful, fun and convenient for you," said Beh.

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Cloudflare

AI REVOLUTION IS ON THE 'EDGE'

John Engates, Field CTO at Cloudflare, gives his tech predictions for 2025, which includes the viewpoint that if AI is truly going to revolutionise industries then it all hinges on the power of edge computing.

THE AI REVOLUTION WILL HINGE ON EDGE COMPUTING:

To unlock AI's true potential, edge computing must bring the compute power closer to where it's actually needed.

Edge computing represents a paradigm shift, dramatically reducing latency and enabling a new generation of sophisticated, responsive applications. Imagine autonomous vehicles making split-second decisions, interactive gaming with zero perceptible delay, and real-time video processing that responds instantaneously.
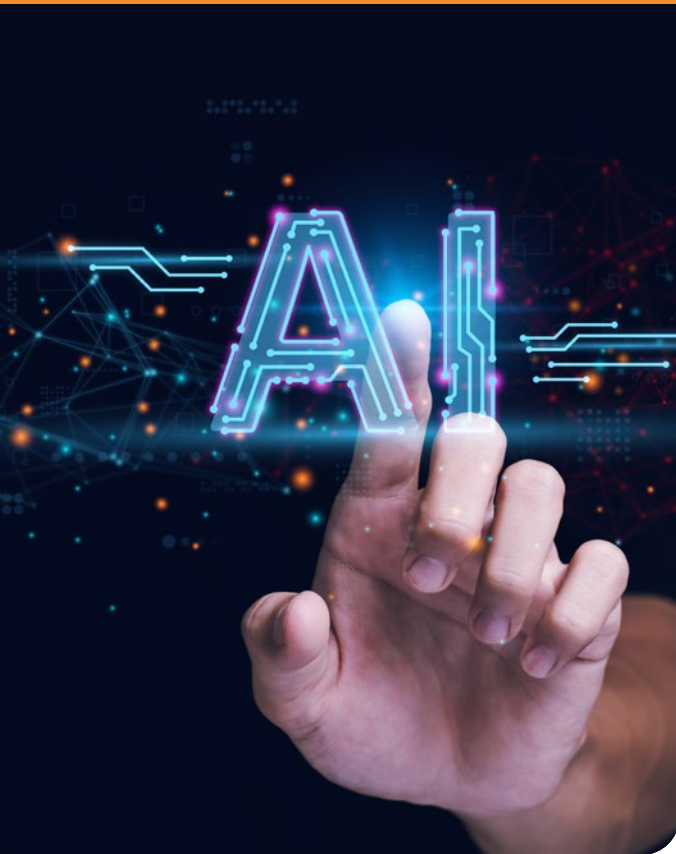
These innovations become possible when compute resources are strategically positioned near their point of use.

That's why the future of AI is not just about raw computational power, but about smart, distributed computing that brings intelligence closer to where it's most impactful.

AI IS THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF CYBERSECURITY:

On the one hand, it powers
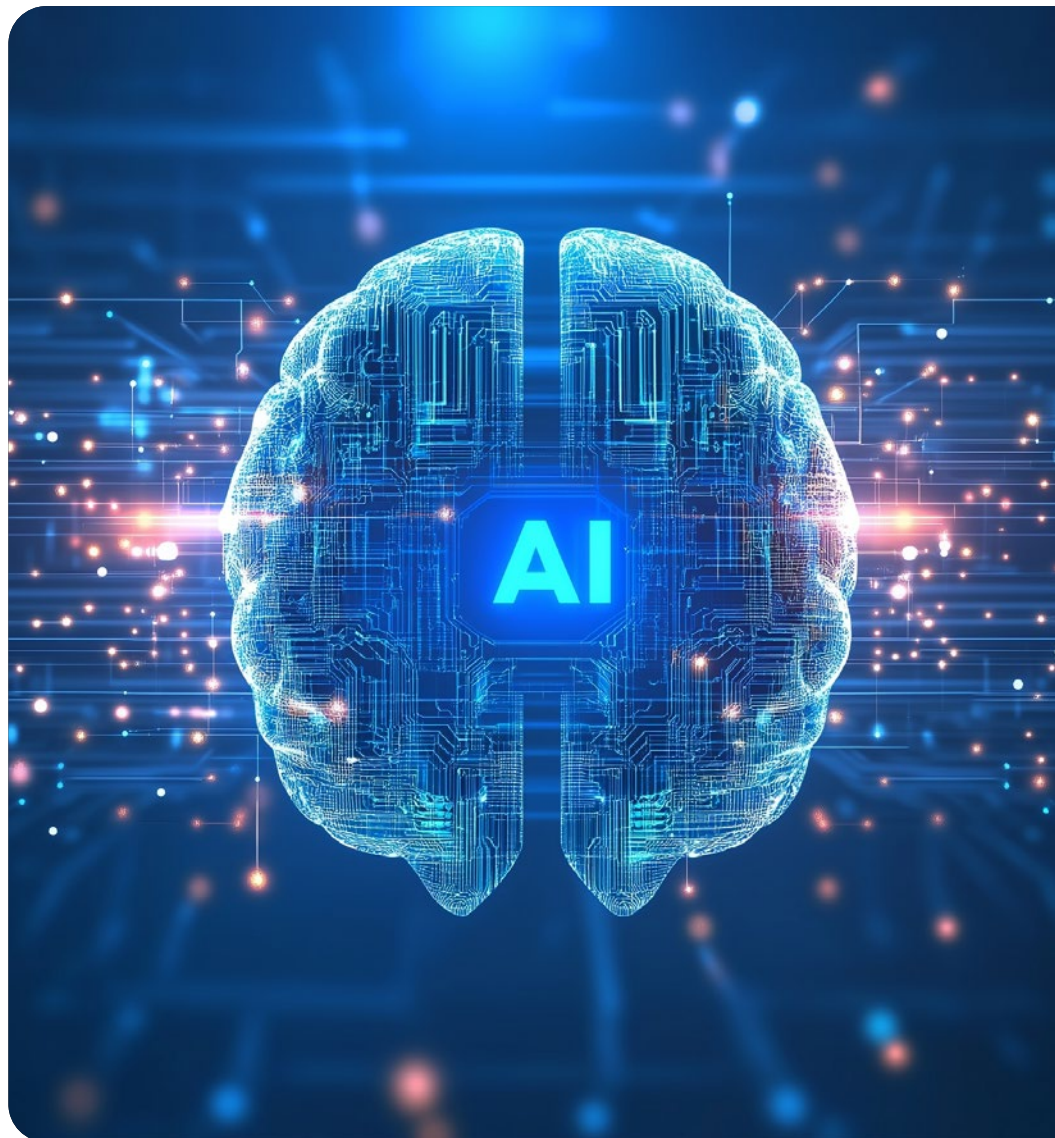
advanced threat detection, anomaly detection, and automated response systems, enabling defenders to stay ahead of emerging threats. On the other, it is being weaponized by attackers to create more sophisticated and adaptive exploits.

We are entering an era where AI systems will battle AI systems, with human security teams orchestrating strategies to maintain the upper hand.

This shift underscores the need for continuous innovation in AI-driven security solutions, as static defenses become increasingly inadequate.

ZERO TRUST EXITS ITS BUZZWORD ERA TO BECOME A FUNDAMENTAL SECURITY NECESSITY:

Imagine a security system that treats every digital interaction as potentially suspicious, requiring continuous verification – much like a hyper-vigilant airport security checkpoint that doesn't just check your ID at the entrance, but monitors your every move.

Zero Trust operates on a simple yet powerful principle: trust nothing by default, verify everything constantly.

This methodology has become even more essential as traditional network boundaries disintegrate in our cloud-native, distributed work environments.

CONNECTIVITY AND THE EVER-EXPANDING SPACE-BASED INTERNET WILL FACE NEW CHALLENGES AND GROWING PAINS WITH MACHINE-TO-MACHINE TRAFFIC:

Connectivity itself is undergoing a profound transformation. As space-based internet services gain traction and billions of IoT devices come online, networks must now handle not only human-to-human communication but also an ever-growing flood of machine-to-machine API traffic.

Meeting this challenge calls for designing networks with security, reliability, and performance baked in from the start.

These attributes become indispensable as data flows multiply and diversify, demanding an infrastructure that can gracefully scale, adapt, and maintain trust at the edges of our increasingly interconnected world.

AI WILL TRANSFORM THE USER EXPERIENCE AND HOW WE INTERACT WITH OUR FAVOURITE TECHNOLOGIES:

Imagine retail platforms that intuitively understand your preferences before you articulate them, or educational tools that dynamically adjust to your unique learning style in real time.

These experiences are made possible by sophisticated AI algorithms that leverage comprehensive yet ethically-sourced data.

Critical to this transformation is robust infrastructure that ensures seamless, consistent experiences across devices and locations.

Emerging technologies like edge computing are key to this vision, bringing computational resources closer to users and enabling faster, more responsive interactions.

The future of user experience is not just about technology—it's about creating intelligent, intuitive connections that feel almost magical in their precision and personalization. cnme

"
To unlock AI's true potential, edge computing must bring the compute power closer to where it's actually needed."

IN CLEAR SIGHT

Dr. Adel Alsharji, COO of Presight, tells CNME Editor Mark Forker, how the company's suite of solutions and services are designed and tailored for the energy sector to become smarter and more sustainable in an exclusive interview for December's edition of CNME.

Can you tell me more about Presight's commitment to leveraging cutting-edge technology for a sustainable future?

We enable data-driven decisions that can help optimize resource-use, reduce emissions and enhance operational efficiency, by integrating AI-powered solutions into sectors such as energy, urban planning and logistics.

A prime example of this is AIQ, our energy sector-specific joint venture company with ADNOC. Powered by Presight's expertise in big data analytics, AIQ has established itself as the leading provider of advanced AI solutions across the entire value chain of the energy sector.

The company develops tools that drive operational efficiency and improved safety, while also supporting the acceleration of sustainability ambitions.

Presight also addresses critical sustainability challenges through partnerships and innovative solutions.

For instance, we recently signed an MoU with Masdar – a partnership that represents a unique opportunity to develop a bespoke tool that consolidates all of the organization's data, uncovers hidden insights and takes action to improve efficiency, predict maintenance needs, and ultimately increase the supply of renewable energy around the world.

How do initiatives like ENERGYai support global efficiency goals?

Initiatives like ENERGYai play a pivotal role in advancing global efficiency goals by leveraging AI and data-driven technologies.

By enabling faster, more accurate, and better-informed decision-making, ENERGYai allows tasks that once took months to complete, to be undertaken in days, and some cases in just a few hours.

These exponential efficiency gains have a direct impact on supporting the reduction of waste, and minimizes emissions – all while addressing industry challenges such as sustainability demands.

How are Presight's AI-driven solutions driving sustainability in key industries, and paving the way for real-world applications that support global environmental targets and energy transitions?

Our solutions empower industries and businesses to operate smarter and more sustainably.

In the energy and climate sectors, our AI solutions can help drive efficiency, reduce the environmental impact of business operations, and improve grid stability.

When it comes to smart cities, our comprehensive solutions, such as the Presight Intelli Platform, revolutionize how cities are managed through efficient waste management and energy usage.

Our focus on real-world applications enables businesses to lower their carbon footprint and meet sustainability goals.

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Our solutions empower industries and businesses to operate smarter and more sustainably."

46

Presight has shown strong growth in Q3 2024, with a 16.2% increase in pre-tax profit and robust revenue figures. What are the key factors that contributed to this success?

Our third quarter continued the trend witnessed in the first half of the year, namely securing new domestic and international contracts, and concluding wide-ranging agreements and partnerships.

We are bringing 'Applied Intelligence' to the private and public sector, accelerating the adoption of advanced AI capabilities and launching cutting-edge Applied AI products and solutions that expand our international footprint and support our long-term growth ambitions.

To date, we have deployed more than 10 flagship technology solutions for our customers, across four continents and 25 distinct projects. Those figures are testament to the hard work and dedication of our team.

Presight has made considerable investments in AI solutions for the energy sector. How are technologies like ENERGYai helping to accelerate the UAE's energy transition, and what role does Presight intend to play in this transformation?

Technologies such as ENERGYai, which is the world's first agentic AI solution at this scale, enables faster, smarter, more targeted and efficient, and sustainable energy practices.

At Presight, we are accelerating the development of cutting-edge AI solutions for the energy sector through strategic partnerships, advanced GenAI solutions, data-driven analytics, and collaborative ventures.

Leveraging advanced GenAI, we enhance decision-making, operational efficiency, sustainability and safety in the energy sector. Our AI tools enable precise data-driven analysis and modeling, crucial for complex oil and gas operations.

Gen AI is going to transform the energy sector, but Gen AI also consumes a lot of energy, with the energy sector under pressure to meet sustainability targets. How can the two work together?

AI must be leveraged to address sustainability challenges while minimizing its environmental impact.

AI's potential to transform energy production, distribution and efficiency is profound, especially when applied strategically in areas like waste reduction, energy efficiency and smart grids.

The energy demands of AI systems themselves can be mitigated by implementing AI-driven energy management solutions. It will also be important for the technology and energy sectors to collaborate in order to harness the power of AI to accelerate the energy transition – whilst securing innovative carbon-free energy solutions to address the growing energy demands of AI technology.

Here in the UAE, we've already seen this in action with efforts between ADNOC, Masdar and Microsoft aimed at ensuring the growing electricity demand of AI is met through a diverse mix of sustainable and carbon-free energy solutions. cnme

Dell Technologies

THE BIG BANG

John Roese, Global Chief Technology Officer and Chief AI Officer at Dell Technologies, outlines some of the key trends he thinks will dominate the technology landscape in 2025, which includes the rise of agentic AI architecture, which he sees as the technological equivalent of the 'Big Bang'.

The year is 2025, and we're witnessing the technological equivalent of the "big bang" with AI at the epicentre of how we live, work and play. Just as the universe expanded rapidly after its inception, technology is exploding into new realms, redefining industries and reshaping our future.

Whether you're a tech enthusiast, business professional, innovator or student, understanding these shifts is vital to navigating this brave new world.

THE RISE OF AGENTIC AI ARCHITECTURE

"Agentic" will be the word of the year in 2025. The birth of agentic AI architecture marks a new chapter in human–AI interaction. Generative AI (GenAI) tools are evolving to enable AI agents, which are poised to revolutionize how we engage with AI systems.

In the consumer world, we've seen early agent approaches with virtual assistants, chatbots and navigation apps. In 2025, a new, more advanced set of agents will emerge.

These agents will operate autonomously, communicate in natural language and interact with the world around them, including working in teams of other agents and humans. They will also be fine-tuned and optimized to perform assigned, specific skills, like coding, code review, infrastructure administration, business planning and cybersecurity.

AI agent systems will feature diverse cognitive, orchestration, and distribution architectures tailored to specific tasks. As complexity grows, multi-agent systems will emerge, requiring the rapid evolution of tech stacks to support agentic systems effectively.

To realize AI's full potential and the rise of agentic architecture, enterprises must upgrade infrastructure – everything from data centers to AI PCs. This distributed infrastructure optimized for agentic AI can address

48

security, sustainability and capacity considerations by distributing the AI workload across the entire IT infrastructure (cloud, data center, edge, and device).

Scaling enterprise AI from concept to reality

Enterprises are poised to take AI from ideation to scale. Enterprise AI is simply the application of AI technology to a company's most impactful processes in its most important areas to improve the productivity of the organization. It requires customers to answer two important questions:

· First, what problem am I trying to solve? Developing a framework to prioritize AI efforts to the most important, impactful areas is critical.
· Secondly, how do I solve that problem? AI solutions implemented as random projects on random tools do not scale. Instead, enterprises must determine the minimum set of AI systems needed to build a reusable and scalable AI foundation. This allows them to solve the first set of critical AI problems, and then leverage that investment to solve all future AI problems.

At Dell, for instance, our priority areas are our global supply chain, our services capability, our sales engine and our R&D capacity. Any impact on these areas results in significant ROI over other areas like HR, finance and facilities.

Next, enterprises should look at specific processes in its priority areas. For example, if process analysis uncovers an opportunity not in how salespeople interact with customers, but in how much time they spend gathering content for the customer meeting, that's a clear AI project. GenAI can be used to automate and accelerate content discovery and creation work. In this case, the ROI is clear: shift sellers' time back to customer-facing activities and increase revenue.

To execute prioritized projects, enterprises today have multiple off-the-shelf tools from which to choose. So, in 2025 the preferred path is to buy and implement AI tools in their private infrastructure. They can also buy tools that accelerate data modernization (data meshes, for example), and with the Dell AI Factory advancements over the past year, the infrastructure is now simple to adopt and implement.

In 2025, we have clear, repeatable approaches for prioritization and more turnkey and well-defined AI platforms and AI infrastructure options. 2025 is a year when it simply becomes easier to know what to do and how to do it when adopting AI in the enterprise space.

SOVEREIGN AI ACCELERATES GLOBAL ADOPTION

Sovereign AI efforts are accelerating AI adoption worldwide. This concept revolves around a nation's ability to create AI value and differentiation using its own infrastructure and data, designing an ecosystem aligned with local culture, language and intellectual property. In an era where data security is paramount, countries are opting for sovereign AI strategies and solutions, often with strong collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Instead of AI systems exclusive to governments, some countries are developing national AI resources to serve both government and local private industry, providing access to compute power and data capacity. Others are implementing a coherent national strategy where governments do not necessarily build new infrastructure but instead proactively and collaboratively co-design and encourage private industry to modernize and lead AI ecosystems.

Sovereign AI empowers nations to increase accessibility, protect critical infrastructure, drive economic growth, and enhance global competitiveness. By fostering the development of AI, it accelerates its adoption. We're seeing growing investments directed toward infrastructure, data management, talent cultivation, and ecosystem development – and we fully expect to see this trend continue in the years ahead.

AI AND THE FUSION OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

AI's true potential lies in its connections with other emerging technologies. While

AI itself is transformative, its impact multiplies when combined with quantum computing, intelligent edge, Zero Trust security, 6G technologies and digital twins, to name a few. This fusion creates a dynamic environment ripe for innovation and addressing existing challenges.

For instance, quantum computing in collaboration with AI will significantly impact most industries by providing the computing capability needed to scale AI to domains where classical computing struggles – like complex material science, drug discovery and complex optimization problems.

AI and telecom are already coming together to transform how cellular networks operate and how fundamental elements of these systems, like spectrum optimization, work. Even the future of the PC is influenced by AI, as we now see the AI PC not just as a client device but part of the end-to-end AI infrastructure. With agentic architectures, we expect to shift agents out of the data center and onto the edge or to the AI PC.

Zero trust security and AI also are intersecting. Zero trust architectures are the best path to a better, more secure world and implementing zero trust in brownfield legacy IT is hard. In contrast, AI infrastructure is new and greenfield. We expect customers to adopt zero trust by default in new AI factories for optimal security. Given the criticality of AI, that is a good thing for all of us.

AI BECOMES AN ESSENTIAL SKILL FOR EVERYONE

AI will become an indispensable tool across professions and industries. Much like past technological advancements, AI is poised to transform the job market. Routine, task-oriented roles may diminish, but new opportunities will arise, such as software composers, AI content editors and prompt engineers.

Recent surveys reveal 72% of IT leaders identify AI skills as a critical gap requiring immediate attention. Organizations must invest in developing their workforce's AI fluency. AI skill development will be focused on defining the AI/human relationship where AI completes more of the tasks, but people define what needs to be done. This allows professionals to focus on higher-level tasks, critical thinking and complex problem-solving.

With AI, it's not just about the work that goes away, it's about the new roles humans play in shaping, directing and leading AI work. AI-enabled businesses can use the evolution of the human-machine relationship to accomplish tasks in different ways and expand the art of the possible.

AI IS TECH'S GRAND EVOLUTION

Just as the Big Bang set the stage for the development of galaxies, stars and planets, the rapid growth of AI is creating new opportunities, industries and ways of living and working.

As we approach 2025, we predict enterprise AI adoption will accelerate dramatically in the coming year. We're seeing better processes, better tools and a stronger ecosystem. At Dell, our initial AI projects have scaled successfully and demonstrated the potential for ROI is real. We predict the rest of the enterprise ecosystem will quickly follow suit.

For CIOs, staying informed and adaptable will be essential. Organizations must prioritize AI fluency, invest in talent development and explore innovative solutions to remain at the forefront of this tech revolution.

The future belongs to those who can harness the power of AI. Whether you're a business executive, tech enthusiast, or innovator, the time to act is now. The impact will be profound. cnme

> "The year is 2025, and we're witnessing the technological equivalent of the "big bang" with AI at the epicentre of how we live, work and play. Just as the universe expanded rapidly after its inception, technology is exploding into new realms, redefining industries and reshaping our future."

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