cnme

RINGING THE BELL

H.E Faraj Ali Bin Hamoodah and Fayez Ibbini,
Co-Founders of Alpha Data, ring the bell, which signals the
tech leader becoming a publicly traded company.

Talk to us:
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"Ibbini details the factors that led Alpha Data to take that seismic step to join the stock market, and explains the gruelling nature of the IPO process."

TRADING PLACES

I first interviewed Fayez Ibbini, CEO and co-founder of Alpha Data, shortly after joining CNME in 2019.

Over the years that have elapsed in that time, I have spoken to Ibbini on several occasions, and he has been on the front cover of CNME on two occasions, once in 2020, and lastly in 2022.

I have always been struck by his humility as a leader, and especially his transparency and openness, which was particularly evident when he openly spoke about the devastating ransomware attack that Alpha Data suffered in 2023.

Most business leaders in that situation would prefer to remain coy on the circumstances that led to the ransomware attack on their organisation, but Ibbini isn't like most leaders – and he wanted to publicly highlight their painful experience in an effort to help other organisations avoid an attack.

On March 11th, Alpha Data become a publicly traded company on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX).

After 40 years of continued growth, the family-owned company rang the bell, which signified a monumental day for the IT company.

On the front cover of March's edition of CNME, Ibbini details the factors that led Alpha Data to take that seismic step to join the stock market, and explains the gruelling nature of the IPO process.

It's a great interview, and a brilliant insight into the processes behind taking a company public, but as Ibbini conceded the hard work is only starting.

On a personal level, I am delighted for Fayez, and Alpha Data.

Over the last number of months, I have spoken to many business leaders and technologists on the need to validate AI use-cases.

With that in mind, I'd like to bring your attention to my interview with Lenovo's Patricia Wilkey.

She outlined how Lenovo is stealing a march on their rivals through a combination of validating AI use-cases within 90 days, and their AI Library, she explains in detail how they do this, and the role played by their Hybrid AI Advantage platform in making all of this happen.

It's been a while since I spoke to global ICT vendor Ericsson, so it was a great to reconnect with them during Mobile World Congress in Barcelona.

MWC is the flagship event for the telecommunications industry, and I spoke to Ericsson's Patrick Johansson during a busy week in Catalonia, to learn more about their approach to the Open RAN movement.

It has been well-documented how many operators have struggled to make an ROI on their investments in both 4G and 5G, but Johansson explained how Ericsson are helping telco's monetize their networks.

Veeam's Tim Pfaelzer highlights how the $15bn market valuation the company received prior to the end of 2024, has given them even greater credibility as they look to expand their presence across the Middle East marketplace.

Veeam has over 1,000 customers in the KSA, but Pfaelzer believes the company is perfectly positioned to capitalise on the opportunities that are emerging out of Saudi Arabia, as a direct result of the transformation underway.

Our annual Women in Tech Awards were held at the beginning of the month under the theme of 'Accelerating Action' – and as always it was a fantastic event.

Special kudos to Kausar Syed, and Sabita Miranda for making the event bigger and better every single year.

There are several other excellent interviews in the magazine, and some superb op-eds, especially from Iman Ghorayeb, who warns that our over reliance on open AI models such as ChatGPT, is rewiring our brains!

Mark Forker
Editor

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"AI is no longer just a technological breakthrough, it's a geopolitical force, and a competitive differentiator." – Bianca Nobilo, IFS

IFS, the leading enterprise cloud and Industrial AI software provider, has been appointed as an Advisory Board Member of the UK's All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on AI, a key platform shaping AI policy and governance at the highest levels. This advisory role positions IFS at the centre of AI policy discussions in Westminster and beyond, alongside policymakers, industry leaders and top businesses including Meta, Capgemini, Deloitte, and Santander.

Bianca Nobilo, IFS Executive Board Member & Chief External Affairs Officer, joins the Advisory Board to lead this engagement, bringing her political experience and expertise as a geopolitical and AI strategist to Westminster's AI policy discussions.

Bianca Nobilo, IFS Executive Board Member and Chief External Affairs Officer, stated: "AI is no longer just a technological breakthrough—it's a geopolitical force, an economic driver and a competitive differentiator. At IFS, we develop AI solutions that power some of the world's most complex industries which we all depend on, and it's imperative that we help shape the global governance that surrounds them."

Bianca Nobilo IFS Executive Board Member and Chief External Affairs Officer.

Dell and NVIDIA celebrate one-year anniversary of their AI factory as they continue efforts to simplify Enterprise AI

Marking one year since the launch of the Dell AI Factory with NVIDIA, Dell Technologies has announced new AI PCs, infrastructure, software and services advancements to accelerate enterprise AI innovation at any scale.

Successful AI deployments are vital for enterprises to remain competitive, but challenges like system integration and skill gaps can delay the value enterprises realize from AI. More than 75% of organisations want their infrastructure providers to deliver capabilities across all aspects of the AI adoption journey, driving customer demand for simplified AI deployments that can scale. As the top provider of AI centric infrastructure, Dell Technologies – in collaboration with NVIDIA – provides a consistent experience across AI infrastructure, software and services, offering customers a one-stop shop to scale AI initiatives from deskside to large-scale data centre deployments.

Michael Dell, Chief Executive Officer, Dell Technologies, states, "We are celebrating the one-year anniversary of the Dell AI Factory with NVIDIA by doubling down on our mission to simplify AI for the enterprise. With seamless NVIDIA hardware and software from desktop to data centre, only Dell delivers the consistency and reliability organisations need to support AI initiatives. We are breaking down barriers to AI adoption, speeding up deployments, and helping enterprises integrate AI into their operations".

Oracle AI Agent Studio designed to empower customers to create, extend, and deploy teams across the enterprise

Oracle recently announced Oracle AI Agent Studio for Fusion Applications, a comprehensive platform for creating, extending, deploying, and managing AI agents and agent teams across the enterprise. Part of Oracle Fusion Cloud Applications Suite, the new AI Agent Studio provides easy-to-use tools for customers and partners to create customized AI agents that address complex business needs and can help drive new levels of productivity.

"AI agents are the next phase of evolution in enterprise applications and just like with existing applications, business leaders need the flexibility to create specific functionality to address their unique and evolving business needs," said Steve Miranda, executive vice president of applications, Oracle. "Our AI Agent Studio builds on the 50+ AI agents we have already introduced and gives our customers and partners the flexibility to easily create and manage their own AI agents. With the agents already embedded in Fusion Applications and our new AI Agent Studio, customers will be able to further extend automation and ultimately, achieve more while spending less".
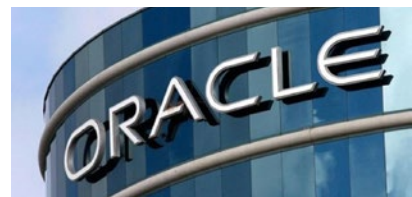
HPE and e& UAE expand their partnership, introducing a new, flexible SD-WAN as-a-service solution

e& UAE, the flagship telecoms arm of e&, and Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE) announced the expansion of their partnership, paving the way for the launch of a flexible SD-WAN as-a-Service offering, based on HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN.

"Throughout the past few months, we've seen an increasing demand highly performant, secure and reliable networking increasing, fuelled by significant developments the UAE's business and especially tech scene as innovations such as AI on the rise," said Zeeshan Hadi, Country Manager for UAE & Africa at HPE Aruba Networking. "The new flexible SD-WAN as-a-Service solution provided by e& UAE will directly address those needs, providing the key advantages of HPE Aruba Networking's EdgeConnect SD-WAN in a flexible as-a-service model. With e& UAE's wide network presence in the country, this will enable more organisations to fully embrace technological developments and scale based on their network usage needs."

"At e& UAE, we are committed to driving cutting-edge digital transformation by delivering scalable, secure, and high-performance networking solutions to our customers," said Hamad Al Marzooqi, Senior Vice President of Presales and Business Operations, e& UAE. "Our expanded collaboration with HPE Aruba Networking marks a significant milestone in offering flexible, as-a-Service SD-WAN solutions that optimize cost efficiency, enhance operational agility, and empower businesses to scale seamlessly. By integrating HPE Aruba Networking's EdgeConnect SD-WAN with our robust Network Operations Centre (NOC), we provide end-to-end managed services, allowing enterprises to focus on innovation while we ensure seamless network performance and security. This initiative aligns with our vision to be the premier managed services provider in the UAE, equipping businesses with the agility to thrive in an evolving digital economy".

Yango Group and ROOTS unveil autonomous robots in Dubai

Yango Group, a global tech company, has partnered with ROOTS, a leading food tech and retail company, to revolutionize last-mile delivery in Dubai. The latest innovation — autonomous delivery robots — has launched officially in Sobha Hartland, offering an eco-friendly and highly efficient solution for grocery deliveries.

Dubai is committed to promoting smart mobility solutions that improve urban life and prioritize sustainability. Ahmed Bahrozyan, Chief Executive Officer of The Public Transport Agency, said: "The introduction of self-driving delivery robots reflects the Authority's vision of building a seamless transportation system based on modern technology, which effectively contributes to reducing congestion and the resulting carbon emissions, and

The official launch of the autonomous robots by Yango Group and ROOTS in the presence of Ahmed Bahrozyan, Chief Executive Officer of The Public Transport Agency, and senior officials from Public

also contributes to improving last-mile logistics services for the benefit of residents and businesses alike."

Redefining convenience customers can place orders through the ROOTS website (go-roots.ae) and opt for robot delivery at checkout. Once the order is prepared, a fully autonomous robot is dispatched to their location. Upon arrival, customers receive a WhatsApp notification to retrieve their delivery.

This initiative aligns with the Dubai Autonomous Transportation Strategy, which targets 25% autonomous transportation by 2030 while cutting CO_2 emissions by 30%.

Accenture and AWS expand AWS Cloud Institute to offer world-class cloud training

As companies continue to accelerate their digital journeys by leveraging the benefits of cloud and artificial intelligence (AI), Accenture LearnVantage, a robust technology learning and training service, and Amazon Web Services (AWS), an Amazon Inc. company, are partnering to help people gain the necessary skills to become cloud professionals.

This partnership brings together Accenture's LearnVantage platform and trainers to deliver AWS Cloud Institute to individuals in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and United Arab Emirates (UAE), equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in cloud technology.

Kishore Durg, global lead of LearnVantage, Accenture – "We're thrilled to collaborate with AWS to launch AWS Cloud Institute powered by Accenture LearnVantage. This program will equip professionals with the essential skills and knowledge they need to forge new career pathways in a highly competitive field and also help address the critical skills gap that organisations face. Our global delivery capabilities and deep expertise will ensure that learners receive a structured, high-quality education that puts them in high demand".

Uwem Ukpong, vice president of Global Services, AWS – "Today's announcement marks a significant step in our commitment to fostering the next generation of cloud professionals, allowing us to expand our reach and bring our capabilities to new regions. This follows AWS's launch of its second Middle East cloud region in the UAE in 2022, with a planned US$5 billion investment in the local economy through 2036. It also builds upon AWS's US$5.3 billion investment to establish data centres in KSA. By partnering with Accenture, we are able to leverage our combined expertise to deliver a world-class training program that will empower people in KSA and UAE to build their careers as cloud professionals".

Google signs agreement to acquire Wiz
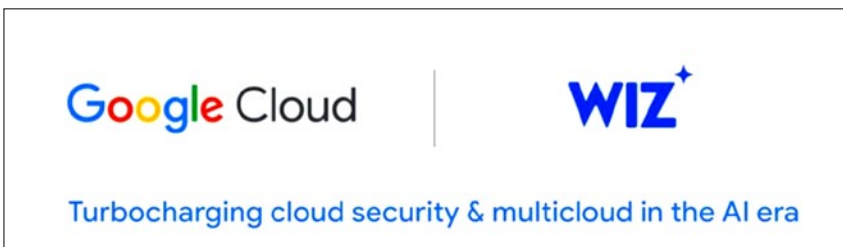
Google LLC recently announced it has signed a definitive agreement to acquire Wiz, Inc., a leading cloud security platform headquartered in New York, for $32 billion, subject to closing adjustments, in an all-cash transaction.

Once closed, Wiz will join Google Cloud. This acquisition represents an investment by Google Cloud to accelerate two large and growing trends in the AI era: improved cloud security and the ability to use multiple clouds (multicloud).

Sundar Pichai, CEO, Google: "From its earliest days, Google's strong security focus has made us a leader in keeping people safe online. Today, businesses and governments that run in the cloud are looking for even stronger security solutions, and greater choice in cloud computing providers. Together, Google Cloud and Wiz will turbocharge improved cloud security and the ability to use multiple clouds".

Microsoft partners with Kuwait Government, to accelerate AI transformation

Microsoft has entered into a strategic partnership agreement with the Government of Kuwait, represented by the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) and the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), to help accelerate digital transformation efforts in line with Kuwait's Vision 2035.

The partnership intends to establish an AI powered Azure Region to advance local AI capabilities, drive economic growth, and foster AI innovation across industries.

H.E. Minister Of State for Communication Affairs, Omar Saud Al-Omar stated that the partnership with Microsoft comes in implementation of the visionary directives of HH the Amir, the strategic instructions of HH the

(L-R) Samer Abu-Ltaif, President of Microsoft Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA), & H.E. Minister Of State for Communication Affairs Omar Saud Al-Omar.

Crown Prince, and the diligent follow-up of HH the Prime Minister to support Kuwait's goal of becoming a digitally advanced and innovative AI nation. "This partnership with Microsoft is a transformative milestone towards utilizing AI technologies to drive economic diversification and enhance

the nation's position in innovation, trade, and investment. The AI powered Azure Region will address both national and local challenges, creating a robust AI ecosystem that fuels economic growth, improves public services, and prepares the workforce for the future."

Samer Abu-Ltaif, President of Microsoft Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA), said that Microsoft's long-standing partnership with the Government of Kuwait has established a foundation for a more integrated and secure future for the nation's public and private sector enterprises. "We are dedicated to supporting the Government of Kuwait in their cloud transformation journey and in utilising cutting-edge AI solutions to enhance productivity and efficiency across the public sector. This partnership will strengthen the nation's digital infrastructure and promote sustainable economic growth".

Tech Mahindra and NVIDIA collaborate to advance drug safety with agentic solution

Tech Mahindra, a leading global provider of technology consulting and digital solutions to enterprises across industries, announced a pharmacovigilance (PV) autonomous solution built with NVIDIA AI software

to advance drug safety management.

The transformative solution leverages agentic artificial intelligence (AI) and automation to enhance the accuracy, speed, and efficiency of pharmacovigilance processes,

addressing critical industry challenges such as manual delays and data overload.

Nikhil Malhotra, Chief Innovation Officer & Global Head of AI and Emerging Technologies Tech Mahindra, said, "As the pharmaceutical industry navigates volumes of data during trials and post-launch, our collaboration with NVIDIA leverages generative AI and multi-agent systems to streamline pharmacovigilance process. Together, we are revolutionising drug safety management and using the innovative AI-driven framework to develop multiple use cases for our global customers".

John Fanelli, Vice President, Enterprise Software, NVIDIA, said, "AI is ideal for monitoring medicines throughout their lifecycle to support safety. Integrating AI into the Tech Mahindra TENO framework with NVIDIA AI Enterprise software enhances pharmacovigilance by augmenting human capabilities to help identify potential safety issues more effectively".

Lenovo

TAKING ADVANTAGE

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Patricia Wilkey**, Senior Vice President and General Manager of Lenovo Solutions and Services Group during LEAP 2025 in Riyadh last month, in a bid to learn more on their Hybrid AI Advantage offering, the need to validate AI use-cases – and the rise of Agentic AI.

Patricia Wilkey has enjoyed a thoroughly impressive career in IT.

She began her career as a financial analyst, and was the Chief Financial Officer at EDS Personal Communications Corp, before pivoting into strategy and sales at EDS Corporation.

Wilkey has worked for global technology players such as HP and DXC Technology, prior to joining Lenovo in 2024.

She is regarded by many of her peers to be one of the best sales leaders in the industry.

During LEAP 2025 in Riyadh, CNME were afforded the opportunity to sit down with Wilkey, to try and better understand how Lenovo is helping their customers leverage the most from AI.

GAIN AN 'ADVANTAGE'

Lenovo's Hybrid AI Advantage portfolio is empowering organisations to turn data and intelligence into business outcomes much quicker.

Wilkey outlined how Lenovo's adopts a consultative approach in order to understand customer pain points, and select the AI use-case that is really going to have the impact they desire.

She acknowledged business leaders are under pressure to adopt AI, and stressed the need to validate AI use-cases.

"Over the last few months, we have spent a lot of time with our customers in terms of how we can help them transition from pocket-to-cloud. We want to determine how do we help them take advantage of AI by deploying the right model. We are taking that technology piece into play, but we're also incorporating the human factor, which is essential. Our strategy straddles a lot of different elements, such as, speed, having the right execution, and having that ease of use. Ultimately, we want to ensure that we can take these solutions, and use-cases, and validate them for our customers. We have designed a model that within 90 days allows our customers to test, validate, and see a proof of value on that use-case that we are bringing forward. We are sitting down with our customers, and we're asking them what is the concept, where do you think we can have the best impact, and then we design that, and we look to validate that use-case within 90 days. We want them to get to a validation point, so they don't have to re-design everything for production," said Wilkey.

Wilkey added that Lenovo is also intensely focused on simplifying AI for their customers.

"A very important component in this AI development, is the need to validate the security framework, we bring the security, whether it is built into our device, or we use a Microsoft tool, but that is key. It is also very important for us to introduce our partner ecosystem, to determine what are they going to need to have for the compute

environment. Data is the killer area for applications. We want to make sure that the general population, or the designer know that this is what it is all about. How does the application manipulate the data, and now with AI and agents the question becomes how do you make it simpler," said Wilkey.

THE LIBRARY

Wilkey stated that educating customer on AI is a huge priority for them, but conceded that in the AI race, patience is not a virtue you tend to see first-hand.

However, Lenovo's creation of an AI library has enabled people to have conversations much quicker, as they have leveraged AI to fast-track the traditionally protracted process of creating an NDA.

"A big focus for us in this first phase of AI is the education of our customers – and to help us with that, we have created what we call the AI Library. Many of our customers have their own IP, but they need another tool, or framework to really gain traction. When you go and speak to a customer one of the first things that your legal team will say is that we need a NDA, you can't have this conversation without one. However, this takes time, so what we did was have all our experts in AI work closely with our legal team to determine how we can have a framework around the best elements that is needed in an NDA agreement. It has all been approved now, and if anyone of our thousands of sellers globally need to have that conversation then they just need to go into the AI library, submit the details, and they'll get the approved documentation that they need to go forward with that conversation. It saves weeks, initially it was reduced from a fortnight to around 3-4 days, but now you can get the approved document within an hour. We've taken our AI library to our customers, and they can now leverage the capabilities provided by this use-case. We also have an incubation model with different ISVs, and service providers in terms of what they are creating and how we can link that into our incubation AI team," said Wilkey.

TAKE IT ON 'BOARD'

Wilkey conceded that many business leaders are under pressure to come back to their board with a clear AI strategy,

> We're working closely with **NVIDIA**, and others in relation to what it all means, and we're looking at how we bring these solutions to fruition, what is the compute power required to validate, test, and go into a production load with these agentic AI models."

and likened the current AI climate to the cloud era.

"Lenovo is in 180 different markets in the world, and each one of them is at a different level when it comes to AI, some of them are more educated on the technology than others, and that's just the state of play. When we speak to our customers we always look at the industry, what industry does this customer operate in. For example, I recently was with an insurance CIO, who admitted there were cautious about adopting AI because of fears over compliance. We spoke, and we looked at where they were having the most pain, and then we looked at developing solutions that are going to address that very specific problem in the most effective and efficient way possible. The first thing that some of these business leaders say to us is 'it's kind of like the cloud era'. Boards are now asking them what is this AI thing, what is our strategy and plan. They are asking us for help. It can be hard to stay on top of AI because it is changing so quickly, but it's our job to educate them, then advise them based on the industry they operate in what the best course of action is. If we don't have that industry expertise, then that's when we leverage our channel and partner to bring that knowledge to the industry," said Wilkey.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

A big feature and theme at LEAP, was the role of Agentic AI.

Many analysts are predicting that the year of 2025, will be remembered as the year of Agentic AI.

"Agentic AI is taking the data, understanding it, and create process improvement around the AI play. These agentic models are learning from themselves and cutting out some of the complex processes that used to hinder coders and developers. As you pull these units together then it's already recognising what people might have had to pull together manually. There is still a lot of compute power needed to make this all happen. We're working closely with NVIDIA, and others in relation to what it all means, and we're looking at how we bring these solutions to fruition, what is the compute power required to validate, test, and go into a production load with these agentic AI models? However, it is expensive, so we're looking at how we can adopt a consumption strategy around the design of these agentic AI models. We want to make it easier for our customers to embrace Agentic AI, and there is a lot of tools out there, but how do you simplify all of that, and use these Agentic AI models to enable what the piece of the process is in order to reduce the time, and make the whole process

easier for the non-developer to be able to experiment and use," said Wilkey.

STAY 'TRU'

Wilkey concluded a superb exchange, by highlighted the role and impact played by Lenovo's TruScale platform.

"We help our customers get access to the environment that they need. Many of our customers are concerned about their security and their intellectual capital, how they maintain, and manage that in their environment. TruScale is designed in a way that addresses these concerns. In some cases, they want to use a public cloud, but in other cases they want to keep it on-prem, whether they are a public sector organisation, or a financial institution, or healthcare provide, it doesn't matter the data is key, and their IP is core to them. They want to have the same experience as if they are in a public cloud. In many instances customers don't have all the capital to be able to put upfront, and that's an impact on their ROI. Lenovo helps them financially to have the right compute, the design of what they need in that environment, but have it in a financial model that makes sense to them, and enable them to turn it up and turn it down, the flexibility is critical," concluded Wilkey.

> ## "A big focus for us in this first phase of AI is the education of our customers – and to help us with that, we have created what we call the AI library."

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Ericsson

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Patrick Johansson**, President - Market Area Middle East, and Africa, at Ericsson, during Mobile World Congress in Barcelona last week, in an effort to learn more about how the Swedish ICT behemoth is helping operators monetize the network, their unique approach to the Open RAN space - and the opportunities emerging from the Middle East region.

Patrick Johansson is a hugely respected business leader in the telecommunications world, having spent almost 30 years at Ericsson.

In August 2024, he was appointed President of Ericsson Middle East, and has been tasked with the responsibility of driving their growth across a marketplace that is awash with opportunities, particularly in Saudi Arabia, where Johansson is now stationed.

CNME managed to catch-up with Johansson during one of the world's biggest connectivity conferences in the form of Mobile World Congress in Barcelona.

COMING TO LIFE:
Johansson began the conversation by highlighting how technologies and products that we talked about for years are starting to come alive.

"At an event like MWC, and other major trade shows there are always technologies and solutions that you want to demonstrate and showcase to attendees. However, I think it's very evident that some of the things that we have been talking about for years are actually happening now. The focus has shifted towards the question of how do you monetize the networks that have been built, and the importance of the ecosystem that has been built over time in terms of enabling that. At our booth we have the Meta glasses, and after so much hype over them, they actually exist now, these solutions and technologies that we have spent years talking about are real now, they are tangible, you can feel and touch them and that's really exciting for the industry. You can't go anywhere at MWC without hearing the word AI, and there have been some incredible examples of how AI is really coming alive, and how it is making organisations much more efficient," said Johansson.
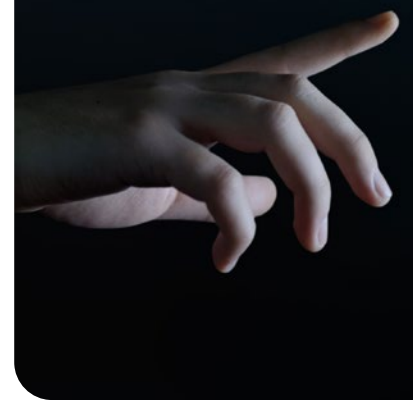
SHOW ME THE MONEY:

It has been well-documented for years that many global operators that made eye-watering investments in both 4G and 5G technology had failed to see a major ROI on those investments, and the need for 5G use-cases was pressing.

Now whilst there is still work to be done, there has been an upturn in the monetization of networks, which Johansson attributes to the fact that operators are now leveraging their networks as a 'platform'.

"Look, we have fixed wireless access, which of course is one key aspect for us, but there are different advancements in networks. I do think the service providers that are now truly advanced with 5G standalone are driving huge transformation through what you can now do with slicing and mission critical activities and so on. They are capitalising on the opportunities that are out there, and they are being proactive and innovative, at the end of the day, it's all about how the network can be a platform for new business development – and the operators that are doing that are having a lot of success," said Johansson.

LET'S BE 'OPEN'

For a number of years, there was a perception that Ericsson was opposed to the Open RAN movement, but as Johansson explained that was an unfair assertion made by others.

Ericsson has become a big player in the O2 interface, and has a key Open RAN collaboration with RedHat.

"A few years ago, there was a perception that Ericsson was opposed to openness, but that wasn't the case at all. It was misguided, and it was a view others had when assessing our approach. We were taking all of the information on

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At Ericsson, we don't just talk about things we'd like to do, we go and do them."

board, and we were simply trying to make sense of it all. All the radios that you see out there are Open Ready, so instead of us competing in the traditional way, we pivoted towards a horizontal approach, and all the radios are compatible, and we want to connect other elements into this programmable network. From a stack point of view, you need RedHat, but it's also important to note that you have to create flexibility for others to build, and then you compete on the elements, and I think that is shaping a much more innovative industry. At Ericsson, we don't just talk about things we'd like to do, we go and do them. Actions speak louder than words – and I think sometimes we are accused of doing things slow, but once things happen it is through action," said Johansson.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY:

It's no secret that the Middle East region is become a prominent force in the global technology ecosystem, and that is evidenced by the sheer volume of investments being made in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE.

Johansson is based in Riyadh, so he is able to witness first-hand the appetite and demand for transformation.

He described the opportunities as hugely exciting, and described the Middle East as a 'unique marketplace'.

"I am super excited by the opportunities emerging from the Middle East region. I believe that the Middle East region is at the forefront of technology. There is a technology-leading aspect at play across the Middle East, but if you peel back the layers the fundamental component that is driving the momentum across the Middle East region is transformation. The appetite and demand for transformation is off the scale. You can also see that many telecommunication operators are diversifying their businesses, and as I mentioned earlier, are using the network as a platform for building that. An example of this is e&, who very quickly turned into a delivery business in Dubai, in a very efficient way, and that was primarily down to the efficiency of the network and the reach they have with their subscriber base. There are also huge investments into the region, and I think the entrepreneurial spirit is very prevalent across the Gulf. It's a very different market to other markets across the world in terms of the pace of change, and it is a very unique market. I think many other markets globally can learn a lot by looking at the transformation underway across the Middle East," said Johansson.

YOU CAN TRUST US:

Ericsson has been in business for over 150 years, and rather inevitably like any business, has enjoyed good times and bad.

However, one element in their armour that has never really been chinked with their customers has been that of the trust in the quality of their networks and solutions, and Johansson believes that remains one of their key market differentiators.

"Ericsson has been able to sustain its success over such a long period of time due to our legacy and trust. Our founder took a decision very early on to go into the international market, and if you see telecoms anywhere, almost all of them at some stage have been with Ericsson. I think a key differentiator for us is security and trust. It's in our DNA, there are other players in our market who may be considered more nimble than us, but businesses know that when Ericsson builds something, then it is robust and fully trusted across the industry. The importance of security and trusted networks is critical. The areas that you get into with businesses at times, is naturally sensitive, whether you are dealing directly with a government, or a private enterprise and you want to ensure that the information stays where it is supposed to be. In terms of trusted networks, not only can we talk about it, but we can actually deliver it," said Johansson.

> **You can also see that many telecommunication operators are diversifying their businesses, and as I mentioned earlier, are using the network as a platform for building that."**

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Aster DM Healthcare

PUT THE 'CARE' BACK INTO HEALTHCARE

Padam Kafle, Head of Innovation at Aster DM Healthcare has written a powerful op-ed, which implores medical practitioners to put the care back into the word healthcare, arguing that technology can be implemented to make patient experiences more proactive and personalised.

Padam Kafle is a healthcare IT leader and innovator with over 21 years of experience.

Serving as Head of IT and Automations for Aster hospitals UAE and Oman & Head of Innovation at Aster DM Healthcare, he has been instrumental in driving transformative projects in super intelligence, blockchain, and automation.

As the inventor of PAHSI (Padam's Artificial Healthcare Super-Intelligence) and ALIF (Advance Life Integrated framework), Padam's pioneering work focuses on predictive healthcare and decentralised patient records.

His overarching mission is to extend healthy life expectancy through technology, making him a true game-changer in the healthcare landscape.

In a world where healthcare often feels like a reactive game of catch-up, Padam

Kafle is playing chess, not checkers.

He isn't just adapting to technological advancements—he's driving them forward with unstoppable energy. Guided by visionary leaders like Dr. Azad Moopen—whose passion to care beyond boundaries has inspired Padam to dream bigger—and mentored by Dr. Sherbaz Bichu, who taught him that if you aim for the best, success will inevitably follow, Padam's mission is clear: build a future where healthcare is proactive, personalised, and profoundly human.

THE JOURNEY OF HEALTHCARE IT: FROM PAPER TO PREDICTIVE POWER

Over the last 21 years, healthcare IT has undergone a sweeping transformation—from the era of paper

charts and fax machines to today's world of predictive intelligence and real-time data analysis. Padam, who has been at the forefront of this revolution, reflects on this journey:

"I saw an opportunity to bridge the gap between technology and healthcare. Technology isn't just a tool—it's a catalyst for revolutionizing patient care."

He envisions a healthcare ecosystem that doesn't merely respond to illness but anticipates and prevents it. From Super Intelligence (SI) to blockchain and automation, Padam's focus is to ensure these tools don't just digitize healthcare but radically transform it.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN HEALTHCARE IT:

Innovation is never without its hurdles. Interoperability remains a significant

organisations to adopt decentralised identity management, explore smart contracts for billing and insurance, and begin training professionals in blockchain and SI concepts. This forward-thinking approach cements Padam as a trailblazer in the rapidly evolving tech landscape.

PAHSI: PERSONALIZING HEALTHCARE WITH SI

At the heart of Padam's groundbreaking work is PAHSI(Padam's Artificial Healthcare SuperIntelligence or Personalised Artificial healthcare superintelligence), a Super Intelligence-powered system designed to redefine healthcare delivery:

"PAHSI was born from a bold vision: healthcare should not be reactive; it should be predictive and personalised."

Unlike traditional systems that focus on treating symptoms after they appear, PAHSI analyses patterns and predicts potential health risks before they become critical. This shift from treatment to prevention aligns perfectly with Padam's broader mission: to make healthcare truly patient-centred.

IMPROVING PATIENT OUTCOMES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

For Padam, every innovation ultimately aims to improve

challenge, with hospitals and clinics still struggling to share patient data securely and efficiently.

Padam also underscores the critical need for data security in an age when cyber threats grow more sophisticated by the day.

"Healthcare systems still struggle to communicate seamlessly. Universal standards and decentralised models like Web3 are a necessity for truly integrated care."

Equally vital is scalability. Cutting-edge solutions must be available not just to large, well-funded institutions but also to smaller clinics. Padam's leadership approach is proactive: anticipating problems, encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration, and ensuring every innovation serves real healthcare needs.

WEB3: REVOLUTIONISING HEALTHCARE'S FUTURE

The next frontier in healthcare IT, according to Padam, is Web3. By decentralising patient data through blockchain technologies, Web3 offers both security and autonomy for individuals:

"Web3 is poised to revolutionise healthcare by decentralising patient data. Imagine your medical records living securely on the blockchain, accessible only to you and your authorized caregivers—no middlemen, no single point of failure."

He advises healthcare

"

Healthcare systems still struggle to communicate seamlessly. Universal standards and decentralised models like Web3 are a necessity for truly integrated care."

20

patient outcomes. Whether it's SI-enhanced clinical decision-making that reduces misdiagnosis or automating hospital workflows to free up doctors' time, the goal remains the same: delivering faster, smarter, and more effective care.

"When I write code, I remind myself that each piece of logic will impact hundreds of thousands of people. Even though I'm not a doctor or nurse, I'm contributing to making healthcare faster, smarter, and more effective through innovation."

It's a humble but powerful reminder that technology, when developed thoughtfully, saves lives.

LEADERSHIP LESSONS: INSPIRED BY DR. SHERBAZ, DR. MOOPEN, AND BEYOND

Padam's accomplishments are as much about leadership as they are about innovation. He attributes his success to mentors and visionaries who have shaped his perspective. Dr. Sherbaz Bichu, his professional mentor, taught him:

"If you desire the best and remain steadfast, you will succeed. The struggle may be challenging, but the end result will always be success and nothing else."

And the broader ethos of Dr. Azad Moopen, whose vision to care beyond boundaries continues to drive Aster DM Healthcare's global impact, resonates deeply with Padam's own aspiration to extend healthy life expectancy for all.

Padam also draws inspiration from leaders like His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai, Prime Minister, and Vice President of the UAE. Paraphrasing His Highness's famous words:

"Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up knowing it must outrun the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up knowing it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve. It doesn't matter if you're a lion or a gazelle—when the sun comes up, you'd better be running."

For Padam, this quote encapsulates the relentless pursuit of excellence—a mindset vital to thriving in any competitive environment, including healthcare.

GRATITUDE: THE MENTORS WHO SHAPED THE JOURNEY

Success, Padam believes, is never achieved alone. He is quick to acknowledge the many individuals who have guided him along the way:

"I have been fortunate to have incredible mentors, colleagues, and family members who supported me throughout my journey. Dr. Sherbaz Bichu has been a key influence, inspiring me to push the boundaries of SI-driven healthcare innovation. My uncle, T.P. Khanal, instilled in me from childhood that there is no limit to gaining knowledge and that learning should be a lifelong pursuit. My grandfather's resilience, my parents' unwavering support, and my grandmother's wisdom have all shaped who I am today."

He reserves special gratitude for his grandmother, who, despite having little formal education, taught him life lessons that surpass even his doctoral research:

"She instilled in me the values of integrity and truthfulness—principles that have guided me through every challenge and success."

These foundational beliefs—resilience, endless curiosity, integrity, and truth—form the bedrock of Padam's professional and personal life, constantly steering him toward pioneering solutions in healthcare.

THE FUTURE AWAITS: JOIN THE CONVERSATION

From PAHSI to Web3 and beyond, Padam Kafle is forging a future where healthcare is predictive, secure, and accessible to all.

Fueled by Dr. Moopen's vision to care beyond boundaries and guided by Dr. Sherbaz's leadership ethos, Padam's work challenges the status quo and dares us to imagine a world where everyone can live longer, healthier lives. anime

Web3 is poised to revolutionise healthcare by decentralising patient data. Imagine your medical records living securely on the blockchain, accessible only to you and your authorized caregivers—no middlemen, no single point of failure."

Veeam

OUR STOCK IS ON THE RISE

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down with **Tim Pfaelzer**, General Manager, and Senior Vice President of Europe, Middle East and Africa, at Veeam, for a conversation that explored how the global data protection leader can capitalize on the opportunities emerging out of the KSA – and how its $15bn market valuation gives them even greater credibility in what is an increasingly competitive and volatile marketplace.

Tim Pfaelzer is one of the most respected sales leaders in the technology industry across the EMEA region.

He has played a key role in the continued growth of Veeam across Europe and Africa, but particularly in the Middle East region.

The sheer scale of transformation underway across the Middle East marketplace is unprecedented compared to other more mature markets such as Europe and North America.

Veeam has been making a lot of financial headlines for all the right reasons over the last six months.

In December 2024, the data protection and ransomware recovery leader was valued at $15 billion following a $2 billion secondary share sale.

The transaction was led by private equity firm TPG, with participation from investors such as Temasek and Neuberger Berman Capital Solutions.

Incredibly, the company's valuation has tripled since January 2020, following

its acquisition by Insight Partners for $5 billion.

As of September 2024, Veeam reported $1.7 billion in annualized recurring revenue, which represented an 18% year-over-year growth, with two-thirds of its revenue coming from subscriptions.

When pressed on the 'significance' of Veeam's eye-watering valuation, Pfaelzer was unequivocal about its importance, citing it gives them huge credibility.

"It represents a great opportunity for us, but it hasn't come to us unearned. This is the result of the tireless work that we've put into our products, customers, and our theme of supporting data resilience to keep businesses operating. We keep businesses running, and that is our mantra. Our investments have resulted in increased credibility that we will develop further alongside the needs of our customers and partners. The news of our $15bn valuation inevitably comes up quite a lot in our daily interactions with customers and prospective leads, because it gives us

> **The news of our $15bn valuation inevitably comes up quite a lot in our daily interactions with customers and prospective leads, because it gives us greater credibility."**

unrivalled credibility. We are undoubtedly now perceived as the number one player in the market outside of industry specific recognition like Gartner reports, we are the leading player, and our valuation only reinforces that viewpoint," said Pfalezer.

As aforementioned above the scale of transformation in the KSA is off the charts, but inevitably, that speed of change comes with challenges, and there are number of pain points, one of which is data resiliency.

But again, as Pfaelzer points out, that's where Veeam can expertly serve its base of customers in Saudi Arabia.

"We have over 1,000 customers in the KSA, which is incredible. They provide us with feedback on how we are helping them, such as making sure they are secure with data backups. They can always rely on Veeam to help keep their data safe, and in the event of a compromise we can assist with data recovery as soon as possible. That trust they have in us is hard to quantify, and they know that as I said before we keep businesses running, and if you are impacted, then we get back up and running quickly. Our latest products are helping us to ensure the customers' businesses

are running smoothly with whatever hardware, or hyper-scalers they are working with," said Pfaelzer.

A recurring theme at the moment is, you can't do anything with AI unless its secure.

The objective of securing AI can be lost amidst the noise and the hustle to deploy AI models, and emerge as a leader in the AI space.

However, in an effort to counteract against this, Veeam are using a 'proactive model' that is embedded in their software.

He stressed how businesses need to focus on validated AI

use-cases that make sense to their business model.

"AI is a race as there's always something new coming up about it in the industry. We are trying to apply AI to our solutions where it makes sense. Our AI offering prompts and reminds the users to help guide them in maintaining the security of their data environment. This proactive model is embedded into our software. A lot of our customers use AI for development and customer data, which we cannot personally secure, but there is an AI module that we can help our customers with," said Pfaelzer.

Veeam have been a long-term advocate of data resiliency. However, amidst a backdrop that is constantly changing and becoming more volatile, the parameters around what is needed to become resilient can change.

Pfaelzer pointed to their recent acquisition of Coveware as being a huge help to the company in terms of providing their customers with that data resiliency.

"We are working with Coveware, an acquisition of ours, who help to investigate and recover stolen data. Through them, we hear a lot of stories, and what they're saying is that the threat actors do not change, they are just getting smarter at the same time that we do. The thing that is changing is the number of attacks coming in every day. The question is not 'do you get attacked' its 'how many times a day do you get attacked'. It's always a race to

stay ahead of them, however we have all the solutions to help you prevent or overcome attacks," said Pfaelzer.

Veeam serves over 550,000 customers globally, including 77% of the Fortune 500 companies, providing solutions for data backup, recovery, and protection across various environments.

The company has also

We may have 1,000 customers in Saudi Arabia, but that's only the beginning for us. The KSA represents a growth region for business, and is one of the biggest that I've personally ever witnessed."

been expanding its cloud-first offerings, aiming to address the evolving needs of businesses in data resilience and protection.

In February 2025, Microsoft made an undisclosed equity investment in Veeam to enhance their partnership and develop AI products, further strengthening Veeam's position in the data protection industry.

However, it is evident that a major focus for them is on the Saudi Arabia marketplace, and understandably so.

At the minute, they have over 1,000 customers, but Pfaelzer is confident that they can grow that number ten-fold over the coming years, as the KSA continues on their radical economic transformation journey.

"We are investing, not only into salespeople, but also technical experts and management positions to ensure that the customers who want our broader solutions are staying happy. We may have 1,000 customers in Saudi Arabia, but that's only the beginning for us. The KSA represents a growth region for business, and is one of the biggest that I've personally ever witnessed. We are beyond excited by the opportunities here, and are very confident that we can fully capitalize on the opportunities coming out of the Kingdom," said Pfaelzer. cnme

TIME TO GO PUBLIC

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down with **Fayez Ibbini**, the CEO and co-founder of Alpha Data, to find out why the time was right for the family-owned digital transformation leader to become a publicly traded company on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) – and how it gives the company greater credibility as it expands in to other markets like Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Alpha Data was established in 1981, and is headquartered in Abu Dhabi.

Under the tutelage and leadership of its CEO and co-founder Fayez Ibbini, Alpha Data has become a leading digital transformation provider and systems integrator across the Middle East.

Earlier this month, Alpha Data successfully launched its Initial Public Offering (IPO) on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX), becoming the first UAE company to go public this year.

The IPO involved the issuance of 400 million shares, representing 40% of the company's issued share capital, at an offer price of AED 1.50 per share. This offering raised AED 600 million (USD 163 million), bringing the company's market capitalization to approximately AED 1.5 billion. (USD 408 million)

CNME secured an exclusive interview with Alpha Data CEO Fayez Ibbini to learn more about the IPO process, and how the landscape has now changed for the company by going public.

Ibbini kickstarted the conversation by highlighting how the IPO process has taken Alpha Data over two years to complete.

"I think there is a perception from some that when they see you ring the bell that signals that you are now a publicly traded company that the decision was made a few weeks ago, but the reality is that the process takes years. Alpha Data started the process of becoming a publicly traded company in late 2022, so it's not like is just occurred to us overnight that we should go public, it's been a lengthy, and at times a very protracted and gruelling process. Alpha Data has been in business for over 40 years, and we first looked at going public back in 2007, and 2008, but then as we all know the global financial crash happened, and we opted out of it. However, it has been something that we have always considered, and in late 2022, we made the decision that the time was right for Alpha Data to go public," said Ibbini.

Ibbini outlined the mitigating factors that led to Alpha Data to go public, citing that in order to maintain continuity and secure the long-term future of the company, the best option for the IT leader was to go public.

"There were two primary factors for going public, and one of them was the fact that both my family, and my partners families have grown. Between us I have three children, but my partners have over 40, so maintaining continuity and harmony between so many shareholders can sometimes be problematic, so we ultimately wanted to avoid any potential friction in the future. Having guardrails, processes, and governance in place guarantees continuity for the long-haul, whereas if it was all dependent on the founders and the partners then it would be very hard to guarantee that continuity in the long-term. Second and third generation owners tend not to have the same enthusiasm and compassion for the business. Out of my 3 children, only one of them has an interest in the Alpha Data business, and the IT industry in general, so you can't force continuity, and you can't force people to be

passionate about a business, or an industry," said Ibbini.

Ibbini used the analogy of going on a holiday and wanting others to experience that joy you get on a vacation when describing their decision to go public.

Ibbini said the company has now gone from being a family-owned business, to a 'community' of investors.

"I'll use an analogy to describe the other mitigating factor behind our decision to go public. Often when you go on holiday and you have a great time, you wish your loved ones, or others

could be with you to enjoy that vacation. At Alpha Data, we've been running this business successfully for over 40 years, and it has been an eventful fulfilling journey, but at some point you would like to open it up to others, and that is what we're doing

by going public. It now means that others can enjoy our success, the public can join us, institutions can join us and naturally, it'll become a much broader story than just the Alpha Data founders enjoying the growth story. We are incredibly lucky to

> "At Alpha Data, we've been running this business successfully for over 40 years, and it has been a nice fulfilling journey, but at some point, you would like to open it up to others, and that is what we're doing by going public. It now means that others can enjoy our success."

have over 7,000 investors in the public listing and over 100 institutions, so now you have a whole community of investors and people rooting for you, and that's a special thing to have," said Ibbini.

Many companies decide to go public in order to raise capital to reinvest, scale and grow their business, but according to Ibbini, Alpha Data didn't need additional funding.

However, he did concede that by going public it completely changes the perception of the company, especially when attempting to penetrate new markets outside of the UAE.

"As a company we have never borrowed money, and we never really needed funding, so we didn't go to the market to get an increase in capital. Essentially, some of the founders sold some of their shares to the public, so as a company Alpha Data doesn't get an injection of cash into its coffers to grow and invest. We are on a journey of growth, and around 18 months ago we expanded into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and we also entered the market in Qatar, and we did this independent of us going public as a company. Where the real value comes for us as a publicly traded company is the fact that it gives you credibility when you enter other markets. In the UAE, we are well-known, we are trusted, but when you step outside of the home market and tell businesses that you are a family-owned company from the UAE then you get a certain reception. However, when you tell them that you are a public company on ADX, then that gives you a different sort of gravitas, and as I said it gives you huge credibility," said Ibbini.

Ibbini said another factor in giving them huge credibility is the fact that they managed to convince over 100 reputable and well-known institutions to invest significantly into the company.

"To convince over 100 very sophisticated institutions to invest in us, and buy into our equity story is quite a feat. You can't play games when you go public, as an entity that has been in business for over 40 years, people can go through all that data, and can comb through all of that, and find out if you're hiding anything. That gives comfort to us, comfort to our investors, and to the public market, and businesses that are looking at partnering with us in the future," said Ibbini.

March 11th was the date Alpha Data went public.

However, as Ibbini pointed out the company could not have handpicked a worse day to float their stock, as there was a bloodbath on Wall Street, and across all the major exchanges, including ADX.

Thankfully, Alpha Data performed exceptionally well on its market debut.

"We honestly couldn't have picked a worse day to go public. There was a bloodbath globally on the stock exchange. We came to the market on the 11th, and when the share started trading the whole screen end-to-end was red, the only share that was in the green was Alpha Data. We closed the day by being up around 7%, and I think

our market debut showed two things, the first of which is that we went in at a very fair price, probably discounted because we as shareholders we were happy to leave some money on the table. Secondly, those that want to sell don't have an incentive to sell because they know they have a solid company, and if they just sit with it by October, we will be paying our first dividends, and they are getting dividends at the rate of 8.7% return," said Ibbini.

Ibbini said that what makes Alpha Data such an attractive proposition for investors is the fact the company operates under a 'capital light' model.

"In 2026, we will be distributing 80% of our profit year-on-year, and this is not something that is done easily because we are a growing company, but we run what is described as a capital light model. We don't have factories, we don't construct buildings, it's all intellectual property, fulfilment and delivery, so whatever profit we make, we keep a little bit of it for growth, and the rest of it goes to our shareholders – and that model is a very attractive proposition for anybody," said Ibbini.

When asked what advice he would give other companies who are potentially looking at going public, Ibbini said it was not for the faint-hearted.

"The first thing that I would say is that it is not for everybody, and what I mean by that is size matters because it is a costly process. If you are a relatively small

technology company then the process will cost you tens of millions, so it's not something that you can do on the side. During the IPO process you have top notch international lawyers, auditors, and consultants, and their fees are excessive to say the least. Investment banks take a large chunk of money out of you to help you through the process and list you, so everywhere you look as a public company the cost is high. In addition to this, it is important for you to have good systems and processes in place, and you need to be transparent, because if you

do have secrets, or skeletons in the closet, then the public market is not for you. You can't play a game these people will expose you if you have flaws," said Ibbini.

Ibbini also stressed that if companies do want to go public then they need to display resilience and fortitude, because the process will be littered with obstacles and hurdles at every juncture.

"It is important to highlight that you need a dedicated team to work on this, because this is not a job for one, or two people. We had a 7 people working on this as a team for the last

> **We are incredibly lucky to have over 7,000 investors in the public listing and over 100 institutions, so now you have a whole community of investors and people rooting for you, and that's a special thing to have."**

two years, and that takes a lot of energy out of everyone, and especially the CEO, as some of the questions can only be answered by the CEO, and can't be delegated to someone else. The CEO is the person that really articulates the equity story of Alpha Data, and again, that is something that can't be delegated to someone else. When you set a specific target, or a goal such as an IPO, then it is critically important that you have the ability to remain focused on that goal, and not be distracted by the obstacles that you face, because inevitably there is going to be many of them, especially with a process like an IPO. Many businesses struggle with that, and become side-tracked, and as a result many of them give up on their goals, but as I said you need to find a way to both navigate and overcome your challenges," said Ibbini.

Ibbini also admitted that he is now only discovering that whilst the IPO process was hard, the real hard work is only beginning.

He used another analogy to describe the stage they are at now as a company, saying the IPO was the pregnancy part, now they are raising a baby, and there will be many sleepless nights ahead.

"The other element that I am only discovering now over the last week or so is that IPO is only the start of the hard work! The people at ADX told me that the IPO process that we've been on over the last two years is like a pregnancy, but don't imagine for a minute that the delivery when the baby comes, which is when we rang the bell is the end of your trouble. It's just the beginning of the hard work, and the sleepless nights, and I'm beginning to see that this is accurate. There are so many players in the stock market that want to drive your share price down, they want to buy it on the cheap, they want to drive it up, they play stock price

> **The people at ADX told me that the IPO process that we've been on over the last two years is like a pregnancy, but don't imagine for a minute that the delivery when the baby comes, which is when we rang the bell is the end of your trouble. It's just the beginning of the hard work, and the sleepless nights."**

games, but you are trying to run a company, and continue its growth believing that this is the way to protect your share price, but whilst that is a good approach, you have to be cognisant of the fact that there are players on the stock market that are out to destroy your share, so there are things you need to do to protect it from day traders and speculators. So now you've entered into new territory that you never bargained for, you wanted to become publicly listed, you didn't want to play share games, so it's not unusual for people to call me and ask me why shares in Alpha Data went down yesterday, and I don't have the answers," said Ibbini.

Ibbini concluded a brilliant interview by saying that whilst he will remain focused

on driving the growth of the business, he also has to be cognisant of the fact that in order to protect Alpha Data, he has to play what he described as a 'two-track' game.

"The fact of the matter is you have to play a two-track game whether you like it or not. On the one hand you need to manage and grow your company and keep it healthy, because ultimately that is what matters.

However, at the same time you can't ignore the day-to-day share fluctuation because there are people out there that can impact the company, but you have to protect the organisation. You have a responsibility to shareholders, you convinced them to invest into your company, so you need your share price to perform. Regardless if the company is performing if the share price is down then that's not a good place to be. They don't like that, you have to take care of that, and it is an ongoing challenge for us as a new company that is now publicly listed on ADX, as I said earlier in the conversation, we are now part of a very big community, and that truly is an exciting place to be," said Ibbini.

Lenovo

THE 'ONE' THAT I WANT

Thibault Dousson, Director, Services and Solutions Group, META at Lenovo, outlines to CNME Editor Mark Forker how their Gen AI-powered 'Care of One' platform is empowering workforces to be more effective and efficient through the use of artificial intelligence.

Thibault Dousson is a seasoned veteran in the IT industry, and is recognised by many of his peers to be one of the most prominent thought leaders in the channel ecosystem across the Middle East and Africa.

Dousson made his name at HP, before joining Lenovo in 2016.

In 2022, he was appointed as Director of Services and Solutions Group for the META region at Lenovo, and under his tutelage the company has enjoyed continued growth.

Last month during LEAP 2025 in Riyadh, CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down with Dousson to learn more about their Gen AI-powered Care of One platform that delivers Lenovo's Digital Workspace solutions.

Dousson claimed that Lenovo's Care of One platform illustrates how effective Gen AI can be in terms of transforming processes within an organisation, and also highlighted its plug-and-play simplicity for users.

"Our Care of One platform is the perfect example of what

AI can do for a company. It is a plug-and-play platform that ultimately enables you to support your workforce to be much more efficient in their day-to-day roles. It gives them intelligence and helps them make better decision faster. The AI behind

our Care of One platform is quite powerful, and that is evidenced by the fact that it can plug in up to 500 applications. Ultimately, the primary objective of the platform is to foster an environment that supports employees to be more efficient through the use of AI. We often hear that AI can be complex, and whilst that remains true in many cases, the same accusation can't be aimed at Lenovo's Care of One platform, as it is engineered with simplicity at its core when it comes to ease of use and adoption," said Dousson.

Despite the advances made when it comes to technology, there are still some business processes that remain mundane and clunky, and in need of transformation.

These business processes are often described as 'pain points'.

> **The AI behind our Care of One platform is quite powerful, and that is evidenced by the fact that it can plug in up to 500 applications."**

Another key feature of Lenovo's Care of One platform is the visibility it provides, which he argues allows agents to streamline sticky processes.

"Lenovo's Care of One platform has incredible intelligence powering it, and it can give agents greater visibility in terms of whether people are using the right level of security, it can flag potential issues that may arise with their hardware, and so on. However, essentially it enables agents to streamline processes in a much more effective and efficient way, which also saves a huge amount of time and money for organisations. If you want to show an ROI on an AI deployment, then saving time and money is a good starting point," said Dousson.

The appetite and demand for transformation across the Middle East region, but particularly in Saudi Arabia is incredible.

Lenovo has rubberstamped its role in the future transformation of the Kingdom following the announcement of a $2bn megadeal with Alat.

Dousson believes the sheer depth and breadth of their product portfolio gives Lenovo a big advantage in the Saudi marketplace.

He did admit that a recurring question from customers, is how can Lenovo help them harness the capabilities of AI.

"It's not easy to serve that demand, the expectations are high that's for sure, but what helps us is the fact that we do have products from the pocket to the cloud – and we have solutions and services that are anchored on top of all of that. That gives us a really strong foundational block to build on when it comes to serving that appetite and demand for transformation across the Middle East. When I speak to customers, basically they are all asking the same thing, and that is what can AI do for me, and how can I digitalise my business? My question back to them is always the same, where is your data sitting? How easy is it to access, how digitised is your business, and ultimately most of important of all, where do you want to go? These are

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the types of things that you need to determine very early on in your conversation with customers. We can do a lot of things, but I don't think we are trying to do everything for everyone either," said Dousson.

There has been a lot of failure with AI over the last 12-18 months.

Many analysts believe that the pressure being applied from leaders in the boardroom who wanted their companies to become major players in the AI space has led to some costly mistake being made.

Some have likened the current environment to that of the cloud era.

However, whilst there has been failure, there is a general consensus that AI use-cases must be validated, and again, this is an area where Lenovo

has an advantage thanks to their AI library.

As Dousson pointed out, customer don't need to fall into the trap of trying to reinvent the wheel when it comes to AI use-cases.

Instead, as he points out, they can leverage their library of use-cases to make inroads in the AI game.

"We try to help businesses realise where the potential is, and we get them to look at the processes within their organisation that give them pain, and we look at how we can infuse AI into those processes to help them

overcome that problem. We have to identify what that process is, that is the key, AI is great, but without a purpose it won't work, and it's also important to validate that AI use-case quickly. At Lenovo, we have a library of AI use-cases that have all been pre-approved, so we can say to customers look you don't need to reinvent the wheel here, you can use something from our AI Library. It makes sense as you save so much time, and most importantly of all, it is validated, and we know it works," said Dousson.

At Lenovo, we have a library of AI use-cases that have all been pre-approved, so we can say to customers look you don't need to reinvent the wheel here, you can use something from our AI Library."

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ACCELERATING ACTION

At the beginning of March, we held our annual Women in Technology Forum and Awards 2025 at the Sofitel Dubai Downtown.

Under the theme of Accelerating Action, the event was designed to help break barriers, challenge biases, and help foster a culture of inclusivity to create equitable opportunities for women in technology.

Women in **TECHNOLOGY** FORUM AND AWARDS

Following is the list of winners of the Women In Tech Awards 2025

Inspirational Woman Leader 2025
Esha D'Souza
Corporate Group

Inspirational Woman Leader 2025
Dr. Pallavi Ranjan
Murdoch University Dubai

Inspirational Woman Leader 2025
Vasudha Khandeparkar
Grant Thornton – UAE

Inspirational Woman Leader 2025
Zina Ashour
Women in Crypto Arabia (WIC)

Inspirational Woman Leader 2025
Mariana Missakian

Inspirational Woman Leader 2025
Mary O'Leary

Inspirational Woman Leader 2025
Suraya Turk
Legal Circle

Woman Leader of the Year
Sherifa Hady
HPE Aruba Networking

Cybersecurity Sales Visionary of the Year
Meriam ElOuazzani
SentinelOne

Technology Visionary Leader of the Year
Haidi Nossair
Dell Technologies

Marketing Visionary of the Year
Yasmin Khaliq
Equinix

Marketing Visionary of the Year
Nagham Halaby
Infor

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Following is the list of winners of the Women In Tech Awards 2025

Marketing Visionary of the Year
Sirin Akrouk
Pure Storage

Technology Leadership Innovator of the Year
Loubna Imenchal
Logitech

Influential Sales Personality of the Year
Nigina Bender
Jabra

Woman Executive of the Year
Sheeba Sultan Hasnain
SENTIENTE

Senior Marketing Leader of the Year
Kristin McDonald
Kaspersky Middle East

Senior Marketing Leader of the Year
Shradha Subramanian
Nutanix

Senior Marketing Leader of the Year
Zeina Haggag
OPSWAT

Senior Marketing Leader of the Year
Gunika Arora
Kyriba

Technology Executive Leader of the Year
Fionnuala Morris
Kyndryl

Marketing Excellence in Operations & Analytics
Litty Reji
TechBridge Distribution

Marketing Executive of the Year
Joumana Karam
Acer

Marketing Pioneer of the Year
Manal Abi Rafeh
Fortinet

Following is the list of winners of the Women In Tech Awards 2025

Technology Frontrunner of the Year
Eliane Gerges
Dynatrace

Innovative Marketing Leader of the Year
Nidhi Aiyanna
Citrix

Innovative Marketing Leader of the Year
Nabila Ayatti
Mindware

Innovative Marketing Leader of the Year
Amrita Ghanty
Cyble

Innovative Marketing Leader of the Year
Shaed Khader
Logicom Distribution

Influential Channel Personality of the Year
Sabine Salloum
Commvault

Marketing Strategist of the Year
Chanchal Hotwani
Ingram Micro Gulf

Marketing Strategist of the Year
Zainab Yusuf
StorIT Distribution FZCO

Marketing Strategist of the Year
Sonali Basu Roy
Bulwark Technologies

Channel Sales Rising Star of the Year
Widad Abdalhadi
Cisco

Technology Businesswoman of the Year
Areej Khan
Innoxhub Global

Influential Marketing Personality of the Year
Mary Mikhail
SentinelOne

Following is the list of winners of the Women In Tech Awards 2025

Strategic Sales Leader of the Year
Anita Quadros
Wesco Anixter

Strategic Sales Leader of the Year
Konica Khandelwal
Inception - A G42 Company

Strategic Sales Leader of the Year
Reena Alex John
Finesse

Brand Awareness Marketeer of the Year
Bindhya Ramadasa
Forescout Technologies Inc.

Brand Awareness Marketeer of the Year
Eleni Papapostolou
Vectra AI

Brand Awareness Marketeer of the Year
Meenakshi Vashisht
VisionTech Systems International LLC

Brand Awareness Marketeer of the Year
Reshma Yasodharan
emt Distribution META

Brand Awareness Marketeer of the Year
Heeba Siddiqa
VAD Technologies

Marketing Rising Star of the Year
Dannah Jane Gargar
Gulf Business Machines (GBM)

Marketing Rising Star of the Year
Nana Xu
Hikvision FZE

Marketing Rising Star of the Year
Safa Qamar
NX Digital Technology

Marketing Rising Star of the Year
Thripti Rao
Jedox

Following is the list of winners of the Women In Tech Awards 2025

Marketing Rising Star of the Year
Saranya Chandradas
MITSUMI Distribution

Marketing Visionary of the Year Nichola Banerjee Nexthink	**Brand Relationship Executive of the Year** Rasha A. Zaki Cisco
Marketing Visionary of the Year Raji Joy John StarLink	**Brand Relationship Personality of the Year** Rima Taha Huawei Technologies
Senior Marketing Leader of the Year Khushnida Akramova Seidor MENA	**Technology Champion of the Year** Manju Mathew StorIT Distribution FZCO
Technology Trailblazer of the Year Lena Halbourian Commvault	**Transformational Marketing Leader of the Year** Mallika Sharma HPE Aruba Networking
Technology Icon of the Year Ekta Puthran Barco	**Marketing Strategist of the Year** Anusree M. Avientek
Influential Marketing Personality of the Year Tarannum Mohammed Saqib TP-Link	**Influential Marketing Personality of the Year** Chantelle Tavid NVIDIA
Marketing Rising Star of the Year Tamara Zbibo Zero&One	**Strategic Sales Leader of the Year** Nandini Sapru emt Distribution META

Marketing Rising Star of the Year
Krishnapriya Nikhil
Digit Solutions LLC

AI

WHO IS DOING THE LEARNING?

Iman Ghorayeb, a seasoned communications leader in the world of technology, has penned a compelling op-ed that examines how the convenience of AI is rewiring our brains.

At a recent teachers' meeting, my son's chemistry teacher went on an enthusiastic deep dive into how the brain learns—neurons firing, connections strengthening, knowledge sticking through repetition.

It made me think this isn't just about students cramming for exams. We're all constantly learning. And these days, a lot of that learning involves AI.

AI, much like an overachieving student hopped up on caffeine, absorbs massive amounts of information at lightning speed. But as we integrate AI into our daily lives, something interesting is happening—we're not just using it but we are also we're adapting to it: how we think, solve problems, and even how remember things is shifting.

So, who's actually learning from whom? Are we getting smarter with AI, or are we slowly outsourcing our intelligence to a digital co-pilot?

> **AI is dangerously convenient. The more it helps, the more we want to use it and we have our brain's dopamine system to thank for that."**

HOW HUMAN BRAINS AND AI LEARN: A SIDE-BY-SIDE LOOK

Let's break it down. AI and our brain both learn, but we do so very differently:

At first glance, AI seems like the smarter one—it's faster, remembers everything, and doesn't procrastinate on social media. But intelligence isn't just about speed or storage capacity; as we get used to relying on AI, are we training it, or is it training us?

HOW AI IS REWIRING OUR BRAINS

Our brains, like AI, are always adapting. When we start using new technology, different parts of our brain kick into gear:

- Prefrontal Cortex (The Thinker) handles decision-making and problem-solving. This is what works overtime when you're trying to figure out a new AI tool

HUMAN BRAIN	AI (NEURAL NETWORKS)
Learns through experience, trial-and-error, emotion.	Learns by processing massive amounts of data
Forms new neural connections over time / neuroplasticity	Adjusts weights / parameters through algorithms
Uses reasoning, intuition, gut feelings	Recognizes patterns, makes predictions
Forgets things	Never forgets
Can get distracted, emotional, irrational.	Only pretends to have emotions
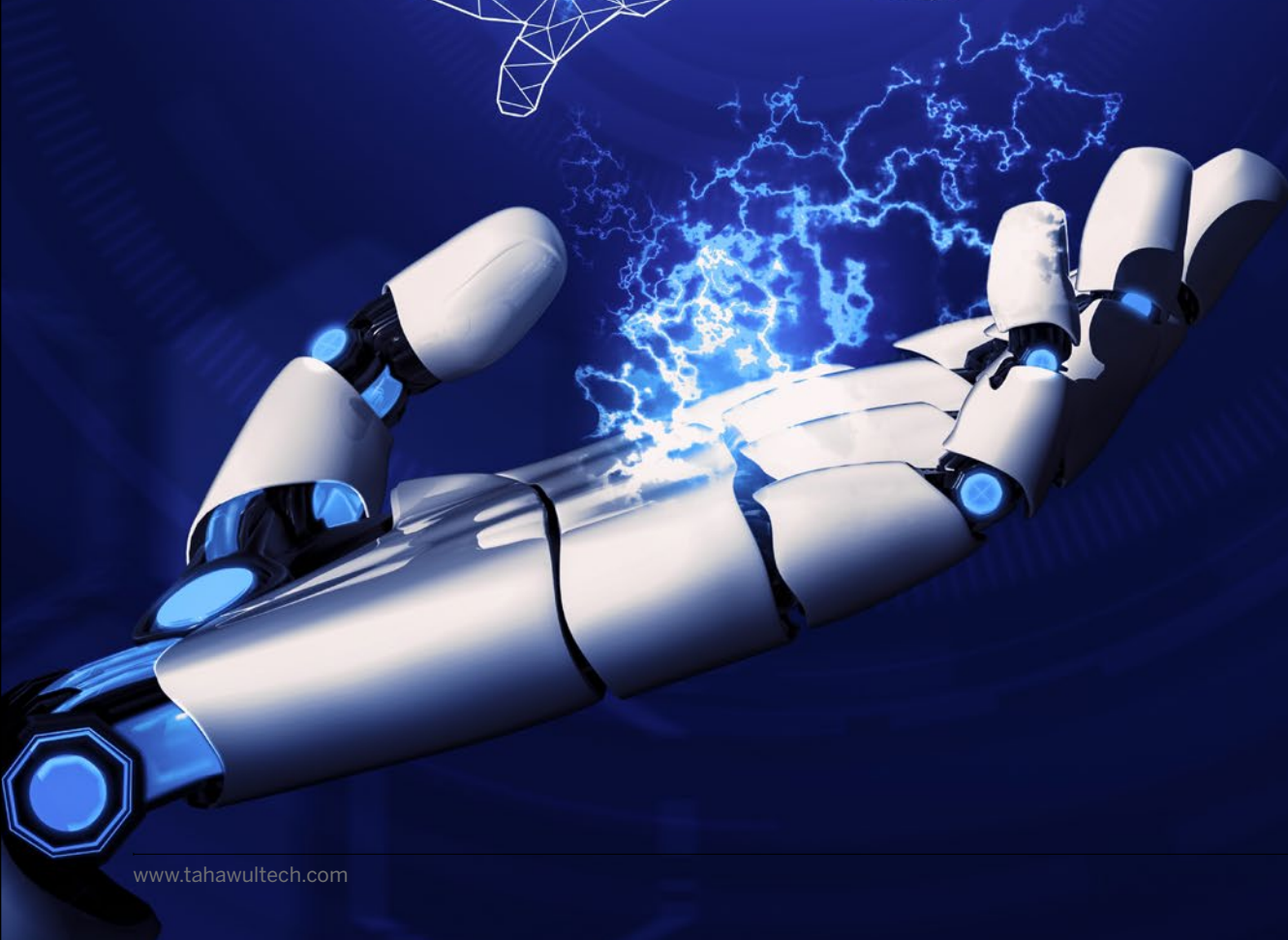
- Hippocampus (The Memory Keeper) stores new knowledge. At first, we actively think about AI commands; over time, they become second nature.
- Basal Ganglia (The Habit Builder) turns repeated actions into muscle memory. Ever found yourself opening ChatGPT for something you definitely could have figured out yourself? That's your basal ganglia at work.
- Dopamine System (The Reward Center) which gives us a little hit of satisfaction when things go smoothly, like when AI writes an email that sounds way more professional than I could.

Our brain's ability to rewire itself is that scientists call neuroplasticity; the more we use AI, the more our thought processes adapt around it. At first, we learn AI. But soon, we start thinking with it. And that's where things get interesting.

THE AI DOPAMINE LOOP: WHY WE KEEP COMING BACK

AI is dangerously convenient. The more it helps, the more we want to use it and we have our brain's dopamine system to thank for that.

It starts small: "Wow, AI just saved me an hour of work!"

Then, it escalates: "Eh, I'll let AI rewrite my whole report—it sounds better anyway."

Next thing you know, you're outsourcing almost all of it, your text messages, resumes, and even dating app bios (not me). You start wondering if AI actually knows you better than you know yourself; ever wonder that it might?

Every time AI saves us effort, our brain rewards us with a little dopamine boost; the same psychological trick that keeps us doomscrolling social media. The easier AI makes things, the more we want to use it—until, eventually, we stop trying to do things without it.

And that's when you realize: who's really in control here?

FINAL THOUGHTS: ARE WE STILL THINKING FOR OURSELVES?

One day, you might catch yourself speaking in structured prompts, thinking in autocomplete, and instinctively asking AI for answers before even attempting to problem-solve. That's when you know: this isn't just a helpful tool anymore—it's rewired how I think.

The challenge isn't just using AI—it's staying aware of how much we're outsourcing our own intelligence. AI learns from us, but we're also learning to depend on it in ways we might not even realize. The key is to pause, reflect, and make sure we're still thinking for ourselves—before our brains turn into nothing more than organic autocomplete systems.

So, are we training AI, or is AI training us? And if we're not careful... who's really learning from whom?

> **The challenge isn't just using AI—it's staying aware of how much we're outsourcing our own intelligence. AI learns from us, but we're also learning to depend on it in ways we might not even realize."**

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THE WILD, WILD WEST

Konstantin Vladimirovich Tserazov, a seasoned fintech expert, and former Senior Vice President at Otkritie Bank; examines in more detail the Wild West that is social media, and the brand implications and financial risks that this type of environment can foster.

Trump's return to the White House in January 2025 has emboldened a deregulatory ethos in U.S. social media. With platforms pivoting toward a less regulated, free-expression model — echoing Trump's vocal critiques of corporate censorship — this move has unleashed a torrent of unfiltered information.

Historically reliant on these ecosystems, advertisers now face a dilemma: stay and risk reputational damage or flee and lose efficiency.

Trump's February 27, 2025, meeting with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, at which he welcomed the remarks of VP JD Vance, who questioned the state of free speech in Britain, underscores his broader agenda to reshape global discourse.

SOCIAL MEDIA'S MARKET INFLUENCE AND FINANCIAL RISKS

At the same time, brands are confronting an increasingly volatile digital landscape, where misinformation and market hysteria thrive, turning social platforms into risky terrain for brands. And if recent history is any guide, the dangers aren't hypothetical.

Consider March 2023: Silicon Valley Bank imploded in just 10 hours after a social media-driven bank run siphoned $42 billion in deposits — a collapse fueled not by fundamentals but by fear spreading at the speed of a post on X.

Sound familiar? The GameStop surge of January 2021 saw a swarm of retail traders on Reddit send the stock soaring from $17 to $483, inflicting $19.4 billion in losses on short-selling hedge funds. In late 2024, another wave of online fervour — this time sparked by a post on X — reignited interest in GameStop, causing a sharp but short-lived rally.

The sudden spike was another alarming reminder of how easily social media can still fuel market swings, raising fresh concerns about volatility and the lack of a decision to fix this issue.

Despite these events, regulators and tech platforms remain largely hands-off. And with fact-checking mechanisms being dismantled in 2025, the stage is set for the next speculative frenzy that advertisers, investors, and policymakers may not be ready for.

THE FUTURE OF BRAND INTERACTION IN BLOCKCHAIN-DRIVEN MEDIA

The decision is to develop blockchain-based social media governed by Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs), in which brands and

> **At the same time, brands are confronting an increasingly volatile digital landscape, where misinformation and market hysteria thrive, turning social platforms into risky terrain for brands.”**

other stakeholders, including clients, will be on the board. This ground for collaboration (DAO for social media) will bring brands closer to their clients and thus create a new level of interaction that will help develop tailor-made goods and services.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will help catalyze this interaction. Combined with fintech and the rise of neo-banks, these innovations will create new social media brands and their client's wants. We see a new paradigm: Brand-to-One (B21). B21 means that every client will get their brand — a personal and unique experience of dialogue with a brand.

These innovations will transform how a brand develops and disrupt the

classical structure of business ownership. Clients will gain huge influence over brands, while brands will have unprecedentedly close relations with customers.

Such interaction will require redefining the role of "branded digital assets" on blockchain. In this year's first couple of months, we witnessed a torrent of such assets — including those associated with the 47th U.S. President, Donald Trump, and The First Lady, Melania Trump.

But I believe we are only at the dawn of a great transformation of the media and information landscape. Social media's reach — 4.5 billion users worldwide — means a rumour in one market can cascade across borders. Only with DAO-

driven social media can such tokens and branded NFTs gain actual 'utility use,' as they can influence how various brands develop.

Now, we still have a shaky information landscape. The power of people's activities on social media has great leverage over financial markets, creating huge volatility in some stocks and driving bank closures. The scope of such influence will only enlarge over time until it makes classical monetary policies critically inefficient.

What factors influence inflation, stock valuations, U.S. Treasury yields, and brand trust? This leverage is the power of social media sentiments to uplift economies and create positive business buzz or throw economies with financial markets and brands under the bus. This new reality is still not properly recognized at the world level — but it's time to do so.

I see the beginning of social media platforms governed by all involved parties via blockchain. The B21 approach, and no less importantly, the rise of SM21 (Social Media-to-One), will create a personalized digital environment tailored to each individual's needs. Blockchain creates a new level of trust. This approach to social interaction will enable us to tackle humanity's greatest challenges— from climate change and government debt to resilient inflation — while finding consensus through blockchain-driven solutions for society. ⊞

Shaffra

REDEFINING AI-DRIVEN AUTOMATION

CNME Editor Mark Forker sat down with **Alfred Manasseh**, COO & Co-Founder of Shaffra, to find out how the company is redefining AI-driven automation, the significance of its partnership with Saudi telecommunications giant STC - and his view on the rise of Agentic AI.

Shaffra has branded itself as a 'deep tech' company. However, can you please elaborate on what the company does and what your mission statement is as an organization?

Shaffra is redefining AI-driven automation by developing exclusive technology that not only enables AI Employees to process data but also understand intent and take action autonomously. While many AI solutions rely solely on Large Language Models (LLMs) for text-based outputs, Shaffra's AI Workforce operates on a more advanced model that allows AI to execute real-world tasks based on contextual understanding.

Through our AI Workforce Trainer, businesses can customize AI Employees to align with their industry-specific workflows, corporate culture, and communication styles. Unlike traditional chatbots or automation tools, our AI Employees can understand business intent and determine the right actions to take, interact across multiple systems such as CRMs, ERPs and databases without requiring separate integrations, and independently handle business operations, from compliance management to customer engagement and sales follow-ups.

Our mission is to help make businesses more efficient by reducing operational costs up to 80%, minimizing errors by up to 95% and enhancing productivity by 10,000%. Driven by rapid growth in the GCC, technology investments are set to reach $24.7 billion by 2030. By bridging the gap between AI intelligence and real-world execution, Shaffra is shaping the future of work with truly autonomous AI.

> **Shaffra is redefining AI-driven automation by developing exclusive technology that not only enables AI employees to process data but also understand intent and take action autonomously."**

During LEAP 2025 in Riyadh, Shaffra announced a major partnership with Saudi telecoms behemoth STC. Can you please provide more information on what this AI-centered partnership will entail – and how it will help enterprises reduce operational costs?

Our partnership with Saudi Telecom (STC) is a game-changer to enterprise AI adoption in the region. This collaboration will integrate Shaffra's AI Employees into STC's digital transformation initiatives, offering automated business solutions that drive efficiency across multiple sectors.

This AI-centered partnership will include Intelligent Process Automation, a tool that reduces manual effort by helping employees handle data management, compliance, customer interactions, and administrative tasks. AI models analyze business data in real time to enable faster and more accurate strategic decisions, while reducing costs by 80% and raising productivity. Employees will have Enterprise-Wide Accessibility via WhatsApp, email, corporate communication tools, and digital platforms ensuring seamless communication with their AI counterparts.

This partnership highlights the tangible and positive effect an AI powered workforce can have in the real world, positioning Shaffra and STC at the center of the region's AI revolution.

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Many analysts have suggested that 2025 will be the year of 'Agentic AI'. How would you define Agentic AI, and can you explain how your AI workforce solutions can empower employees to make better and faster decisions?

Agentic AI refers to AI systems that operate independently, learning from interactions to make decisions and execute tasks without constant human supervision. Unlike traditional AI, Agentic AI is proactive, adaptive, and context-aware, making it a key enabler of business automation.

Shaffra's AI Employees embody Agentic AI by analyzing data to anticipate business needs, making real-time decisions by managing workflows to ensure faster execution, streamlining business operations through clear communication with employees and reducing errors by 95% through proper data verification.

By integrating Agentic AI into the workforce, Shaffra is helping businesses operate more efficiently, minimize delays, and make smarter, data-driven decisions at scale.

How important was an event like LEAP for Shaffra, in terms of allowing you to demonstrate your portfolio of solutions and project your overall message as a company?

LEAP 2025 was significant for Shaffra as it gave us a global platform to showcase the power of AI-driven workforce solutions. At LEAP, we demonstrated how our AI Employees streamline business processes through Live AI Employee Integrations. We also announced major partnerships with Saudi Telecom (STC) and Omantel to provide Agentic AI solutions to Saudi companies and support Oman's telecom and enterprise sectors with AI-driven automation.

We were also able to highlight how businesses can almost eliminate operational errors and costs while rapidly increasing efficiency by adopting AI workforce solutions.

Participation at LEAP has reinforced Shaffra's role as a market leader, attracting key industry stakeholders and solidifying our position as the go-to provider of AI workforce solutions.

Shaffra operates in a competitive marketplace, but what would you say ultimately differentiates you from your market rivals?

Shaffra is changing the face of the AI workforce by delivering fully integrated, independent AI Employees that go beyond traditional technology. We understand that penetration of GenAI is heavy in the Middle East, with 81% of employees having used it in the workplace over the past 12 months.

Our services stand out because we offer seamless AI workforce integration, where our AI employees work within existing business systems without disruptive overhauls. Through AI Workforce Trainer, customers get a personalized AI employee who operates according to their business model. These AI employees are completely adaptable to business sizes from SMEs to multinationals, easily accessible through different enterprise tools and digital platforms, and offer tangible return on investment, increasing productivity by 60%, reducing errors to near zero, and decreasing costs by 80%.

At Shaffra, our focus is to provide a comprehensive AI workforce solution that integrates seamlessly into any industry, any workflow, and any business model.

Our partnership with Saudi Telecom (STC) is a game-changer to enterprise AI adoption in the region."

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