Technology
Record

The best of enterprise solutions from the Microsoft partner ecosystem

Accelerating AI adoption

How proof-of-value and lighthouse locations can highlight real-world benefits

Shanthi Rajagopalan looks at how technology improves in-store experiences

Parul Bhandari on the role of AI in the media and telecommunications industries

PLUS:

Nicole Dezen explains how Microsoft partners develop solutions for all industries

We chart the impact of Teams in the workplace, with insights from Ilya Buksteyn

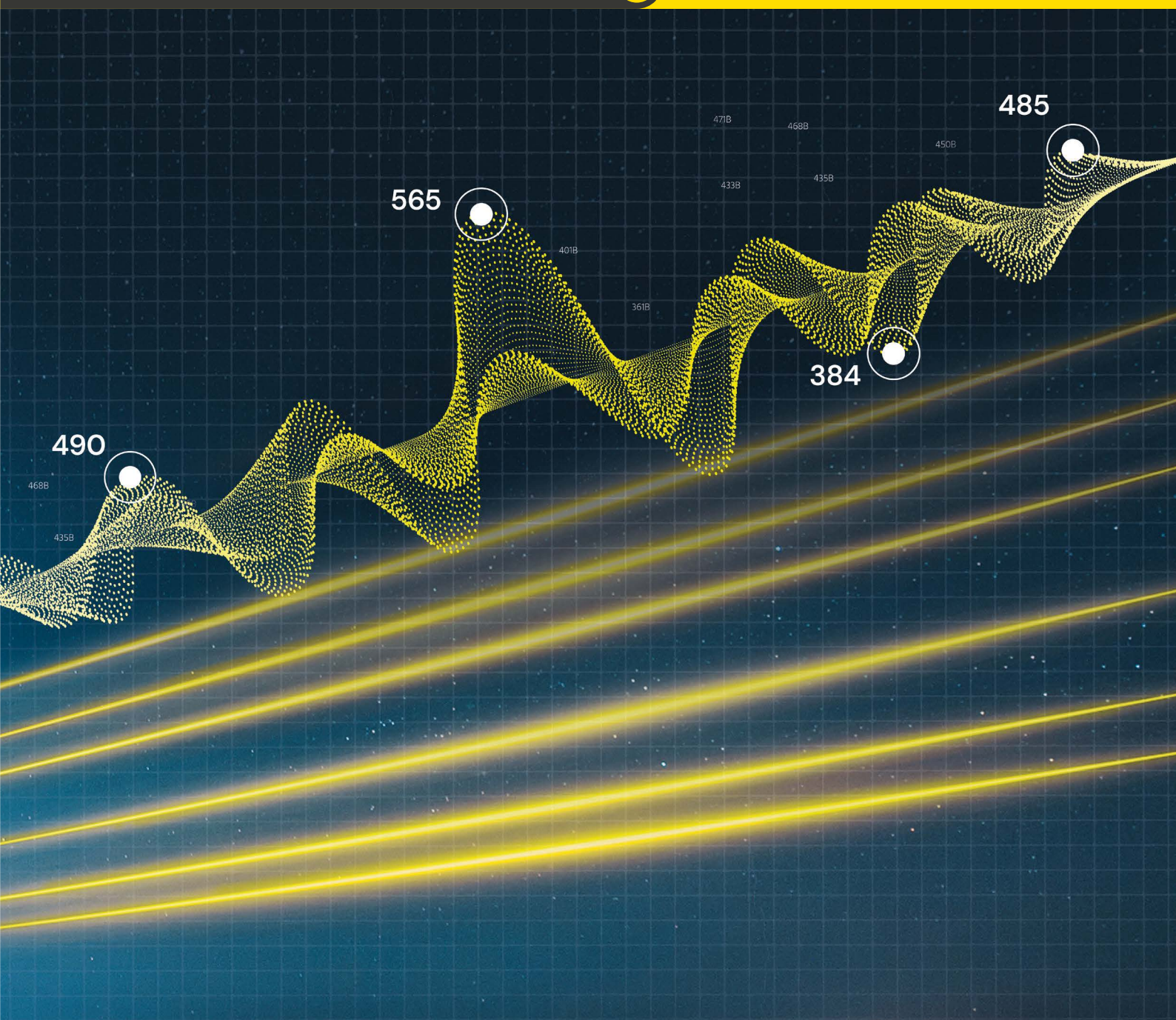Gary Keen of University of the Arts London discusses the future of work

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Modernize Retail Operations and Create The Modern Store

According to McKinsey, there's been **more change in retail in the last 5 years than the last 50**,* with retailers working to accommodate rising shopper expectations for convenience, fulfillment and a frictionless experience.

Though the list keeps shifting and growing, **there are three challenges that remain constant**:

Ongoing Labor Issues

There are 70% more jobs open and 10% fewer people looking for work

Source: "Retailers are Bracing for a Holiday Worker Shortage—and Shoppers Should Be, Too."
Dallas News, August 2, 2021.

Operational Complexity

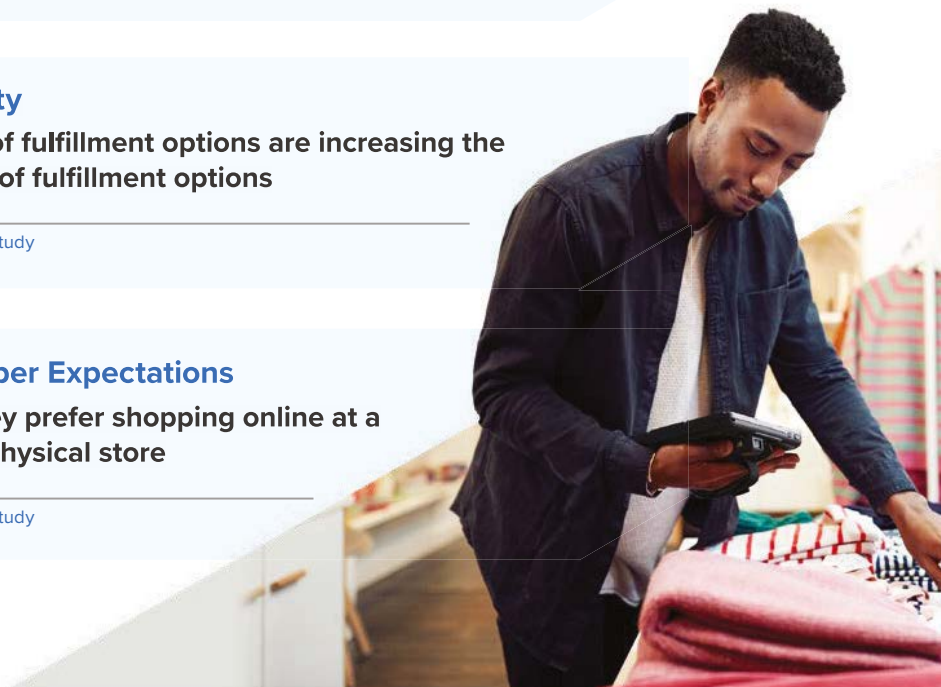**85% of decision-maker of fulfillment options are increasing the speed and convenience of fulfillment options**

Source: 15th Annual Global Shopper Study

Rapidly Shifting Shopper Expectations

70% of shoppers say they prefer shopping online at a retailer who also has a physical store

Source: 15th Annual Global Shopper Study

Modernizing your store operations is essential to meeting these challenges head on and providing customers with a seamless retail experience.

With intelligent retail solutions, you can simplify operations by **engaging associates**, **optimizing inventory**, and **elevating the customer experience**:

Engage Associates

Optimize Workforce Management

Reduce store labor spend by **5%**

Streamline Task Management

Achieve **95%** on-time task completion

Simplify Communication and Collaboration

Reduce employee turnover by **8%**

Use Intelligent Retail Solutions:
- Task Management
- Workforce Management
- Real-Time Communication

Optimize Inventory

Improve On-Shelf Availability

Achieve **98%** inventory visibility

Modernize In-Store Fulfillment

Easily locate **90%** of products

Minimize Theft and Loss

Reduce product waste shrink by **27%**

Use Intelligent Retail Solutions:
- Inventory Management
- Task Management
- Real-Time Communication
- AI-Powered Analytics

Elevate Customer Experience

Enhance Checkout Experience

Reduce customer wait times by **23%**

Improve In-Store Service

Increase transaction value by **25%**

Use Intelligent Retail Solutions:
- Workforce Management
- Real-Time Communication

Actual performance may vary depending on, among other things, store environment, product mix and process adherence.

Want to learn more?

Visit Zebra's website to explore how intelligent retail solutions can simplify your store operations and help you create the modern store of the future.

www.zebra.com

Your Source for Networked AV Training

AV and IT are fully united. And if your background is IT— you need to know both sides of the technology. That's where AVIXA® (the Audiovisual and Integrated Experience Association) comes in with training solutions from experts in the field to help you understand how AV applications operate within networks.

We know that collaboration between AV/IT teams is challenging. Our online course, *AV for IT Pros* can show you how to work together to deliver consistent solutions for your customers.

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SUPERCHARGE YOUR MICROSOFT 365 WITH M-FILES

Boost Efficiency with AI-Powered Knowledge Work Automation

Unlock the full potential of your Microsoft ecosystem with M-Files. By integrating seamlessly with Microsoft 365, Teams, Outlook, and SharePoint, M-Files transforms your workspace into a centralized hub for all enterprise data. Powered by M-Files Aino, a powerful GenAI assistant, M-Files accelerates information discovery, automates tasks, and provides valuable insights directly within your Microsoft applications. Access, organize, and manage critical information directly within familiar Microsoft interfaces.

Boost collaboration, enhance decision-making, and achieve a higher ROI—all without disrupting existing processes. Achieve smarter decisions, stronger compliance, and greater efficiency. With M-Files, the future of AI-enhanced productivity is here.

Find out more about M-Files & Microsoft Integrations

m-files.com

Forecasting the year ahead

ANDY CLAYTON-SMITH: EXECUTIVE EDITOR

This issue of *Technology Record* offers a glimpse into the innovations and milestones that will shape 2025, including in our exclusive interview with Nicole Dezen, chief partner officer at Microsoft. Dezen outlines her vision of how Microsoft and its global ecosystem of partners will further enable customer innovation across all sectors in the year ahead. You'll find the interview on page 32.

In our cover story on page 38, Sam Murley, general manager of industrial artificial intelligence and strategic partnerships at Microsoft, explains how lighthouse locations and proof-of-value will help accelerate AI adoption.

As the print edition of this magazine reaches its readers, the global industry event season will kick off in New York with NRF 2025: Retail's Big Show for the retail community in January 2025. On page 162, Shanthi Rajagopalan, senior director and global head of strategy for worldwide retail and consumer goods at Microsoft, shares how technologies like AI can take in-store shopping experiences to new heights with products like Microsoft Cloud for Retail and Dynamics 365.

Microsoft will celebrate an important milestone in 2025: its 50th anniversary. Throughout this half-century of innovation, Microsoft has maintained its primary focus of "empowering every person and organisation on the planet to achieve more". For much of that time, the team producing *Technology Record* has been on hand to report on the progress that Microsoft and its partner ecosystem have made in both the enterprise space and the public sector. We'll share more on that soon, but for now, I hope you enjoy reading our final issue of 2024.

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Accelerating digital transformation from the heart of your business

Kyndryl consultants work at the heart of your digital systems, with a unique ability to quickly understand the right opportunities to power your organization's progress.

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Copilot End User Training

Engagement Overview

Our Copilot End User Training is a tailored engagement designed to empower your organization with the full capabilities of Microsoft 365 Copilot. This session offers hands-on experience, delivering in-depth knowledge and customized solutions to enhance productivity and streamline collaboration across your team.

What we cover:

- **Introduction to Generative AI and Microsoft 365 Copilot:** Understanding the basics and capabilities of Generative AI and Microsoft 365 Copilot.
- **Microsoft Data Protection and Privacy Policy:** Insights into Microsoft's comprehensive data protection measures and privacy standards.
- **Demonstrations:** Interactive demonstrations showcasing Copilot's integration with various Microsoft 365 apps.
- **Persona Workflows:** Tailored workflows and brainstorming sessions based on specific user personas.
- **Copilot in Microsoft 365:** Demonstrations in Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook, Teams, and Business Chat.
- **Day in the Life Scenarios:** Illustrative examples showing the workflow of different user personas to stimulate creative thinking and application.

Upon completing the Copilot End User Training, you can expect:

- **Increased Productivity:** Experience up to 70% increased productivity and efficiency in tasks such as searching, writing, and summarizing.
- **Enhanced Understanding:** Gain a thorough understanding of how Microsoft 365 Copilot can be integrated into your daily operations, tailored to specific roles within your organization.
- **Improved Collaboration**: Learn how to leverage Copilot's features to facilitate better communication and collaboration across teams.
- **Actionable Insights:** Walk away with practical tips and knowledge that can be immediately applied to improve workflows and outcomes.

Elevate your productivity with Synergy Technical's Copilot End User Training. Experience the future of work today! For more information and to get started, please contact us at info@synergy-technical.com.

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PUBLIC SECTOR

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Anywhere365's dialogue management and cloud contact centre solutions are a native communication layer on top of Microsoft Teams and Azure Communication Services and skyrocket omnichannel customer engagement.

AVEVA

AVEVA creates industrial software that inspires people to shape the future, by delivering solutions across the asset and operations life cycles.

AVIXA

AVIXA is the international trade association for the audiovisual industry, producer of InfoComm trade shows around the world, and co-owner of Integrated Systems Europe.

Infosys
Navigate your next

Infosys is a global leader in next-generation digital services and consulting, enabling clients to navigate their digital journeys.

kyndryl

Kyndryl and Microsoft are delivering solutions that enable modern work experiences and support mission-critical workloads and hybrid cloud adoption.

M-Files

M-Files is the leading platform for knowledge work automation. With the M-Files platform, knowledge workers can find information faster, work smarter and achieve more.

ZEBRA

Zebra Technologies is an innovator at the edge of the enterprise with solutions and partners that enable businesses to improve performance.

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Diversity in Dynamics
Promoting inclusivity in the Dynamics community

Microsoft launches new Copilot agents

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella introduced the updates and discussed the future of Windows at the Microsoft Ignite event in Chicago, USA

The purpose-built artificial intelligence agents are designed to work alongside various applications in the Microsoft ecosystem, including SharePoint, Teams and Business Chat. They were launched by Satya Nadella, chairman and CEO of Microsoft, in his keynote speech at Microsoft Ignite, which took place in November 2024 in Chicago, USA.

"It's not about tech for tech's sake but it is about translating it into real outcomes," he said.

The updates will enable users of SharePoint to create their own agents, tailored to specific files, folders or sites, to gain real-time insights into stored files. The agents will comply with existing user permissions to ensure data protection.

In Teams, Facilitator agents will take real-time notes and share important information as the conversation progresses during meetings and chats. Meanwhile, Interpreter agents will provide real-time translation in up to nine languages so participants can speak and listen in their preferred language. They can also use

Interpreter to simulate their voice for a more immersive experience.

Copilot Studio users will also be able to create autonomous agents to orchestrate and execute business processes on behalf of an individual, team or department. These AI-powered assistants will act on behalf of users without being prompted.

In addition, Microsoft launched Copilot Analytics to provide administrators with a better understanding of how business trends compare to key performance indicators such as sales, finance and marketing.
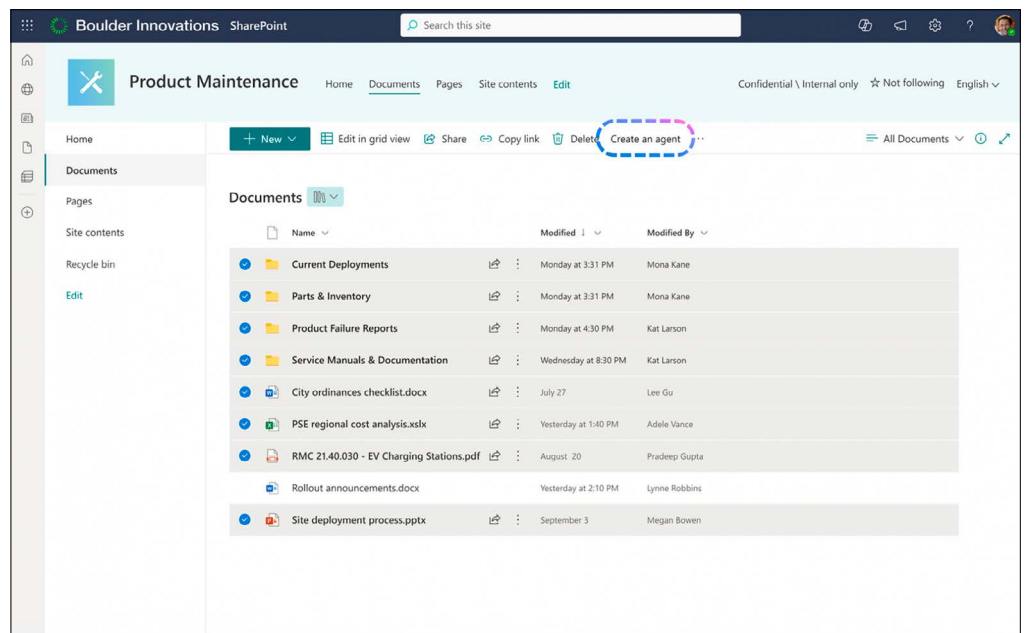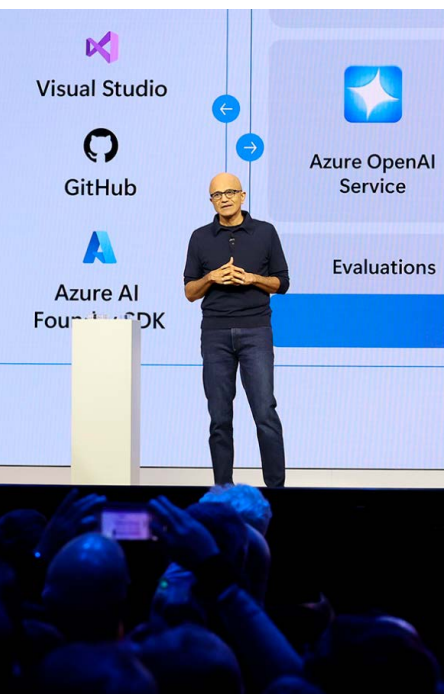
Copilot updates include the ability to create agents in SharePoint, as announced by Satya Nadella (left) at Microsoft Ignite

"Think of Copilot Analytics as a tool for all of us to change how work, workflow and work artifacts are getting done," said Nadella.

In October 2024, Microsoft also added voice and vision capabilities to Copilot to make the AI assistant feel "more human". Copilot Voice will provide quick, digestible and

partners Reuters, Axel Springer, Hearst Magazines, USA Today Network and Financial Times. More sources are due to be added over time.

Also during his Ignite keynote speech, Nadella launched Windows 365 Link, a portable cloud PC solution designed to provide users with access to their Windows 365

learning models. Developers will be able to access all existing Azure AI Services with Azure AI Foundry, while IT professionals and business leaders can use the tools to measure return on investment from AI initiatives. Azure AI capabilities will be accessible from familiar tools like GitHub, Visual Studio and Copilot Studio via the Azure AI Foundry software development kit.

In addition, Microsoft showcased Fabric Databases, a new class of cloud databases designed for application developers, at Ignite. Fabric Databases enable users to bring together transactional and analytical workloads with a built-in vector search, retrieval augmented generation support and Microsoft Azure AI integration. The first available database is the SQL database, which helps data professionals to complete common tasks up to 71 per cent faster. Fabric Databases is available now in preview.

"It's not about tech for tech's sake but it is about translating it into real outcomes"

fluent answers to users' questions about the web content (including text and images) they are viewing, as well as suggested next steps, feedback and advice, without disrupting their workflow. Users can choose from four voice options for Copilot Voice.

Another new feature, Copilot Daily, will provide a summary of news and weather in users' chosen Copilot Voice. It will pull content from authorised sources only, such as Microsoft

desktop wherever they have access to a monitor. Device features include high-fidelity experiences for Teams, 4k monitor support and security baseline policies to ensure user data remains protected. Windows 365 Link will be available from April 2025.

Microsoft's new platform, Azure AI Foundry, was also launched at Ignite. It has been designed for developers to explore, build, test and deploy apps using AI tools and machine

Read more about Microsoft Ignite on page 28.

Photo: Unsplash/massimiliano morosinotto

UK government agrees new partnership to drive digital transformation

The UK government has agreed a new partnership with Microsoft to drive digital transformation across the public sector over the next five years.

  The new five-year agreement will enable eligible public sector organisations in the UK to access cost savings on Microsoft 365, the Azure cloud platform, Business Applications and Microsoft 365 Copilot. The partnership aims to accelerate innovation across the UK public sector, enhance efficiency, improve cross-departmental collaboration and deliver improved services for citizens.

PMI launches PMI Infinity 2.0

An updated version of PMI Infinity, Project Management Institute (PMI)'s AI-powered project coach, is now available.

  Infinity 2.0 currently has over 50,000 users and is helping project managers to streamline their workflows for improved efficiency. New features include an expanded knowledge base with over 15,000 pieces of curated content and guided experiences for learning and practicing project management skills. Other new tools, such as document uploading and generation, templates, and checklists, help take projects to the next level.

New users can access a free 30-day trial of PMI Infinity 2.0 at: bit.ly/pmi-infinity

DID YOU KNOW?

Women in Dynamics, an association dedicated to promoting inclusivity in the Microsoft Dynamics community, recently rebranded as Diversity in Dynamics. The change reflects the evolving narrative of the community and the growing awareness of diversity.

Lanteria delivers new advanced analytics capabilities

HR management platform provider Lanteria has launched an advanced analytics module focused on providing HR managers with deeper employee insights for better strategic decision-making.

Built on Microsoft Power BI, the new module provides access to over 40 comprehensive dashboards, which offer a 360-degree view of an organisation, including recruitment, hiring, diversity, performance and termination analysis, as well as attrition prediction, employee risk scores and more.

"We're taking HR data to the next level with Lanteria and Microsoft," said Andrew Swiler, CEO at Lanteria. "With faster, more extensive access to employee and business data, organisations can make better, data-informed decisions to support business growth and future planning."
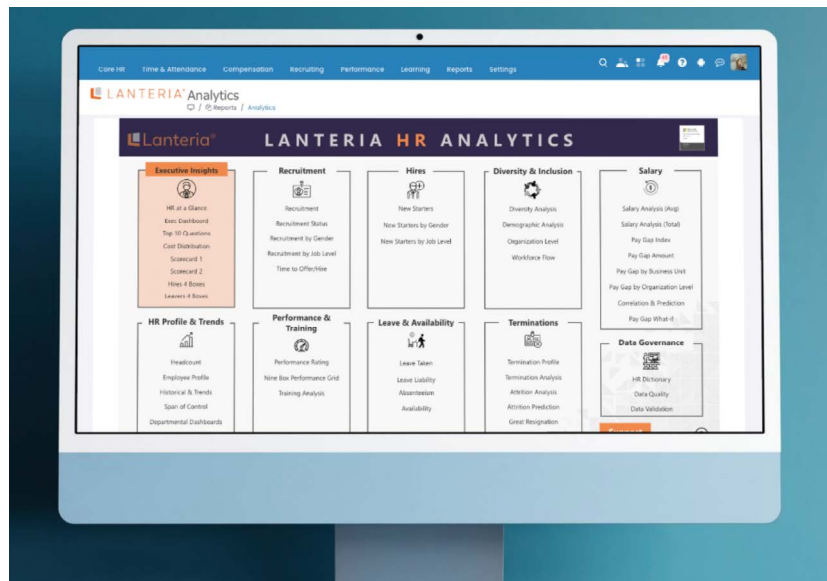
CallCabinet extends call recording capabilities

CallCabinet customers with core and advanced recording licences can now access selective AI transcription, call summarisation and sentiment analysis tools to extract key insights from their recorded call data. This information can transform recorded conversation data into rapidly consumable takeaways or verbatim call references.

By being able to quickly identify key points and understand the overall tone of conversations, businesses are empowered to efficiently make informed decisions to streamline performance.

Schedule a demonstration at:
www2.callcabinet.com/schedule-demo-now

Are you looking to deploy Microsoft 365 Copilot?

Cloud solutions provider Synergy Technical offers a readiness assessment tailored to help businesses integrate Microsoft 365 Copilot seamlessly while upholding stringent security and compliance standards. Accessible to all Microsoft customers, the comprehensive assessment provides a detailed security review and prepares organisations for Microsoft 365 Copilot adoption. Participants gain valuable insights into compliance and information governance, along with personalised recommendations for successful deployment, with an emphasis on customisation and user training.

Microsoft to equip one million people in Poland with AI skills

Microsoft will provide free AI training to one million people in Poland by the end of 2025, as part of its investment in the development of the Polish Digital Valley. Free AI training will be available on the Microsoft AI Skills Navigator educational platform, which offers over 200 courses from LinkedIn Learning, Microsoft Learn, GitHub and partners in one place.

Business leaders unprepared for AI in the workplace, says Jabra

Jabra, an audio equipment and video conferencing solutions provider, has released a new study suggesting that while business leaders are optimistic about the potential of AI technology, they are yet to fully implement it across their operations.

The *Great ExpectAItions: work in the age of AI* study, which includes insights from 1,800 AI decision-makers in six countries and 4,200 employees from 14 countries, found that:

70% of business leaders have strong levels of trust in AI

23% of office workers are using AI in their daily roles

64% of decision-makers believe AI can improve their work

83% of leaders say they are unsure how AI can improve efficiency and need to better understand the workplace benefits before implementing it

Miro launches Innovation Workspace with enhanced Microsoft integrations
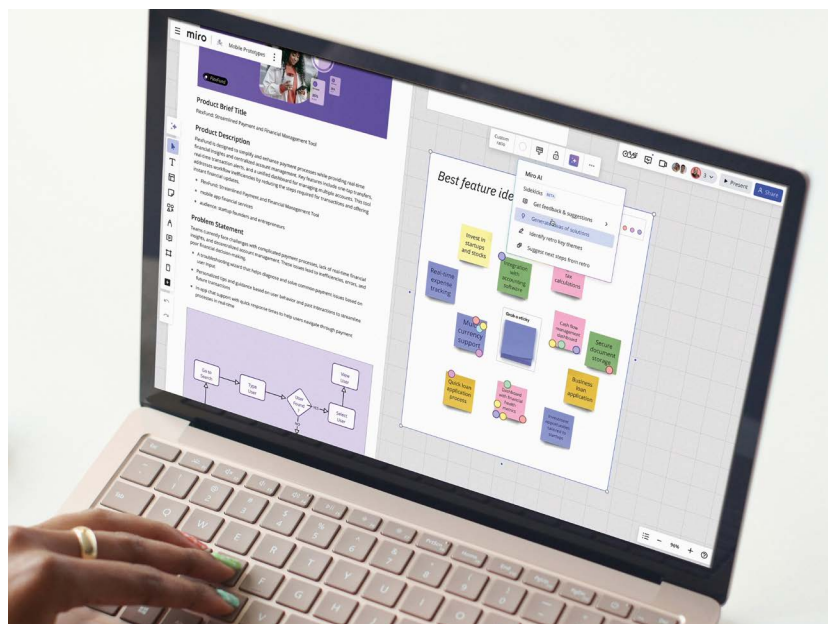
Miro's Innovation Workspace, an AI-powered platform designed to redefine how teams innovate, introduces over 30 new features, including AI-powered prototyping, documents and tables.

The platform deepens ties with Microsoft 365 to accelerate the speed of projects from ideation to delivery, simplify daily workflows and reduce unnecessary actions all in one single, secure workspace. Users benefit from seamless integrations with Microsoft Copilot, Teams, Azure Dev Ops, Power BI, Purview and the Microsoft Office suite.

Learn more at: mirohq.click/Microsoft
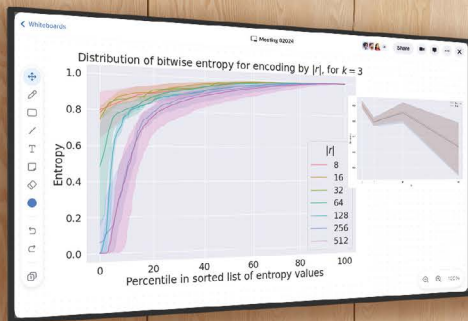
The DTEN Bar: a small room solution

DTEN's new DTEN Bar for Microsoft Teams Rooms can be mounted vertically between two displays for a dual-display setup with centre-mount camera in small and medium-sized rooms.

The DTEN Bar's dual-display setup provides space for both presented content and remote participants. The vertically mounted bar with centre-mount camera captures in-room participants at eye-level for more natural meeting experiences for both in-room and remote colleagues.

The DTEN Bar, which is an addition to the DTEN all-in-one system, will be on display at Stand 2V130 at the Integrated Systems Europe conference in Barcelona, Spain, from 4-7 February 2025.

CentrePal's email channel provides support directly within Teams

CentrePal has developed an AI-powered email channel for its native Microsoft Teams contact centre solution to transform how businesses handle customer support directly from within the platform. The solution uses AI to categorise incoming emails, summarise threads and assist agents in crafting accurate responses, all while keeping data secure within Microsoft 365. This helps service teams to manage high volumes of emails while slashing response times and maintaining consistency across interactions, without increasing the employee headcount.

"Email is a crucial channel for complex enquiries," says Tim Suley, product marketing manager for CentrePal. "By bringing AI capabilities directly into Teams, we're helping service teams deliver faster, more consistent responses."

The Australian Ballet is amongst the first organisations to implement the technology.
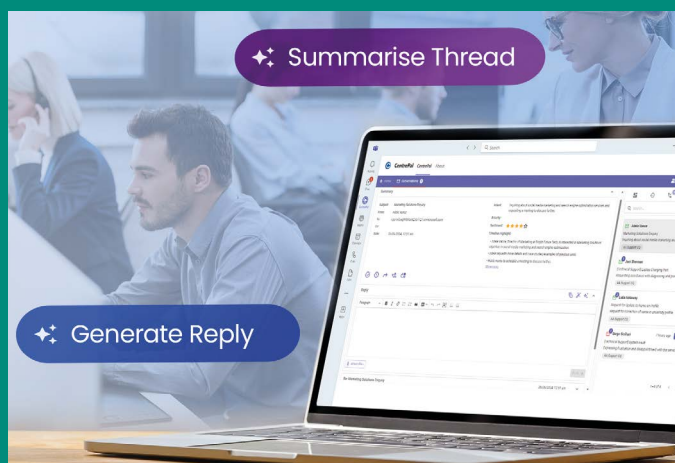
Photo: CentrePal

Crestron Experience Center showcases hybrid working solutions

Crestron has opened the Crestron Experience Center (CEC) in Manhattan, New York, to enable customers to interact with its hybrid working technologies in person.

"The CEC is about real-world experiences in a fixed space that has many, many uses," said Rich Sasson, global director of the professional community at Crestron. "That's the difference between the CEC and a trade show booth – or, for that matter, a showroom. A trade show is a transient walk-through booth, and a showroom is often simply an exhibition space. Our goal is for visitors to get hands-on experiences with Crestron, to actually use the technology in the same manner one would at work or at home."

Visitors can bring their own devices to the centre and make calls from the allocated Microsoft Teams rooms using products like the Crestron Videobar 70, 1 Beyond cameras and more.

The Crestron team opened the Crestron Experience Center on 15 October 2024

CallTower expands availability of Teams solution to 27 countries

CallTower, a cloud communication solution provider, has expanded its Operator Connect for Microsoft Teams service to offer enterprises voice solutions across 27 countries.

Operator Connect enables companies to add public switched telephone network calling to Teams while benefitting from CallTower's high-touch customer support and expert guidance. This offers clients a streamlined solution that bypasses the complexity of third-party providers.

The solutions can now be used in Latin America and Asia Pacific. CallTower solutions already have an established presence in the USA, Canada, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

DID YOU KNOW?

An IDC study has found generative AI adoption is rapidly expanding with usage figures jumping from 55 per cent in 2023 to 75 per cent in 2024, with deployments taking less than eight months, on average, to complete.

Read the full study, titled The Business Opportunity of AI at*: info.microsoft.com/ww-landing-business-opportunity-of-ai*

Tollring Analytics 365 portfolio gains Azure IP co-sell eligibility status

All three of Tollring's software-as-a-service Analytics 365 solutions for Microsoft Teams – including Call Analytics, Call Recording with AI Analytics and Collaboration Analytics – have attained Microsoft Azure IP co-sell eligibility status. This enables Tollring to collaborate on sales opportunities with Microsoft whilst allowing end users to reduce their Microsoft Azure Consumption Commitments.

End customers, service providers, resellers and Microsoft partners can purchase the Analytics 365 applications via the Microsoft Azure and AppSource Marketplaces.

Find out more on page 97
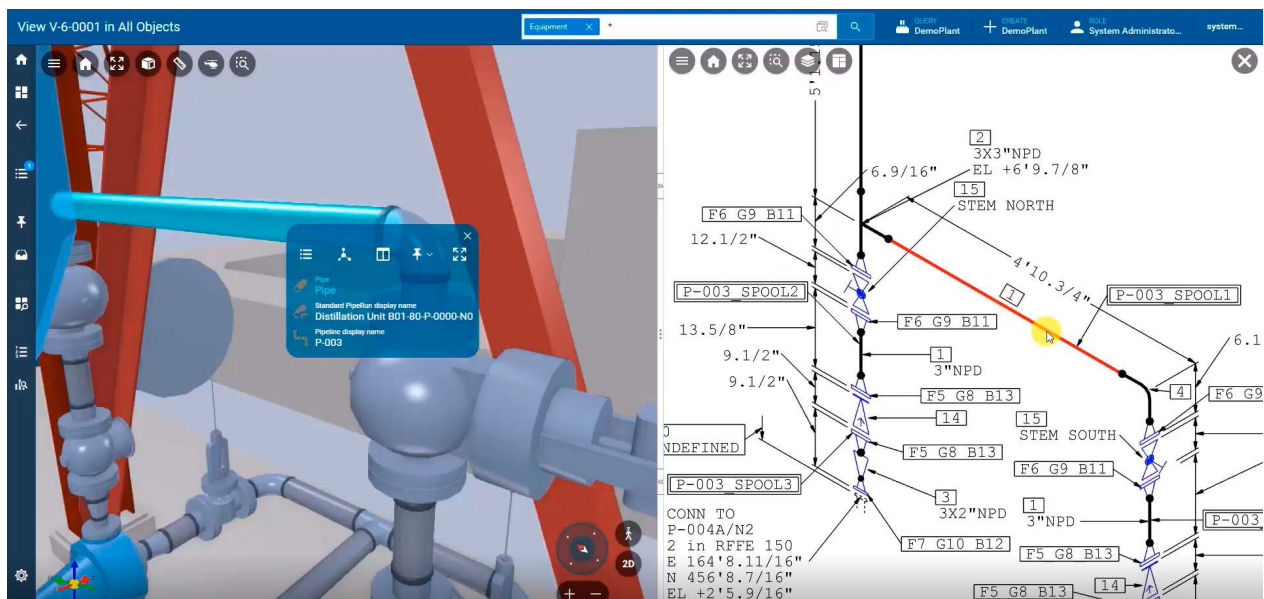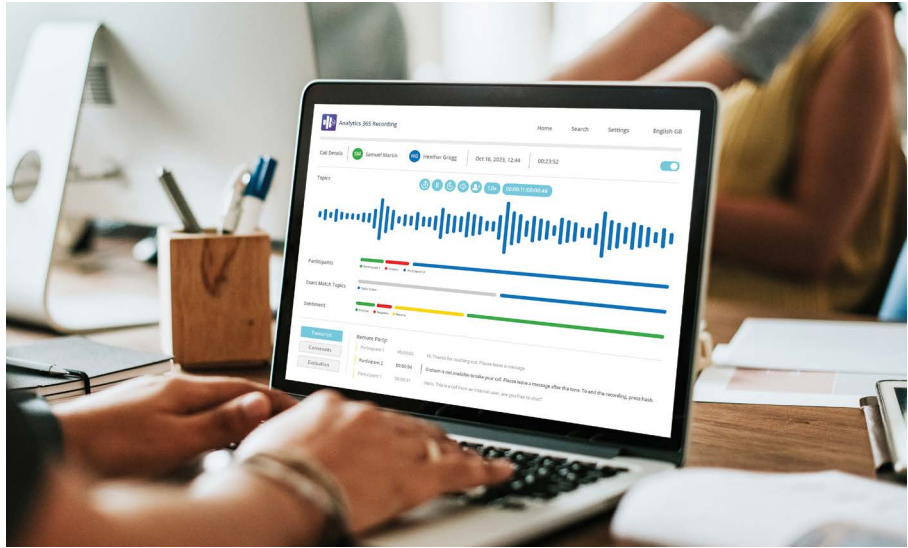
Hexagon hosts HxGN SDx2 solution on Microsoft Azure

Hexagon's Asset Lifecycle Intelligence division has partnered with Microsoft to host its HxGN SDx2 solution on Microsoft Azure to provide industrial organisations with the real-time, AI-powered data they need to improve project, asset and facility management.

HxGN SDx2 is a multi-tenant, cloud-native, software-as-a-service solution that captures engineering and operational data to create a digital twin. It provides industrial organisations with real-time

access to contextual, AI-enabled data flowing across the asset, facility and project lifecycle.

Hosting HxGN SDx2 on Azure enables Hexagon to offer side-by-side visualisation of 2D and 3D engineering data, giving stakeholders a comprehensive view of projects to facilitate enhanced collaboration, decision-making, productivity, operational efficiency, safety and more.

Coles empowers employees with Microsoft-powered tools

Australian supermarket chain Coles Group will build on its partnership with Microsoft to develop an AI-as-a-service platform, powered by Microsoft Azure OpenAI, to generate customer insights for store managers. The insights will be based on customer feedback surveys and help managers to make decisions about product placement and orders.

The retailer will also use Microsoft Power Apps and Copilot agents to provide its team with real-time insights to increase customer satisfaction and drive productivity.

Coles already has more than 70 per cent of its data in the cloud and uses tools like Microsoft Power BI and Power Platform to generate insights on store data in real time.

Microsoft Azure incorporates NVIDIA's Blackwell system

Microsoft Azure is the first cloud running NVIDIA's Blackwell system featuring GB200-powered AI servers. Microsoft will power advanced AI models, taking advantage of Infiniband networking and closed-loop liquid cooling.

Jamf releases new security solutions
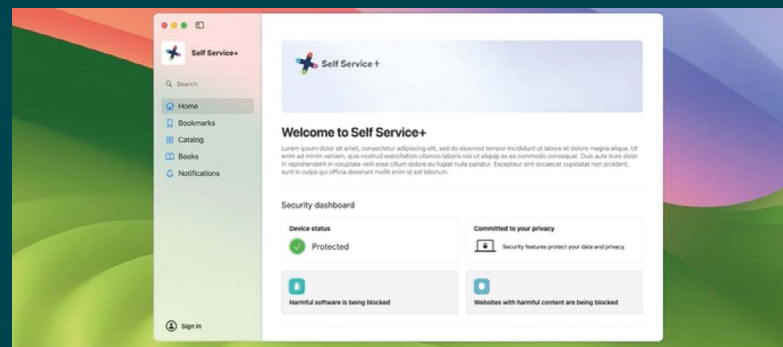
Jamf has developed several new features to further integrate device management, security, compliance and user productivity, hosted on Azure and available for purchase on Azure Marketplace. Jamf supports MDM restrictions to allow or prohibit different Apple Intelligence features, like integrating with external intelligence services, Writing Tools, Genmoji and more.

Blueprints will help IT professionals proactively manage device settings, commands, application installations and restrictions, while Self Service+ provides a streamlined experience for users to view security data and download IT-approved apps in one central place.

Compliance Benchmarks aims to simplify building, managing, auditing and reporting on Center for Internet Security benchmark compliance, while AI Assistant can assist admins with relevant management and security insights.

Shure joins the Microsoft Device Ecosystem Platform

Shure, a manufacturer of collaborative audio solutions, has joined the Microsoft Device Ecosystem Platform (MDEP), an Android-based platform that provides enhanced security, device pairing, accessibility and management capabilities for Microsoft Teams Rooms on Android devices.

"Shure's expertise in professional-grade audio technology aligns perfectly with our commitment to delivering exceptional communication experiences," said Juha Kuosmanen, head of MDEP. "Together, we're empowering users across industries with high-fidelity, reliable audio that transforms the quality of collaboration in meeting spaces."

M-Files toolkit helps organisations with automation and AI integration
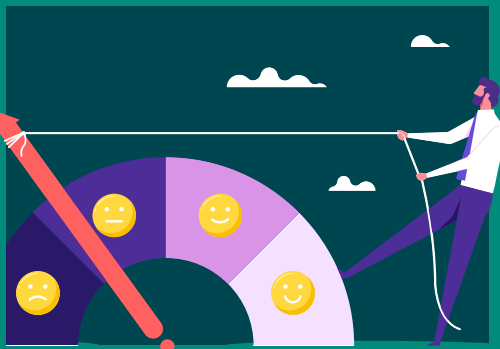
M-Files has created a toolkit to help companies assess where they are in their digital transformation journey and develop a strategy for future improvements. The toolkit offers access to M-Files' Knowledge Work Automation Capability Maturity Model, which was released in August 2024, as well as Forrester's *Unlocking Efficiency: The Inevitable Rise of Knowledge Work Automation* study. It also includes The Digital Maturity Assessment Tool, which has been developed by M-Files in collaboration with Forrester. This tool provides customised recommendations based on maturity scores to guide organisations to enhance automation and AI integration.

To access the Digital Maturity Assessment Tool and determine your organisation's digital transformation maturity level, visit: bit.ly/4eS0Zvx

Microsoft Ignite

Microsoft hosted over 800 sessions, demonstrations and expert-led labs at the Ignite event in Chicago, USA, in November 2024. Among the innovations demonstrated were Copilot agents, Copilot Analytics, the portable cloud PC solution Windows 365 Link, and a new application platform called Azure AI Foundry.

Hundreds of Microsoft partners and customers also launched new products – like C3 AI's Enterprise AI app on Microsoft Azure, Holistic AI's version 2.0 of the Holistic AI Tracker and Quantexa's Unify Workload for Microsoft Fabric.

Nicole Herskowitz, corporate vice president of modern work and business applications at Microsoft, spoke about the new Interpreter agent in Microsoft Teams, which enables real-time speech-to-speech interpretation in meetings. Charles Lamanna (left and top), corporate vice president of business and industry copilot at Microsoft, discussed updates to Copilot Studio that will make it easier for developers to build AI agents

A spotlight on security

Microsoft covered several key themes during Ignite, including the power of partnerships, accessibility and security. The following announcements highlight Microsoft's latest innovations and efforts to address critical industry challenges

1 Microsoft expanded its custom silicon portfolio with a new in-house security chip, the Azure Integrated hardware security module (HSM). This is designed to harden key management for encryption so sign-on keys remain within the bounds of the HSM without compromising performance.
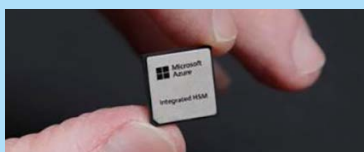
2 Microsoft Security Exposure Management became generally available. The solution tracks the relationship between devices, data, identities and other connections to provide customers with a comprehensive, dynamic view of their IT assets and potential cyberattack paths.

Exposure Management also helps security and IT teams measure the effectiveness of their cyber hygiene and security initiatives, such as zero trust and cloud security.

3 Microsoft will host the largest public security research event in history: the Zero Day Quest. This new competition, which will take place on 19 January 2025, aims to attract the world's best security experts to tackle high-impact scenarios critical to Microsoft and its partners' customer security. It will also focus on discovering any vulnerabilities in Microsoft's own products.
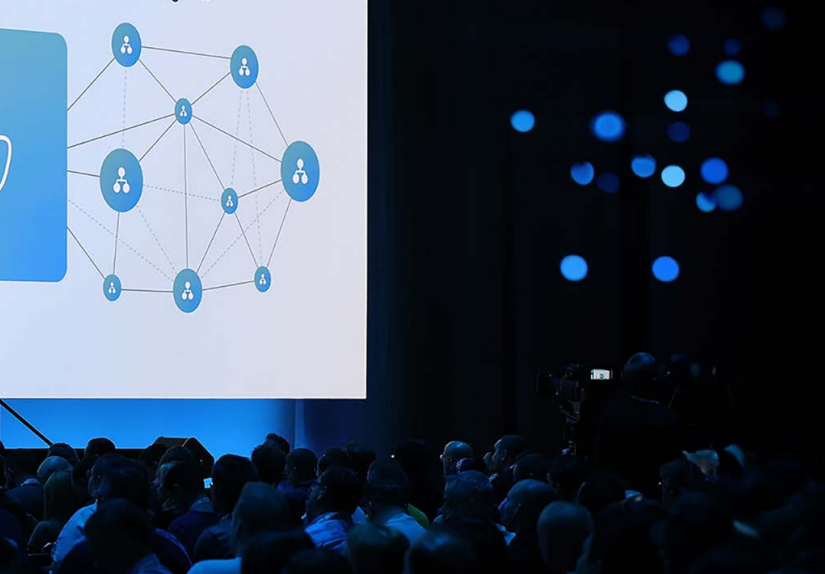
The influence of AI on accessibility

Microsoft Ignite explored the importance of accessibility in technology and the opportunities that AI provides for disabled and neurodivergent people in the workplace

"We've been around for long enough to see lots of new eras of technology and this one [AI] is very exciting for the world of disability and accessibility," said Jenny Lay-Flurrie, vice president and chief accessibility officer at Microsoft.

Several Microsoft partners are striving to improve the work experience for disabled employees, including Vodafone, which has an 'Inclusion for All' strategy to ensure all workers have access to the connectivity and digital skills they need to perform well in the workplace. As part of the strategy, Vodafone deployed Microsoft Copilot for all its employees and saw a "noticeable impact" on performance. For example, workers with dyslexia were using the technology to review and summarise meetings more easily.

Lay-Flurrie joined fellow Microsoft executives including Tara Roth, corporate vice president of customer success engineering, and Angela Byers, senior director of product marketing, to discuss how to empower neurodivergent employees with Copilot, such as using it to break down complex tasks into simpler, manageable steps. They also demonstrated how Copilot can summarise a Teams meeting with positive reinforcement, notes for improvement, suggested next steps and explanations of any uncomfortable interactions.

Another breakout session with Anna Cook, senior designer at Microsoft, and Hiren Shukla, global neurodiversity and inclusive value leader at EY, showed how AI is enabling accessibility in various industries.

"Accessibility is key to workplace productivity," said Cook. "Companies that prioritise accessibility find that up to 70 per cent of employee productivity increases by offering experiences that let people work in their own way. Furthermore, companies that support accessibility through workplace accommodations tend to find that their turnover is lowered by up to 30 per cent."

Shukla then discussed EY's work with Microsoft in improving Copilot adoption for neurodivergent people and the Azure AI Foundry, including a six-week workshop hosted in 2023 that allowed neurodivergent technologists to use Copilot. The workshop helped EY and Microsoft discover how the technology was meeting their employee requirements and also where there needed to be improvements for accessibility.

Empowering partners

Various sessions at Ignite celebrated the success of, and new opportunities for, the Microsoft partner ecosystem

"Without [our partners], our products are just products," said Judson Althoff, executive vice president and chief commercial officer at Microsoft. "They don't become solutions until we partner together."

Althoff led a session on 'Driving Growth Together' with Nicole Dezen, chief partner officer and corporate vice president of global partner solutions at Microsoft, where they revealed new updates for the Microsoft Artificial Intelligence Cloud Partner Program. They included the Partner Center AI assistant – which provides users with tailored insights to help them initiate support tickets if they need assistance – and new resources to help partners drive adoption of Microsoft Copilot.

Kathleen Mitford, corporate vice president of global industry marketing at Microsoft, also sat down with Satish Thomas, corporate vice president of Microsoft industry clouds and solutions, and Julie Sanford, vice president of go-to-market programmes and operations and global partner solutions, to discuss the role partners play in the Microsoft ecosystem and the Microsoft AI Cloud Partner Program.

"I like to say we have one Microsoft partner programme, and we have worked hard to make sure we're simplifying it for partners to engage with us," said Mitford. "Think of it as one umbrella where we bring all our investments and assets together across the whole lifecycle of the partner ecosystem, whether it's onboarding, skilling, getting access to marketing resources or co-selling with our massive sales organisation."

Mayank Kapur, director of modern work partner marketing, revealed the key partner investments for the 2025 financial year. One key investment area will be in partner enablement, with a focus on practice development guidance, developing the modern work partner community and improving modern work readiness and training.

Discover more news from the event at: bit.ly/3ATH2qj

NRF 2025: Retail's Big Show

12-14 January 2025 | New York, USA

NRF 2025: Retail's Big Show will bring together representatives from 6,200 brands from more than 100 countries at New York's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center.

The event stages will host some of the "biggest names in the business", according to NRF, including Tommy Hilfiger, founder and principal designer of Tommy Hilfiger Global; John Furner, president and CEO of Walmart US; and Brian Cornell, CEO of Target.

Sessions will cover how retailers can create future-proof strategies with AI and data insights, as well as how retailers can reinvent their business models with sustainable programmes and new payment models. Speakers will also highlight how brands can build identities and sell their stories, create advertising that sells, enhance the customer experience, and predict the future of the industry.

For example, Kayla Broussard, chief technology officer of consumer and travel market at Kyndryl, will explain how to deliver differentiated customer and frontline worker experiences in a session titled 'Staying one step ahead'. Other Microsoft partners will lead sessions too, including Dell Technologies, NVIDIA, PwC, Qualcomm Technologies, SAP and Zebra Technologies.

Microsoft will join over 1,000 exhibitors at the event to showcase its latest technology and plans to showcase the benefits of cloud computing services, customer insights and analytics, and data processing at its booth, number 4503.

To find out more and register for NRF 2025, visit: nrfbigshow.nrf.com

Ansys highlights Microsoft partnership at Supercomputing24

Simulation technology provider Ansys focused on advancing high-performance computing, AI-driven solutions and its continuing partnership with Microsoft during Supercomputing24 (SC24), which took place on 17-22 November 2024 in Atlanta, USA.

The firm showcased its simulation innovations during cloud theatre sessions, including Ansys Access on Microsoft Azure, whilst also exploring how AI is revolutionising simulation efficiency.

Ansys also hosted demonstration pods to demonstrate use cases of its AI-enhanced simulations and met with partners and customers to discuss commitments to addressing industry challenges.

AI Everything Global

4 February 2025 | Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates and 5-6 February 2025 | Dubai, United Arab Emirates

AI Everything Global – which is being marketed as the world's most groundbreaking AI event – will take place in UAE's two biggest cities for the first time in 2025. The event will begin at The St. Regis Saadiyat Island Resort in Abu Dhabi on 4 February and conclude at Dubai Exhibition Centre in Dubai on 5-6 February.

The event will unite business leaders, decision-makers, government policymakers, ministers, investors, scientists, researchers, coders, entrepreneurs, global media, students and others, who will collectively represent a vibrant ecosystem from more than 60 countries.

Held under the theme 'Powering Global Collaborations in the New AI Economy', the event will demonstrate the need for cross-continental commitment to drive collaboration, innovation and the responsible development of AI.

To find out more and register for AI Everything Global, visit: aieverythingglobal.com

Gitex Europe

21-23 May 2025 | Berlin, Germany

Gitex Europe, taking place at Messe Berlin, will unite technology innovators, government leaders and more with the goal of driving Europe's digital economy forwards.

Set to host 2,500 exhibitors, the event will cover a variety of technology including artificial intelligence, big data, cloud, quantum computing and Web 3.0.

The conference programme will also highlight themes such as AI evolution, deep tech, new energy and how small and medium-sized enterprises can benefit from industry knowledge.

Plus, Gitex Europe will feature sub-events Gitex Green Impact, which is focused on technology for sustainability; AI Everything; and North Star Europe, which will connect startups with investors.

To find out more and register for Gitex Europe, visit: www.gitex-europe.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

ISE 2025
4-7 February 2025
Barcelona, Spain
www.iseurope.org

TechEx Global
5-6 February 2025
London, UK
www.techexevent.com

ARC Industry Forum US
10-13 February 2025
Orlando, USA
www.arcweb.com/events/arc-industry-leadership-forum-orlando

MWC Barcelona
3-6 March 2025
Barcelona, Spain
www.mwcbarcelona.com

Partnering for progress

Nicole Dezen highlights how Microsoft and its partner ecosystem is transforming businesses with AI-powered solutions to enhance productivity, customer engagement and industry-specific operations

BY ANDY CLAYTON-SMITH

More than 500,000 companies are part of the global Microsoft AI Cloud Partner Program (MAICPP) community, which is dedicated to enabling digital transformation for customers across all industries with cloud and artificial intelligence-powered solutions. Nicole Dezen, chief partner officer and corporate vice president of global partner solutions at Microsoft, is leading this initiative with a strong emphasis on the benefits of generative AI tools like Microsoft Copilot on cloud adoption and for partner ecosystems.

You became chief partner officer in 2022. How have your first couple of years been and what are the highlights of your work so far?
The past couple of years have been incredibly rewarding and transformative. Working closely with our diverse and dynamic partner ecosystem, we've achieved some remarkable milestones.

One of the highlights has been the evolution of MAICPP. Just as AI is infused throughout Microsoft's product portfolio, it's wired throughout the partner programme. This enables our partners to meet customer needs, no matter where they are on their AI transformation journey. MAICPP is the umbrella programme for everything partners need to go to market with Microsoft, including skills, tools, benefits, designations, specialisations and incentives.

We continually introduce new AI capabilities and tools that empower our partners to drive innovation, enhance productivity and create new business opportunities. Additionally, substantial investments in incentives and support – particularly in areas like security, Microsoft Azure and Copilot – enable partners to earn the trust and confidence of customers in this rapidly changing technology landscape.

We view partners as an extension of our sales force. We continue to introduce new ways for partners to gain access to the latest tools and guidance from Microsoft, as well as opportunities for them to engage with Microsoft customers, leaders and other partners. In July 2024, we hosted the Microsoft Customer and Partner Solutions (MCAPS) Start for Partners event to enable our
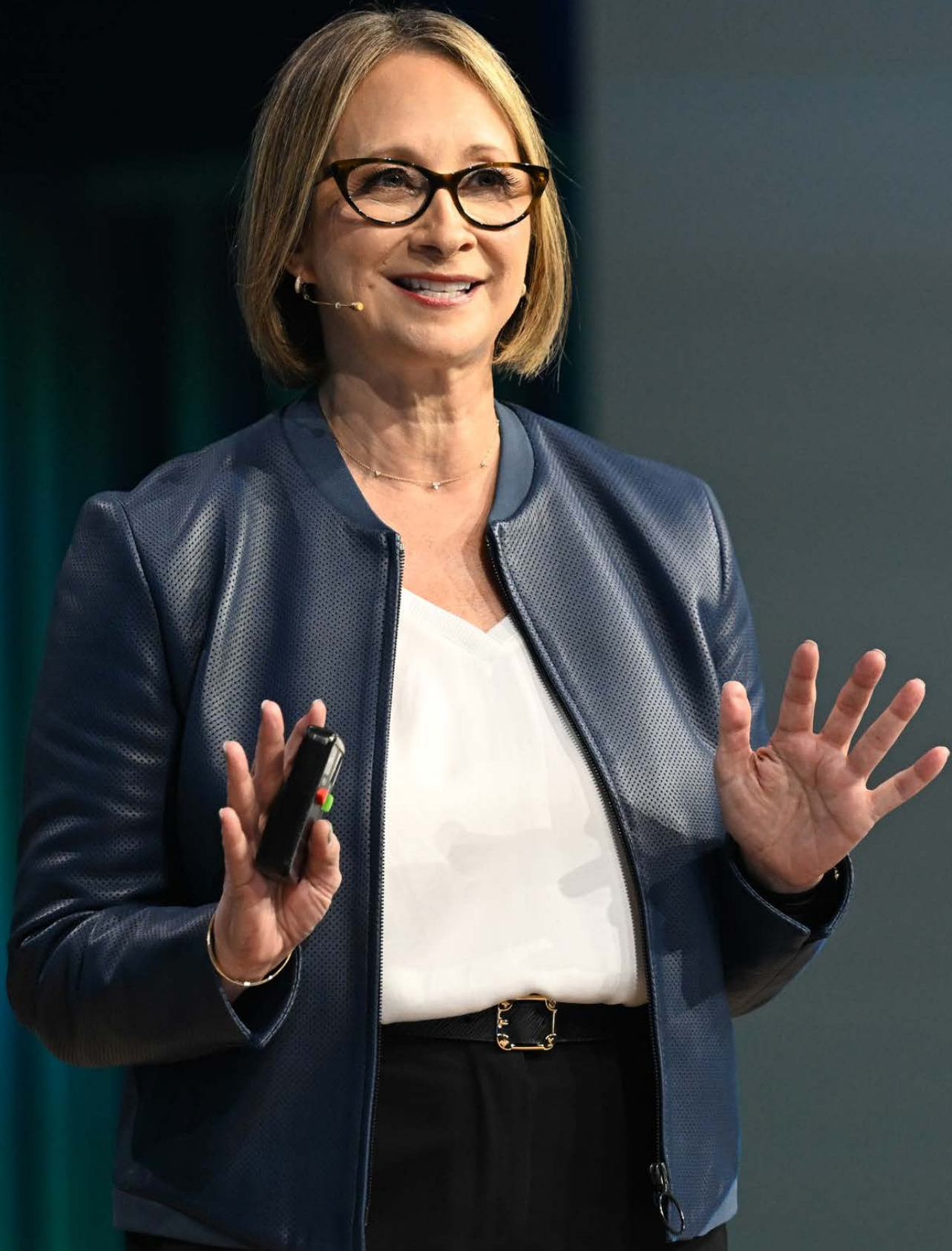
"We continually introduce new AI capabilities and tools that empower our partners to drive innovation, enhance productivity and create new business opportunities"

partners to participate in our financial year kick-off readiness events. Additionally, based on their feedback, we integrated partners into Microsoft Ignite in November. This in-person and digital event served as a platform for business and technical decision-makers, and for Microsoft partners, to see all of our new innovations, attend breakout sessions and engage in community discussions.

With the continuing growth of Azure as an infrastructural platform, and more recent innovations such as the voice and vision capabilities in Copilot, how has the general direction of travel changed for Microsoft in the past two years?

Generative AI has introduced significant changes for the world and for our customers, and Microsoft has been at the forefront of these transformations. The growth of Azure as a robust platform has been pivotal in supporting the evolving needs of businesses worldwide. Azure's scalability, security and comprehensive suite of services have enabled organisations to innovate and adapt to new work patterns seamlessly.

One of the most exciting developments has been the integration of generative AI tools into our offerings. The introduction of voice and vision capabilities to Copilot is a testament to our commitment to enhancing user experiences and increasing productivity. These innovations enable Microsoft and our partners to create more intuitive and interactive services and solutions, empowering users to achieve more with less effort.

Our focus on AI and its transformative potential has been a key driver of our mission to empower every customer and every organisation on the planet to achieve more. AI is being leveraged across various industries to boost productivity, enhance operational efficiencies and improve cybersecurity. Copilots automate repetitive tasks, enable faster decision-making and provide deeper insights through advanced analytics.

In addition, our strategic partnerships and investments in AI have further solidified our position as a leader in this space. Collaborations with companies like NVIDIA and ServiceNow have expanded our AI capabilities, bringing innovative solutions to sectors such as healthcare and life sciences. Additionally,

initiatives like the Global AI Infrastructure Investment Partnership – with BlackRock, Global Infrastructure Partners and MGX – are driving the development of new data centres and energy infrastructure to meet the growing demand for computing power.

"Our focus on AI and its transformative potential has been a key driver of our mission"

In June 2024, we launched Copilot+ PCs in collaboration with many of our silicon and device partners. This new category of AI-powered PCs represents a significant advancement in computing power and user experience. Copilot+ PCs deliver new AI experiences, enabling users to get more done in less time and transform the way they work, play and communicate. As highlighted in our

2024 *Modern Work Asset Performance Report*, 'AI is reshaping work by enabling new levels of productivity and collaboration, and our investments in AI infrastructure are paving the way for future innovations'.

The International Monetary Fund's *World Economic Outlook* predicts global economic growth will reach 3.3 per cent in 2025. How is Microsoft positioning itself to support customers and partners in times of more modest growth and how will the partner ecosystem add value to your activities?
As we look ahead to 2025, Microsoft is committed to supporting our customers and partners by focusing on innovation, efficiency and strategic partnerships. Our approach is centred around leveraging the power of the Microsoft Cloud, AI and our extensive partner ecosystem to drive value and growth.

Microsoft is committed to continually investing in AI to deliver on our promise of customer and partner success. We invest heavily to enable partner success through the MAICPP. This is the vehicle to provide our partners with access to our comprehensive portfolio of tools, skilling, benefits, go-to-market assets and incentives. This financial year, our partner incentives are at a record high and are designed to support them with delivering solutions across the entire customer lifecycle. This enables Microsoft to leverage the scale, reach and differentiated capabilities of our vast partner ecosystem, in order to serve the unique needs of customers in every segment, globally.

An excellent example of the scale that our partner ecosystem generates is Vodafone, one of our largest direct Cloud Solutions Provider partners. In order to deliver value-added services to its customers, Vodafone developed a new managed service to support them in transitioning to Microsoft 365 and realise the productivity benefits of the cloud and Microsoft's platform. Our partner ecosystem drives innovation and delivers exceptional value to customers, extending Microsoft's reach and impact. By fostering strong partnerships

Dezen onstage with Todd Minor, general manager and global learning leader at Microsoft, at Accelerate, an event hosted by MCAPS Academy to encourage successful adoption and use of Microsoft solutions and products

and investing in AI and cloud technologies, Microsoft is committed to supporting our customers and partners in achieving their goals.

In November 2024, Microsoft hosted thousands of partners and customers at Microsoft Ignite in Chicago, USA. What is the relevance of events like this and how do the messages shared there impact the broader customer community?
Events like Ignite are meaningful for showcasing our latest innovations, sharing strategic insights and providing direct learning opportunities. They bring together partners and customers to engage with Microsoft experts, network with peers and gain valuable knowledge.

Ignite demonstrates Microsoft's leadership and industry innovation, particularly in areas like AI with Copilot, Copilot Agents and the Copilot Stack. The messages shared help our partners and customers stay ahead of the curve and make informed decisions about their technology investments.

The event also offers extensive education and training, driving greater adoption, more efficient paths to innovation and effective use of our solutions. By fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing, Ignite contributes to the success of our partners and customers.

How is generative AI driving the adoption of cloud computing? What has the real uptake from business communities and civic organisations looked like in 2024, and how has Copilot impacted the adoption of Microsoft's Azure Clouds for Industry family?
Generative AI drives cloud adoption by offering tools that foster innovation and efficiency across industries. Copilot integrates seamlessly into Microsoft platforms, including Azure, and provides AI-powered insights that all users can rely on for data-driven decision-making.

IDC's *Microsoft Partners: Driving Economic Value and AI Maturity* report revealed that software organisations are recognising the immense business value of generative AI. One of the key findings is that for every $1 of Microsoft revenue, partners who provide services generate $8.45, and those who develop software make $10.93. AI is a huge growth opportunity, and we see the excitement from many partners in our ecosystem who are taking advantage of the MAICPP tools and resources to help customers transform and migrate to Azure.

Vodafone has transitioned to Microsoft 365 to improve productivity across its stores

For partners, generative AI tools are more than just technological advancements; they serve as solutions that enable customers to address real business challenges. This translates into significant growth and economic opportunities for partners.

Microsoft Azure Clouds for Industry is a collection of tailored solutions designed to meet the specific needs of industries by combining the power of Azure, Microsoft 365, Dynamics 365, Microsoft Fabric and Power Platform.

"For every $1 of Microsoft revenue, partners who provide services generate $8.45, and those who develop software make $10.93"

In 2024, we have seen significant uptake. One example is with Żabka Group, Poland's leading modern convenience store chain. Like many retailers, Żabka is dedicated to understanding the needs of its customers by offering products and services designed to simplify their lives. With this mission in mind, it launched Nano Stores, which provide

autonomous, unmanned retail experiences to maximise customer convenience. Żabka combined AI-powered, real-time computer vision technology to monitor customer behaviour and product selection with the Microsoft Cloud for Retail to centralise data, analysis and solution scalability. Żabka's personalised customer journeys have garnered high satisfaction ratings and attracted more customers. With added enhanced operational efficiencies, the retailer is able to pass on cost savings to its customers.

Industries with the longest histories can be the most challenging to modernise, yet they can have the biggest benefits from our industry clouds. The banking industry, for example, often struggles to update outdated systems. At the same time, the sector is highly competitive and banks face obstacles to adapt to market demands for personalised products. Microsoft partner Zafin, based in Canada, leverages Microsoft Cloud for Financial Services to transform banking. Zafin has collaborated extensively with Microsoft to help financial institutions transform core modernisation efforts. Its enterprise product platform is built on the Microsoft Financial Services Cloud and helps banks modernise core systems and achieve faster returns on business transformation projects.

As we anticipate a busy year ahead, what new innovations are you particularly looking forward to exploring in 2025?
We announced incredible innovations at Ignite, including new AI agents across Microsoft 365 Copilot to help organisations better manage daily tasks. I am particularly looking forward to exploring the agentic world, which will be defined by a tapestry of AI agents that act on our behalf. It will be exciting to explore the connection between Copilot Studio and building customised agents, and it's fascinating to see how software developers are already creating value with Copilot Agents.

I've personally experienced the productivity benefits of Copilot as it has become familiar with me and how I work, and learned to curate the content I need. There has been so much positive impact with our recent Wave 2 Copilot release with the new features like Copilot in Excel and Outlook. I especially appreciate the prompt for Copilot to 'Prioritise my inbox'. It's been a game-changer for how I start my days. Customers are experiencing how Copilot enriches employee experiences, reinvents customer engagement and reshapes business processes. This is an exciting time for innovation at Microsoft and I'm eager to see how these advancements will drive growth and create new opportunities for our customers and partners. ◼

Dezen showcased new opportunities for Microsoft partners at Ignite

Accelerating AI adoption

Microsoft's Sam Murley explains how organisations in every industry sector can capitalise on the real-world benefits of AI through 'lighthouse' proof-of-value initiatives

BY ALICE CHAMBERS
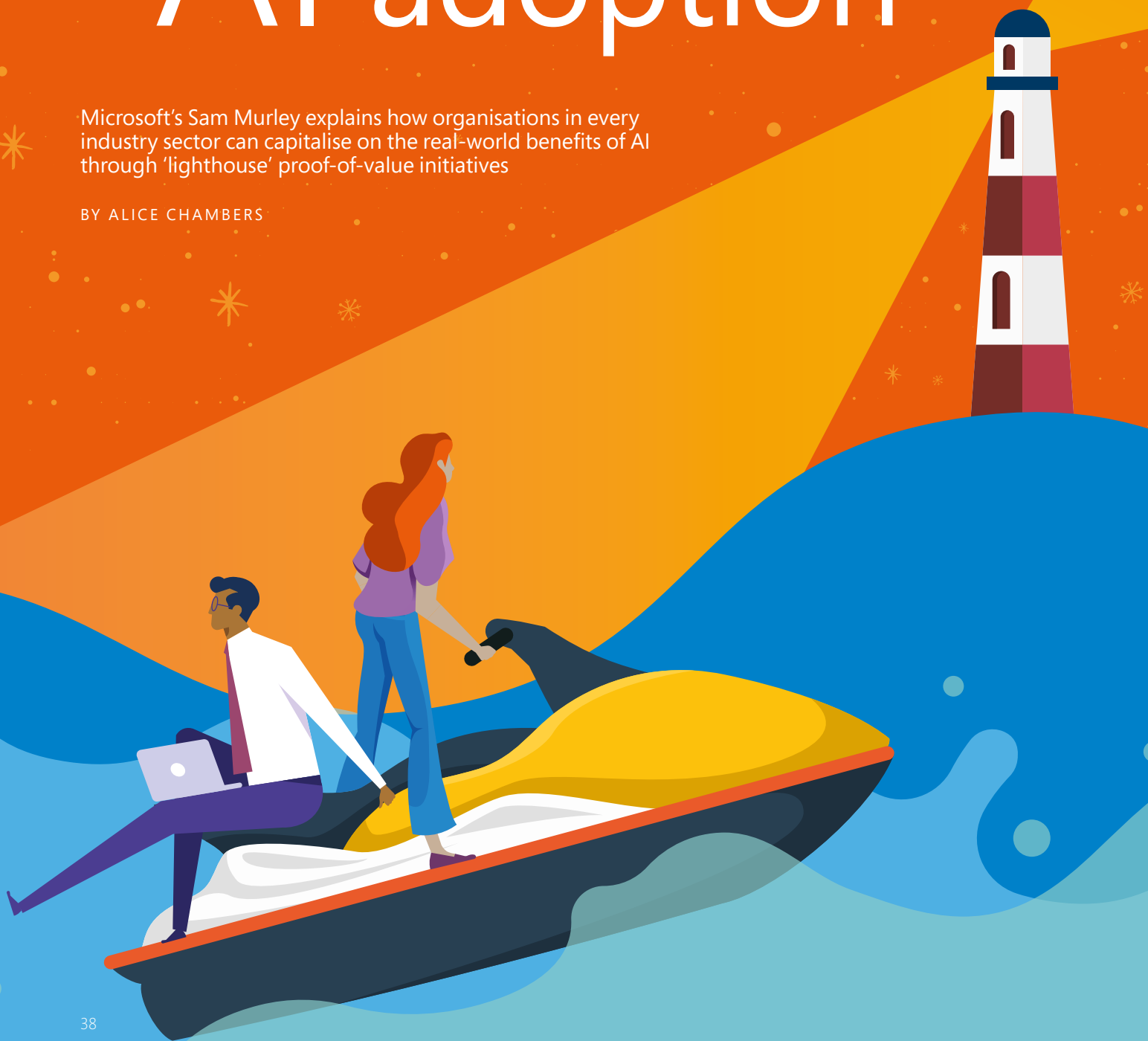
Organisations investing in artificial intelligence earn significant profits, with generative AI delivering an average return on investment of $3.70 per dollar spent, and some companies achieving up to $10, according to *The Business Opportunity of AI*, an IDC study commissioned by Microsoft.

"For customers to understand the business opportunity of AI, they need to see how it can directly impact their top and bottom line," says Sam Murley, general manager of industrial AI and strategic partnerships at Microsoft. "We work closely with customers to identify the practical benefits of AI for their business, such as increased efficiency, cost savings and differentiation through innovation that creates new revenue streams.

compliant way, standardising data formats and ensuring data quality and accessibility. Lastly, a human-centric approach to AI innovation focuses on enhancing user experiences and driving meaningful outcomes, ensuring that technological advancements align with human needs and ethical considerations. These themes collectively drive successful AI transformations, enabling industries to harness AI's potential while maintaining security and fostering innovation."

Organisations across industries also need to implement AI solutions that address their specific needs and use cases.

"Industry-specific AI models can significantly enhance organisational efficiency by leveraging domain-specific knowledge and data to tailor

"One of the most effective ways to accelerate adoption of AI initiatives is by leveraging lighthouse locations to demonstrate feasibility and business impact against high-priority scenarios"

"Successful AI adoption occurs when customers prioritise connecting AI initiatives to their profit and loss. They clarify the goals of AI and communicate the purpose of these changes before focusing on implementation. One of the most effective ways to accelerate adoption of AI initiatives is by capturing business value across scale and multi-year deployments, creating proof of value in the near term, and leveraging lighthouse locations to demonstrate feasibility and business impact against high-priority scenarios."

Cross-industry impact
Murley outlines three essential steps for successful AI transformation: maintaining strong security standards, consolidating data and prioritising a human-centric approach to innovation.

"Ensuring robust security measures is paramount as organisations integrate AI into their operations, safeguarding sensitive data and maintaining trust," says Murley. "Data harmonisation and creating an AI-ready data estate are critical for deriving actionable insights. This involves integrating diverse data sources in a secure and

solutions that address unique challenges and opportunities within a particular industry," explains Murley. "Because these models are trained on data that is highly relevant to the industry, they allow for more accurate and context-aware insights. This customisation ensures that the AI solutions are directly applicable to the organisation's operations, leading to more effective decision-making."

For example, medical professionals at Chi Mei Medical Center in Taiwan are serving double the number of patients per day with help from a generative AI assistant built on Microsoft's Azure OpenAI Service. Two-thirds of the pharmacists are using A+ Pharmacist copilot to summarise patients' clinical information from multiple databases including medication lists, surgical records, allergy history, lab tests and medical records. According to Hui-Chen Su, head of the pharmacy department at the centre, the copilot means one pharmacist can see 30 patients per day rather than 15. This allows pharmacists to spend more time caring for patients with complex needs.

Medline, a medical supply manufacturer, has also partnered with Microsoft to use AI to improve healthcare supply chain operations.

"The solution, called Mpower, aims to leverage AI-generated insights to save time and improve inventory management," says Murley. "This partnership aims to reduce disruptions and enable healthcare professionals to focus more on patient care. The solution combines customer and supplier data to provide actionable, predictive recommendations for healthcare supply chain professionals."

AI-powered Microsoft technology is also enhancing supply chain operations in the consumer goods industry. CONA Services – a Coca-Cola system IT services company – has combined data from demand, supply, transportation and production into one solution. Built on Azure with help from Microsoft partners Blue Yonder and Snowflake, the solution enables employees to access all data in one place. "Technology has made our company more resilient by putting cohesive enterprise planning all together in one place under the Blue Yonder roof," says Baron Jordan, chief product officer of supply chain at CONA Services, which is now exploring how AI-driven innovations can take its operations to the next level.

Another retailer implementing AI is Coles Group in Australia. The supermarket chain will use AI-powered models, powered by Azure OpenAI, to generate 1.6 billion productions on the flow of 20,000 stock-keeping units per day. Its Microsoft-powered Intelligent Edge Backbone system uses data from internet of things sensors across the supply chain to enable real-time stock visibility and predict supply chain disruptions across 850 stores.

Similarly, technology firm and manufacturer Siemens is using Microsoft's AI tools for operational improvements. The company is using Microsoft Copilot for Dynamics 365 within its Smart Infrastructure Buildings Business Unit to streamline the creation of over 1.4 million annual work-order reports generated by its more than 10,000 field technicians. The solution aims to generate higher-quality, standardised reports, improving customer communication, supporting efficient facility operations and boosting the firm's sustainability efforts.

These use cases are made possible by the robust infrastructure underpinning the AI technologies. As the adoption of AI accelerates, so does the demand for the data centre capacity required to support these innovations. Microsoft's efforts ensure that as industries transform with AI, the underlying infrastructure evolves in an environmentally conscious way, enabling organisations to innovate responsibly while contributing to global sustainability goals.

"The growth in AI adoption has driven a significant increase in data centre activity, with global workloads in 2020 being nine times what they were in 2010," says Murley. "At Microsoft, we are continuously researching and innovating ways to make our data centres and AI systems more energy and water efficient. In the coming years, new data centres will come online that consume zero water for cooling, and we'll expand our use of super-efficient liquid cooling systems, such as cold plates. Furthermore, we're investing in carbon-free energy sources like wind, geothermal, nuclear and solar power, ensuring that AI's growth does not come at the expense of sustainability."

The agentic shift

AI solutions are poised to reshape the future of enterprise and public sector operations, with intelligent agents able to seamlessly integrate with every aspect of a business.

"These agents, powered by advanced AI models, will be able to provide real-time insights and automate complex workflows, scaling the impact every individual and team can drive to improve operations and end customer experiences," says Murley. "They will free up human talent to focus on more strategic and creative endeavours. The ability to process and analyse vast amounts of data with unprecedented speed and accuracy will unlock new dimensions of efficiency and innovation, transforming how organisations operate and compete in the global marketplace."

Coles Group will use AI models, powered by Azure OpenAI, to streamline its store and supply chain operations

Photo: LinkedIn/Coles Group

At Microsoft Ignite 2024, Satya Nadella, chairman and CEO of Microsoft, revealed new AI-powered agents across Microsoft 365 Copilot to help organisations better scale individual impact and transform business process. For example, SharePoint agents allow every employee to quickly tap into their SharePoint knowledge base with agents that can answer questions about specific files, folders or sites. Meanwhile, the Facilitator agents in Teams take real-time notes from meetings and chats. These agents complement the 10 autonomous agents announced for Dynamics 365 users, which help build capacity for team members in sales, services, finance and supply chain departments to drive business outcomes and improve customer experiences.

Organisations are already starting to build their own AI agents with Microsoft technology. For example, vehicle manufacturer Toyota Motor Corporation has used Azure OpenAI Service to build a collection of AI agents for its O-Beya system. Using OpenAI's multimodal GPT-4 large language models, the system answers questions on a variety of topics using information sourced from Toyota's design data, including past engineering design reports, regulatory information and documents handwritten by veteran engineers. For instance, an engine agent can answer questions related to engine output while a regulatory agent provides answers on emissions limits.

Microsoft customers can also build and manage custom agents with Copilot Studio, and connect them to Copilot. These agents can range from simple prompt-and-response to fully autonomous.

"Think of agents as the new apps for an AI-powered world," says Jared Spataro, chief marketing officer of AI at Work at Microsoft. "Every organisation will have a constellation of agents – ranging from simple prompt-and-response to fully autonomous. They will work on behalf of an individual, team or function to execute and orchestrate businesses process. Copilot is how you'll interact with these agents, and they'll do everything from accelerating lead generation and processing sales orders to automating your supply chain."

As AI continues to evolve, several emerging trends are set to further revolutionise how businesses and public sector organisations operate, unlocking even greater potential for

"Industry-specific AI models can significantly enhance organisational efficiency "

innovation and efficiency. Murley explains that the integration of AI with edge computing, AI-driven digital twins and advancements in natural language processing all have the potential to open new possibilities across various industries.

"As we stand on the brink of this technological revolution, it is imperative that we harness AI not just as a tool, but as a catalyst for change," he says. "By fostering a culture of continuous learning, we can ensure that AI serves as a force for good, driving sustainable growth and creating a world where technology and humanity coexist harmoniously." ◾

Toyota has built AI agents to answer employee questions based on its own design data

Partner perspectives

We asked selected Microsoft partners how they are working with Microsoft to develop AI solutions that deliver real value for their customers
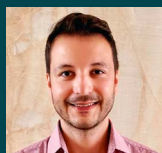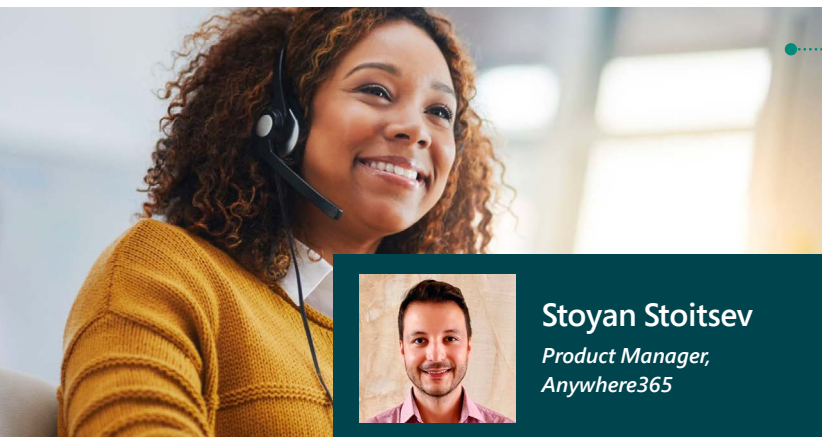
Stoyan Stoitsev
*Product Manager,
Anywhere365*

"We use Azure OpenAI for an AI-driven dialogue management platform with real-time transcription, sentiment analysis and summaries, which enhances issue resolution speeds and reduces interaction handling times. Our Deepdesk-acquired Agent Assist, trained on historical data and internal knowledge bases, aids rapid agent onboarding, provides accurate answers and suggests actions while maintaining the right tone. Assistants built using large language models offer intuitive self-service, lessening the agents' workload. Anywhere365's open platform allows automated workflows that can, for example, assess interactions based on business criteria, ensuring high-quality service in every customer interaction."

"AI and cloud technologies have transformed software accessibility, bringing advanced capabilities within reach of diverse groups. By combining cloud-hosted data, generative AI with large language models, and other types of AI, users can access sophisticated industrial solutions that feel intuitive and humanlike, minimising the need for extensive training. AVEVA has teamed up with Microsoft to elevate its Industrial AI Assistant on CONNECT, extending the power of Azure OpenAI services. Now, users can tell the assistant what they want and it will generate results on the fly, including customised dashboards with pie charts and stacked bars."

Jim Chappell
*Global Head, AI and
Advanced Analytics, AVEVA*

"Up to 80 per cent of AI projects are stalled due to governance issues. Challenges are threefold: a lack of organisational framework, a trust deficit and regulatory complexity. Holistic AI's governance platform, available on Azure Marketplace, enables AI workloads to make it into production more quickly. By providing visibility into how AI is used across the organisation, Holistic AI acts as a portal for teams to self-assess and report, creating a unified dashboard for observability and accountability. It embeds risk assessment and remediation from the start, tackling a variety of risks. It also creates consistent governance frameworks tailored to internal processes and external regulatory requirements for both in-house and third-party AI systems."
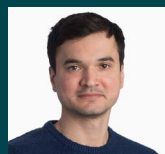
Adriano Koshiyama
*Co-CEO and Co-Founder,
Holistic AI*

Who uses this mac and what is their position in the company? H2WFP7BPQ6NV

> ✅ 3 steps completed 23 seconds

May 1, 8:46 PM | 31 seconds

The Mac with the serial number "H2WFP7BPQ6NV" is used by a user named "Cook E. Monster". Their position in the company is "Lead Cookie Tester". The device is a Mac mini with the IP address "63.231.129.50". The last contact with the device was on 2024-05-02 at 03:39:02 UTC.

☺ How's this response?   ↓ ☐

Does that mac have any suspicious applications in

> ✅ 3 steps completed 27 seconds

May 1, 8:47 PM | 35 seconds

Andrew Smeaton
Chief Information Security Officer, Jamf

"When investigating a security alert, the details within the alert are often not enough to understand the full context. Jamf's plugin for Microsoft Security Copilot addresses this by providing device information directly from Jamf, giving security analysts a clearer picture of what occurred on the device through the power of AI. This integration streamlines access to critical data, enabling faster incident resolution and turning insights into actionable steps. It's a practical solution that helps bridge the gap between IT and security and most importantly protects businesses from cyberthreats quickly."

"MetaViewer harnesses the power of cloud and AI technology to transform how organisations handle accounts. By automating traditionally time-consuming, manual processes, it significantly reduces data entry errors, speeds up invoice processing and ensures accuracy, allowing employees to focus on more strategic, value-driven tasks. The integration with Microsoft's cloud technology ensures that teams can access accounts payable (AP) data securely from anywhere, promoting flexibility and collaboration. AI further enhances MetaViewer's capabilities by intelligently extracting data from invoices, identifying discrepancies and automating workflows based on historical patterns. This means AP teams can make faster, data-driven decisions while reducing the risk of human errors."

Andy Birkey
Marketing Communications Specialist, Metafile Information Systems

"Zebra is working with Microsoft and companies from its partner ecosystem – including Qualcomm Technologies and SAP – to develop generative AI-powered solutions for frontline workers. From retail to healthcare, we are helping customers to identify efficiency and productivity gains with our technology. For example, mobile computers with generative AI applications help retailers accelerate task completion, such as restocking shelves, and clinicians in healthcare environments to gain real-time access to patient information. No matter what industry, we are predicting tangible results where generative AI eliminates human error, ensures accuracy and improves the customer experience."

Rowan Fuller
Global Sales Leader, Consulting Partners and Alliances, Zebra Technologies

No more hold music

Damian Black of Anywhere365 explains how conversational AI technology and large language models are facilitating new capabilities that will redefine the contact centre experience

BY REBECCA GIBSON

Famed as the 'Little Italy' of San Francisco, USA, North Beach is a lively destination offering multiple gastronomic, historic and cultural attractions for residents and visitors to explore – if they can find a space to park their car.

"Parking at North Beach is a nightmare," says Damian Black, chief product and technology officer at Anywhere365. "There aren't enough parking spaces, so everyone drives around in circles and you get stuck in traffic for what feels like hours. It's a lovely place, but visiting by car is always a stressful experience."

According to Black, the experience of parking in North Beach is analogous to contacting a call centre to ask a query or resolve an issue. "When you call a contact centre, you have to navigate a complex automated menu to be connected with the right department, then you sit on hold for a long time before someone finally answers your call," he says. "Often, this person is unable to help you, so they transfer you to another department and you're forced to go through the whole cycle again, continually repeating yourself until you finally reach someone with the expertise to resolve your issue. It can take hours – or sometimes days – to resolve your query and leaves you frustrated, fed up and contemplating taking your custom elsewhere in future."

To reduce call waiting times and increase first contact resolution rates, Black recommends that organisations adopt contact centre-as-a-service (CCaaS) solutions, such as Anywhere365's Dialogue Cloud. The platform natively integrates with Microsoft Teams and other back-office IT systems to enable businesses to interact with customers across any channel via

any device, from anywhere at any time. It also leverages conversational artificial intelligence technology and large language models (LLMs) to power virtual assistants that can automatically handle basic queries and route callers to humans if necessary.

"LLMs and AI are driving key breakthroughs in business-to-consumer (B2C) communications," says Black. "The comprehension capabilities of virtual assistants powered by these technologies are extraordinary – they can interpret nuanced speech in multiple languages and accents. Customers describe the problem and the LLM will understand it, summarise it and provide a fast and accurate answer using relevant information from the organisation's knowledge database.

"Alternatively, if the virtual assistant identifies a complex issue that would benefit from human interaction, it will automatically route the caller to the most qualified person, providing them with a concise and contextualised overview of the interaction so they can help instantly."

In addition, AI and LLMs are enabling Anywhere365 to facilitate smarter call routing.

"Traditionally, each agent is assigned specific tags to denote their skills and contact centre solutions use this information to match them

"Virtual assistants will probably be more knowledgeable and quicker at resolving problems than humans"

with callers but it's not always accurate," says Black. "Now, Anywhere365 is using LLMs and AI to power semantics-based routing, which enables virtual assistants to understand the full meaning of a customer's statements and identify the right agent based on this information. This makes the call routing process far more precise, minimising the likelihood of callers being transferred multiple times and eliminating wasted time for both the agent and the customer."

Anywhere365, which has acquired Deepdesk and integrated its AI agent assist technology into the Dialogue Cloud platform alongside Microsoft Azure OpenAI services, is also

using LLMs and conversational AI to develop applications that help human agents respond to enquiries more quickly and accurately. It uses these technologies to generate conversation summaries, transcribe audio in real time, autocomplete sentences and suggest next-best actions or relevant cross-selling or upselling opportunities.

"Giving agents access to this detailed information empowers them to quickly understand the issue and work productively and efficiently to provide accurate and personalised responses," says Black. "This cuts resolution times and frees agents up to focus on more complex issues. Our AI technology

Anywhere365 uses AI technology to provide agents with detailed call summaries, suggested responses and more to improve customer interactions

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also performs real-time sentiment analysis on conversations, helping agents to understand how their behaviour is impacting the customer experience and how they can improve the interaction. Together, these capabilities significantly enhance service quality."

Meanwhile, supervisors can use analytics to track the performance of both individual agents and the overall call centre to detect and fix issues in real time before they affect customers.

"Supervisors can monitor call queues and waiting times to ensure they aren't too long or intervene in conversations if an agent isn't answering questions quickly, accurately or in compliance with company policy," says Black. "This allows them to redistribute resources and prevent agents from mishandling situations. Organisations can also analyse how their team interacts with the different features of our platform to understand how to optimise their use. We're continually updating these capabilities with the aim of establishing a virtuous cycle where we're able to use AI-driven analytics to improve the usability of Dialogue Cloud and enhance both the agent and customer experience."

To further optimise its CCaaS offering, Anywhere365 has also integrated Azure Communication Services (ACS), Microsoft's B2C communication platform, into Dialogue Cloud.

"The APIs and software development kits in ACS open up multiple opportunities for us to improve Dialogue Cloud and create new chat, voice, video, text messaging, email and other capabilities," says Black. "These features will enable us to deliver seamless omnichannel communications, making it easier to transfer people between different channels, depending on what is most convenient and appropriate at the time. For example, the customer might start the interaction with a voice call but receive a text message with a link to an online portal where they can resolve their issue."

Anywhere365 plans to integrate ACS across the remainder of its product portfolio and will also continue to explore how it can use AI and LLMs to further optimise the contact centre experience for both customers and agents, according to Black.

"Our unified platform already provides the tools organisations need to help their call centre teams resolve customer queries more productively, efficiently and cost effectively, but

conversational AI and LLMs are empowering us to fully reshape the way they operate," he says.

Black predicts that once these technologies are fully mature and embedded in CCaaS solutions, they will make virtual assistants a more attractive option than human agents for many customers.

"Today, customers are still sceptical of AI-powered chatbots because they're not yet capable of providing solutions to complex issues, but conversational AI and LLMs are unlocking new capabilities that will fundamentally change how we interact with them," he says. "At some point, virtual assistants will probably be more knowledgeable and quicker at resolving problems than humans. They'll also be more specialised and have human-like characteristics, so conversations will be more natural and interactive – for instance, customers may be able to interrupt them as they do now when speaking to a person. Fully autonomous bots will likely become a reality in future too.

"AI and LLMs have the power to redefine B2C communications and Anywhere365 is at the forefront of this transformation, leading the way in creating the call centre of the future." ◼

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Five best practices for implementing Copilot

PETER HUDACKO: KYNDRYL

How can organisations ensure their generative AI technology implementations are effective? Kyndryl's own Copilot for Microsoft 365 rollout provides a blueprint for success

During the second year of Kyndryl's 24-month global IT transformation, we made a strategic decision to invest in generative artificial intelligence technology.

Copilot for Microsoft 365 was the logical choice for us and, after collaborating with Microsoft on a rollout strategy, our Copilot team launched a multiphase implementation in July 2023. Over the following 12 months, we worked with multidisciplinary teams across Kyndryl to execute and refine our strategy before vetting use cases and staging rollouts of Copilot licences.

By July 2024, we had assigned nearly 20,000 Copilot licences and amassed more than 600 approved use cases for the technology.

We learned a lot throughout the process and have distilled our lessons learned into five best practices to help guide other organisations on their Copilot journey.

1. Prepare your data to optimise performance
Data is the fuel for large language models that power generative AI tools like Copilot. Therefore, your data structure and information architecture must be flawless and adhere to the latest data privacy and cybersecurity standards to perform optimally.

Over the course of four months, Kyndryl's Copilot team reviewed existing Microsoft 365 data controls, content lifecycles and data classifications to prepare the information architecture for Copilot.

During this process we tightened access controls in Microsoft SharePoint and reduced the number of internal public sites to approximately 10,000. We also automated the deletion of roughly 20,000 inactive SharePoint sites, developed a data classification module based on sensitivity, tagged content with relevant keywords and organised data.

2. Establish a robust governance model
Without proper guardrails for generative AI in place, users are at risk of misusing the technology or exposing sensitive data that can cause significant operational, financial or reputational damage.

During implementation, the Copilot team collaborated with legal, risk and human resources teams to review each use case request individually to ensure alignment with compliance standards and risk considerations.

Each month, administrators reviewed dashboard reports to measure the frequency of use and reclaimed licences from employees who hadn't used the technology within a specified period. Reclaimed licences were then reallocated to individuals with approved use cases, ensuring employees who would benefit most from the technology had access to it.

3. Grant access incrementally
With tools like Copilot, it's better to allocate licences over time than to immediately grant full access to the technology. Staggering implementation lets administrators review use cases and assess any associated risks that arise before deploying the technology to your entire workforce.

We had a two-phase rollout of Copilot following the preflight assessment period. This approach allowed a limited number of Kyndryl employees to experiment with the technology prior to purchasing thousands of licences, giving our implementation team time to determine which use cases provided the most business value.

4. Provide extensive training

Education is crucial for maximising the potential of Copilot, so it's critical to start training users with the technology early in the implementation process.

Before we granted employees access to Copilot, they were required to attend training conducted in partnership with Microsoft. These educational sessions covered proper Copilot usage, including how to create effective prompts and ways to properly handle data.

We also worked with Microsoft to conduct role-specific training sessions to address the unique needs of different business units within Kyndryl. For example, Copilot specialists led interactive video training with our finance team to highlight use cases and demonstrate the technology's capabilities in Excel, showcasing how Copilot can help with data summarisation and analysis in finance scenarios.

5. Create robust feedback cycles

It's essential to collect feedback once employees start using Copilot. Internal administrators and Microsoft product teams can use these insights to fine-tune deployment, increase engagement and enhance the Copilot user experience.

Our Copilot team established feedback protocols for users to document their experiences in four categories: use case application, overall quality and performance, unauthorised access and technical questions.

We also empowered Copilot users to improve the quality of our organisational data. For example, if a user discovered outdated or inaccurate information, they were asked to report it to the Copilot team so administrators could correct the data.

The bottom line

Generative AI is rapidly evolving and new use cases are being discovered constantly, so early adopters will need to continually refine their systems and processes and offer ongoing education and training to take full advantage of tools like Copilot.

Even as Kyndryl explores the full power of generative AI, Copilot has already yielded significant time savings and contributed to a more efficient work environment for our teams. Our approach and lessons learned can serve as a blueprint for other organisations starting to use generative AI. ■

Peter Hudacko is lead infrastructure specialist at Kyndryl

Delivering what customers need

ROWAN FULLER: ZEBRA TECHNOLOGIES

On-device generative AI solutions are boosting efficiency and security for frontline workers across multiple industries, especially in retail and healthcare

For more than 50 years, Zebra Technologies' mission has been to provide our customers across all industries with the technology to unlock productivity gains within their organisation – whether that be by optimising assets, improving worker efficiencies or gaining real-time insight into their operations.

In 2024, our innovations continued to align with this mission. We've partnered with the world's leading companies, including fellow Microsoft partner Qualcomm Technologies, to develop a first for the enterprise market: an on-device generative artificial intelligence, large language model solution. Zebra is taking generative AI capabilities to the edge for frontline workers and removing the requirement for cloud connectivity. There are several reasons we have taken this strategic approach and many key benefits our customers and partners can gain from AI.

> "Early adopters who are already evaluating and implementing generative AI solutions will have a huge advantage over their competitors"

The central pillar of our mission at Zebra is to put our customers first. We are seeing an ever-growing demand to capture and deliver on the potential of generative AI in an industry-specific manner. We continually hear from clients who are looking to use generative AI to address today's business challenges and boost revenues.

One of our key joint venture partners, SAP, recently identified in its *AI: State of Adoption 2024* report that 67 per cent of companies have partially defined AI objectives, with 79 per cent of companies overall implementing or evaluating AI solutions. This research aligns with Zebra's generative AI strategy, as we are building generative AI tools to deliver industry-specific use cases. Each industry has its own unique set of challenges and opportunities, which our generative AI on-device solution can help to address.

For example, *Zebra's Global Shopper Study* found that 60 per cent of employees express frustration over having to perform low-level tasks rather than helping customers. We can see a future for our retail customers where generative AI tools go beyond helping employees to complete tasks such as restocking shelves more quickly, to reach a point where an enterprise tool can anticipate workers' needs and function as an enabler. For example, the right enterprise mobile computer solution could provide an employee with real-time answers to any shop floor questions and queries about store policies – improving the customer experience.

In addition to being beneficial for retail use cases, generative AI is also helpful in a healthcare environment where clinicians, consultants and nurses can access the technology on their mobile device. For instance, healthcare professionals can access real-time

and accurate information about medicine dosage and specific treatment support while at the patient's bedside. This eliminates human error, ensures accuracy and improves both the patient's safety and overall treatment experience.

We can also identify benefits in increased security protection; an on-device solution keeps sensitive data on the device rather than exporting to the cloud. Linked to this, without the need for cloud service, the solution can be enabled in low/no connection areas, which reduces the barrier for usage in harder-to-reach locations such as underground sites or at sea. This removes latency (a user should see immediate response times) and the minimal cloud calls reduces costs.

Early adopters who are already evaluating and implementing generative AI solutions will have a huge advantage over their competitors due to the identified efficiency and productivity gains, as well as the ability to enhance customer experiences and accelerate the training of new employees. In a world where industries are struggling with frontline worker labour shortages, prioritising the worker experience is becoming increasingly important to ensure employees stay motivated, informed and empowered.

Deploying generative AI solutions for frontline workers is not without its challenges, however. Businesses starting their AI journey need to fully understand the issues they are trying to solve and the key performance indicators for the project. They should also be mindful of the potential costs associated with running AI on large servers and look at on-device/far-edge solutions as they improve the customer experience, reduce costs and protect privacy and security.

The generative AI solution on Zebra devices is powered by a longstanding partnership with Qualcomm, and is built on a wide array of open-source and third-party models as part of Zebra's strategy to deliver effective on-edge AI solutions across multiple industries. This makes Zebra's devices an ideal choice for businesses seeking reliable, scalable and secure AI solutions that directly address the challenges of deploying AI at the edge. ■

Learn more about the partnership between Zebra Technologies and Qualcomm technologies at: bit.ly/3ZexxLJ

Rowan Fuller is global sales leader of consulting partners and alliances at Zebra Technologies

Innovation and integrity

EMRE KAZIM: HOLISTIC AI

Staying up to date with constantly evolving AI regulations and standards is challenging, but organisations can use the new Holistic AI Tracker to stay informed, while the Holistic AI Governance Platform helps to ensure compliance and business success

Artificial intelligence technology is advancing rapidly, meaning the AI regulatory landscape is also evolving at speed. The responsible use of AI by organisations is paramount to ensure public trust, as well as the protection of user data. Businesses embracing these tools must ensure they comply with regulations and industry standards, not just to fulfil their legal obligations but also to build long-term credibility and success in an AI-driven future.

At Microsoft Ignite 2024, Holistic AI launched version 2.0 of the Holistic AI Tracker, a real-time knowledge hub for AI governance, regulatory and compliance activity worldwide. This free tool – available on our website – has

> "The Holistic AI Tracker is a powerful information resource that enables companies to stay ahead of compliance requirements"

been designed to enable users to stay informed on the latest developments in AI and the potential impact of these technologies.

The Holistic AI Tracker includes three key features: the Atlas, the Feed and the AI Expert Community. The Atlas offers a graphical world map view of AI activity across key regions, providing users with an at-a-glance perspective. Customisable filters and real-time alerts enable organisations to stay updated on global AI regulations.

The Feed delivers relevant news and research, in-depth articles on significant developments, activity summaries and expert analyses crafted

by our policy and legal experts. It also features contributions from the AI Expert Community, a global network of multidisciplinary experts collaborating to share insights on AI governance advancements.

Currently, there are almost 500 AI laws in progress globally, 200 of which are at the federal level in the USA, along with 83 lawsuits that pertain to generative AI alone. Approximately 100 penalties have been issued for AI systems in Europe. This is significant activity for a promising technology that is still in its early stages of adoption. Our Holistic AI Tracker is a powerful information resource that, together with the Holistic AI Governance Platform, enables companies to stay ahead of compliance requirements, avoid penalties, legal actions and reputational damage, all while helping to maximise the return on investment of their AI use cases. Our policy and legal team provides in-depth and thorough analyses of all the latest developments in the AI governance ecosystem.

The Holistic AI Tracker can be leveraged by numerous teams across an organisation. Legal teams can use it to monitor emerging laws, identify compliance gaps and track precedent-setting legal actions. Meanwhile, product teams can use it to stay informed about new regulations and standards, integrate compliance into product development and mitigate potential risks.

Although it functions as an independent knowledge hub, the Holistic AI Tracker has been designed as a companion to our AI Governance Platform, which integrates AI governance seamlessly with data and AI systems across an organisation. The Holistic AI Governance Platform automatically discovers AI projects in progress, simplifies inventory

management, assesses technical and regulatory risks early in development, and offers actionable risk mitigation strategies.

Numerous organisations have already implemented Holistic AI's solutions, including Aon, a financial services management firm. Michael Fetzer, associate partner of global science and analytics at Aon, described the Holistic AI Tracker as a "game-changer" for the talent management space. Over the last several years Aon has attempted to track legislation relevant to AI in the talent management space in a very labour-intensive way, however, the pace at which legislation is moving on a global scale made the process almost impossible. Fetzer says that by implementing our Tracker, the company now has a "comprehensive and up to date" solution that has saved Aon "hundreds of hours of manual labour".

Tom Kemp, author of *Containing Big Tech: How to protect our Civil Rights, Economy, and Democracy*, also uses Holistic AI to stay up to date with AI legislation in his role as a policy advisor for political campaigns and advocacy groups. He says it's a "no-brainer to help cut through the noise". ■

Emre Kazim is CEO and co-founder (alongside Adriano Koshiyama) of Holistic AI

The year of leveraging people data

isolved's Amy Mosher explains how AI can help HR teams make faster decisions and improve employee retention and wellness

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

Human resources (HR) teams have increasingly leveraged artificial intelligence to make faster and more informed decisions in 2024. According to isolved's *2024-2025 Voice of the Workforce* report, 77 per cent of HR professionals believe AI training is critical to enhancing their roles. And 81 per cent of companies have already adopted AI tools. On average, AI handles about 34 per cent of HR-related tasks across those surveyed organisations.

"The additional work that's being accomplished through these tools is significant," says Amy Mosher, chief people officer at isolved. "Given the numbers, it's clear AI is making a big impact. I'm excited about the potential for AI adoption to reach 100 per cent next year – HR teams are not leveraging their potential by not adopting these tools."

Companies worldwide are using isolved's Predictive People Analytics (PPA) tool to improve outcomes, particularly in the USA. For Lisa Johnson, HR lead at PS Operating Company LLC, formerly known as QC Supply, a wholesale agricultural business in Nebraska, PPA analytics have been a game-changer in boosting employee retention.

"We use it to feed data to get insights on time to fill, time to staff, diversity, turnover rate, new hires, onboarding statistics, and revenue per employee and cost of benefits compared to gross pay," says Johnson. "With this data at our fingertips, I can proactively articulate to the executive leadership team the tangible costs of what turnover means to the company. This was not possible before."

Meanwhile, grocery retailer Hames Corporation in Sitka, a small city on Baranof Island in Alaska, implemented isolved's solution to streamline HR, automate tasks and consolidate employee data, allowing HR to focus on priorities like training and development. "With a small candidate pool on the island, Hames struggles to retain employees during tourist season due to employees finding more highly paid temporary work," says Mosher.

Outdated policies made managing staff challenging. Now, with a centralised data source, Hames can focus on retention. Tools like People Cloud for surveys and Share & Perform for engagement enable the company to regularly check employee wellbeing and create supportive communities, fostering a more resilient and adaptable workforce.

One way to retain staff is to offer flexible work opportunities. The *Voice of the Workforce* report found that 39 per cent of employees say flexible work is key to improving their experience, while 48 per cent believe it helps reduce burnout.

"Understanding people analytics will allow HR to better support employee needs"

"We've seen that burnout risk is especially high among younger employees," says Mosher. "Millennials and Generation Z workers, for example, are 10 per cent more likely than Baby Boomers to report feeling overwhelmed by their work. In fact, 58 per cent of Generation Z

workers cite burnout as their top reason for job dissatisfaction."

isolved's AI-powered HR solutions help alleviate burnout by providing a consistent, high-quality and more tailored experience for employees.

"Consider, for instance, companies wanting to offer more accessible time off to support work-life balance, perhaps through a non-accruing or unlimited paid time off (PTO) plan," says Mosher. "This type of policy requires significant administration to ensure employees are accurately entering their time, so managers can clearly see time-off balances and ensure a flexible PTO policy is fair. With the right technology in place, companies can manage this policy more effectively, reduce financial burdens and

enhance employees' perceptions of trust and flexibility."

Organisations should also use AI to improve the employee experience, which will in turn lead to a great customer experience, says Mosher. For instance, 72 per cent of employees surveyed for isolved's *Uncovering the Significant HR Trends of 2024* say their experience at work impacts the customer experience they deliver.

"Our survey findings demonstrate that 47 per cent of respondents believe AI has the potential to significantly improve employee onboarding processes from a learning perspective," says Mosher.

AI can also personalise training by identifying skill gaps and tailoring onboarding processes for new hires, improving efficiency and the

employee experience. By analysing training data, AI helps organisations address gaps in compliance or skills, creating customised development plans to maximise employee potential and benefit the business.

HR analytics will continue to be a key priority and one of the top investment areas for HR leaders in 2025, predicts Mosher. "It'll be crucial for organisations to leverage people data for business decisions," she says. "The areas to focus on are analytics, employee wellness, benefit selection, employee surveys and performance management. With the amount of data available now, understanding people analytics will allow HR to better support employee needs, from wellness and benefits to career development." ∎

HR trends for a people-focused future

Andrew Swiler explains how Lanteria will continue to evolve its solutions to help customers meet the needs of tomorrow's workforce

BY HANNA MILLER

Lanteria has continuously evolved its flagship human resources solution, Lanteria HR, since its launch in 2008. Andrew Swiler, who was appointed CEO of Lanteria in April 2022, has dedicated the last two years to broadening the company's global presence, championing innovation and creating a culture of continuous improvement to better position it to deliver new innovations for customers.

What challenges are HR leaders facing and how Lanteria is adapting its solutions to help customers overcome these obstacles?
HR leaders are struggling to keep up with changing technology and how to use it to their advantage. Concepts like data-driven decision-making, upskilling or reskilling, and supporting remote workforces are strategies they have been tasked to implement, but their existing tools are either inadequate or in multiple systems, making it time-consuming and hard to manage.

Lanteria offers an all-in-one HR management system with advanced analytic and reporting capabilities that meet these needs and can easily be scaled and adapted for future needs.

How will Lanteria continue to drive technological innovation and expand its business operations?
We partner with global analysts and perform quarterly business reviews with our customers to keep our finger on the pulse of customer needs. Having a solution built on Microsoft, and being a Microsoft Gold Partner, means we can not only ensure our solution is at the forefront of innovation, but we can also expand and scale our business and deployments with ease.

What role will strategic partnerships, such as the one you have with Microsoft, play in achieving growth objectives?
Strategic partnerships are crucial to Lanteria's growth, enabling us to leverage industry leaders' strengths, expand market reach, and enhance value to our customers. Our partnership with Microsoft is a prime example, particularly through our integration with Microsoft Azure. This allows us to offer a highly secure, robust cloud environment that enables our customers to scale with ease and ensures the capacity to power big data and advanced analytics.

> "Having a solution built on Microsoft technology means we can ensure our solution is at the forefront of innovation"

Looking ahead, what emerging trends in AI and analytics do you see as pivotal for the future of HR?
AI is still greatly underutilised due to concerns about data privacy, potential bias, and the loss of human touch. I see properly implemented AI being pivotal to reducing HR time spent interpreting data and servicing employee requests, leaving more time for HR staff to focus on strategic projects that drive meaningful change.

At Lateria we are committed to providing solutions that help businesses secure their employee data and streamline their HR processes to help them achieve their workforce goals. ∎
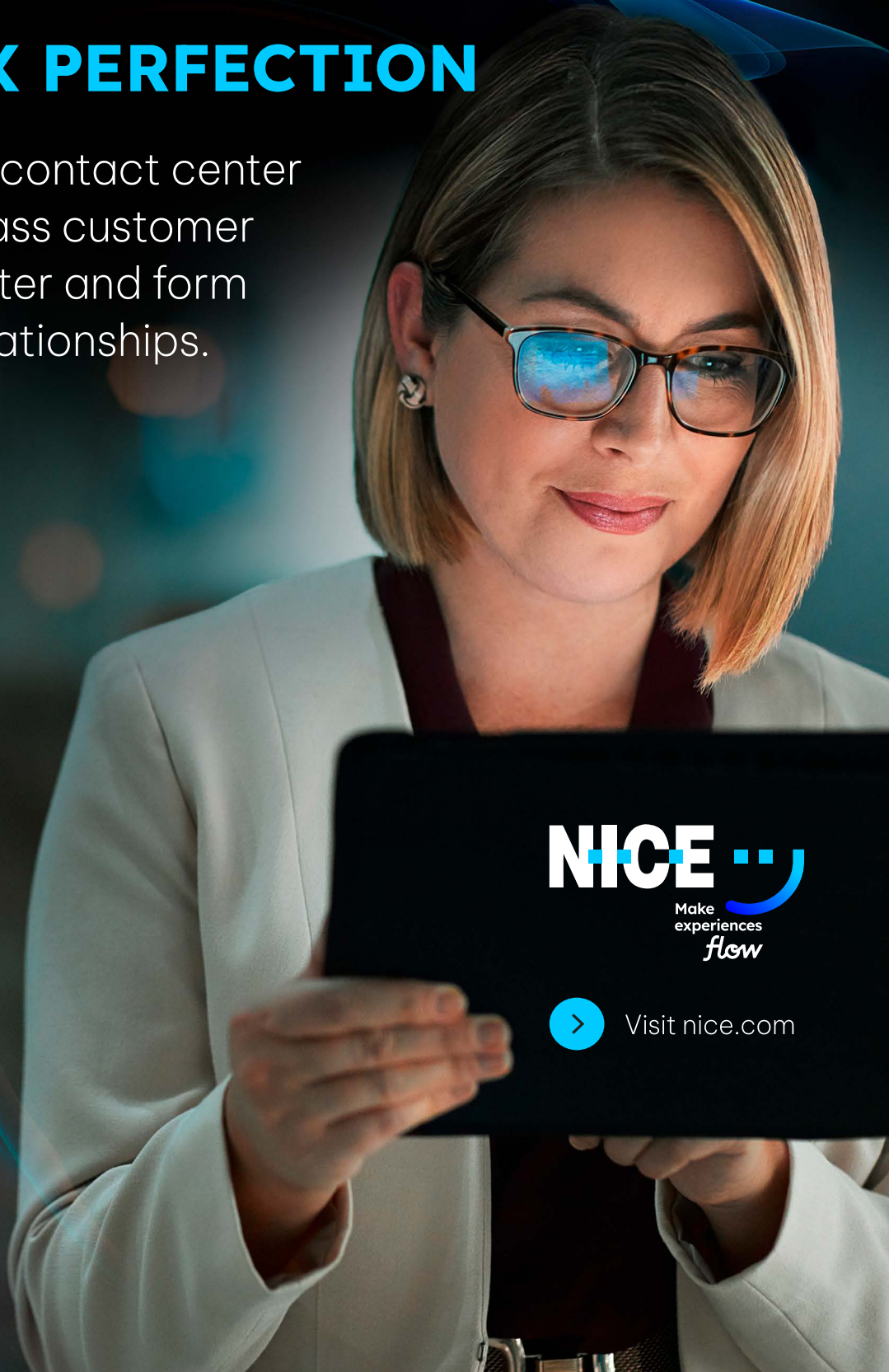
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Transforming how we work with Microsoft 365

JOHN OPGENORTH: SYNERGY TECHNICAL

Synergy Technical is enabling businesses to integrate Microsoft 365 Copilot into their operations and leveraging the same tools internally to ensure exceptional service delivery

Over the past year, Microsoft 365, powered by artificial intelligence and the cloud, has fundamentally transformed how we work, bringing innovation directly into our daily tasks. At Synergy Technical, we have experienced firsthand the efficiencies made possible by Microsoft 365 Copilot, an innovative AI-powered productivity suite that has been seamlessly integrated into our workflows.

Microsoft 365 Copilot's impact has been remarkable, enabling our teams to work smarter, not harder. This tool has transformed routine tasks – automating processes that once took considerable time. For instance, Copilot's ability to summarise lengthy email threads has improved communication efficiency, ensuring we stay on top of essential information without wading through extensive back-and-forth conversations. This feature alone has kept our teams aligned on projects, improving our response times and overall productivity.

"Microsoft 365 Copilot has enabled us to streamline workflows, foster collaboration and innovate daily"

Meeting efficiency has also reached new heights with Copilot's capabilities. Copilot's integration into Microsoft Teams has enabled the automatic creation of meeting notes, action items and summaries, allowing us to focus more on discussions and strategic decisions during meetings rather than manual note-taking. These notes ensure that key takeaways and follow-up actions are documented and easily accessible to everyone. As a result, our team members leave meetings with clarity and confidence, ready to act on clearly outlined next steps.

In addition to email and meeting enhancements, Microsoft 365 Copilot has streamlined our content creation processes. For example, the tool can transform Microsoft Word documents into PowerPoint presentations, saving our teams the time and effort of manually formatting content across platforms. This functionality has been invaluable for preparing client presentations and internal briefings, allowing us to convert information seamlessly and maintain our brand guidelines.

Beyond productivity, Microsoft 365 continues to emphasise security – an essential factor for our organisation. Copilot keeps sensitive information protected while enabling us to collaborate freely. By using our data sensitivity labels, Copilot ensures that our data remains confidential, providing our teams with the peace of mind that our data stays within our tenant.

A year into using Microsoft 365, it's clear that AI and the cloud have changed how we operate, allowing us to work efficiently and securely. Microsoft 365 Copilot has enabled us to streamline workflows, foster collaboration and innovate daily – reshaping our approach to work and preparing us for continued growth. ∎

John Opgenorth is account executive at Synergy Technical

The importance of always being ready

A well-planned cyberattack can make all work grind to a halt and have numerous other business ramifications. Organisations must stay on top of security to thwart increasingly sophisticated hackers, says Jamf's Andrew Smeaton

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

There is a common thread between some of the largest, most complex and deadliest data breaches in recent history. In 2010, malware like Stuxnet disabled Iran's nuclear enrichment programme by infecting a contractor's laptop, which was used to perform updates on the supervisory control and data acquisition (known as SCADA) equipment. Threat actors stole data from Aadhaar – the largest ID database for 1.1 billion Indian citizens – including personally identifiable information (PII) and financial data in 2018 after gaining entry through an unprotected website linked to the database. And in 2021, a developer targeted LinkedIn, exploiting its API to scrape PPI from 700 million users before selling the data dump online. In these and similar cases, the attacks were made possible by targeting and compromising just one device. Since a business's security perimeter is not limited to the office anymore, all devices that access company data need to be trusted.

The Jamf Security 360: Annual Trends Report 2024 found that 40 per cent of mobile users have been running a device with known vulnerabilities. Why? They believe that their data would not be of interest to cybercriminals. However, as more critical business applications are run on mobile devices, these sensitive data repositories are increasingly subject to attacks that could be more effectively mitigated with better practices.

"While Apple makes incredibly secure operating systems, it has become an attractive target for attackers because of its growing popularity in the enterprise," says Andrew Smeaton, chief information security officer

at Jamf. "With more company data and apps on Apple work devices administrators must respond quickly to security incidents as they arise, rather than waiting for an issue to escalate. Fortunately, for most organisations, these risks can be effectively managed with the right tooling and processes. To actively manage the organisational security of Apple devices that run Microsoft software, we recommend that security teams follow a few crucial steps. Apple releases major operating system (OS) updates every year, so the first line of defence is keeping the OS on all devices up to date. Technologies like Jamf automatically configure native security settings, enrol devices securely, encrypt data, monitor compliance, and manage app security."

Jamf aims to help businesses achieve these steps by tracking their telemetry data to verify the security health status of each device. Technologies like Zero Trust Network Access (ZTNA) keep devices protected by checking endpoint health against a series of requirements to ensure they meet a minimum level of security before a user is granted access to requested resources.

"Adhering to the 'never trust, always verify' creed, a ZTNA solution like Jamf Connect

"With more company data and apps on Apple work devices administrators must respond quickly to security incidents as they arise"
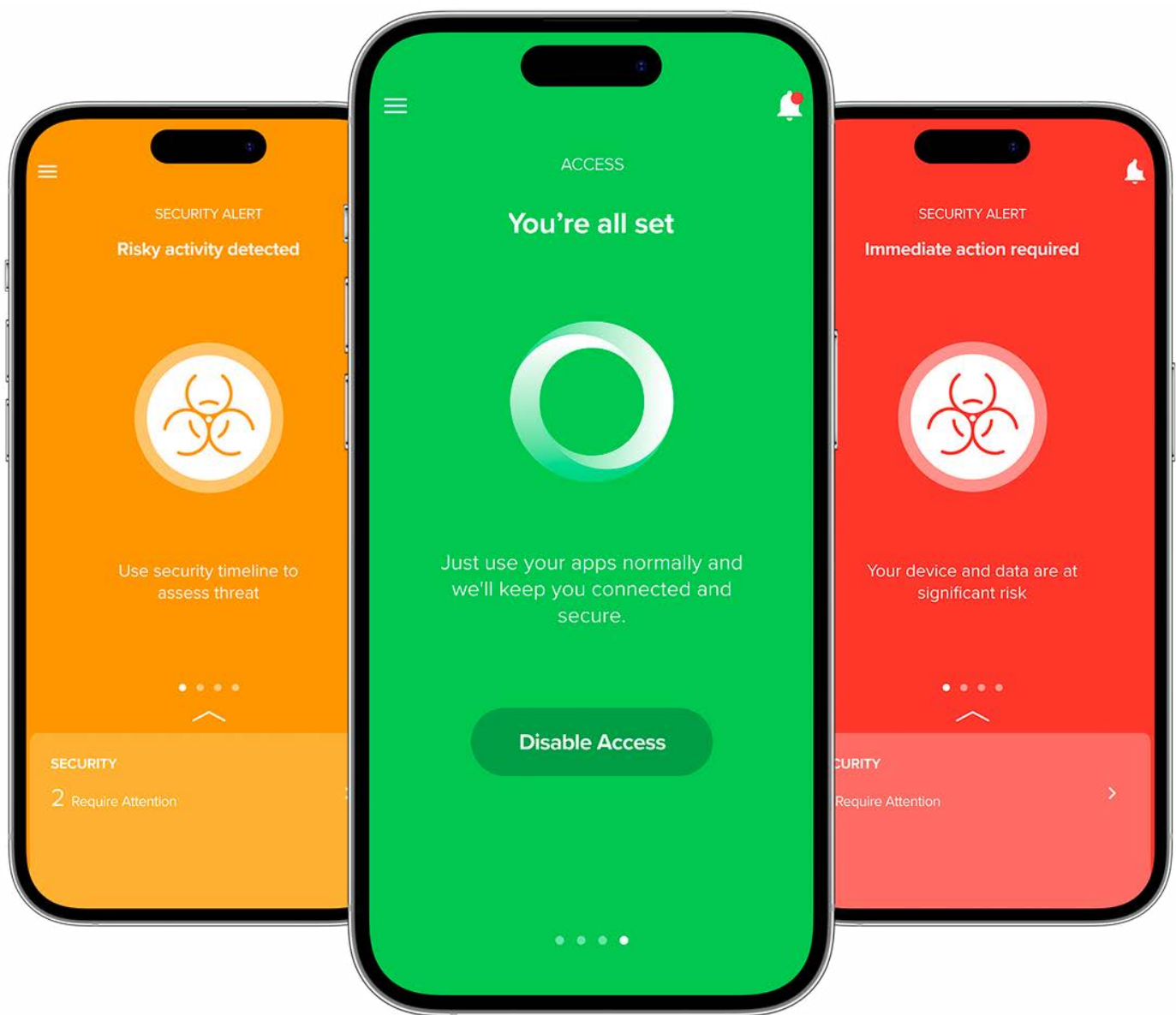
verifies that access is originating from an enrolled and trusted device, making identity and access management a cornerstone of your security strategy," says Smeaton. "Endpoint security solutions, like Jamf Protect, add a safety net to macOS, iOS, iPadOS, Android and Windows devices to ensure that they are safeguarded against suspected threats through analysis of on-device and in-network threats. These provide faster detection, quicker incident response and effective, automated threat mitigation and remediation workflows that don't compromise security, privacy or overall performance."

The University of Glasgow in Scotland uses both Microsoft and Jamf to manage and secure a fleet of Apple devices used by 8,000 staff members and 30,000 students. Jamf Connect and Jamf Protect are fully integrated with Entra ID and Microsoft Intune and report live into the security information and event management (SIEM) platform Microsoft Sentinel.

"Jamf Protect is built on native-Apple frameworks providing a deeper level of understanding of logs and events that happen on device," says Smeaton. "It pushes all Apple security data and events, as well as alerts allowing the university to seamlessly monitor and protect its Mac fleet through Sentinel, providing a unified view of security events across all endpoints and facilitates a more effective response to threats. This setup is ultimately what helped the university achieve its Cyber Essential+ certification."

This customer story exemplifies how integrations between Jamf and Microsoft solutions enable real-time reporting, improve identity management, security and compliance for IT, enhance security policies and enables seamless access control across its ecosystem. ■

The road to project management success

John Doran from Mission Essential Group and Jonathan Sanders from Entergy share their insights into project management and how Project Management Institute supports them on their journeys

BY AMBER HICKMAN

More than 1.5 million people worldwide have received the project management professional (PMP) certification from Project Management Institute (PMI) to date. The accolade demonstrates that they are able to lead campaigns in any industry, but what does it take to become a successful PMP?

John Doran, vice president and portfolio/programme manager at Mission Essential Group, a provider of intelligence and operations solutions, is a PMP and PMI agile certified practitioner and he believes three core skills are critical to effective project management. "You must know how to develop a structured framework for running projects, establish clear communication with stakeholders, and proactively manage risk and new opportunities," he says.

Jonathan Sanders, IT project manager for cybersecurity at integrated energy company Entergy, agrees that strong communication and flexibility are key.

"As a project manager I need to be able to clearly and effectively communicate with my teams to make sure we are on the same page and keep stakeholders and sponsors aware of project updates," he says. "We also need to be flexible to accommodate the potential changes that can arise and know when to adapt or refocus our team."

Project managers should also keep up to date with new tools and technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to learn how to implement it in their work and capitalise on the new opportunities it provides.

"AI advancements have become an asset in my role, transforming how I plan, automate and

execute tasks," says Doran, who uses various AI tools, including ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot to "assist with general writing clarity". He also uses PMI Infinity, PMI's AI-powered assistant designed to help project managers throughout their training and work.

"PMI Infinity has become a vital part of my project management toolkit," says Doran. "For example, I've leveraged it for defining project requirements, generating certification-related questions and developing the initial steps of our project processes."

Meanwhile Sanders is using PMI Infinity to prepare for the PMP exam. "I will ask it to give me a quick quiz of five or ten questions to keep me in the testing mindset throughout my workday," he explains.

AI also helps Sanders save time in his day-to-day tasks, so he can focus his time to where it's needed most.

> ## "AI advancements have become an asset in my role"
> JOHN DORAN, MISSION ESSENTIAL GROUP

"Another solution that has been a major benefit for me is Tactiq," he says. "It's a browser extension that connects to online meeting platforms such as Microsoft Teams and creates a full transcription of my calls. When I am done, the application can then generate a full meeting summary with action items. This not only saves

me time, but it also means I don't have to worry about writing down everything that is said, giving me the freedom to actively participate in the conversation."

PMI also supports PMPs with a range of resources, such as webinars, online courses and its *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* publication.

"These resources keep me motivated, updated on the current industry best practices and connected with a global network of project professionals," says Doran.

Project managers who are still working towards their PMP certification also have access to PMI Study Hall, which Sanders says has been an "amazing resource that has made preparing for the PMP easier and less intimidating".

In addition to using these resources, professionals can also take other proactive steps to further their project management knowledge and skills.

"Networking is essential," says Doran. "It opens doors to mentorship, knowledge sharing

and career growth. I'd advise starting with local PMI chapters, then expanding to regional and global involvement."

Sanders agrees. "There are so many amazing and knowledgeable project managers out there from whom you can gain so much insight, just by attending a few meetings a year."

"Technology can help us in so many ways"

JONATHAN SANDERS, ENTERGY

Sanders also emphasises the importance of "being curious with technology".

"Technology can help us in so many ways, but if you don't jump in and try it, you will never discover what benefits you could receive from just a little trial and error," he says. ∎

Networking through PMI chapters allows project managers to share knowledge and develop their skills

Shaping the future of work

Gary Keene, head of AV for University of the Arts London, discusses the benefits of AI, cybersecurity, sustainability and cost-effective solutions for the workforce

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

The Smart Workplace Summit, hosted at Integrated Systems Europe (ISE) 2025, will bring together experts from the systems integration and audiovisual (AV) industries to discuss technologies and solutions for distributed workforces. Gary Keene, head of AV for the University of the Arts London, and chair of the summit, addresses some of the key themes he will discuss at the event.

Which artificial intelligence-driven tools do you think will have the greatest impact on workforce efficiency?
AI-powered tools that reduce manual effort, increase speed and accuracy, and provide data-driven insights to optimise operations are likely to have the largest impact in the short-term by delivering scalable marginal gains at little or no cost.

The areas where they will have the most impact include analysing historical and real-time data to forecast future trends, identify risks and optimise operational decisions around staffing and inventory management. Other benefits include using conversational AI to create chatbots and virtual agents that can handle customer service and employee support tasks; automating repetitive, rules-based back-office processes with intelligent process automation; and making information more accessible and actionable for employees with natural language processing.

What challenges do organisations face in securing increasingly connected AV systems and how can they balance their security with their performance?
Many AV systems run embedded operating systems and software with known security

flaws, making them vulnerable to threat actors. Connected AV devices often lack strong authentication, authorisation and encryption, which exposes them to exploits related to the internet of things. Other challenges include remote management risks, siloed AV systems that complicate policy enforcement and hidden vulnerabilities in the supply chain.

"AI is transforming AV technology through innovations that enhance collaboration, maintenance, security and sustainability"

To address these, organisations should implement a zero-trust architecture and verify all users, devices and connections. A centralised unified endpoint management (UEM) platform enforces security policies across the AV infrastructure. Integration with extended detection and response platforms enables real-time threat detection, while network micro-segmentation isolates AV systems to limit threats. Regular device posture checks ensure compliance with security baselines. Lastly, training users on security best practices is essential for maintaining a strong security posture.

What steps can companies take to evaluate and reduce the environmental impact of their AV solutions?
The first step in creating sustainable AV systems is performing a lifecycle assessment to measure environmental impacts across raw

material extraction, energy use, transportation and end-of-life disposal. Organisations should then prioritise energy-efficient AV equipment with features like automatic power management, LED display backlighting and efficient internal components.

Sustainability efforts should include extending hardware lifespans through maintenance and upgrades, securely recycling e-waste and emphasising reuse over disposal. Also, educating users on sustainable practices maximises these efforts. Training should focus on how to use efficient power settings, reduce physical media and travel and adopt paperless workflows. Together, these measures make AV systems more environmentally responsible while maintaining high performance.

As conferencing technology becomes more commodified, concerns about quality and accessibility arise. How is this trend impacting the AV industry and what should organisations consider when choosing cost-effective solutions?

This trend has flooded the enterprise market with low-cost, feature-limited AV solutions, often at the expense of professional quality, performance and support. The technical impacts on the AV industry include increased price pressure, reliability concerns, interoperability challenges, and limited technical support and maintenance with commodity AV solutions often having reduced availability of firmware updates, spare parts and technical support.

As organisations balance budgetary constraints with the need for high-performance, accessible AV capabilities, they should evaluate key technical factors, including long-term total cost of ownership, after maintenance, support and upgrade expenses. They must also prioritise AV solutions that conform to industry standards. In addition, they should ensure that AV hardware and software meet relevant accessibility guidelines, such as captioning and screen-reader compatibility, and choose products that accommodate organisational growth.

What major trends or innovations do you expect will shape the AV industry in future?

AI is transforming AV technology through innovations that enhance collaboration, maintenance, security and sustainability.

Photo: iStock/AndreyPopov

Intelligent collaboration features like automated camera framing, speaker tracking and personalised AV experiences powered by AI make virtual meetings more fluid and inclusive. Meanwhile, predictive maintenance uses machine learning to optimise system uptime by identifying and addressing issues before they occur.

Security is also advancing, with AI supporting zero-trust architectures that verify users, devices and connections accessing AV systems. UEM integrates with advanced tools to ensure visibility, threat detection and rapid mitigation.

Sustainability is becoming a priority, driving the development of energy-efficient AV hardware with advanced power management and modular designs. Circular economy practices – including refurbishment, reuse and e-waste recycling – are streamlining lifecycle management. Additionally, transitioning AV workloads to virtualised, cloud-based platforms is reducing hardware footprints and energy demands, offering scalable and sustainable solutions for the industry. ■

Learn more about the Smart Workplace Summit taking place at ISE at: www.iseurope.org

Moving from chaos to Canvas

JEFF CHOW: MIRO

Employees face collaboration challenges, but Miro's Innovation Workspace, powered by Intelligent Canvas, integrates seamlessly with Microsoft tools, enabling streamlined workflows and AI-powered automation

When projects come together, it feels like a jolt of energy shoots through the company. But we've all had that feeling where the rush of early excitement gives way to the reality of corporate culture. Before you know it, you're maintaining 19 versions of the same document in five places for three teams with two competing goals. Your responsible, accountable, consulted, informed chart looks like someone dropped last night's spaghetti on a slide, and there's a project manager making threatening gestures with deadlines. It's impossible to think straight, never mind move fast.

"We've launched the Innovation Workspace to help companies cut through the tangled mess of complex workflows"

Organisations know this is a problem. In our recent survey of 3,000 global innovation leaders and information workers, Miro discovered that only 41 per cent of leaders think their processes actively encourage faster innovation, and that number drops to less than one-third for the employees doing the work. So, it's time to ask critical questions like 'do teams have the right insights and collective understanding of the problems they need to solve?', 'are they co-creating solutions effectively?' and 'are they agile enough to overcome roadblocks and do they feel empowered to change direction?'

We've launched the Innovation Workspace to help companies cut through the tangled mess of complex workflows, lost context and siloed information that is slowing them down. It's a single place where businesses can manage the entire lifecycle of their innovation efforts so teams can shift seamlessly from unstructured to structured work and back again, remove areas of friction, and progress from idea to outcome faster.

All of this is made possible by the Intelligent Canvas, which is an infinite playground designed for real-time visual collaboration, not just task-tracking or document storage. When teams work together on the canvas, they can take advantage of flexible formats and applications like tables, documents and presentations, so they can break down information silos, reduce the number of tools they're using, and get back to focusing on the thing that really matters – the craft of collaboration.

Our integration with the Microsoft ecosystem of productivity tools makes this even easier. With embedded Microsoft Office 365 links, your team can simply copy and paste a link to any PowerPoint, Power BI or Word document directly into Miro. And because the data is synced, any update made in the original document will automatically be applied to Miro, too.

Instead of the data residing in one place while the work gets done in another, your teams will have access to everything in the same place with Microsoft and Miro. That means less confusion, fewer delays, and more time spent on design and prototyping.

Introducing the

Intelligent Canvas

You ⟶ ✦ Miro AI

A new AI-powered way for teams to ideate, iterate, and deliver faster.

Watch the keynote
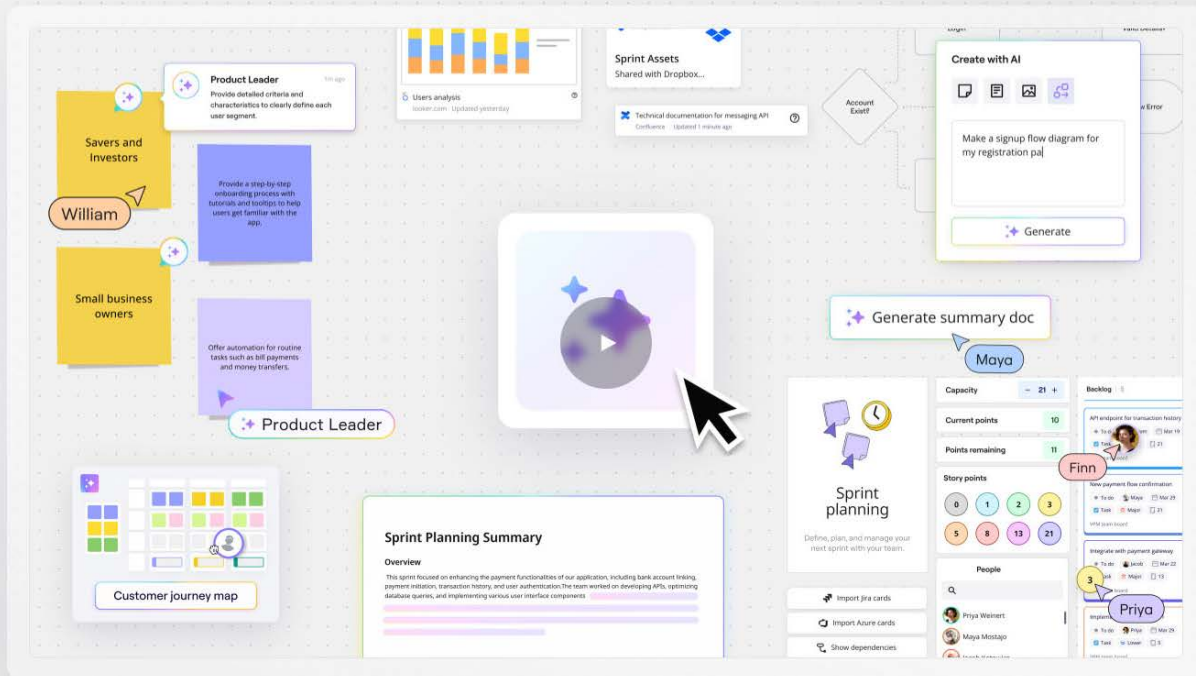
Of course, if we're talking about moving faster, we have to discuss artificial intelligence. We have a simple belief that AI should help teams at every stage of their work, whether it's turning ideas into something more, collaborating effectively, or getting projects over the line. Consequently, we've deeply embedded AI into the canvas to automate tasks like summarising comments, grouping insights or creating diagrams and prototypes from simple text prompts.

We're also joining forces with Microsoft to make it easier for teams to find the information they need, whether they're working on the canvas or off it. For example, if an employee asks their team to start work on a new product launch, there would be a Miro board to gather insights and feedback from customers, but the main communication channel is Microsoft Teams. To avoid hours of scrolling through messages to find the link to the board they need, users can ask Microsoft Copilot to find it instead. All they need to do is type a query into Copilot, and it'll provide a list of boards with a dedicated 'open in Miro' button. The user can then jump straight back into the canvas instead of getting lost in a maze of messages, allowing them to make faster decisions with key insights, and push the project forwards.

At Miro, we believe that innovation belongs on the canvas. But when you add Microsoft to the mix, it's even more powerful. It's where teams come together to discover, define and deliver ideas they're passionate about, using the tools they love. And it's how you hit the innovation accelerator for your enterprise. ◾

Jeff Chow is chief product and technology officer at Miro

Miro's Intelligent Canvas creates summaries, generates diagrams and provides instant feedback to employees

Refactor, replace or replatform

KEN GAMBON: KYNDRYL

The convergence of mainframes and cloud computing is reshaping how modern enterprises do business, but which migration method is the right one?

Kyndryl's 2024 *State of Mainframe Modernization Report* found that 96 per cent of organisations are moving, on average, at least 36 per cent of their workloads to the cloud.

A hybrid approach allows organisations to take advantage of the performance and security of mainframes while enjoying the flexibility offered by the cloud. However, modernising or moving mission-critical workloads to a cloud platform can be challenging as these have strict performance and security requirements.

Even if you plan to move an entire mainframe to the cloud, the migration will likely be done in stages. Since workloads and data will be in a hybrid environment during this process, firms need to take extra steps to help ensure ongoing access to data, security and fast connectivity.

One of the key decisions developers will have to make when migrating is whether to refactor, replace or replatform applications.

Refactoring app code is like renovating a kitchen. However, instead of changing out obsolete fixtures, restructuring existing code optimises app performance.

This approach makes sense when an app's original code is generally well written but needs to be updated to a newer programming language. For example, converting COBOL to .NET or Java. Although the refactored app functions much like the original, the updated code should improve overall efficiency, quality and maintenance.

Refactoring can take longer than other migration approaches because IT teams need to

fully understand the original code and business logic before converting it. However, refactored apps are often easier to maintain because there are more developers available with skills in modern languages to update the software.

Our team is refining commercial processes to refactor apps at scale on Microsoft Azure. We use a portfolio analyser tool to identify data dependencies on the overall mainframe landscape before converting the original code. To help detect and reduce errors, we also run apps on both the mainframe and the cloud

"The overarching goal should be to put the right workload on the right platform"

throughout the migration phase. Once converted to the new language, refactored apps function like .NET containers running on Azure. This approach enables software enhancements while keeping the existing business logic intact.

Out with the old and in with the new is the premise behind the replacement approach. It entails completely discarding old apps and starting from scratch with software-as-a-service or off-the-shelf products.

Replacing apps may be viable when older technology can no longer meet business needs or has become too complex to support. This method eliminates the need to rework existing software and maintain custom code, making

it a popular choice when developers lack the time or expertise to refactor older software. But replacement can be expensive, and IT teams must embrace new ways of working when deploying and learning to use the technology.

In November 2021, Kyndryl's chief information officer replaced existing systems with standardised apps and platforms whenever possible. The goal was to reduce IT complexity, technical debt and the total cost of ownership.

Over two years, we downsized our app portfolio from more than 1,800 business apps to fewer than 360. Ultimately, this technology transformation will play a significant role in lowering Kyndryl's selling, general and administrative expenses by $200 million.

Often called 'lift and shift', replatforming involves modifying older software to work in the cloud without rewriting its core architecture or drastically altering its functionality.

Replatforming is often the easiest way to move apps because it requires minimal changes to the underlying architecture and data. Although this approach reduces overall risk, long-term maintenance costs may be higher than replacing or refactoring an app.

We're currently helping a global communications provider control its infrastructure costs and derive richer insights from its data by moving critical mainframe apps and data to Azure. The cloud-based apps will connect to the customer's service management platform and support its artificial intelligence for IT operations estate model. Software that remains on the mainframe will integrate with data from a more comprehensive set of systems for analytics.

By 2026, we project replatforming will reduce an organisation's mainframe operating costs and energy consumption by 70 per cent, leading to savings worth more than $22 million annually.

Regardless of how a company approaches modernising mainframe apps, the overarching goal should be to put the right workload on the right platform. By aligning technology strategy and budget with long-term business objectives, organisations can choose a path that optimises performance and efficiency now and in the future. ■

Ken Gambon is director and principal of global engineering in Kyndryl's applications, data and AI practice

Solving information chaos with AI

VILLE SOMPPI: M-FILES

AI can help to unlock the power of companies' information assets, but successful implementation requires more than just technological solutions

Since the emergence of generative artificial intelligence, businesses have been eager to harness the power of the new technology. If used successfully, AI can be a powerful tool for transforming how organisations manage, analyse and leverage their information assets. However, successful implementation requires a holistic approach that goes beyond simple technology adoption.

One area which demonstrates the need for a balanced strategy are the productivity applications of Microsoft 365. These apps – including Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Teams, SharePoint and more – are used at all levels of most organisations around the world and are simple on an employee

"AI can help solve the problem of information chaos"

and team-wide level. They are, however, only a collection of tools. Businesses still require a strategy to oversee their effective use, and without a clear information management plan, a company of a certain size can accumulate hundreds or even thousands of data silos across different libraries, sites and channels. This makes valuable knowledge harder to find and leverage.

AI can help solve the problem of information chaos. Large language models can harvest insights from vast amounts of data and save a tremendous amount of time that workers would otherwise spend searching for information. However, the accuracy of this process is affected

by the quality of the data. If none of the content is classified and governed, the AI won't be able to tell the difference between a poorly written draft and a carefully crafted piece of knowledge from a subject matter expert.

For a generative AI app to be successful in addressing information chaos, it requires well-curated source content to build a robust index and a user prompt bolstered by additional contextual information. Optimally, the prompt offers an explicit context, such as limiting the answer to a specific type of project plan documents.

Implementing generative AI for information management therefore requires more than just technological solutions. Businesses must assess their readiness and establish proper governance structures.

The first step should be to develop a clear strategy for information management, knowledge utilisation and AI integration. This should align with overall company objectives and clearly articulate how generative AI will contribute to achieving these goals. Company leaders must understand the importance of managing information, and key stakeholders from various departments should be involved in defining this strategy to ensure it addresses their diverse needs and concerns while fostering a sense of ownership across the company.

Next, the company should establish and enforce effective data governance processes. Ideally, these should be automated to ensure consistency and compliance. Clear policies should be in place for data retention, organisation, classification and access control. One aspect to consider during this

step is deciding how to determine the relevance of data for AI processing, evaluating the potential value of different data types alongside the legal and ethical considerations of using them.

Companies should also assess the ability of their current IT infrastructure to support the content strategy and governance requirements they've developed. It is essential to ensure that systems and integrations can facilitate connectivity, confidentiality and curation. When evaluating generative AI solutions, consider factors such as vendor trustworthiness, pricing models and overall cost-benefit analysis. It's important to choose solutions that integrate well with existing systems and can scale to meet future needs.

The business should then take action to assess the current level of automation in their content processes and identify opportunities for expansion. The goal should be to progress from basic automation focused on consistency and compliance to more advanced apps that support decision-making and provide real-time insights. Implementing generative AI solutions often involves reimagining existing processes entirely, and organisations should look for opportunities to transform how work is done and how value is created.

The final step is to evaluate how well current content capabilities support end users across different functions and industries. Organisations must consider the varying needs of different user groups and ensure that AI enhances, rather than complicates, their work processes. Assessing the company's change management capabilities and end users' readiness to adopt new tools is equally important, as successful implementation often requires significant changes in work practices and mindsets. Businesses should invest in training programmes, create champions within different departments and develop a communication strategy to build enthusiasm and address concerns about AI adoption.

Businesses can position themselves to reap the full benefits of AI by following this framework and addressing the foundational elements of information management. The journey to effective AI implementation may be challenging, but the potential rewards – including enhanced productivity, improved decision-making and unlocked innovation – make it a worthwhile endeavour for forward-thinking leaders across all industries.

As we move further into the era of AI-augmented information management, the companies that navigate this transformation successfully will be well-positioned to thrive in an increasingly data-driven business landscape. ∎

Ville Somppi is senior vice president of industry solutions at M-Files

Valuable knowledge can be hard to locate within large organisations

Exploring the benefits of automation for use tax

GREG CHAPMAN: AVALARA

Managing use tax is a complicated and time-consuming process, but automation can help businesses to overcome its challenges

The sales tax landscape is complex and ever changing. In 2023 alone, there were 11,192 sales and use tax rate updates in the USA, and 85,836 taxability updates in the USA and Canada. While managing sales tax is complicated, that's just one side of the tax compliance coin. Managing use tax can be an even more complex and time-consuming process for businesses.

Audit risks are also high – a recent Avalara survey of accounts payable departments, accounting, finance and tax professionals found that of the respondents whose businesses had been audited within the past three years, 63 per cent said consumer use tax was a "substantial" part of the audit process.

"It's easy for businesses to make mistakes in use tax compliance"

Use tax is an indirect tax levied on the use, storage or consumption of tangible personal property or services, and is paid for by the purchaser. With so many different regions and tax changes, it's easy for businesses to make mistakes in use tax compliance.

Without the right systems and processes in place, underpayments and overpayments are inevitable, and both have financial implications and inherent risk. Businesses can benefit from streamlining vendor use tax management by automating complex tasks in the procurement process.

AvaTax for Accounts Payable helps businesses manage consumer use tax compliance within the AvaTax platform. The solution empowers businesses to use prebuilt integrations or APIs for management of use tax on their purchases, ensuring compliance with use tax regulations.

The AvaTax for Accounts Payable integration for Microsoft Dynamics 365 delivers accounts payable functionality into customer workflows. This ensures they can calculate accounts payable tax on purchase orders and invoices, adjust the amount charged by the vendor or the tax rate/percentage, review journal entries created with accounts payable tax accruals and post the entries to their general ledger.

A key benefit of AvaTax for Accounts Payable is its ability to check rates according to jurisdiction, product taxability and any special rules that may affect a sale. By identifying and correcting overbilled tax on purchases, the solution can keep businesses from overpaying.

Another benefit of the integration is the centralised configurations provided within AvaTax, which can apply to both real-time and batch transactions with a hybrid design. The solution is also designed to provide a single location for businesses to view, act on and report on purchase transactions.

Businesses using AvaTax for Accounts Payable will also be able to take advantage of other Avalara solutions. Built into the unified Avalara Platform, the solution delivers seamless integration with applications including Vendor Exemptions, Returns and Reporting. ■

Greg Chapman is senior vice president and general manager of AvaTax at Avalara

Making data make sense

JENNIFER BULACH: HEXAGON

The power industry must digitise the full asset lifecycle and optimise their data to meet the ever-increasing demand for cleaner energy

The energy sector is at a turning point. Players in this industry must continue to be a dependable source of power, yet they are also experiencing an incredible demand for change. According to McKinsey & Company's *Global Energy Perspective 2022*, some estimates suggest power demand will triple by 2050. This may be driven by trends for greater electrification as data centres need to enable artificial intelligence and more. In addition, McKinsey & Company's *The net-zero transition: What it would cost, what it could bring* report indicates that the power industry is also responsible for nearly one-third of carbon dioxide emissions. Consequently, it is expected to make significant change to help curtail climate change and align with customer demand for zero-carbon initiatives.

In response, the power industry – and the power generation, utilities, transmission and distribution, and engineering and construction firms that support their projects – faces several mandates driving significant capital expenditures. They include the need to upgrade existing aging facilities to improve efficiency and cost performance, find new sources of low-carbon power generation and invest in carbon capture, utilisation and storage to support the industry's sustainability goals. In addition, the power sector will need to upgrade the grid and transmission capacity to be able to connect new and distributed energy resources and invest in newer technologies, such as energy storage and electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

How can energy suppliers maintain affordability for customers, protect their own bottom line and innovate at the pace needed to keep up with (and surpass) expectations?

The answer is simple and complex in equal measures – energy companies must embrace the full potential of data by digitising the full asset lifecycle.

Hexagon's Asset Lifecycle Intelligence division leverages Microsoft Azure to enable wide accessibility of critical data that drives success. Its EcoSys integrated enterprise project performance platform helps companies optimise capital investment decisions, ensuring their projects reinforce strategic imperatives. Using the same data, organisations can monitor a project through to execution to mitigate cost and schedule risks, and dramatically improve outcomes.

By harnessing technology and capturing data, organisations can create a digital backbone that informs and supports essential processes throughout an industrial facility's lifecycle. Within Hexagon's HxGN SDx2, AI-empowered 'data take-on' capability captures and contextualises engineering and asset data so it is easy to find and action. This contributes to greater asset reliability, lowered operational risks, reduced downtime and increased efficiency, while ensuring regulatory compliance.

By capturing and interpreting operational and engineering data effectively through technology, companies can bolster their facilities, equipment and workforce. With over 50 years of experience, Hexagon has the expertise to help companies in the power sphere to make their data make sense, so they can form data-driven decisions and achieve sustainable success. ■

Jennifer Bulach is executive industry consultant for power utilities at Hexagon's Asset Lifecycle Intelligence division

Will AI make sustainable energy a reality?

Jim Chappell of AVEVA explains how data and AI can empower organisations in the energy sector to achieve sustainable transformation

BY REBECCA GIBSON

Artificial intelligence is much more than just one technology – it comprises expert systems, machine learning (ML) programmes, prescriptive and prognostic models, reinforcement learning, large language models (LLMs) and generative AI. Jim Chappell, global head of AI and advanced analytics at AVEVA, explains how this broad spectrum of AI technologies work together with the cloud, data management and analytics solutions to provide utility companies with powerful insights and capabilities to optimise their operational sustainability.

How is AI being used to make the energy sector more sustainable?
AI-infused solutions can turbocharge industries' progress towards efficiency and sustainability. Although AI has been helping to lower carbon emissions for many years, we have only scratched the surface of its potential in the overall area of sustainability. For example, predictive analytics can quickly identify underperforming assets or incorrect control settings that result in additional fuel being burned and generating excess greenhouse gas emissions.

Furthermore, ML systems can help predict energy consumption. For example, data-driven AI can be combined with physics-based simulation to better emulate operations as part of a grey-box modelling system.

Carbon capture simulation is another area where AI can support sustainability. AI can also help make renewable and alternative fuels, such as wind and green hydrogen, more economically viable and competitive with traditional sources, thus accelerating the global green energy transition. All of these factors will support industrial companies on their journey to net zero.

These types of AI solutions do not involve training massive LLMs, so they don't consume large volumes of power. In the case of grey-box modelling, where AI models replace physics-based models, AI runs substantially faster, thus requiring significantly less energy than its alternative.

As AI evolves and becomes more objective-driven, it will play an ever larger role in climate change control and overall sustainability. This will also include more AI-driven closed-loop control for optimal performance.

What types of industrial insights can AI-powered solutions offer?
Using AI models trained on various types of historical data allows utility companies to more accurately predict demand, manage varying energy sources, forecast asset failure and fine-tune their operations. For example, AI can analyse sensor data from many types of energy storage systems and zero-carbon power generation, including wind, solar, nuclear, hydroelectric and geothermal. AI can detect problems long before a human or other type of software can, significantly increasing operational efficiency and reliability.

In addition, AI can model alternative energy production, including green hydrogen. Large

"As AI evolves and becomes more objective-driven, it will play an ever larger role in climate change control"

advances can be achieved by using AI models intermixed with physics-based simulation.

AI black-box models run hundreds of times faster than a corresponding physics model and are much easier to set up, enabling them to identify issues in near-real time. Furthermore, by combining prescriptive, prognostics and predictive analytics, organisations can optimise resource allocation and minimise waste, resulting in significant savings.

How can organisations use AI to identify energy-saving opportunities?
On the demand side, AI-driven energy management systems are empowering consumers and businesses to take charge of their own energy usage. By analysing consumption patterns and providing personalised recommendations, these

applications promote energy efficiency and reduce costs.

For example, US-based utility provider Dominion Energy is using AVEVA's CONNECT Data Services, powered by Microsoft Azure, to collect and share real-time data on energy sources and power flows. This enables customers to track their usage, supporting their progress toward net-zero goals.

In what ways can AI help to track and reduce global carbon emissions?
AI-powered models can predict the impact of operational changes, enabling companies to make real-time adjustments for efficiency and cost savings. For instance, AVEVA is working with TotalEnergies to monitor over 110 greenhouse gas reduction projects. Data from various global operational sites is fed

directly into dashboards at the company's French headquarters using AVEVA's PI System. After verifying and contextualising the data, the team analyses performance and measures results against specific key performance indicators. This enables them to monitor 85 per cent of emissions accurately and use AI models to forecast the impact of operational changes. In one case, optimising power delivery at a single site cut carbon emissions by 15 per cent annually. Scaling this approach across TotalEnergies' portfolio could result in tens of thousands of tonnes of carbon savings each year.

Another example involves predictive and prognostic AI being implemented at a major US power producer as part of an overall reliability-centred maintenance programme. When a generating unit was brought back online after repairs, an operator inadvertently set the extraction steam temperature too low. Thankfully, predictive analytics caught this issue very early, so the company was able to quickly fix the problem, allowing it to prevent 2,000 tonnes per week of excess carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere and saving 100,000 gallons of water.

What role does open-source technology play in amplifying AI-infused solutions?
Open-source collaboration can accelerate the potential of AI and ML-enhanced energy networks. Open technologies establish a shared language for data exchange, ensuring compatibility across different systems. This enables data from sources like sensors, smart meters, weather stations and maintenance logs to be seamlessly integrated and analysed together.

Historically, the proprietary nature of energy systems limited innovation. Today, open technologies allow data and ideas to be shared across departments, companies, industries and countries, driving deeper collaboration and faster progress in the energy sector.

How will quantum computing impact the future of AI and energy efficiency?
AVEVA recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Oxford Quantum Computing to explore how quantum power can reduce the energy load of AI. A Forbes study suggests that simple quantum apps can cut energy use by up to 50 per cent. Currently, it takes the equivalent energy of running 47 US

Photo: Adobe Stock/zhengzaishanchu

homes for a year to fire up a supercomputer, while it takes the energy needed to boil just seven kettles of water to run a quantum computer.

However, quantum has a number of hurdles to cross in order for it to become mainstream. It is prone to error, susceptible to noise, requires complex hardware and lacks scalability and reliability. A lot of work is being done to overcome these challenges. In the future, quantum is likely to provide a very energy-efficient alternative to intensive computing, such as AI.

Can you give an insight into how AI will transform AVEVA's operations?
Successful AI implementation will depend on building partnerships that drive large-scale innovation. A prime example is our collaboration with Microsoft, where we leverage AVEVA's industrial expertise in the cloud to benefit customers worldwide. This approach is crucial to delivering the advantages of AI at scale.

Additionally, we are actively working with governments and our industrial clients to continually refine AI models, enhancing efficiency and supporting the energy transition. ■

Learn more about the advantages of implementing AVEVA's industrial AI-based solutions at: bit.ly/3ZzcBhE

AI can analyse sensor data from wind turbines to forecast asset failure and optimise performance

The missing piece in organisational sustainability efforts

FAITH TAYLOR: KYNDRYL

Businesses must learn how to leverage data and AI tools to translate their climate commitments into real outcomes

Despite the global population becoming increasingly aware of the detrimental effects of climate change and environmental destruction, the progress made towards addressing these challenges has been slower than expected.

According to the United Nation's *2024 Emissions Gap Report*, there is a "massive gap between the rhetoric and reality", and the worldwide effort to restrain the temperature increase to 1.5C will remain a distant dream if countries don't start delivering on their environmental commitments.

"Technology is becoming a powerful catalyst for driving action and predicting future risks"

We are witnessing a similar trend in the enterprise world, with 84 per cent of organisations placing high strategic importance on achieving sustainability goals, according to the Kyndryl-Ecosystm *2024 Global Sustainability Barometer Study*. The report, which reflects on the perspectives of 1,355 global sustainability leaders surveyed from 20 countries and nine industry groups between August and September 2024, also found that only 19 per cent of businesses have implemented concrete sustainability initiatives.

Several factors contribute to this wide gap between enterprise intent and action. They include limited integration of sustainability into business strategy, the limited availability of resources and skills, and lack of coordination among key internal stakeholders.

While it's encouraging to see more CEOs getting involved in defining organisations' sustainability strategies, they must build a culture of synergy and collaboration, especially in finance and sustainability teams, and leverage the power of technology to translate their vision into measurable outcomes.

Technology, especially data analytics and artificial intelligence, is becoming a powerful catalyst for driving action and predicting future risks. Most teams are focused primarily on using this technology to track their environmental impact and, while that's an essential area, organisations are missing out on a bigger opportunity to use technology to transform their overall environmental footprint and predict their future potential.

The Kyndryl-Ecosystm study highlights several of the areas where technology can significantly impact sustainability initiatives. For starters, it found that only 21 per cent of organisations globally recognise the dual role technology plays in reducing their carbon footprints and

AI for impact: a proactive approach

How does your organisation use data and AI to reduce, manage and report on its global environmental footprint?

62%
Monitor energy usage and emissions

56%
Identify high energy use

51%
Highlight opportunities for lowering carbon footprint

45%
Flag suppliers with high carbon emissions

34%
Recognise inefficiencies

34%
Support circular economy through manufacturing defects reduction and reuse

30%
Predict and prepare for natural disasters
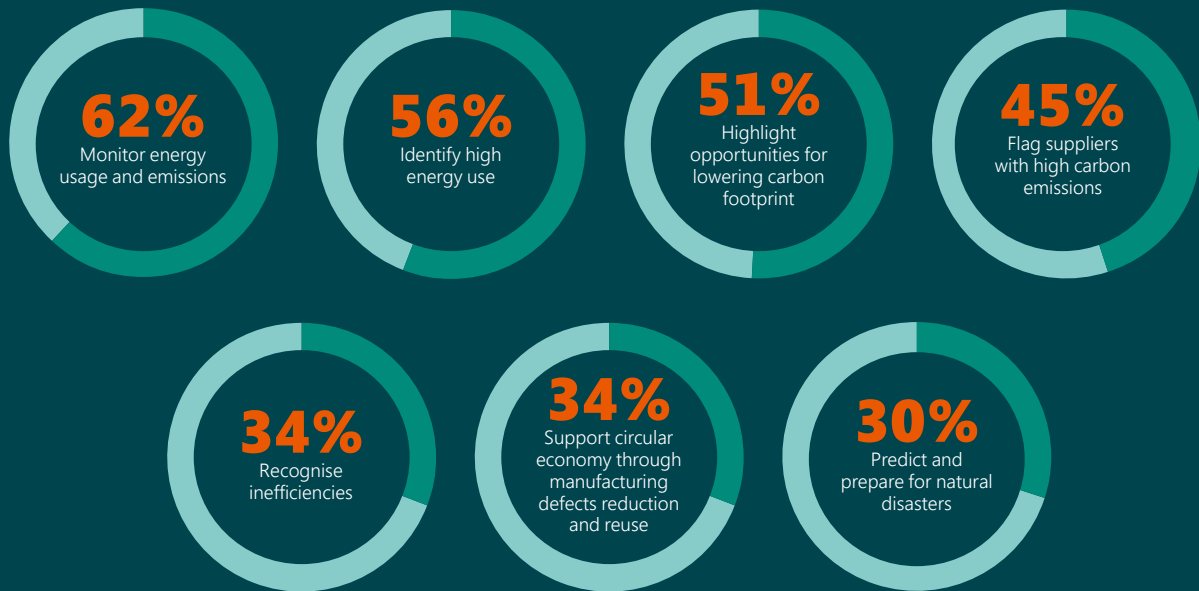
Source: *2024 Global Sustainability Barometer Study*

advancing broader sustainability goals. If organisations start to examine how they can integrate technology into their strategies, they can soon turn abstract goals into actionable, data-driven plans.

Secondly, while 54 per cent of businesses incorporate sustainability goals into existing reporting processes, only 19 per cent fully utilise their data for strategic planning and decision-making.

Most organisations now have a robust data platform with a variety of inputs, and if they begin to integrate their sustainability data with operational and financial data, they can discover the insights needed to deliver on commitments and drive resilience. Not only will this help them get an integrated view of their operations, but it will also help establish authentic baselines and set realistic goals.

Finally, whilst anyone can pick up an AI tool and start using it, knowing how to use it efficiently can provide immense potential for sustainability.

The study reports that 55 per cent of organisations believe AI will significantly impact their goals. However, 62 per cent currently limit their use of AI to simply analysing historical data for monitoring and reporting. If organisations invest in and leverage AI-powered scenario planning and climate risk mitigation, they can adopt a more holistic approach to environmental responsibility.

The *2024 Global Sustainability Barometer Study* underscores the importance of bridging the sustainability-technology divide and provides valuable insights for business leaders looking to drive meaningful change. By examining the roles that strategy, data and AI play in achieving sustainability goals, not only will organisations be better equipped to take the next steps in their sustainability journey, but they will have the information they need to trigger real change.

The integration of technology into sustainability strategies is key to unlocking the full potential of sustainable business growth. It's time for organisations to leapfrog from sustainable technology to technology for sustainability. ■

Faith Taylor is chief corporate citizenship and sustainability officer at Kyndryl

A game-changer for Teams

Microsoft's Ilya Bukshteyn discusses the introduction of AI into the platform, plus new features, industry applications and the benefits of a partner ecosystem

BY AMBER HICKMAN

Microsoft Teams launched as part of the Microsoft 365 suite in 2017, with a free-to-use version available in 2018, and has since developed into a key collaboration platform that is supporting organisations across every industry as the workplace continues to evolve.

In the first quarter of 2024, the total number of active Teams users worldwide hit 320 million per month and continues to grow. According to Ilya Bukshteyn, vice president of Microsoft Teams calling, devices and premium experiences, this rapid growth is "a testament to the value customers find in using Teams for communications and collaboration".

Bukshteyn attributes the platform's success to a variety of features, including everything from the built-in chat and call functionalities to the meeting scheduling and collaborative tools. "Teams is a one-stop shop for all your communication and productivity needs," he says.

Another benefit is that Teams integrates with other Microsoft 365 applications, allowing users to access and share documents, spreadsheets, presentations and more without leaving the platform.

To ensure users consistently get the most out of their Teams experience, Microsoft works to continuously update the platform with new capabilities that boost productivity and make collaboration more efficient. In particular, the introduction of artificial intelligence capabilities has been a "game-changer", according to Bukshteyn.

One of the key AI features in Teams is the new Interpreter agent, which was revealed at Microsoft Ignite 2024 and provides real-time interpretation in up to nine languages. This enables meeting participants to speak and listen in the language of their choice for a more inclusive experience.

Other examples include the Intelligent Recap feature, which generates AI-generated summaries of meetings, and IntelliFrame, which provides optimised views of the meeting room to external participants. IntelliFrame also offers

"Teams is a one-stop shop for all your communication and productivity needs"

Photo: Migros

a speaker recognition feature, which ensures that quotes from people speaking in the room are correctly attributed in Intelligent Recap summaries, meeting transcripts and Microsoft 365 Copilot.

As with any new product, Microsoft employees like Bukshteyn try out new tools and features themselves to ensure they will provide value for customers.

"One feature I now rely on every day is background noise suppression and voice isolation," he says. "I split my work time between the office and home, and when I'm working from home, I trust those features to block out any kind of background noise which might be distracting."

Applications for every industry
The versatility of Teams means that different teams in different organisations in any industry can leverage the platform in a way that best suits their specific needs.

Migros reduced costs by 30 per cent after introducing Teams and Teams Phone to its employees
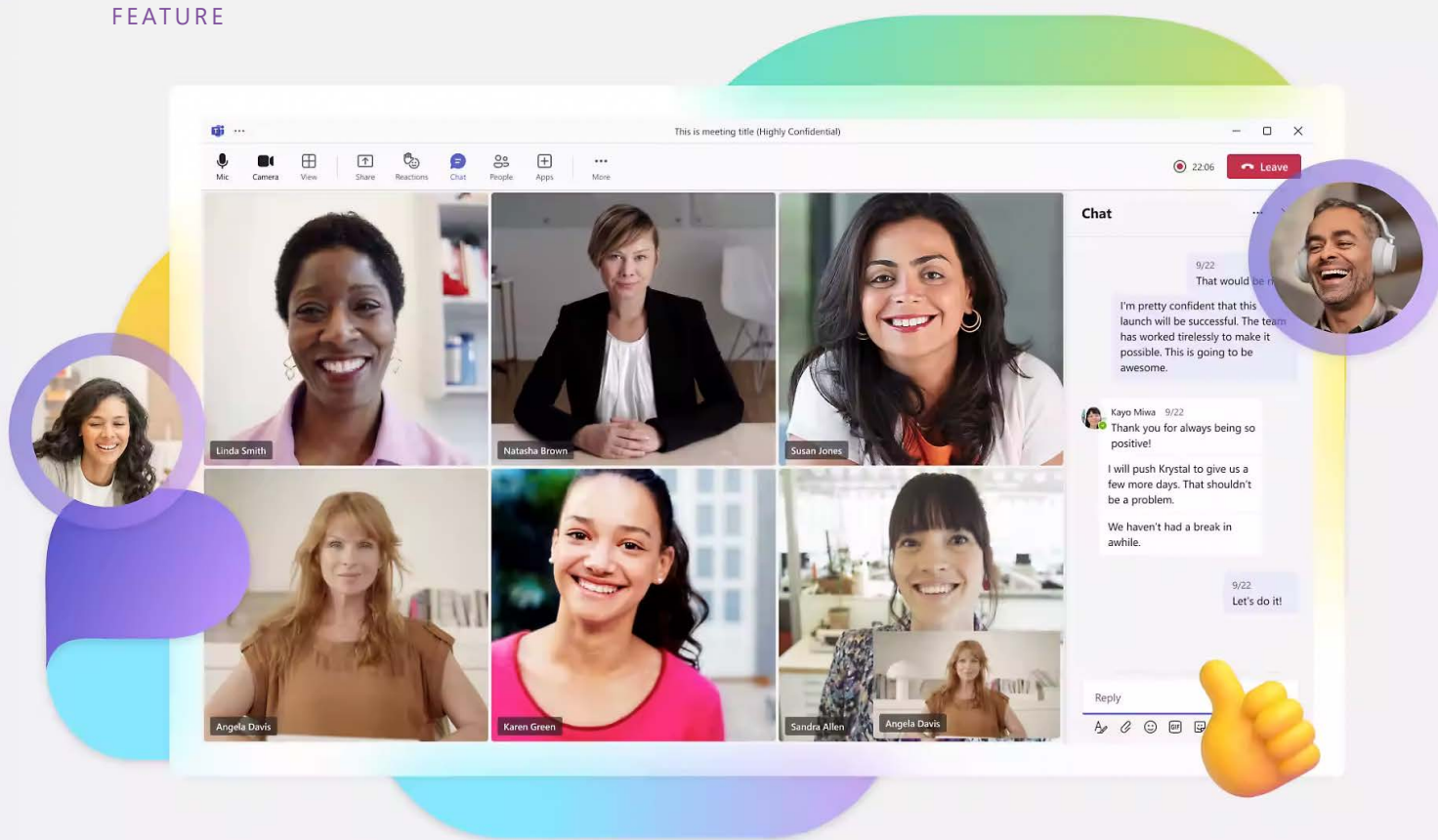
Companies, for example, can use Teams Rooms and Places to help employees better coordinate their in-office time. The tool provides hybrid employees with suggestions on when to come into the office based on coworker status, daily meetings and space availability, providing a more inclusive experience and optimising their time.

"Today's workplace requires flexibility and collaboration," says Bukshteyn. "Whether an organisation offers flexible working to their employees, or regularly communicates with external entities, hybrid work is a staple of today's work environment. We see teams make the most of our workplace tools when they can get the most out of their in-person connection time and have seamless communication experiences, regardless of their location."

Meanwhile, frontline workers can use Teams Phone to stay connected with their coworkers and make calls over the internet or through a traditional phone network. The solution includes traditional telephone features like voicemail, call forwarding and speed dial but also brings in new capabilities from Teams, such as intelligent call recaps.

Meanwhile, customer service agents in call centres can use tools such as the Queues application for Teams, which helps organisations to manage call queues and automatic attendants within Teams. It also provides users with real-time metrics such as average wait time so supervisors can analyse trends and performance.

"Teams make the most of our workplace tools when they can have seamless communication experiences, regardless of their location"

In early 2024, Turkish supermarket chain Migros introduced Teams and Teams Phone to 6,300 users across 3,300 stores. The brand wanted to improve communication between employees and locations and deliver training materials easily.

The migration to Teams allowed Migros to eliminate physical and wireless phones in large

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Seamlessly migrate any legacy or proprietary calling data.

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areas such as warehouses, which improved efficiency and reduced costs by 30 per cent.

The move also improved frontline employee productivity, with a reported 15 per cent time saved on routine tasks. Administrative staff also benefited from the shift due to their newfound ability to manage domestic and international calls via Teams.

Power-up through partnership

To ensure it can fulfil the requirements of different organisations and consistently deliver an efficient Teams experience, Microsoft works with key partners to provide a range of hardware and software solutions that can be integrated with, or added on to, the platform. For instance, organisations that require hardware such as audiovisual devices and displays or room-booking panels can obtain these from certified partners like Crestron, Epos, Jabra and Shure.

"We work hard with industry leaders that build devices designed to meet stringent requirements in order to be certified for Teams," says Bukshteyn. "This certification programme sets a high standard to assure customers that these devices offer excellent audio and video quality, as well as a seamless integration with Teams."

Meanwhile, partners such as CallCabinet, CallTower, Jamf, Spectralink and Tollring offer software solutions that support organisations with analytics, device management, regulatory compliance and more.

"On the software side, Teams offers a powerful platform that allows our rich ecosystem of independent software vendors to build solutions that can enhance the platform," says Bukshteyn. "These solutions focus on high-end contact centres, compliance recording and more, allowing customers to meet their business communication needs. Microsoft provides a certification programme in this area too."

Microsoft also works with its partners to discover potential use cases for Teams and test new features that can improve efficiency. For example, as part of its collaborative relationship with Microsoft, the EY Global Tax team had the opportunity to preview Copilot in its early stages to see how it could apply generative AI to its solutions. EY Global Tax collaborated with Microsoft to build a proof of concept for a Teams plugin that allows users to access data, generate reports and discover analytics through natural language queries.

The EY Global Tax team expects to see time-saving benefits from the tool. For example, if an employee is in a meeting and a question comes up, they can ask Copilot and receive an answer immediately, rather than having to leave Teams and access the data elsewhere.

Once the EY Global Tax team has proven the value of the tool and Copilot within its organisation, it will start demonstrating to its clients how they can use the technology to manage their own internal data.

A collaborative future

As the world of work continues to evolve and organisations discover new uses for tools such as AI, Bukshteyn predicts that Teams has an "incredibly promising" future.

"Over the next year we anticipate significant advancements in Teams to further enhance its capabilities and the overall user experience," he says. "One of the key priorities of focus will be the integration of AI across all areas, from meetings to chat to calls."

Furthermore, with over one million Teams Rooms licences already established, Microsoft aims to continue to support the evolving needs of modern workplaces by enhancing capabilities in a variety of spaces such as formal meeting rooms, hot desks and 'bring your own device' spaces.

The new Windows 365 Link, which will be available from April 2025, is one example. The cloud PC solution will allow employees to connect to their Windows 365 desktop wherever they have access to a monitor, with high-fidelity support for Teams to provide hybrid and remote work environments.

In addition, Microsoft will continue to focus on use-case specific capabilities to enhance the Teams experience for different industries and business needs.

"While Teams is often thought of as a tool mostly for collaboration, we're excited to find ways to expand use cases for the platform by building deeper integrations into core business workflows," says Bukshteyn. "We are committed to investing in the capabilities, technologies and partnerships to help our customers succeed in their digital transformation journeys." ◼

Features such as IntelliFrame provide external attendees with an optimised view of the meeting room

NO DESK? NO PROBLEM.

S Series DECT handsets, now with Microsoft Teams fully integrated.
Used by the world's most productive deskless teams.

Hear and be heard clearly.
Clear voice, noise suppression, and optimized sound features help convey important information the first time.

Improve workforce safety.
Integrated panic buttons and motion detection alarms for peace of mind and help in emergencies.

Go further with Microsoft Teams.
An advanced Microsoft Teams integration boosts workforce collaboration and productivity.

Partner perspectives

We asked selected Microsoft partners how their solutions are enhancing
the impact of Microsoft Teams in the workplace

"Anywhere365's unique advantage is that it integrates the Teams platform with previously isolated systems, like customer relationship management and IT service management, and enhances it with AI and advanced dialogue management capabilities. This enables anyone in the organisation to leverage these tools, making Teams the best platform to deliver a fully fledged customer engagement solution. Partnering with Microsoft Azure Communication Services and Teams gives agents a unified interface, reducing the need to switch screens between tasks and improving customer support efficiency."
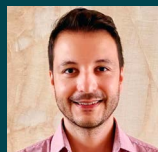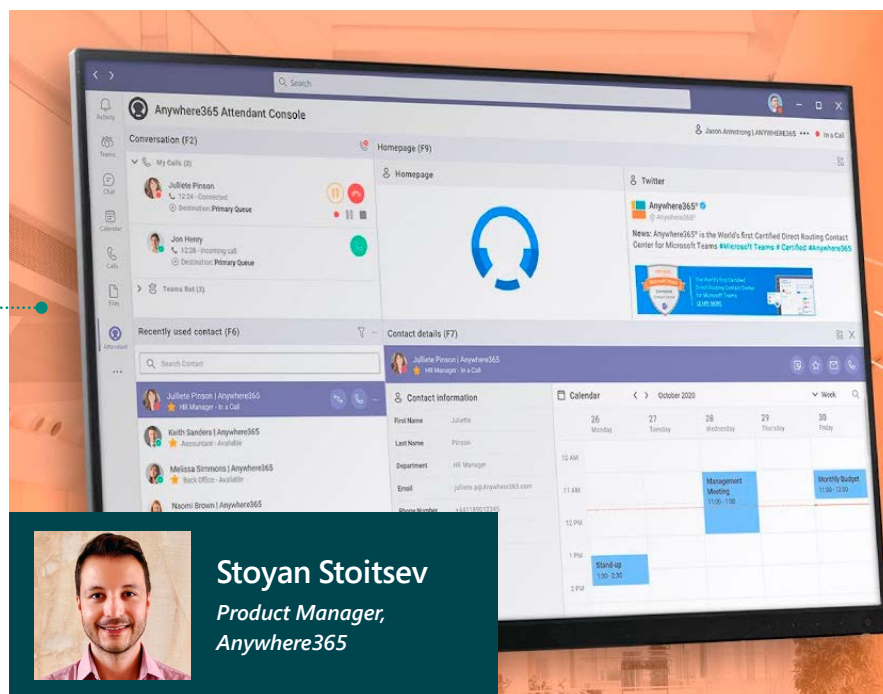
Stoyan Stoitsev
*Product Manager,
Anywhere365*

Simon Peters
*Managing Director, EMEA,
CallCabinet*

"For organisations navigating the complexities of hybrid Teams deployments, CallCabinet provides a comprehensive solution that eliminates compliance gaps with unsurpassed granular policy controls, ensures consistent recording across all devices and platforms and offers powerful analytics to support business objectives.

CallCabinet gives users direct control over recordings via its Teams app add-in and can be embedded at a global system for mobile communications network level. By integrating seamlessly in hybrid Teams environments, CallCabinet's calling and analytics solutions deliver the compliance and call data security required to operate confidently and most effectively in today's dynamic business landscape."

Paul Holden
Vice President of Sales, EMEA, CallTower

"At CallTower, we enhance Teams' impact in the workplace by integrating flexibility, productivity and resiliency into our solutions. For example, we improve customer service with solutions like Five9, Solgari and Webex Contact Center, which are seamlessly integrated with Teams for hybrid workers.

Plus, Teams Mobile ensures that Teams functionality is fully accessible on the go, offering seamless communication and collaboration for remote and mobile workforces. And our SMS and MMS texting within Teams – supported by multilingual translation – enables effective communication for mobile workforces.

These integrated solutions provide a robust Teams experience that empowers organisations to be more connected, responsive and prepared for any challenge."

"CentrePal has been built from the ground up for Teams and is revolutionising how organisations handle customer engagement. The solution seamlessly integrates enterprise-grade contact centre capabilities into Teams, enabling businesses to manage everything from voice calls, chats and emails to AI-powered self-service channels, without needing to switch platforms or windows. CentrePal amplifies the impact of Teams in the workplace by transforming it into a complete customer engagement hub, helping organisations to unlock its full potential beyond internal collaboration. This integration delivers immediate improvements in efficiency and customer service delivery, reducing operational complexities, all while enabling businesses to leverage their existing investments in Teams."
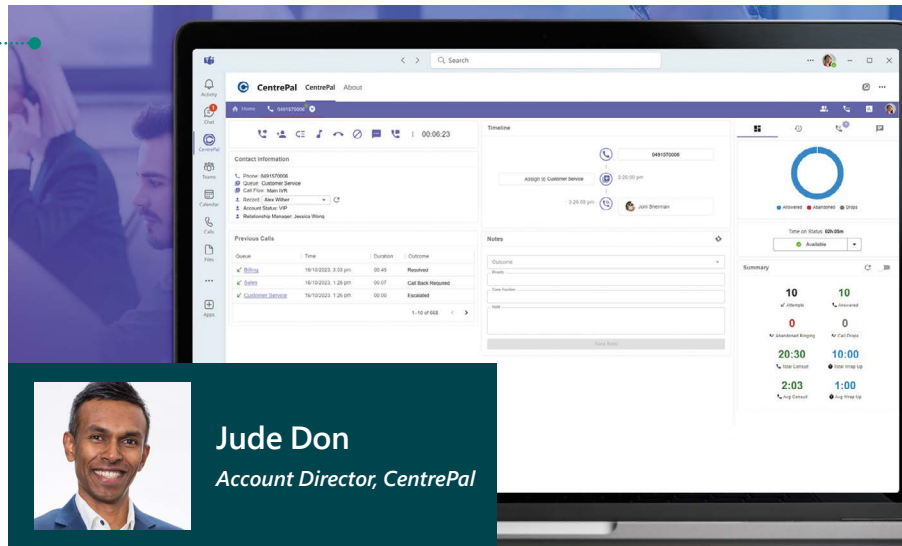
Jude Don
Account Director, CentrePal

Brad Hintze
Executive Vice President, Global Marketing, Crestron

"Crestron provides a wide variety of solutions to enhance the impact of Teams in the workplace, but the common thread through all of them is seamless integration between our hardware and software solutions and the Teams platforms. Features such as one-touch control are at the heart of what we do. Beyond that, our quality has been recognised by Microsoft itself. In fact, the team at Microsoft turned to Crestron to help outfit its Signature Teams Rooms. At the heart of that room are our Automate VX solution and its 1 Beyond cameras, an intelligent video system built for high-impact spaces where a simple webcam won't do."

"Whether they are used in a huddle room, group collaboration space, faculty office or boardroom, DTEN-certified systems for Teams Rooms pack powerful AI-enhanced video meeting technology into elegant solutions to instantly transform any space into an epicentre for hybrid work success. DTEN solutions for Teams Rooms are cleverly designed to boost meeting engagement and productivity with professional quality 4K camera, microphone, speaker and display systems. DTEN systems can be set up in minutes, with simple, easy-to-use controls and built-in Teams Rooms software. Users can simply tap the screen to launch professional AI-driven Teams meetings."

Hadar Carmel
*General Manager,
EMEA Sales, DTEN*

"Jabra's research shows that 80 per cent of meetings include at least one remote participant, but they often miss out on what's happening in the room. The Jabra PanaCast 50 video bar makes Teams meetings more inclusive and engaging for everyone. The unique 180-degree field of view fits everyone in the picture and covers every part of the room. Intelligent features such as multi-stream Dynamic Composition provide a close-up view of meeting room participants by giving individuals their own video stream, as well as showing a panoramic view of the entire room. Everyone can be seen and heard, enhancing productivity and collaboration."

James Spencer
*Video Solutions Director,
Jabra*
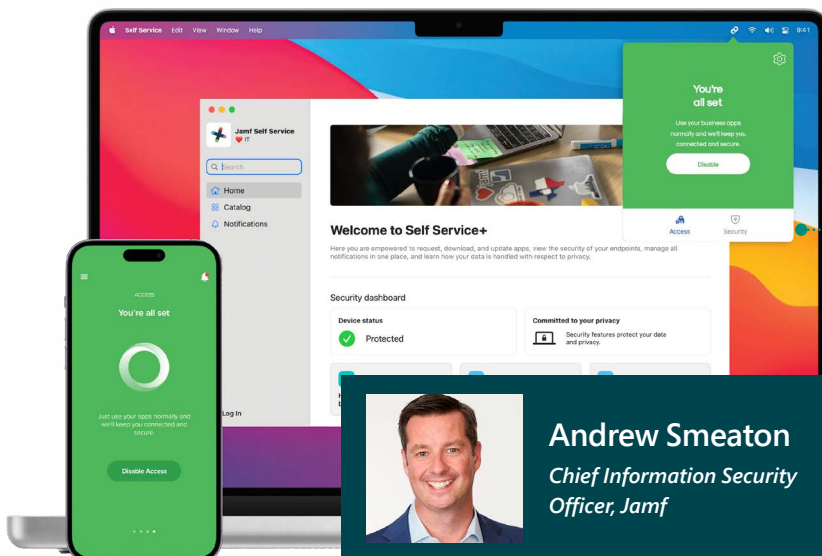
Andrew Smeaton
*Chief Information Security
Officer, Jamf*

"For users to fully benefit from Teams, it must be deployed on both company and personal devices used for work. With Jamf Pro, IT teams can seamlessly deploy and update Teams, along with other Microsoft productivity apps, across all devices. To ensure secure access to company data within Teams, Jamf integrates with cloud identity providers like Entra ID for identity and access management, while also offering endpoint security solutions. This combination protects devices, apps and users, maintaining a trusted environment."

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■ Stop tracking

Elevate Your Hybrid Experiences with AI

Intelligent presenter tracking and audio-based camera switching

Q-SYS VisionSuite enhances the visibility of participants in the room, providing a more natural viewing experience for remote attendees and enabling teams to feel connected and engaged, regardless of their location. It features AI-enhanced computer vision technology, intelligent audio-based automatic camera switching, flexible camera options, and vision-driven room automation.

Q-SYS®

"Lenovo offers a full portfolio of certified solutions for Teams. With modern computing, driven by intuitive controllers and supported by advanced software and services, Lenovo's ThinkSmart solutions enable customers to create more employee-centric experiences in every meeting.

AI is poised to evolve meeting experiences to new levels and Lenovo is ready to help businesses benefit. Powered by the Intel Core Ultra processor with an integrated neural processing unit, the ThinkSmart Core Gen 2 significantly accelerates computation and data transfer, enhancing AI tasks and making operations more efficient, while consuming up to 40 per cent less power. The ThinkSmart Core Gen 2 Full Room Kit for Teams Rooms is a single stock-keeping unit option that adds the intelligent ThinkSmart Bar 180, featuring Edge AI-enabled cameras and precision voice detection."

Shannon MacKay
General Manager, Worldwide Smart Collaboration Business, Lenovo

"Miro is an innovation workspace designed to adapt to any organisation's technology stack and features integrations with over 160 workplace apps, including Teams. Miro's plugin for Copilot enhances Teams collaboration with AI-driven features like keyword, date and title searches across all Miro boards. Users can drive asynchronous productivity with embedded boards into Teams channels and get real-time notifications on board activity. This integration streamlines workflows, boosts collaboration and helps teams make data-driven decisions more efficiently. Miro's flexibility makes it an essential tool for improving productivity and collaboration in the modern workplace."
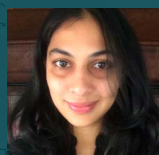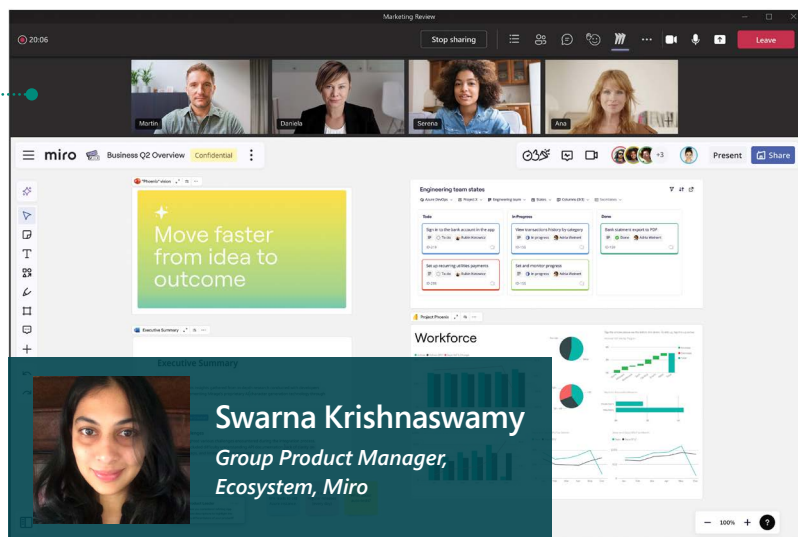
Swarna Krishnaswamy
Group Product Manager, Ecosystem, Miro

"Q-SYS delivers a cloud-manageable, fully integrated audio, video and control platform that enables complete solutions for high-impact spaces such as divisible and flex rooms, all-hands spaces and executive boardrooms, all while maintaining the user reliability and familiarity of a fully certified Microsoft Teams environment. Q-SYS helps users elevate the meeting experience by allowing them to purpose-build to the needs of every space with a large portfolio of Teams-certified devices. Furthermore, Q-SYS enables control of third-party devices on Teams Rooms, allowing users to create custom automations for lighting, shades, heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, and more."

Patrick Heyn
Vice President, Marketing, Q-SYS

Tyler Troutman
Manager, Strategic Market Development, Shure

"Using Shure audio devices with the Teams platform significantly enhances the impact of every meeting by ensuring clear communication and boosting productivity. The premium, intelligible audio provided by the Shure portfolio facilitates effective and equitable meetings, fostering collaboration and engagement. High-quality audio allows both remote and in-room participants to fully capture nuances in speech tone and inflection, which are integral for accurately conveying ideas and feedback. Collaboration experiences with enhanced audio enable more inclusive discussions, ensuring that all voices are heard clearly, ultimately driving better teamwork and decision-making in the workplace."

"Spectralink IP-DECT Servers natively integrate with Teams to enable enterprise deskless workers to use the same calling platform as their office-based colleagues for smoother communications and a more connected and informed workforce. S Series DECT handsets feature background noise cancellation to ensure clear Teams calls even in noisy environments such as factories and retail stores. Communication on Spectralink DECT handsets is intuitive and reliable, resulting in more answered calls since employees can be reached anywhere on the job. This leads to higher productivity and improved customer experience."
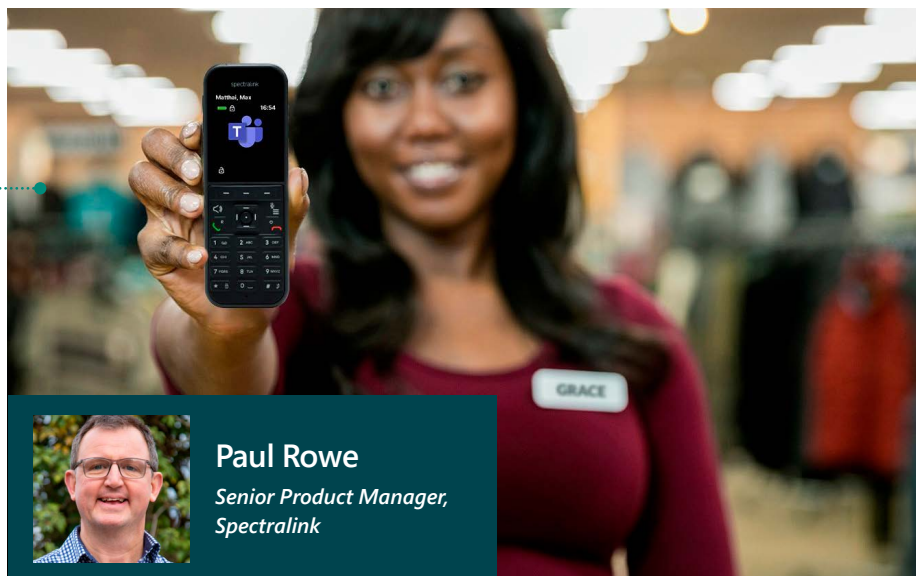
Paul Rowe
Senior Product Manager, Spectralink

Hilary Oliver
Chief Customer Officer, Tollring

"The latest Analytics 365 Call Recording with AI-driven analytics for Teams, alongside Teams Call Analytics and Collaboration Analytics, deliver a unique trio of powerful analytics solutions with a consistent and familiar user interface, documentation and support.

Leveraging AI to analyse Teams recordings can deliver considerable benefits to organisations of all sizes. By interrogating recordings of conversations, businesses can achieve a whole new level of insight to drive improvements in customer experience. Analytics 365 delivers the ability to transcribe calls then leverage AI to automatically spot keywords, topics, sentiment and outcomes at scale."

A decade of integration: from Lync to Teams

Spectralink's partnership with Microsoft began when it became the first and only DECT vendor with direct integration into Microsoft Lync. Paul Rowe explains how the company has been building on this legacy ever since

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

Microsoft Teams is the preferred communications platform for more than one million businesses worldwide, according to Microsoft. In the first quarter of 2024, Microsoft revealed that it reached 320 million monthly active Teams users – that's 80 per cent of the overall number of Microsoft Office 365 monthly active users. This indicates that Teams is driving a lot of growth and revenue for Microsoft and its partner community.

One of those partners is Spectralink, which has worked with Microsoft on joint solutions for corporate communication for over a decade.

"We've enjoyed a strong partnership with Microsoft since 2011, when we launched Spectralink digital enhanced cordless telecommunications (DECT) servers integrated with Microsoft Lync – a world-first and exclusive integration," explains Paul Rowe, senior product manager at Spectralink. "We continued this with Skype for Business in 2015 and became the first to market with native Teams session initiation protocol (SIP) Gateway integration in 2022. Looking back, the launch of the exclusive Spectralink DECT servers integration with Lync in 2011 set the stage for our strong partnership with Microsoft."

Spectralink DECT provides reliable, high-quality wireless voice communication for on-site mobile workers, ensuring seamless connectivity across office spaces, healthcare facilities and industrial environments. By integrating with Teams through the SIP Gateway, Spectralink DECT allows businesses to bring Teams voice functionality to their deskless workers, providing a unified communications experience.

"Working with Microsoft on these and future integrations ensures the most advanced workforce experiences," says Rowe. "Because of this, many enterprises have continued to use their same Spectralink DECT system while transitioning from Lync to Skype to Teams."

For example, labelling equipment supplier Arca Etichette initially used Spectralink's Skype for Business integration in 2015 and has since migrated to the native Teams integration.

Microsoft retired Skype for Business Online in 2021, making Teams the recommended communications and collaboration service for businesses, according to Microsoft.

"In contrast to Skype, Teams is purely cloud-based and scales to support organisations as they grow," says Rowe. "For customers, this accelerates the often-delayed replacement of systems and processes that have since become

"Integration with Lync in 2011 set the stage for our strong partnership with Microsoft"

obsolete. A fitting example of this is satisfying the need to equip their workforces with DECT handsets. Across industries customer organisations are retiring legacy phone systems by implementing Spectralink DECT products."

Due to its history of working with Microsoft on these products, Spectralink's status as a trusted Microsoft partner has grown and

customers expect its solutions to be easy to install, configure, use and manage while providing high enterprise security.

"Our reputation as a trusted Microsoft partner translates to multiple advantages for our customers," says Rowe. "We provide efficient and intuitive onboarding, and DECT handset subscriptions. This includes a user-friendly Teams menu on Spectralink S Series handsets, as well as a set of administrator and manager functions including auto provisioning, subscription, and sign-in processes, smart configuration templates, manager dashboards and proactive monitoring and reporting."

Spectralink also provides exclusive features for Teams, such as 'do not disturb' and 'call forwarding' settings, which are available on DECT handsets and applied to all users' clients and devices for focused productivity. Users can also sign-in securely to any DECT handset using display prompts and their Microsoft credentials. Alternatively, the administrator can use Spectralink Admin or Microsoft Teams Admin Center to sign in handsets.

By enhancing productivity and usability for deskless workers today, Spectralink is also looking ahead, with plans to further advance workforce safety initiatives.

"Spectralink maintains a robust ecosystem of mobile application partners to provide messaging and alarm capabilities to best meet the needs of end users," says Rowe. "In addition, Spectralink S Series S35 and S37 feature Bluetooth Low Energy for precise positioning of mobile worker location when a DECT handset alarm has been activated. New solutions combining strengths of Spectralink and Microsoft will launch in early 2025." ∎

Spectralink's solutions for Teams help deskless workers like those in factories to connect with each other more easily

Solving the call compliance conundrum

RYAN KAHAN: CALLCABINET

Organisations with multiple unified communications platforms no longer need multiple compliant call recording solutions, and CallCabinet can help

Photo: Adobe Stock/DC Studio

Various studies and trends suggest that companies, especially large, global enterprises, often adopt and manage multiple unified communications (UC) platforms simultaneously to meet diverse communication needs, support varied user preferences, and reliably ensure redundancy and flexibility in operations.

However, having a greater number of UC platforms increases the challenges and costs when enterprises are trying to holistically make sense of the conversation data. Throw regulatory compliance requirements into the mix, and the need for a universal solution that can seamlessly capture and analyse conversation data across multiple platforms and channels becomes abundantly clear.

Imagine a financial services company that uses Microsoft Teams as its primary collaboration tool but also incorporates other platforms depending on the department's function, geographical location and the specific needs of its customers. The compliant call recording solution chosen for this Teams environment should be able to extend Teams capabilities to ensure complete regulatory adherence. It should also empower users with a Teams application add-in for instant control

over recording, have deep granular policy capabilities, work seamlessly with every Teams-enabled device, and cater to on-premises, hybrid and cloud deployments.

Now imagine having a single solution that does all this and more, not only for the Teams platform but also every other communications platform used by the company as well. A compliance-first solution that not only compliantly captures conversations but also provides artificial intelligence-powered analytics, automated call quality assurance and custom business intelligence reporting without compromising data sovereignty.

At CallCabinet, we wanted to build a compliant call recording and AI-powered analytics solution that

would deliver exactly this. Instead of focusing on integration with a single UC platform, our solution can be applied universally across all platforms, giving businesses unprecedented levels of flexibility, insight and control.

Compliant call recording has evolved from being a necessity to being a full-fledged strategic asset that drives business agility in real time. With CallCabinet, businesses are empowered to break free from legacy thinking and gain a unified view of conversation data from across any platform, device, location, deployment or legacy system for an always-on understanding of all internal and external conversations. ∎

Ryan Kahan is CEO of CallCabinet

Meeting commitments

HILARY OLIVER: TOLLRING

Investing in Tollring's Analytics 365 product suite can help organisations to maximise their Teams investment in line with their Microsoft Azure Consumption Contract

Every business committing to a Microsoft Azure Consumption Contract (MACC) needs to maximise its investment in Microsoft technologies. Third-party applications that are Microsoft Azure IP co-sell eligible, such as the Analytics 365 suite from Tollring, not only contribute to Azure consumption but also help businesses to increase productivity and make smart data-driven decisions.

Tollring's cross-functional product suite caters to diverse business needs. For instance, Call Analytics provides a window into call queue performance and engagement, while Call Recording offers secure, artificial intelligence-powered insights across every conversation and Collaboration Analytics enables a comprehensive view of team dynamics within Microsoft Teams. Combining all three products allows businesses to select individual solutions and features to suit their specific operational and insight needs, ultimately improving decision-making and driving long-term productivity gains.

Furthermore, each solution has potential apps across the Microsoft ecosystem, providing greater value for the business and its MACC commitments.

For organisations where internal collaboration and efficiency in hybrid working are a priority, Analytics 365 compliments Microsoft Viva Insights, with in-depth analysis of collaboration trends, behaviour and activity across individuals and teams.

In cases where Teams calling is used for external interaction, Call Analytics can be used to highlight unreturned missed calls to keep customer satisfaction high. Analytics 365 also works with the new Microsoft Queues app, offering in-depth reporting and analysis on trends and call activity.

Lastly, when used alongside Microsoft Copilot, Analytics 365 provides compliance recording capabilities and automated AI-powered analysis of all conversations in Teams. This allows organisations to interrogate topics, keywords and sentiment to highlight the calls that matter and support business decisions.

The Microsoft IP co-sell eligible status amplifies Tollring's reach and delivers broad visibility across the Microsoft ecosystem. To further encourage adoption, the Analytics 365 portfolio is available directly from Microsoft marketplaces and is easy to deploy to support a consistent user experience and ensure that customers can fully leverage their Azure investments and accelerate organisational growth whilst meeting their commitment goals. ■

Hilary Oliver is chief customer officer at Tollring
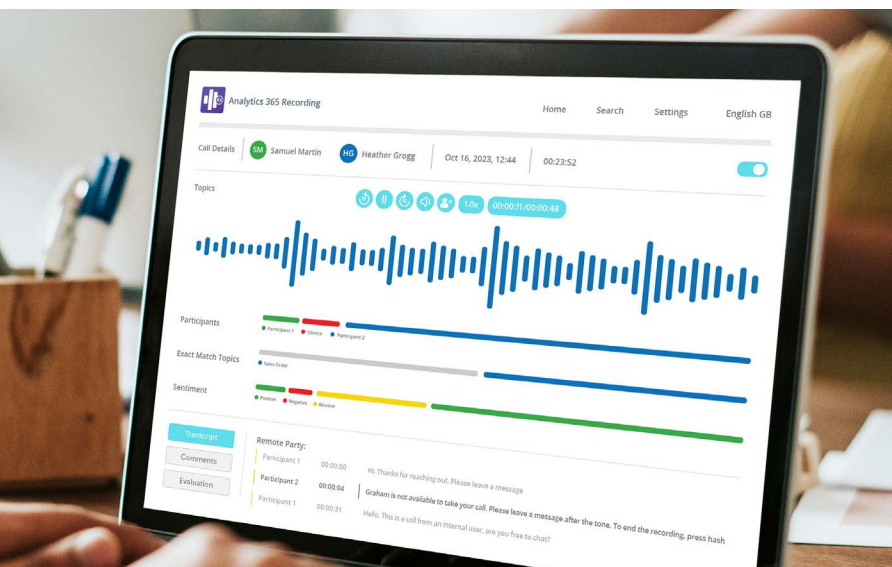
Here comes the AI in collaboration

SHANNON MACKAY: LENOVO

Innovative AI applications, powered by Lenovo, could offer the solution businesses are looking for to level up their collaboration experiences

American writer and leadership expert John C. Maxwell once wrote that "collaboration is multiplication". By this, he meant that effective teamwork is a force multiplier for any organisation. Being competitive and winning are by-products of collaboration, which indicates that there are few business challenges more important than developing and maintaining great teams.

As hybrid work scenarios continue to become a default business practice of business worldwide, organisations face another challenge in intelligent transformation – making meeting spaces smarter. According to collaboration technology provider Logitel's global workforce

"The integration of AI into collaboration tools presents a transformative opportunity to connect people"

survey, more than 43 per cent of remote workers feel they are not fully included in meetings and less than eight per cent of meeting rooms worldwide are video enabled. Consequently, firms are looking to level up collaboration experiences to meet the needs of workers and the IT departments serving them.

Lenovo works with Microsoft to build certified solutions for Microsoft Teams under our ThinkSmart portfolio, helping to elevate meeting experiences and amplify collaboration.

The role of smart collaboration technology has never been more critical as many Lenovo customers are continuing to redefine meeting spaces and how work is done.

The integration of artificial intelligence into collaboration tools presents a transformative opportunity to connect people and improve productivity. Lenovo, the global leader in PCs, is bringing more compute power to collaboration with innovative solutions like the ThinkSmart Core Gen 2, one of the first AI-optimised computing devices purpose built to run video conferencing room systems. Powered by the Intel Core Ultra processor with an integrated neural processing unit, the ThinkSmart Core Gen 2 is ready for AI-heavy meeting room workloads and delivers unparalleled performance for intuitive collaboration and enhanced productivity, all in a protected and user-friendly solution.

In the future, end users of platforms like Teams will be empowered by enhanced predictive capabilities that anticipate their needs and suggest relevant resources or actions before they're requested. And AI-driven analytics will provide real-time feedback on productivity and team dynamics, enabling more informed decision-making and fostering a more agile and responsive work environment.

For IT managers, collaborative AI tools hold the potential for even greater automation, proactive management and strategic insight. AI is expected to further reduce the manual workload by automating more complex maintenance tasks, predictive monitoring and

security measures, allowing IT teams to focus on innovation rather than routine operations.

As these AI-enabled collaboration tools evolve, they will increasingly become essential resources in daily tasks for meeting participants while helping to reduce complexity and workloads for IT managers.

These changes to how we work and collaborate with the assistance of AI are just the tip of the iceberg. In the years to come, not only will hybrid meetings become an even more seamless business activity, but the value that can be derived and executed on will also increase. Meeting participants can have clear action items automatically generated for them afterwards, and AI assistants will support them in finding and organising information on AI PCs so those action items can be completed faster and better.

The AI revolution in business and its impact on corporations' meeting cultures couldn't be happening at a better time. According to *Harvard Business Review*, meetings have increased in length and frequency over the past 50 years. Executives now spend an average of nearly 23 hours a week in meetings, up from less than 10 hours in the 1960s.

From conference calls to video conferencing, technology enabled more meetings and greater connectivity as enterprises grew globally. Now, technology is not just making more meetings possible, it's also making them better. And it's enabling workers to make smarter decisions about attending meetings. Got a schedule conflict or just too busy with other pressing tasks? No problem. Meetings are now recorded, so you can quickly read high-quality auto-generated transcripts.

Working closely with our strategic partners like Microsoft, Lenovo will continue to deliver on its promise of 'smarter technology for all' and make meetings better for our customers by delivering the hardware and computing power to get the most out of innovative AI applications. ◼

Shannon MacKay is general manager of worldwide smart collaboration business at Lenovo

Lenovo works with Microsoft to develop solutions for Microsoft Teams under its ThinkSmart portfolio

Upgrading the office

Angela Comitini discusses how solutions by Q-SYS integrate with Microsoft Teams to elevate employee experiences and drive the growth of high-impact workspaces

BY AMBER HICKMAN

Flexibility plays a crucial role when businesses evaluate their real estate options for the hybrid working world. Frost & Sullivan's *The Transformative Effect of High-impact Spaces on Modern Workplaces* report found that 46 per cent of organisations are modernising office spaces and adding more technology to improve the in-office employee experience.

"Businesses are recognising the importance of outfitting all office areas to increase flexibility, nurture their culture and maximise the value of their real estate holdings," says Angela Comitini, director of alliances at Q-SYS. "As employee expectations continue to evolve, employers are recognising the value of transforming traditional meeting rooms into more sophisticated environments for hybrid collaboration. This is especially true in high-impact spaces."

High-impact spaces are defined by analysts at Frost & Sullivan as dynamic, scalable and sophisticated meeting areas – such as divisible rooms, auditoriums, training rooms and lecture halls – that are equipped with professional-grade audiovisual and control platforms to enhance hybrid collaboration and productivity.

"Q-SYS enables these experiences in Teams Rooms by providing a broad portfolio of Microsoft Teams-certified devices, allowing organisations to select the appropriate audio and video peripherals to meet the specific needs of each space," says Comitini.

For example, Q-SYS VisionSuite uses artificial intelligence to track presenters in a meeting room and integrates with the new Microsoft Multi-Stream capability within Teams Rooms. This feature enhances hybrid meetings by enabling up to four simultaneous camera streams from a single room, providing both in-office and remote participants with a comprehensive view of everyone in the space.

"Users can get a dynamic view of the room with features including presenter tracking and active talker switching," says Comitini. "This experience is further enhanced by the user's ability to choose what to focus on at any given moment, leading to greater engagement and hybrid collaboration."

The number of deployed high-impact spaces will grow by an average of 15 per cent per year and reach 14.4 million by 2028, according to Frost & Sullivan's report. Comitini attributes this to two key factors: the adoption of AI and changing employee expectations.

"AI is significantly transforming how people work and is becoming foundational to our collaboration methods," she explains. "We are beginning to see more AI innovations and capabilities emerge across different workplaces, which is driving inclusivity, productivity and collaboration. Furthermore, recent years have taught employees to collaborate productively and more efficiently from home, and they no longer want to return to the office to sit in small meeting spaces with limited engagement.

"Businesses must repurpose their existing spaces to meet employee expectations and leverage new capabilities and collaboration tools to ensure an inclusive and collaborative environment that champions equity, boosts productivity, enhances workforce satisfaction and, most importantly, builds a culture where all employees can thrive." ∎

"Employers see the need to repurpose existing meeting rooms into high-impact spaces"

Making the move to E5 Teams licences

Paul Holden explains how businesses can improve productivity, security and collaboration with help from CallTower

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

Upgrading from an E3 to an E5 Microsoft 365 licence unlocks advanced product features that enhance productivity, security and communication for businesses. CallTower, a provider of collaboration solutions, helps organisations seamlessly transition licences to capitalise on these enhanced capabilities, particularly in Microsoft Teams.

"We tailor our services to each customer's individual needs, minimising disruption as they transition to the E5 licence and start benefiting from the enhanced capabilities," says Paul Holden, vice president of sales for Europe, Middle East and Africa at CallTower. "Upgrading from E3 to E5 licences provides tools like threat protection and data loss prevention, which are crucial in today's digital landscape."

The firm also implements robust security measures to safeguard communications and provides 24/7 support to resolve any issues quickly, all during the transition between licences. It records and stores all interactions within Teams in compliance with industry regulations to "offer added security and peace of mind", according to Holden.

Additionally, CallTower optimises the performance of Teams for users by delivering services that enable high-quality video and voice calls. For example, the firm offers enterprise-grade call management and custom integrations tailored to specific business needs.

"Our services transform Teams into a powerful tool for voice communications, improving workflows across the organisation," says Holden. "This includes custom third-party integrations that address specific operational needs, helping teams achieve smoother workflows."

CallTower's suite of analytics tools provides actionable insights into Teams usage, enabling organisations to refine communication strategies and boost collaboration.

"These insights help organisations make data-driven decisions to enhance productivity, improve efficiency and maximise the platform," says Holden. "With our comprehensive approach to implementing and optimising Teams, CallTower empowers businesses to achieve seamless collaboration, enhanced security and improve productivity." ◼

Photo: CallTower

"Upgrading from E3 to E5 licences provides tools like threat protection and data loss prevention"

101

Solving video meeting challenges with edge AI

STEIN OVE ERIKSEN: HUDDLY

New, intelligent video conferencing solutions are making the meeting experience more dynamic and immersive than ever before

Artificial intelligence is one of humanity's most incredible inventions, standing alongside the lightbulb as a moment of profound innovation that changes everything. Video conferencing, like many other technologies, will never be the same again.

For a video meeting, this transformation is set to come from edge AI. This is intelligence built directly into the cameras, optimising the meeting experience for full engagement and productivity.

But here's the secret: while edge AI on a single camera delivers impressive results, the real step change happens when it powers a multi-camera system. This combination doesn't just improve meetings, it transforms them, making them more dynamic and immersive than anything before.

"Using the capabilities of edge AI, our cameras see, understand and adapt"

Edge AI, or 'AI on the edge', means the device handles all the data processing right on the camera, without sending it off to the cloud or an in-room computer. This makes everything faster and more responsive, while also keeping your data more secure since it stays on the device.

This intelligence is powered by machine learning, specifically convolutional neural networks and object classification. This enables the camera to distinguish between people and objects like tables or laptops, while also understanding where people are, where they're looking, and who's speaking.

In short, it turns cameras into intelligent sensors that react to what's happening in the room. The result? Real-time adjustments, precise framing and video that naturally follows the conversation, enabled by technology that is both practical and affordable.

There are four key challenges with video conferencing which we believe edge AI can help solve, bringing the technology to a turning point. The first of these is autonomously adapting video conferencing to the human experience. Humans are a social and collaborative species. When people come together, they figure things out. But in a hybrid world, recreating the energy of in-person interactions can be tricky, especially when technology gets in the way. Nothing disrupts the flow of a meeting quite like having to adjust your behaviour to meet the needs of the technology.

Using the powerful capabilities of edge AI, our cameras see, understand and automatically adapt to how you naturally act and communicate. The best meeting experience is autonomous – participants should be able to just focus on the conversation, and let the technology do the rest.

The second challenge edge AI enables us to overcome is enhancing engagement and productivity to match in-person meetings, which some people think won't ever be achieved. But we believe the issue isn't video – it's that we've settled for an experience that's barely good enough. If all you see is a static room view, it's easy to tune out and stop

Photo: Huddly

Edge AI enables Huddly's video conferencing cameras to identify where people are, where they're looking and who's speaking

contributing. Real magic happens when people come together, and video should capture that energy.

Driven by edge AI, our cameras can actively shape the meeting, boosting engagement with real-time framing and editing. The real step change in experience then happens when adding multiple cameras, like with our Huddly Crew system. You now have a dynamic, multi-angle experience to harness the full power of human collaboration.

Next, we face the challenge of enabling scalability and flexibility in our meeting environments. Collaboration can happen anywhere – lounge areas, huddle spaces or boardrooms. Your video setup should be flexible enough to work in all of these spaces, without the need for costly redesigns. That way, you're empowering teamwork wherever it happens naturally.

Edge AI makes it easy to scale your video conferencing. Start with one of our cameras, then expand to three – the technology adjusts to your needs without compromising power or performance. And with machine learning that's trained to deliver experiences that focus on people, not spaces, your teams can collaborate anywhere.

Finally, we turn to the challenge of keeping up with evolving video conferencing technology. Video conferencing is at a turning point, and things are going to move even faster from here. You don't want to get stuck with tools that will become outdated soon. Plus, if something breaks or becomes obsolete, you shouldn't have to rip out and replace everything – that's neither sustainable nor smart business.

With edge AI, our cameras are built to grow with you. Upgradable

software and modular hardware empower your teams to perform at their best while adapting to changing needs over time. Think modular, think flexible and prepare for the next decade, not just the next year.

Huddly is here to push the limits of what's possible. By using edge AI to solve the challenges of autonomy, engagement, scalability and evolving technology, we're making video meetings what we've always thought they should be: inclusive, effective, and accessible for all.

But in the end, it's about more than better meetings. Human connection is key to overcoming challenges, and we're focused on building a more connected world, where collaboration fuels innovation and leads to real, meaningful progress. ■

Stein Ove Eriksen is co-founder and chief product officer at Huddly

A Teams transformation

CentrePal's Tim Suley explains how the convergence of unified communications solutions and contact centre functionality is transforming customer engagement

BY LAURA HYDE

With multiple communication channels available to customers looking to reach out to businesses, it's crucial for organisations to integrate their channels into one unified system. This ensures agents are well-informed and are able to provide consistent and personalised interactions, regardless of which channel customers use.

"Today's customers expect service on their terms – they want instant, personalised support across channels 24 hours a day, seven days per week," says Tim Suley, product marketing manager at CentrePal. "They want businesses to know their history and expect agents to quickly grasp their issue without lengthy explanation or repetition, so their problems are solved in the first interaction. While customers are happy using self-service artificial intelligence-powered chatbots for simple issues, they expect a seamless handover to skilled agents when needed. Smart businesses understand that exceptional service drives loyalty and growth."

CentrePal unites all business communications in Microsoft Teams, turning it into a one-stop contact centre. The solution embeds customer service tools natively into Teams and connects with customer relationship management systems. This ensures agents can access all the information they need in one place and focus on helping customers, rather than wasting time juggling multiple systems and switching between screens.
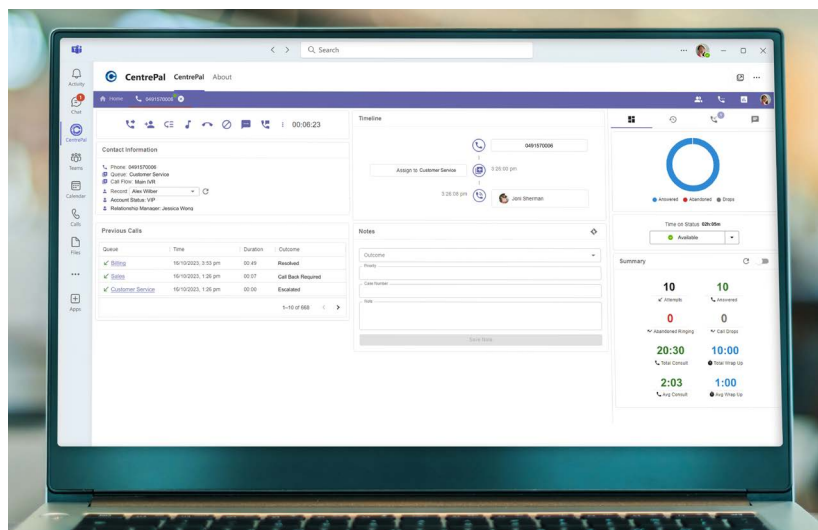
In addition, CentrePal uses AI tools to help agents resolve issues fast while still delivering the personalised care customers expect.

"At CentrePal, we view AI as an enabler that enhances, rather than replaces, human service," says Suley. "We are thoughtfully integrating AI capabilities, focusing on where it can genuinely improve customer experience rather than just jumping on trends. Our existing AI-powered features – which include intelligent chatbots, smart email handling and customer journey insights – work alongside agents to handle routine tasks. This frees up team members to focus on what they do best: delivering personalised, empathetic service while AI works behind the scenes to make every interaction more efficient."

As technology advances and customer needs change, Suley and the CentrePal team will continue to focus on "practical innovations that deliver real value" to customers. "Our vision has always been about making advanced contact centre capabilities accessible to businesses of all sizes, and that guides how we evolve," he says. ∎

"We are thoughtfully integrating AI capabilities, focusing on where it can genuinely improve customer experience"
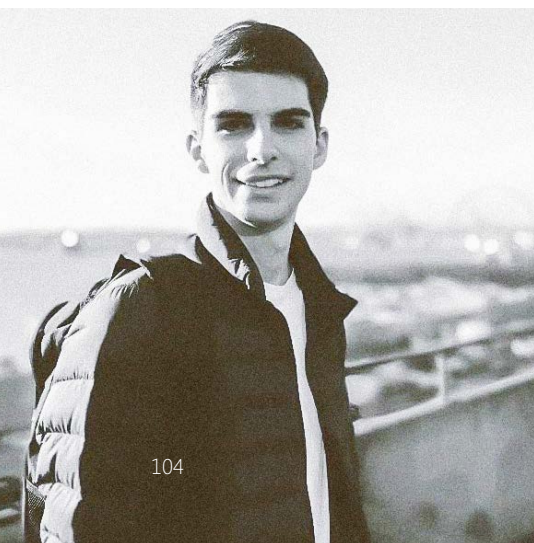
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High-quality, reliable meeting room audio is now easier than ever. Shure's pre-configured and pre-routed Audio Conferencing Kit includes the MXA902 Integrated Ceiling Array Microphone + Loudspeaker, paired with the ANIUSB-MATRIX Audio Network Interface for a complete, ready-to-use audio solution.

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Learn more at
www.shure.com/MXA902ConferencingKit

Certified for Microsoft Teams

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Improving the collaborative space

In a world of hybrid work, it is important that employees can hear, and be heard, clearly. Shure's Tyler Troutman tells us more

BY AMBER HICKMAN

Organisations around the world are navigating changing work trends and establishing environments that allow their employees to be productive in a way that suits them. But what does this entail?

"The return to the office has been a big focus lately, and we've seen a lot of companies asking their employees to start coming back into the office," says Tyler Troutman, manager of strategic market development at Shure. "But this doesn't mean the hybrid experience is going away and there is a big focus on making sure that both in-person and hybrid employees have an equitable experience."

Virtual conferencing over platforms such as Microsoft Teams is a vital part of creating a hybrid work environment. However, employee efficiency is diminished if organisations use low-quality audio technology that results in unclear voices, poor connectivity and inaccurate transcripts.

Shure aims to solve this issue by providing a full ecosystem of audio solutions, including microphones, digital signal processors and loudspeakers, that fit the needs of businesses wherever they are on their hybrid journey.

"Employees want to be able to collaborate and engage as a team and high-quality audio solutions are key to this," says Troutman. "We work to ensure that audio pickup with our devices is the exact same for every single person in the room, wherever they are sat. This makes it so everyone is heard on the exact same level by external participants."

Shure's latest offering, an audio conferencing kit for small and medium conferencing rooms, is one such solution. The kit contains the Shure MXA902 Ceiling Array Microphone with built-in loudspeaker and the ANIUSB-MATRIX Audio Network Interface, which provides seamless connectivity to conferencing platforms like Teams. The devices are pre-routed and paired for user convenience.

"The main benefit of this kit is that it's really a touchless system," says Troutman. "In the past, a setup like this would require more configuration on the user side. Now we are doing that work for them. All the user has to do is pull it out of the box, plug it into the network and everything is ready for them to use."

The out-of-the-box functionality makes it ideal for businesses just starting to establish hybrid workspaces, or those that don't have the budget or time to invest in external sound engineering. Furthermore, by working with Microsoft to ensure the devices are Teams-certified, users don't have to worry about compatibility issues and can get to work quickly.

According to Troutman, collaborating with Microsoft and ensuring smooth functionality

> "Developing our partnership with Microsoft is more valuable than ever"

with Teams is an important part of Shure's mission to providing value for organisations.

"As the world is progressing more towards virtual Teams Rooms, developing our partnership with Microsoft is more valuable than ever as it is shaping the future at the application
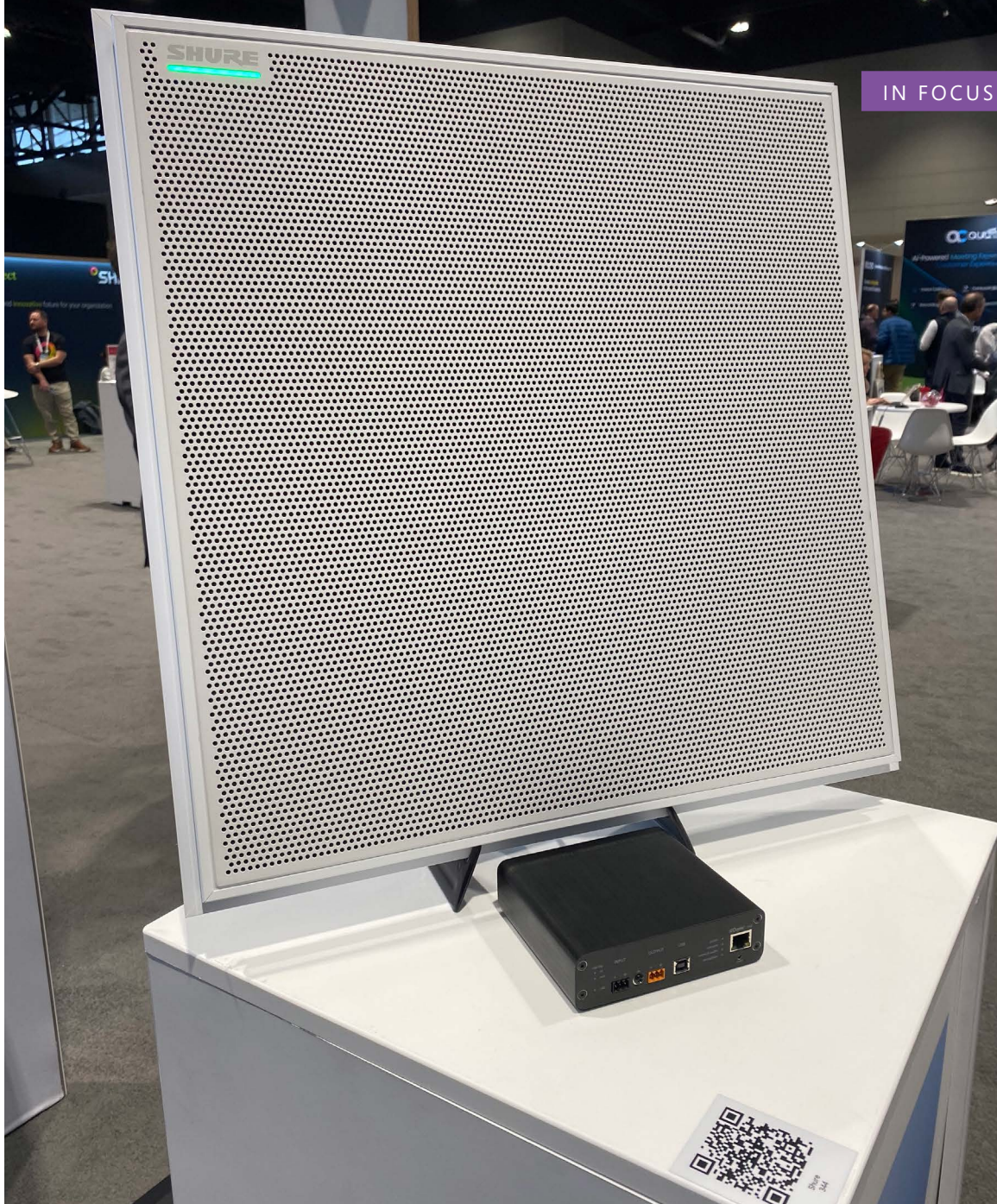
layer," he says. "We are excited to continue working to provide audio solutions that optimise the tools they deliver, and improve value and productivity for our joint customers.

"For example, those who are trying to understand how to maximise their return on investment with tools such as Copilot in Teams may face challenges. If they are getting poor transcription results because of poor audio, then they won't recognise that return."

Shure exhibited the MXA902 + ANIUSB-MATRIX Audio Conferencing Kit at Microsoft Ignite 2024, which Troutman says was a great opportunity to reach more customers and

make them aware of how they can upgrade their collaborative spaces and assist Copilot performance by improving transcription accuracy with better audio.

"Microsoft Ignite is such a big show, and Teams only takes up part of that space, but we saw a lot of great traffic to the booth from existing customers, people who recognise our brand from the other industries we work in as well as those who have never heard of us before," says Troutman. "We want people to get the most out of their Teams experience and so it has been great to show the potential of the new MXA902 as well as our other solutions." ■

The Shure MXA902 + ANIUSB-MATRIX Audio Conferencing Kit was exhibited at Microsoft Ignite 2024

Reach
for the
higher
hanging fruit

Microsoft's Chad Hamblin explains the connection between employee productivity and customer satisfaction in the financial services industry, showing how they create a powerful virtuous cycle – one where generative AI plays a pivotal role

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

The change in technology over the last 20 years has been transformational and, in many ways, has spoiled customers, claims Chad Hamblin, global industry director of financial services at Microsoft.

"Customers now expect the process for accessing financial services to be as seamless as ordering on Amazon, but there's a big difference between buying a $10 item and securing a 30-year loan," he explains. "However, people don't see it that way due to the rise of rapid, personalised online services."

Microsoft's solutions, primarily in the Dynamics 365 suite of products, Power Platform and Copilot Studio, are helping financial services organisations to deliver on evolving customer expectations.

"With Dynamics 365, sales teams can track interactions, products and cases to understand customer preferences and communicate with them across multiple channels," says Hamblin. "Dynamics seamlessly works with Microsoft Office so that professionals don't have to switch back and forth between applications to serve customers. And, when they are able to work productively, employees have more time for meaningful interactions."

Generative artificial intelligence is now integrated into most Microsoft products too.

"Microsoft has bet the house on generative AI," says Hamblin. "We have copilots for Microsoft Power BI, Dynamics and Office, as well as Azure OpenAI. They have a dramatic impact on the customer experience. For example, AI-powered, intelligent chatbots provide customers with 24/7 information. They also streamline key banking processes such as mortgage handling, 'know your customer' (KYC) and onboarding."

By enhancing operational efficiency, these AI tools are also transforming how financial services professionals engage with their clients.

"Generative AI can help employees provide more relevant and customised product offers, decreasing the amount of time they spend creating content or drafting emails and freeing them up to focus on other customer-related activities," explains Hamblin. "In essence, it makes their daily lives more productive, reducing wasted cycles and giving more time back to customers."

Working in tandem
Microsoft partners play a key role in identifying potential AI use cases for improving the customer experience.

"Partners are the lifeblood of Microsoft," says Hamblin. "They do a good job of enhancing and extending our first-party capabilities. For example, VeriPark has a broad set of banking-specific capabilities built on top of the Microsoft stack, using Azure and Dynamics 365, and they integrate with Microsoft 365. VeriPark's solutions enhance loan origination, KYC and teller management. And Zafin is a leading provider of product and pricing lifecycle management solutions that help banks to manage the products and services they offer to customers."

Zafin is leveraging Microsoft technologies as the basis for its solutions, which provide access to financial data and modernise old core banking systems. Meanwhile, Backbase's seamless integration to Dynamics 365 and Microsoft Teams is helping banking operations, especially tasks associated with mobile and online banking.

"With Backbase, financial services providers can connect mobile and online banking to a holistic view of customer activity, allowing them to communicate with customers across various channels," says Hamblin. "Backbase provides banks with advanced business intelligence capabilities to help with renewals and best-offer actions. Meanwhile, Personetics uses predictive analytics and generative AI to analyse financial data in real-time to anticipate customer needs and ASC Technologies integrates with Teams to help financial services employees comply with regulations and enhance productivity."

Hamblin predicts that AI-powered solutions will likely automate manual tasks, like checking for regulatory compliance and paper-based processing, in the next few years. But he believes employees should embrace this change.

"There's a sense of concern around AI in that it's replacing human jobs, but AI should be seen as a combination success story," he says. "It automates some human-led tasks that are routine, laborious or time-intensive – and frankly, these areas will be improved by automation. However, there are many cases where there is a hand-off or an intersection between generative AI and those human interactions."

For example, AI automation could cut digital debt, which Microsoft defines as the burden placed on information workers by "the inflow of data, emails, meetings and notifications" in the *2023 Work Trend Index Annual Report*. Nearly two in three people (64 per cent) say they struggle with having the time and energy to do their job and almost two in three leaders (60 per cent) feel the effects, saying they lack innovation or breakthrough ideas from their teams, according to the report. This is particularly for true for the financial services industry.

"The sheer amount of data and apps banks use is basically causing information overload for a lot of employees," explains Hamblin.

Hamblin (centre) joined ASC's Katrin Henkel and Michael Broderick at Money20/20 USA to present a joint session on their collaboration to develop AI-powered solutions for banking compliance

"But they can use generative AI to draft emails, pulling together data from multiple sources rather than having to search three of four different systems, saving them minutes, if not hours."

For instance, employees working in commercial or investment banking can use generative AI to pull together data from multiple sources in the Office Copilot suite to draft emails, create PowerPoint presentations with PowerPoint Copilot, track meetings and generate follow-up actions with Teams Copilot, and build dashboards showing key banking trends with Power BI Copilot.

"Investment and commercial banking requires employees to interact with large organisations and to understand regulatory documents like Securities and Exchange Commission Filings," says Hamblin. "Generative AI can review a 100-page document and identify the most relevant data, preventing information overload."

Additionally, a relationship manager can use generative AI for assistance during a conversation with a customer. "The manager may want to have details about the customer's life events, recent purchases or any risks associated with their profile," explains Hamblin. "A copilot product could feed them real-time prompts, links and product information to enable an informed conversation with the customers."

This use case is particularly relevant for contact centres, where calls must be categorised upfront. A study commissioned by Microsoft found that some UK customers are waiting for an average of eight minutes and 27 seconds to speak with a financial services representative when phoning a call centre. This is 25 times longer than the optimal industry standard, says Microsoft, which requires agents to answer calls within 20 seconds.

"Generative AI can allocate those calls to the right agents," says Hamblin. "Banks can also use the technology to more intelligently escalate cases to the right support groups or to specialist agents if the issue is complex."

Future milestones
Reflecting on the industry's current mindset, Hamblin notes: "The high-level feedback that we're hearing from our customers is that everyone is very excited about generative AI but it's still very much a nascent technology. We've

Several sessions were led by Microsoft at Money20/20 USA, including a 'Women in FSI' panel led by Microsoft's Kathleen Mitford (far left) that highlighted the positive impact of using generative AI to manage workloads

reached a critical stage where banks are trying to understand how they can more broadly use generative AI and track its benefits."

As organisations explore these possibilities, they're finding that generative AI is no longer limited to straightforward productivity enhancements but has the potential to transform other areas of work.

"While productivity, research and content creation are some of the more common AI use cases in banking, we are also starting to see a wide variety of other functionalities including fraud detection, product, risk and marketing," says Hamblin.

Firms can leverage the capabilities of generative AI to enhance decision-making and streamline processes, enabling them to go beyond productivity use cases where the low-hanging fruit is.

"Banks should look beyond the traditional apps of generative AI by using it more dynamically to generate products and offers tailored to individual customers," says Hamblin. "For example, most banks offer 30, 20 and 15-year mortgages but what if a customer needs a 13 or 22-year mortgage due to personal circumstances or specific financial goals?"

Banks could also use generative AI to facilitate dynamic payments and provide customers with a payment mechanism that best matches their individual financial needs. For example, different types of payments – like buy now pay later or credit and debit cards – could be offered to customers under one platform. "In a perfect world, you could even change the terms and conditions based on a person's financial profile," says Hamblin. "Customer A might have good credit while customer B may have bad credit, so banks could provide each of them with different terms and conditions."

Another potential use case for generative AI is creating a financial education tool for customers to better understand wealth management, adds Hamblin. "Intelligent bots can be trained with data from wealth management to improve financial literacy. They will be able to break down information for the general public to understand their financial opportunities."

There is a lot of opportunity with fraud prevention and detection too. "Current fraud systems use machine learning and predictive analytics, but generative AI can help to more accurately identify fraudulent patterns and trends, then use that intelligence to create models offering a higher prevention rate," explains Hamblin.

To capitalise on the opportunities created by generative AI, the financial services industry must first overcome its biggest challenges: security, compliance and governance.

"A lot of banks are still trying to understand how they can tap into the power of generative AI but still protect themselves from a security and compliance standpoint."

> "Everyone is very excited about generative AI but it's still very much a nascent technology"

While Hamblin acknowledges these challenges, he believes the opportunities for AI adoption outweigh the burden of overcoming security and compliance regulations.

"There's tremendous opportunity with generative AI," he says. "Banks can offer more relevant products and upgrade their key processes and we'll see generative AI being used across various departments, from marketing to compliance and risk.

"Over the next two years, the technology will mature, improving its reasoning and decision-making capabilities. We'll also see different type of AI technologies merging. Whether that's robotic processes, predictive analytics, machine learning, or even metaverse technology, they will all integrate with generative AI for more focused use cases and business scenarios like creating best-offer products, case resolutions and renewals." ■
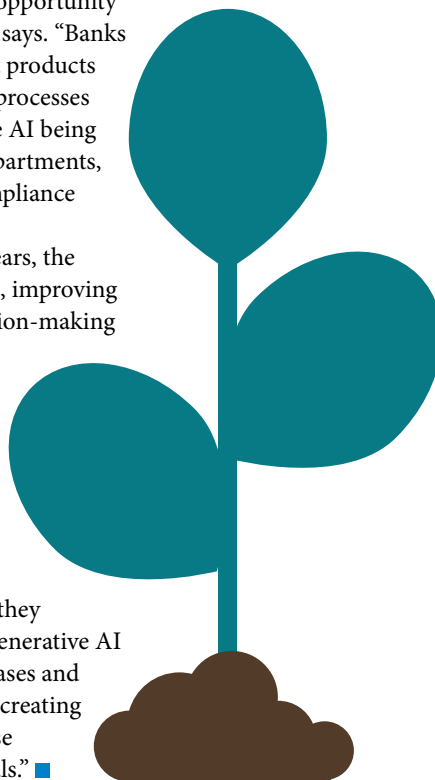
Photo: iAdobeStock/HappyBall3692

Analyst perspective

BIAN's Hans Tesselaar offers his view on the impact of AI-powered technology on financial services

"Conversational AI is being used to improve customer service offerings and answer frequently asked questions in a more personalised way. Organisations can also use AI to process past customer behaviour, demographic data, preferences to recommend products to increase customer engagement and drive revenue growth, this is something we're exploring as part of our latest Coreless Banking concept.

When it comes to employee engagement, AI is making organisations more efficient, freeing up employees to focus on more satisfying tasks, and reducing burnout by automating manual tasks such as data processing."

Hans Tesselaar
Executive Director, Banking Industry Architecture Network

Partner perspectives

We asked selected partners how Microsoft-powered solutions are helping financial services firms to enhance customer experience and empower workforces

"Financial services organisations need to meet regulatory standards such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), MiFID II and Dodd-Frank, while improving customer experience, productivity and workforce empowerment. Recording Insights, our Microsoft technology-powered solution for Teams, addresses these needs by providing compliant recording and AI-driven analytics. This solution helps prevent fraud, provides actionable insights into customer needs, and enables financial institutions to respond quickly and effectively. With features like automated transcription and sentiment analysis, users can meet customer expectations with enhanced reliability and operational efficiency, turning compliance requirements into opportunities to improve service and performance."

Katrin Henkel
President, Americas, ASC

"Backbase empowers banks to achieve highly personalised customer interactions and engagement by leveraging Microsoft Fabric's robust data lakehouse capabilities. Through our customer data and AI services, banks gain access to integrated AI and machine learning within the Engagement Banking Platform, maximising automation and enabling straight-through processing. This advanced integration allows banks to deliver tailored, data-driven interactions across all digital channels, meeting customers' unique needs in real time while improving efficiency and service quality."

Vimal Sethi
*Global Vice President,
Partners and Alliances,
Backbase*

"Banks today face rising customer expectations for personalised financial guidance. Traditional approaches to personal financial management and marketing no longer suffice – customers expect their bank to understand their unique situation and deliver tailored advice. We're seeing a fundamental shift in how banks engage with customers. By analysing transaction data and applying AI with Personetics' Engagement Platform – which leverages Azure, Copilot and Power BI – banks can now anticipate customer needs and deliver hyper-personalised insights and advice that demonstrate clear financial benefits. Leading institutions using this approach raise customer satisfaction scores and increase relationship balances among engaged users."
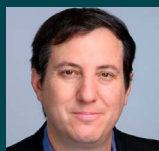
Dorel Blitz
*Vice President,
Strategy and Business
Development, Personetics*

"SAS provides intelligent copilots that guide users through model building, offering code generation, pipeline development assistance and machine learning concept explanations. This presents incredible leverage for a workforce, enabling anyone from data scientists to business users to start with data and end with a decision.

Enterprise-wide decisioning is an area of focus for SAS and where we are seeing a lot of demand from our clients. SAS partnered with Microsoft to launch Decision Builder through Fabric. Institutions can build advanced decisioning which combines data integration, decision rules and AI models. We're seeing clients gain advantages through combining decisioning across different systems into a single platform, making it easier to automate, govern and make product changes."

Stephen Greer
*Banking Industry
Advisor, SAS*

Jason Shane
Head of Strategy and Innovation, Financial Services, SymphonyAI

"Financial services organisations facing complex compliance and investigation challenges can implement SymphonyAI's Microsoft-powered solutions to streamline operations and enhance financial crime management. SensaAI for AML (anti-money laundering) triages alerts, reducing false positives whilst identifying new risks. SensaAI for Sanctions Screening also decreases false positives with AI-driven accuracy, lowering costs. Sensa Investigation Hub with Sensa Copilot automates data collection and analysis for faster, precise financial crime investigations. Leveraging Azure OpenAI, SymphonyAI's generative AI solutions empower institutions to transform workflows, boost workforce productivity and strengthen the financial ecosystem."

"Financial organisations must balance digital innovation and security with cost efficiency to enhance customer experiences and empower their workforce. At Synergy Technical, we leverage Microsoft solutions for telephony, productivity, security and compliance to tailor our approach to our customers' needs. Microsoft Security and Compliance provides robust data protection to meet regulatory standards and safeguard sensitive financial information. Teams and Teams Phone enables seamless collaboration and communication across remote and on-site teams, improving productivity and responsiveness. By leveraging these Microsoft tools, we help financial organisations achieve a balance of innovation, security and cost efficiency, tailored to their unique needs in a rapidly evolving industry."

Chris Weinfurt
Chief of Staff, Synergy Technical
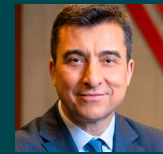
Ozkan Erener
CEO, VeriPark

"At VeriPark, we provide Microsoft-powered solutions for financial services organisations to elevate customer experience and empower their workforce. Our customer relationship management (VeriTouch) and loan origination (VeriLoan) solutions are built on Dynamics 365 and place customers at the centre of digital transformation. Our omnichannel customer engagement (VeriChannel) solution integrates with Dynamics 365 for seamless, personalised experiences across channels. Leveraging Azure AI, we offer predictive customer insights and next-best-action recommendations. For workforce empowerment, our role-based AI copilots automate tasks, while Teams integration and PowerPlatform insights foster collaboration and informed decisions, creating exceptional customer journeys and a connected, productive workforce."

Photo: AdobeStock/wavebreak3

"Zafin empowers banks to achieve more by providing deep expertise in product and pricing solutions, seamlessly integrated with Microsoft's broad platforms including Teams, Dynamics 365 and Azure AI. Built on Microsoft's Financial Services Cloud, Zafin's platform helps banks modernise abstract product and pricing capabilities from core systems into a cross-enterprise product innovation layer.

By integrating with Microsoft's platforms, we also enhance collaboration across an organisation. By equipping banking professionals with actionable insights through Power BI and advanced analytics tools, workforces are able to make informed decisions swiftly, boosting productivity and effectiveness. Finally, Zafin's platform modernises core systems by breaking down large transformation projects into manageable components, reducing risk and delivering immediate business value."

Chris Dickin
Global Head, Strategic Partnerships, Zafin

Four ways to embrace AI in banking

THOMAS FUSS: BACKBASE

Financial services providers need to start experimenting with AI as soon as possible to avoid falling behind competitors. They can do this by establishing specific use cases and adopting AI platform models to better serve their customers

Most banks by now understand the benefits of adopting artificial intelligence. But being convinced of the value is just the beginning – they also need to implement the technology and may not know how to get started. Here are four insights to help ensure a successful AI journey.

1. The time to act is now
The 'wait and see' approach to AI is becoming increasingly problematic, because although firms may not want to be the first to adopt AI, they definitely don't want to be the last. High-profile institutions like JP Morgan Chase and Wells Fargo have already led the charge on generative AI-based employee tools and AI-powered virtual assistants, respectively. And that means other banks can't be far behind.

> "The human touch in banking remains critical, but firms can always use AI to make employees faster, smarter and better at their jobs"

As more institutions experiment with AI, they will find it increasingly difficult to use AI as a differentiator from their competitors. Make no mistake, the AI hype cycle is in full effect, thanks to companies like Microsoft, and that means that customers are waiting to see how banks will leverage this technology – not whether they will adopt it at all. So, get started now, even if that means starting small. For example, organisations can start with a small launch first, then adopt it on a larger scale.

2. Start with a specific target area
It's essential to have a specific business use case in mind before you begin adopting AI. Simply rushing an AI value proposition to market will never work if there is no clear vision for its usage, as this will make it impossible to budget, among other things.

Financial services providers should always start with the business case so they can actually define what is needed to get done. They should ask themselves questions like 'why do I want to adopt AI?' and 'what's the problem we want to solve?'. Identifying the business case means they can better understand the return on investment and avoid risks. There's no option for zero risk with AI but if firms know what they are looking to get out of it, they can define the risk and investment factors, whether it's worth it and if there's a way to mitigate them.

3. There is no 'AI banking'
AI should always be used to better serve the customer. Rather than looking at it as a revolutionary new style of banking, banks should consider it as an advanced tool that can help them to reach their business objectives, of which customer-centricity should be front and centre.

And while AI will allow you to reduce headcount – particularly when it comes to tiresome manual processes like data entry and

Jasper Meijer
Plus Plan · Young Professional

Preferred language is English

Full name	Date of birth	Customer since
Jasper Meijer	15 Jun 1995 (age 29)	20 Dec 2018
Primary phone number	Primary email address	Primary address
+31 627 228 915	jasper.meijer@gmail.com	42 Van Hallstraat, Amster...

More customer details

Products

Account name, number	Account type	Currency	Balance
Spending Account ·····1022	Checking	EUR	
Saving Account ·····3278	Saving	EUR	

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processing – the industry doesn't want to lose the human touch. Because, while 77 per cent of consumers say AI is helpful for solving simple banking problems, according to Zendesk's *Customer Experience Trends Report 2023*, 63 per cent still want personal, one-on-one conversations with representatives. This indicates that the human touch in banking remains critical, but firms can always use AI to make employees faster, smarter and better at their jobs.

4. Use an AI platform
Like all next-level technology, adopting AI will take considerable time and resources but a platform model streamlines the process. For example, repetitive manual tasks can be automated with an AI script.

When a platform is in place, with all the available capabilities and microservices, companies can adopt AI a lot faster. So, before getting started, organisations should consider working with a strategic partner to implement a platform model. That will make it easier to automate routine tasks, reduce costs and time, and offer superior customer experience. ∎

Thomas Fuss is chief technology officer at Backbase
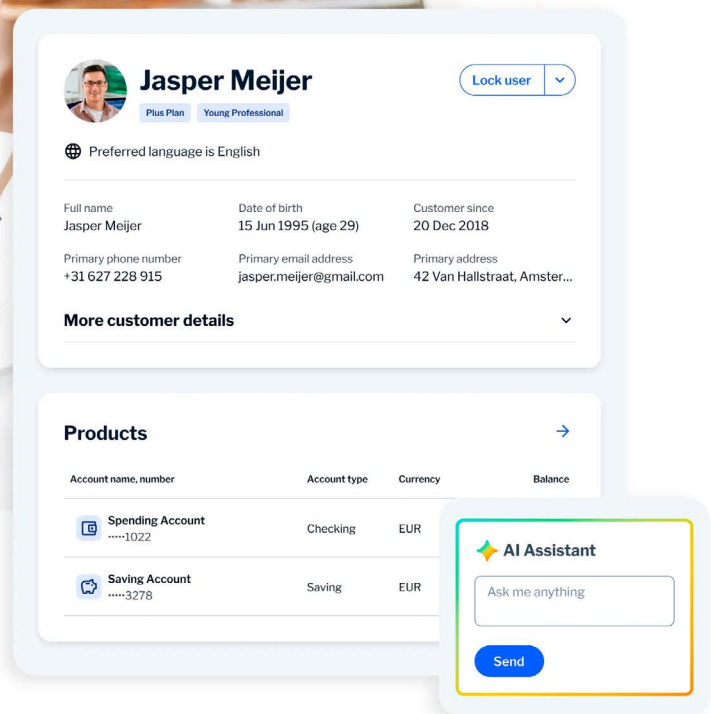
Bank professionals can use AI to access account information to better serve their customers

< ✦ **Just ask** ⓘ

Good morning Chris, how can I help you?

Transfer €500 to Lawrence ✏

Which Lawrence are you referring?

Lawrence Green
892828881922

Lawrence Smith
222332225552

👍 👎 ⤓

Money sent
You sent €500.00 to Lawrence Green.
They can accept the money now.
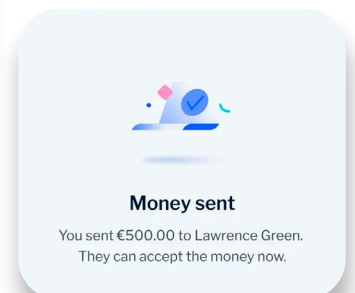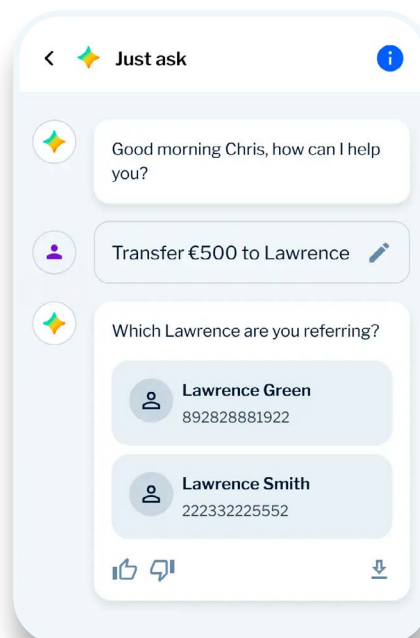
The passwordless future of finance

HAIDER IQBAL: THALES

Financial services organisations should be looking to adopt alternative authentication methods to protect their systems and data from cybercriminals

Financial services organisations are among the most common targets of cyberattacks, with threat actors ranging from individual scammers to highly organised cybercriminal groups that attempt to exploit and disrupt the sector. Cybersecurity is therefore a vitally important consideration for financial institutions and their clients to prevent fines and reputational damage, and ensure confidence.

For years, usernames and passwords have been the go-to method for securing our digital identities, and most US banks still rely on this method. However, everyone has moments where they are vulnerable to attacks exploiting their biases, and the challenge with using passwords

"Passkeys are helping improve authentication and paving the way for a passwordless future"

is that users can quickly get fatigued. Constantly creating and keeping track of the burgeoning number of passwords needed to navigate the myriad systems they interact with daily is a task that leads to many users seeking workarounds.

Fortunately, as technology advances, so do the methods available to authenticate users securely. This is why passwordless authentication is growing in popularity among organisations, because it eliminates many of the pain points and costs that come with managing passwords in an enterprise-sized organisation. One

increasingly popular method is passkeys, a replacement for passwords. Offering enhanced user experience, security and scalability, passkeys are helping improve authentication and paving the way for a passwordless future.

Passkeys are a more secure and easier option than passwords. With passkeys, users can sign in to applications and websites via biometric credentials such as a fingerprint or facial recognition, a PIN code or a pattern, meaning they no longer have to remember and manage passwords.

The FIDO Alliance is at the vanguard of passkey technology. Fast Identity Online (FIDO) standards, such as FIDO2 and WebAuthn, facilitate secure authentication mechanisms by enabling passwordless logins via biometrics, USB tokens, or mobile devices. By eliminating the need for passwords altogether, FIDO standards mitigate the inherent vulnerabilities that go hand in hand with traditional authentication methods.

While all types of passkeys serve the same purpose – eliminate passwords – there is some variation in how they can be stored and managed which impact the way financial services should use them. There are two categories: synced and device-bound.

Synced passkeys are synchronised between user devices via a cloud service, which can be part of a given device's operating system or third-party software. This allows users access to their credentials seamlessly across multiple devices. Whether logging into a website on a laptop or accessing an application

on a smartphone, synced passkeys ensure a consistent and frictionless user experience.

Device-bound passkeys are tied to specific hardware, such as a smartphone or a USB security key. By leveraging the unique characteristics of each device, these passkeys boost security by adding another layer of protection against account compromise. This type of passkey also reduces the reliance on centralised servers, mitigating the risk of data breaches and server-side attacks. Last but not least, they fully comply with regulations such as PSD2.

While synced passkeys are a good alternative to passwords for moderate assurance use cases such as login to web resources, banks should also enable device-bound passkeys for high assurance use cases requiring strong customer authentication (SCA) or multi-factor authentication (MFA), such as customers operating a final transaction or employees or business partners accessing sensitive digital resources of the organisation. A good benchmark for banks in the USA is the PSD2 regulation in Europe. Synced passkeys, while great for user experience, cannot fully match the stringent SCA requirements.

To ensure a smooth and secure transition to new methods of authentication, financial services companies should adopt Thales' Passwordless 360° approach, which provides a comprehensive framework for planning and evaluating passwordless implementations.

Key steps of the Passwordless 360° approach include user ecosystem mapping, in which internal and external users, including employees, customers, partners and suppliers, are charted.

Organisations should evaluate their access levels, transaction types and associated data sensitivity, a process which will expose potential security gaps in current and planned passwordless coverage.

Next, the organisation should establish risk-based assurance levels by determining the appropriate authentication strength for each user group. High-risk scenarios necessitate robust MFA, such as using hardware keys in combination with biometrics. For low-risk access, however, streamlining authentication may be more convenient.

Finally, overlaying existing passwordless deployments onto the map highlights any remaining vulnerabilities. For example, strong authentication for internal supply chain staff might not address equally sensitive access by external collaborators.

Overall, the Passwordless 360° approach empowers IT leaders to visualise complex passwordless needs, justifying investment to stakeholders and prioritising a phased rollout for maximum impact. By adopting the holistic Passwordless 360° approach, businesses become more resilient against cybercriminals' evolving tactics.

It's time to move into the future of authentication. With FIDO passkeys, financial institutions can enjoy the unbeatable combination of security, usability and trust they provide. ■

Haider Iqbal is identity and access management product marketing director at Thales

Discover more about the Passwordless 360° approach at: bit.ly/4gEGjbK

Supply strategy gets smarter

Microsoft's Indranil Sircar discusses how generative AI, copilots and digital twins can help manufacturers optimise their supply chain operations

BY RICHARD HUMPHREYS

Manufacturing organisations have been forced to contend with various sector-specific and cross-industry challenges in recent years. Many have been impacted by labour shortages, driven by an ageing workforce and a lack of tech-savvy employees. Other challenges include global inflation, geopolitical tensions, natural disasters, cyberthreats and the lingering effects of the Covid pandemic, as well as supply chain disruptions caused by incidents like the Baltimore bridge collapse and the Red Sea shipping crisis.

Navigating these complexities requires strategic investments in technology, workforce development and agile planning. Consequently, manufacturers must invest in automation and digitalisation, and adapt how they operate to comply with evolving regulations and develop the flexibility to handle economic uncertainties and overcome other obstacles.

"It's crucial for manufacturers to develop a supply chain strategy to respond to changing customer demands and market forces," says Indranil Sircar, chief technology officer of manufacturing and supply chain at Microsoft. "Maintaining relevance in a rapidly evolving market is essential – customer preferences can shift quickly, and a strategy that anticipates and responds to these changes helps manufacturers to stay relevant and meet customer expectations. A proactive strategy allows manufacturers to identify potential risks and opportunities early, including supply chain disruptions, regulatory changes or technological advancements.

"By understanding and addressing the needs of customers, manufacturers can build stronger relationships and increase customer loyalty. A strategy focused on market changes encourages innovation, leading to investments in R&D and new products that meet emerging needs. It also addresses the growing demand for sustainable practices, which can enhance brand reputation and meet the expectations of environmentally conscious consumers."

The cloud, digital twins and artificial intelligence are all key technologies for developing these supply chain management strategies.

"Generative AI is revolutionising supply chain management by introducing new levels of efficiency, resilience and sustainability," says Sircar. "By enhancing demand forecasting through the analysis of historical data, market trends and external factors, generative AI enables companies to make more accurate predictions. This optimisation helps maintain ideal inventory levels, reducing the risk of product shortages and ensuring customer satisfaction."

In addition, generative AI can be used to continuously generate optimised replenishment plans based on real-time demand signals, supplier lead times and current inventory levels. This helps to minimise costs and ensures that products are available when needed.

Microsoft Copilot is having the greatest impact for manufacturers in terms of supply chain management, says Sircar. "It provides actionable insights by analysing large volumes of data, enhancing visibility across the supply chain and automating routine tasks," he explains. "This allows employees to focus on more strategic activities, improving overall productivity. By facilitating communication and collaboration, Copilot ensures that all parts of the supply chain are aligned and working towards common goals."

Copilot's ability to integrate with systems for enterprise resource planning (ERP), customer relationship management (CRM) and supply chain planning forms the backbone of its role in streamlining operations and enhancing customer satisfaction. For example, in Microsoft Dynamics 365 Supply Chain, Copilot helps to manage purchase order changes at scale, assess

"Generative AI is revolutionising supply chain management by introducing new levels of efficiency, resilience and sustainability"

risks and optimise procurement. Meanwhile in Microsoft 365 Customer Service, Copilot delivers contextual responses and speeds up case resolutions.

The integration of Copilot provides manufacturers with real-time visibility into supply chain operations and enables proactive decision-making. "Microsoft 365 Copilot can be integrated into various supply chain processes to enhance productivity and visibility," says Sircar. "For instance, it can be used for supplier collaboration, demand planning and supply chain logistics. By leveraging AI and machine learning, Microsoft 365 Copilot can help forecast demand, optimise inventory and simulate disruptions, thereby improving supply chain resiliency."

The latest Microsoft 365 Copilot updates introduce features that enhance supply chain management, such as advanced agent customisation in Copilot Studio. This allows integration with third-party data sources and enables automated actions, streamlining tasks like ordering parts and managing inventory.

"When integrated with Dynamics 365 Supply Chain Management, Microsoft 365 Copilot can optimise complex and labour-intensive processes," says Sircar. "It combines data and AI to identify and mitigate risks in the supply chain, improve the accuracy of demand forecasting, and support autonomous and self-regulated supply chains. The latest capabilities enable supply chain teams to take actions based on insights with conversational help while in the flow of work, ensuring increased productivity and improved collaboration among employees across supply chain and other cross-functional teams.

"The 2024 release wave 2 for Dynamics 365 Supply Chain Management focuses on copilots in three key areas: planning, procurement and manufacturing traceability. This includes improvements in planning optimisation to calculate capable-to-promise for sales orders faster and without waiting for the next master planning run."

Microsoft Fabric Copilot enhances supply chain operations through advanced data management and analytics. "It transforms data into actionable insights with intelligent tools like Copilot for Data Factory, which generates and explains Mashup code and Copilot for Synapse Data Warehouse, streamlining Transact-SQL explorations," says Sircar. "Paired with Microsoft Cloud for Manufacturing, it boosts supply chain resilience, security and sustainability by enabling visibility, risk management and improved forecasting using Azure-based partner solutions.

"Teams Copilot further strengthens supply chains by enhancing collaboration and decision-making. It enables seamless communication and data sharing across supply chain ecosystems, optimising processes

Future-proofing logistics

Microsoft's Nayana Singh provides a snapshot of Microsoft's Cloud Supply Chain transformation, emphasising the use of distributed ledger technology and AI

Microsoft's cloud business is growing rapidly, supported by the Cloud Supply Chain (CSCP) organisation, which enables the infrastructure powering this growth. CSCP oversees sourcing, demand forecasting, capacity planning, supply chain execution and the management of over 300 global data centre assets. Core functions run on SAP and Azure-integrated systems, including ECC, GTS, MDG and Ariba, which streamline planning, procurement and partner collaboration.

Despite advancements, challenges persist in achieving visibility across the n-tier supply chain. Traditional systems are siloed, relying on sequential data flows and fragmented processes. Reconciling data across suppliers, manufacturers and logistics providers is labour-intensive, which limits agility and operational efficiency. The solution lies in implementing a robust business application layer atop a distributed ledger, integrating ERP functionalities to create a unified data platform. This allows end-to-end visibility so manufacturers can capture purchase orders, invoices and goods movement as a single source of truth, driving transparency and collaboration.

This transformation provides near-real-time data access, reducing reconciliation efforts and enabling proactive decisions. Supply chain managers can answer critical questions – such as the location of goods and payment statuses – instantly. Enhanced visibility also accelerates procure-to-pay cycles and improves cash management, shifting manufacturers from reactive to proactive operations. Billions of dollars in commodity goods are now tracked on this distributed network, yielding economic benefits at a similar scale.

Looking ahead, Microsoft plans to onboard more suppliers, validate ERP integrations and expand partnerships to enable traceability from raw materials to recycling. This innovation optimises sourcing, inventory management and forecasting while improving resilience, agility and cost efficiency.

The platform also addresses emerging regulatory challenges, such as forced labour and sustainability laws. Leveraging AI and generative models, Microsoft aims to standardise data, integrate human rights risk information and create an AI-powered fusion platform. This enables secure data processing, risk detection and actionable insights to manage supply chain risks effectively.

Nayana Singh is senior director of supply chain innovation and product at Microsoft. Read Nayana Singh's full viewpoint at: www.technologyrecord.com

Photo: Unilever

in real time and handling complex tasks with AI-driven insights. Integrated with Dynamics 365 Supply Chain Management, Teams Copilot helps inventory managers by providing forecasts, alerts and recommendations based on demand and supply constraints."

Two software companies leveraging Copilot to enhance their supply chain planning solutions are Blue Yonder and o9 Solutions. "They are using Copilot Studio to build custom workflows and industry-specific copilots tailored to address unique business processes and challenges," says Sircar. "Blue Yonder is developing a copilot on Azure OpenAI for demand planning, which helps forecast demand accurately by analysing historical data and market trends. While o9 Solutions is empowering supply chain operations by integrating generative AI capabilities for faster decision-making and optimised planning. This includes enhancing digital assistant workflows through an agent framework utilising Azure OpenAI Service's chat-completion and code-generation features to enable intelligent automation within ERP operations."

Meanwhile, global consumer goods company Unilever leveraged AI and cloud technology to enhance real-time risk sensing and mitigation across its supply chain. By integrating data across procurement, R&D, manufacturing and logistics, Unilever can predict and respond to risks proactively. A resilience framework prioritises material risks, using predictive analytics and scorecards to focus on high-demand products. This approach shifts investment from reactive problem-solving to prevention, improving supply chain resilience while reducing costs and enhancing efficiency.

In addition to generative AI and Microsoft copilots, manufacturers are using digital twin technology to enhance supply chain operations. "Digital twins and control towers are transformative tools for ensuring seamless and sustainable supply chain operations in manufacturing," says Sircar. "Digital twins create virtual replicas of supply chains, enabling real-time simulations to predict disruptions, optimise processes and reduce waste. By leveraging predictive analytics, they help manufacturers to forecast potential issues and make informed decisions, enhancing efficiency and sustainability. Control towers complement this by providing end-to-end visibility, enabling quick responses to supply chain changes and fostering collaboration with real-time data.

"Together, these technologies improve resource utilisation, track and reduce carbon footprints, and ensure ethical sourcing. By adopting them, manufacturers can build resilient, adaptable, and sustainable supply chains that meet modern demands effectively." ◼

Read the extended version of the article at: www.technologyrecord.com

Unilever has improved its supply chain resilience by leveraging AI and cloud technology in its manufacturing operations
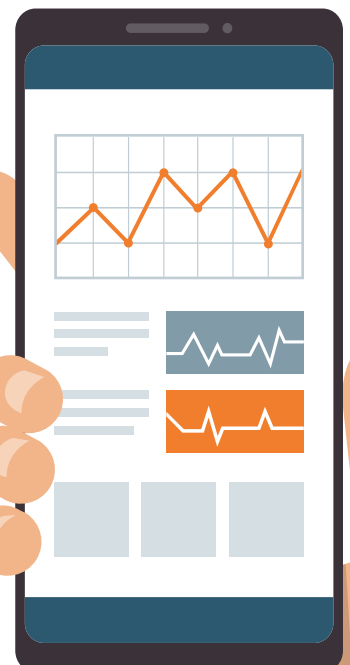
Partner perspectives

We asked selected partners how Microsoft's tools and technologies are helping manufacturers to develop resilient and sustainable supply chains in a time of changing customer demands and market forces
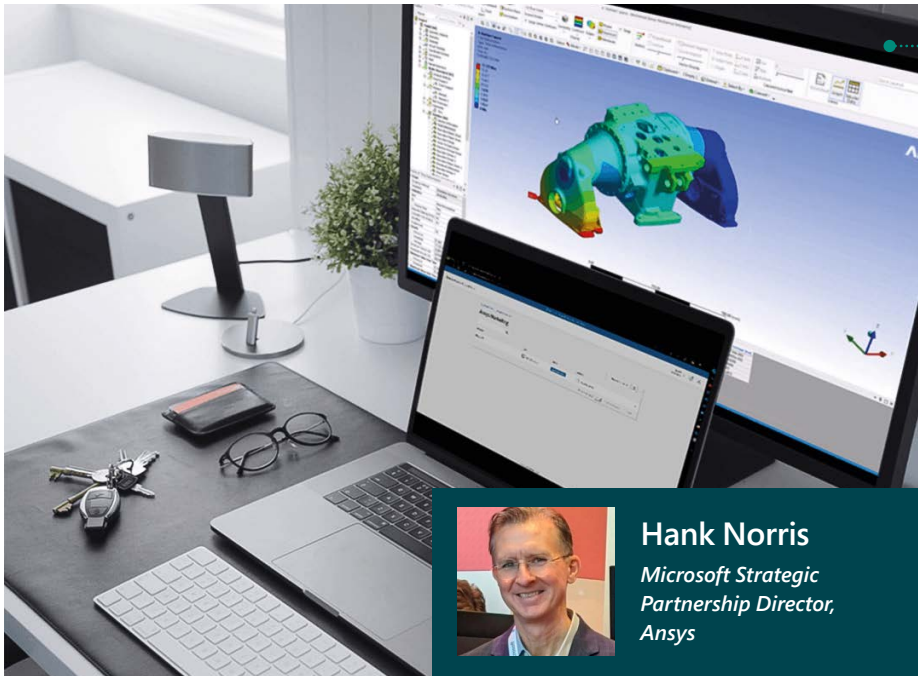
Hank Norris
Microsoft Strategic Partnership Director, Ansys

"Manufacturers can develop resilient and sustainable supply chains using Ansys Access on Microsoft Azure, a cloud engineering solution designed to meet evolving customer demands and market forces. For example, consultancy firm Movares Europe uses Ansys Mechanical – structural finite element analysis software running on Azure – to run advanced fatigue calculations on steel bridges. Movares benefits from the efficiency and scalability of Azure, which allows it to run complex simulations on optimal infrastructure. Meanwhile, the user-friendly setup and support from Ansys ensures minimal disruption. This combination allows manufacturers to innovate and adapt quickly while maintaining sustainability and operational efficiency."

"At Avalara, we empower manufacturers using Dynamics 365 to build resilient, sustainable supply chains by simplifying tax compliance. Our automated solutions ensure accurate tax calculations, exemption certificate management and seamless tax filing, helping businesses adapt quickly to changing market demands and regulatory shifts. By minimising errors and saving time, Avalara enables manufacturers to focus on growth and operational efficiency rather than tax challenges. With real-time tax rate updates and a robust cloud-based platform, we support sustainable business practices and help manufacturers navigate complex tax landscapes effortlessly."

Greg Chapman
Senior Vice President, General Manager AvaTax, Avalara

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"Real-time visibility in industrial operations can be viewed in two maturity stages. The first basic stage reacts to 'when things go wrong', using real-time monitoring to resolve issues immediately and minimise latency in addressing process deviations.

The advanced stage is proactive, where industrial companies leverage AI and machine learning to catch issues before they arise, enhancing predictive maintenance and quality. Additionally, advanced planning and scheduling capabilities enable 'capable-to-promise' modelling, which ensures that production goes right in the first place supported by realistic plans and schedules."

Sree Hameed
Consumer Products Industry Strategist, AVEVA

"Optimising asset efficiency, safety and sustainability across the full lifecycle – including engineering, procurement, construction, and operations and maintenance – is critical. Supply chains represent one of the greatest opportunities for improvement. Hexagon's Asset Lifecycle Intelligence division offers solutions powered by Azure that provide a secure, scalable platform for building resilient supply chains in dynamic markets. Leveraging Azure Functions, our internet of things-enabled supply chain software delivers real-time insights and material visibility, while empowering decision-makers and reducing waste. Many of our solutions integrate seamlessly with Microsoft Power BI, equipping diverse stakeholders with advanced analytics to boost productivity and performance."

David Whelan
Senior Strategy and Enablement Consulting Lead, Hexagon

"Modern supply chain solutions drive operational resilience and agility, allowing businesses to swiftly adapt to market shifts. A supply chain control tower (SCCT) offers end-to-end visibility, using AI and machine learning to predict disruptions, optimise inventory and streamline production. Predictive insights prevent downtime, ensuring timely deliveries, while AI-driven optimisation minimises costs, waste and stockouts. Advanced analytics uncover inefficiencies and enhance decision-making, improving resource utilisation. AI-powered labour planning boosts productivity, and real-time alert systems enable proactive disruption management. Tredence's SCCT solution, available on the Azure Marketplace, leverages Azure's cloud, data and AI capabilities to provide scalable, data-driven and agile supply chain management."

Rakesh Sancheti
Chief Growth Officer, Tredence

Enhancing simulations for success

According to Dr John Baker and Krishna Samavedam, Ansys' dedicated Microsoft Azure platform is paving the way for smoother, more flexible simulations in the manufacturing industry

BY AMBER HICKMAN

When working on simulations, engineers must have the means to work quickly, efficiently and unhindered by technical difficulties.

To ensure it can deliver simulation solutions that can fulfil these needs, Ansys carries out frequent surveys to identify engineers' biggest pain points, says Dr John Baker, EMEA cloud business development manager at Ansys. "Currently, one of the top barriers our customers face is the need to reduce design cycle times as simulations continue to get more complex and require larger computational capacity."

The firm's cloud solution, Ansys Access on Microsoft Azure, addresses this problem by providing customers with access to high-performance computing (HPC) infrastructure in Azure.

"Ansys Access on Azure provides an interface for engineers that allows them to easily create virtual machines, autoscaling HPC clusters and shared storages, and having them in the cloud means they can scale up and down as needed," says Baker.

One of the key features of Ansys Access on Azure is the HPC Platform Services (HPS) capability.

"HPS is Ansys' new job submission tool, which allows users to submit jobs to remote clusters easily and without having to leave their Ansys application interface whether they are in the cloud or on-premises," says Krishna Samavedam, cloud lead product manager at Ansys.

Whilst there are several benefits to using the platform, the power of 'bring your own licence' (BYOL) and 'bring your own environment' (BYOE) are "the main driver and the primary use cases for Ansys Access on Microsoft Azure," according to Samavedam.

"Customers are sensitive about their engineering data, and they want to ensure that it doesn't leave their cloud environment," he explains. "Our service allows customers to bring their own cloud environment and licences. Another advantage of BYOE is that customers can install third-party tools manually to complete their end-to-end engineering workflow."

> "Our service allows customers to bring their own cloud environment and licenses"
>
> KRISHNA SAMAVEDAM

Businesses around the world have benefited from adopting Ansys Access on Azure, including Movares Europe, an engineering consultancy firm based in the Netherlands.

"Some of our customers really valued the ability to create standard desktops for day-to-day work but still have access to a much larger, more powerful machine when needed," said
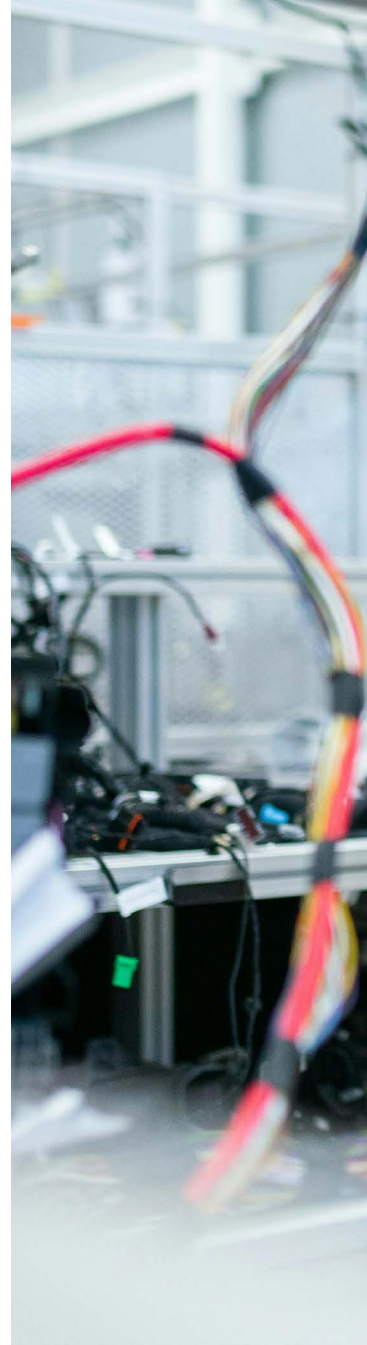
Baker. "This provides them with flexibility in both power and capabilities, which has a positive impact on cost too."

Many organisations need to increase flexibility and scale up their operations. "Currently, a customer facing a hardware barrier may reduce their model size and compromise on running large simulations," says Samavedam. "Ansys Access on Microsoft Azure removes these barriers. This can be achieved through a lift-and-shift or a hybrid approach by submitting jobs using HPS, providing them with the flexibility that is right for the organisation."

Ansys is constantly looking for new ways to enhance Ansys Access on Microsoft Azure to improve the user experience and provide further simulation efficiency and cloud integration.

In addition, the firm is intent on extending its strategic partnership with Microsoft through further innovation.

"Computer-aided engineering is at the heart of what we do, and we need to partner with great organisations like Microsoft to be able to provide our customers with the best performance possible," says Dr Baker. "Ansys has been a Microsoft partner since 2019 and so far, our journey together has resulted in the creation of two generations of cloud platforms: Ansys Cloud Direct and now Ansys Access on Azure.

"It's a very strong partnership which will continue to grow, and we have some exciting things in store that we can't wait to show our customers in the near future." ∎

Tapping into the hive mind

Bry Dillon of AVEVA explains how radical collaboration between organisations across the industrial sector could help to solve the world's greatest challenges

BY REBECCA GIBSON

Leafcutter ants work as a team to cut and transport fragments of leaves to underground nests, where they cultivate fungal 'gardens' to provide sustenance for the full colony. Together, they use their collective strength and intelligence to overcome challenges.

The industrial sector is now exploring how radical collaboration can help it to harness the power of a similar 'hive mind' to solve business and real-world challenges. Bry Dillon, senior vice president of partners and commercial strategy at AVEVA, explains more.

Why is it crucial for partners within the industrial sector to collaborate?
Businesses want to collaborate, especially if they share common goals and complementary solutions. In these cases, partnering is straightforward – both sides work together to create shared value for the customer. However, radical collaboration goes further. It encourages partnerships with potential competitors and peers, embracing a balance between cooperation and rivalry.

Through radical collaboration, organisations of all types can co-develop software solutions tailored to local or global needs. This kind of joined-up intelligence is essential for reimagining how we address some of the world's most pressing sustainability goals.

Working openly and collaboratively helps us tackle universal challenges, like resource management and global carbon emissions, on a faster and more efficient timeline.

What is radical collaboration and what are the key benefits?
Radical collaboration involves securely sharing data with partners, vendors, government bodies and customers to accelerate innovation. For example, oil and gas companies, which are usually fierce competitors, have collaborated on initiatives like

the Offshore Safety Data Sharing Programme, where they pool data on safety incidents and near misses. By analysing this combined data set, companies can identify patterns, reduce accidents and enhance safety standards for the entire industry.

We should universally embrace this approach, even if it challenges the status quo. Innovation thrives when diverse minds – and data sets – come together. Major breakthroughs often stem from building on each other's

ideas. For example, the collective hive mind can support innovations in cost reduction and operational efficiencies, as well as improved industry practices and increased sustainability. The more we collaborate, the greater our capacity for true innovation.

How can the CONNECT platform and ecosystem help with radical collaboration?
AVEVA supports industrial customers throughout the entire asset lifecycle – from design and build to operation and optimisation. This

"Innovation thrives when diverse minds – and data sets – come together"

unique market position enables us to support the unlocking and extending of data across all phases for partners, vendors and customers.

CONNECT, our open industrial intelligence platform, aims to foster sustainability and efficiency. We're committed to offering end-to-end solutions – leveraging artificial intelligence, distributed computing and data analytics – to help companies tackle previously unsolvable problems.

Photo: iStock/FG Trade

AI, in particular, offers new capabilities that can help us solve complex challenges more quickly. With advances in computing power, it's possible to overcome obstacles that were once too difficult or time-consuming. However, achieving this goal requires access to well-structured data that can be used across multiple environments.

CONNECT offers a seamless digital experience across the entire asset lifecycle. Our hybrid approach allows customers to utilise the tools they've always used, while enhancing data reusability and accessibility across the platform. This strategy supports innovation and empowers the industry to collectively tackle challenges head-on.

How is AVEVA exemplifying radical collaboration in its own operations?
Radical collaboration lies at the heart of AVEVA's ethos. We acknowledge that some partners have overlapping capabilities with us, including competing product lines. This is natural and expected within any technology stack. For instance, partnerships with companies like Microsoft often require a balance between collaboration and competition. We embrace this approach in our partner ecosystem.

Our guiding principle is to act as a steward of data across the asset lifecycle, empowering customers with choices to select solutions that best fit their unique environments. This flexibility enhances customer value and helps to strengthen our impact on their operations.

How are AVEVA and Microsoft working collaboratively for collective progress?
One major example is CONNECT data services, where AVEVA is co-innovating with Microsoft to create a partner shortcut to Microsoft Fabric.

Fabric is a unified data analytics platform that brings together multiple tools on Microsoft Azure, simplifying data management and accessibility. This partnership combines AVEVA's industrial data expertise with Microsoft's cloud and data capabilities to offer enhanced solutions for industrial companies.

One key advantage of Fabric is its integration with AI assistant Microsoft Copilot, which directly supports customers with problem solving. Our partnership with Microsoft ensures that data within our systems is natively accessible across the entire Fabric ecosystem.

Traditionally, our main data users have been plant floor personnel, who frequently use Microsoft Office but may not directly engage with our applications. Now, additional users like business analysts and data scientists, who prefer working within Microsoft's ecosystem, can seamlessly access our data within Microsoft tools without transferring it across platforms.

This aspect of our partnership demonstrates how we can jointly deliver greater value to our customers, enhancing accessibility and utility across diverse user groups. ∎

Learn more about CONNECT at: bit.ly/4inMB13

Always-on visibility for supply chains

ANDY BIRKEY: METAFILE INFORMATION SYSTEMS

AP automation enhances manufacturing efficiency, transparency and supply chain resilience

For the manufacturing sector, the goal is clear: maintain the flow of materials and goods seamlessly, even as customer demands and market conditions shift rapidly. Accounts payable (AP) automation provides a solution to supply chain visibility challenges. For many leaders in the manufacturing industry, this approach to digital transformation offers a sustainable path forwards in an increasingly complex global market.

Manufacturing organisations face mounting pressures to operate with greater efficiency, precision and adaptability. The impact of a disrupted supply chain can cascade through every level of production, making effective management of AP processes essential. Here, MetaViewer's AP automation comes into play, offering an integrated and secure solution that harmonises supply chain operations.

By embracing AP automation, manufacturers can gain complete transparency into every stage of their supply chain operations, from order placement to invoice reconciliation. This transparency is crucial in identifying bottlenecks, enhancing collaboration and making informed, proactive decisions that benefit the entire production lifecycle. Furthermore, automated systems provide real-time analytics and reporting, empowering leaders to anticipate trends and respond to challenges before they escalate.

Traditional AP processes in manufacturing are often labour-intensive and prone to human error. Paper invoices, manual data entry and time-consuming approval workflows create delays and limit visibility. However, with an automated solution, manufacturers can streamline the entire process, enabling instant access to financial data that supports better decision-making and ensures continuous supply chain movement. ∎

Learn more about AP automation at: metaviewer.com

Andy Birkey is marketing communications specialist at Metafile Information Systems

Photo: Adobe Stock/lukyeee_nuttawut

The broadcasting revolution

With the demands for personalised content putting linear workflows under strain, Microsoft's Silvia Candiani explains why cloud-based AI solutions can bring broadcasting into the future

BY ALEX SMITH

The world of broadcasting is in the midst of a revolution. The traditional, linear workflows which defined the media organisations of the past are beginning to creak under the demands of the modern broadcasting landscape, with audiences now expecting content to be available anywhere, anytime. Media companies are therefore now searching for ways of working that can adapt with this new reality while continuing to deliver greater value.

The development of cloud platforms and the emergence of generative artificial intelligence has proved to be transformative in this search. Built on the foundation of the cloud, AI solutions have the potential to make production processes significantly more efficient and flexible – a fact that has been quickly recognised by the industry, suggests Silvia Candiani, vice president of telecommunications, media and gaming at Microsoft.

"The media and telecommunications industry is leading the way in AI-driven innovation," she says. "This sector is exceeding others in terms of AI-driven returns, with projects delivering value quickly, often within 12 months or less. This swift implementation and realisation of benefits underscore the strategic advantage of AI in media and telecommunications, where the demand for personalised, on-demand content is rapidly evolving."

The uses of AI span the entire production process, from content creation to distribution. Tasks such as scriptwriting, editing and scheduling can be streamlined, while machine learning algorithms can optimise content distribution by predicting viewer preference and recommending personalised content.

"These technologies are revolutionising the way broadcasters operate by automating and enhancing various aspects of their workflows," says Candiani. "This automation not only increases efficiency but also allows broadcasters to deliver more engaging and relevant content to their audiences."

AI also has an important role to play in enabling media organisations to make better use of data, says Candiani.

"The ability to manage and analyse large volumes of data efficiently is essential for making informed decisions and personalising content for viewers," she says. "Advanced data analytics tools enable broadcasters to gain insights into viewer behaviour, preferences and trends. This information can be used to tailor programming, optimise advertising strategies and improve overall viewer satisfaction. By leveraging data solutions, broadcasters can stay ahead of the competition and adapt to the evolving demands of their audiences."

Taking advantage of AI-powered solutions requires workloads to be moved into the cloud, marking a fundamental change in how broadcasters manage and deliver content. This presents a unique set of challenges, including the need to comply with data regulations, integrate legacy systems and to ensure staff are sufficiently trained in cloud operations.

"The journey to the cloud is not without its obstacles, but with determination and strategic planning, broadcasters can navigate these challenges and emerge stronger," says Candiani. "Organisations should focus on implementing robust security measures, working closely with technology partners to ensure seamless integration, and investing in comprehensive training programs for their staff. By doing so, they can make the transition to the cloud as smooth and effective as possible, positioning themselves to capitalise on the myriad opportunities that cloud technology offers."

Among the variety of benefits broadcasters could see as a result of moving to the cloud is a significant increase in the flexibility of broadcast operations.

"These technologies are revolutionising the way broadcasters operate"

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"Flexibility is key," says Candiani. "With cloud technology, broadcasters can swiftly adjust their resources based on demand, something traditional infrastructure simply can't provide. This dynamic scalability ensures high performance and reliability without the need for substantial upfront investments in physical infrastructure."

Cloud platforms can also enable media organisations to adapt to the changes in today's work environment, as employees move to work across different locations. Teams spread across the globe can securely access content and workflows from anywhere, accelerating production timelines.

"The ability to work collaboratively, regardless of location, also opens up opportunities for broadcasters to tap into a global talent pool, bringing diverse perspectives and expertise to their projects," says Candiani. "This eventually shows up in the quality of content your teams are producing."

The wide variety of benefits to cloud-based, AI-enhanced workflows are already bringing substantial rewards to those organisations who have embraced the technology. According

to *The Business Opportunity of AI* report by IDC, for every $1 invested in AI, companies are realising an average of $3.70, with some organisations seeing returns as high as $10.30.

Such substantial returns are encouraging more media companies to invest in AI solutions. For some, however, concerns remain around how the technology can be

"Our commitment to trustworthy AI helps broadcasters navigate the complexities of AI adoption"

implemented while maintaining compliance with security standards. In an industry that relies on audience trust and content integrity, it's essential that AI is used ethically. According to Candiani, this is one of the main reasons Microsoft is "uniquely positioned" to help broadcasters in their AI ambitions.

"Our commitment to trustworthy AI helps broadcasters navigate the complexities of AI adoption while maintaining the highest standards of security and compliance," she
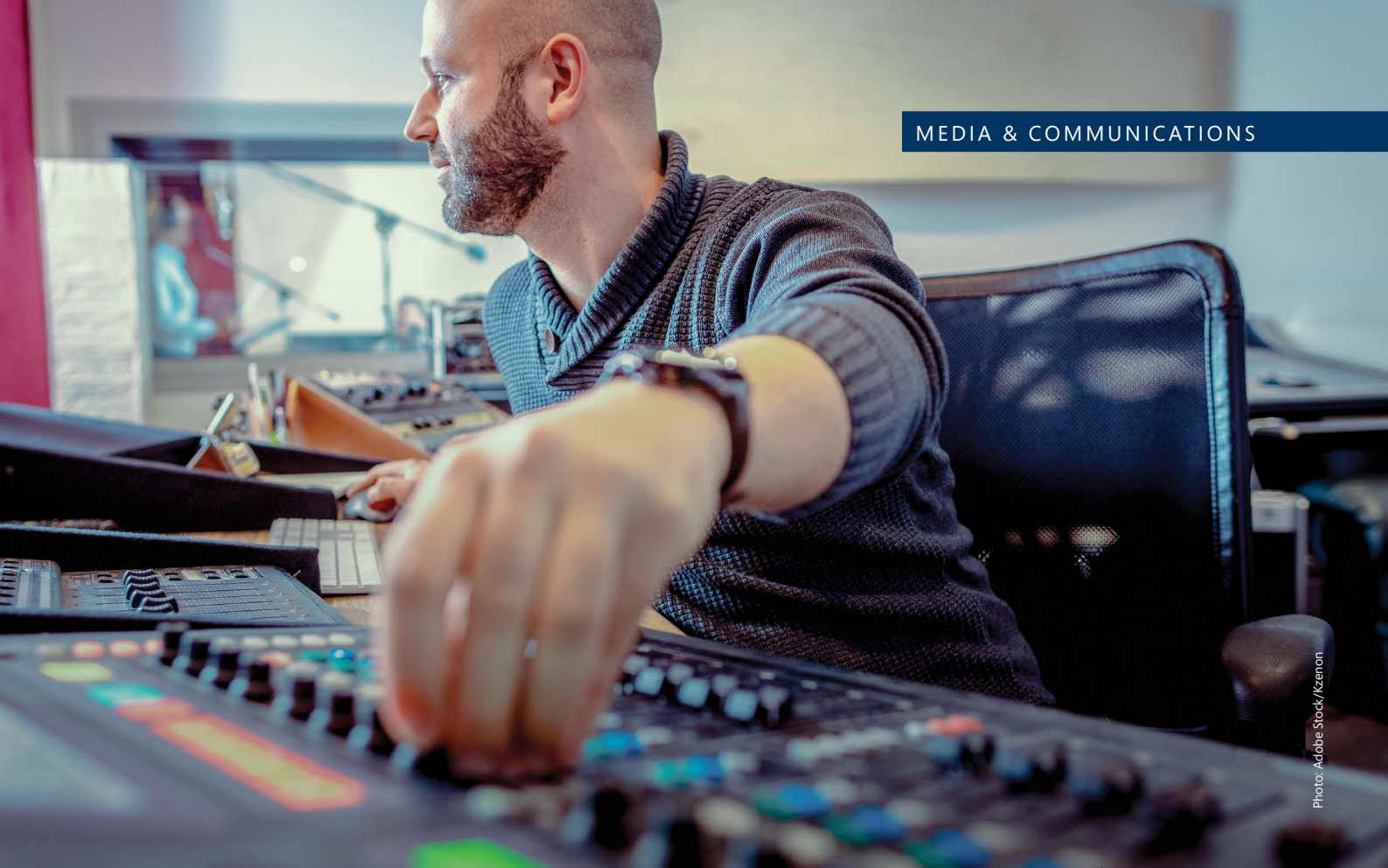
Photo: Adobe Stock/Kzenon

says. "Microsoft emphasises responsible AI, and we provide guidelines and tools to help organisations build AI systems that are fair, transparent, and secure. By prioritising ethical considerations, AI solutions can be built that not only deliver value but also maintain the trust and confidence of stakeholders."

Media companies can also rely on Microsoft to help them with the task of leveraging their data for AI solutions, says Candiani.

"Good AI starts with good data, so it's crucial to take a close look at how data is currently handled and identify areas for improvement," she explains. "Our data solutions enable broadcasters to efficiently store, process, and analyse their data, providing the foundation for AI-driven insights and automation. By ensuring that data is clean, well-organised, and accessible, we help media companies unlock the full potential of AI, leading to more informed decision-making and personalised viewer experiences."

Microsoft can also work with its partners to help integrate AI into existing creative workflows rather than reinventing them entirely.

"This allows media companies to adopt new AI tools without disrupting their established processes, making the transition smoother and more efficient," says Candiani. "By working with industry-leading partners, we ensure that our AI solutions are tailored to the specific needs of broadcasters, enabling them to innovate without compromising on quality or efficiency."

For those companies still unsure about how the new technologies can best benefit them, Microsoft can also provide significant resources to support education and ideation.

"By engaging in workshops, training sessions, and pilot projects, we empower broadcasters to envision and implement innovative solutions that enhance their content production and distribution processes," says Candiani. "This hands-on experience is invaluable in helping media companies understand the potential of new technologies and how they can be integrated into their existing workflows."

Candiani highlights that, though AI-powered solutions are now capable of bringing significant improvements to broadcasting operations, their greatest benefit will be in enabling innovation from media professionals.

"It's not simply about automating repetitive tasks with AI," she says. "It's about giving media professionals the extra time that allows them to focus on more creative and strategic activities. That's what drives the real value." ◾

AI solutions are making an impact across every aspect of media production, from content creation to distribution

Industry perspectives

Media industry experts offer their insight into the ongoing
shift towards cloud-based broadcasting

Sean Wargo
*Vice President of
Market Insight, AVIXA*

"Ultimately the benefits of implementing cloud-based operations for broadcast primarily come down to scalability since it enables an organisation to avoid expensive redundancies as content is rolled out geographically. Data security can also be a key benefit in that roll-out as long as it is carefully specified and addressed by all vendors contributing to the solution. A centralised cloud system also provides opportunities for large scale data analytics as the content is consumed, revealing patterns and enabling customisation. Last but not least, being centralised allows for broad collaboration efforts as employees work from single sources. As with any technology integration effort, always make sure to choose your partners carefully to ensure compliance with requirements."

"The future of broadcasting is moving to the cloud, and Azure is leading the way. With its robust network infrastructure and powerful tools, Azure offers broadcasters, such as the NBA, a scalable, cost-effective, and reliable platform to revolutionise their operations.

By migrating workflows to the cloud, the NBA can benefit from increased agility, enhanced disaster recovery capabilities and access to AI services. Azure's advanced media services enable seamless content creation, localisation, distribution, and monetisation, empowering the NBA to deliver exceptional viewing experiences to our fans.

As the broadcast industry continues to embrace cloud technology, Azure is poised to support broadcasters worldwide who seek to unlock new opportunities and drive innovation in this ever-evolving media landscape."
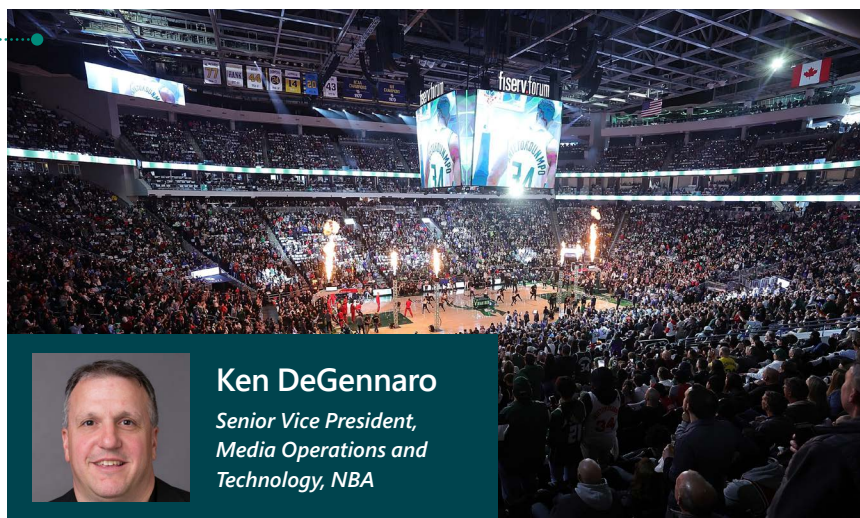
Ken DeGennaro
*Senior Vice President,
Media Operations and
Technology, NBA*
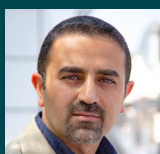
Aus Alzubaidi
*CISO, Director of IT &
Media, MBC*

"We have transitioned to cloud-based operations by migrating petabytes of media assets to Azure. This partnership enhances our scalability, allowing dynamic resource allocation during traffic surges, and supports a hybrid work environment for remote collaboration. Azure's advanced security features strengthen our cybersecurity and compliance posture, safeguarding content and data privacy. The cloud infrastructure enables rapid deployment of services, improves resilience, and offers robust disaster recovery options, ensuring uninterrupted operations. Access to the latest AI models from OpenAI enriches our AI pipelines, fostering innovation. Overall, this move brings operational efficiency, cost savings, and agility to adapt to evolving industry demands."

Partner perspectives

Technology Record asked Microsoft partners how they are helping media organisations transition to cloud-based workflows

Eric Gallier
Vice President, Video Solutions & Strategic Partners, Harmonic

"Harmonic is an innovator in cloud-native streaming technology – from ad insertion to video processing and delivery – for big scale sporting events. Integrating the company's end-to-end VOS360 Media SaaS with Microsoft's Azure cloud and OpenAI Service enables media companies to increase user engagement, advertisement revenue, and workflow efficiencies. Our collaboration with Microsoft is essential for revolutionising the way users engage with live sports. Using VOS360 Media and VOS360 Ad on Azure, our customers can securely stream sporting events at scale, monetise their investment via innovative new ad formats, and deliver premium experience to millions of viewers."

"The integration of NVIDIA full stack accelerated computing with Azure enables broadcasters to leverage powerful cloud computing for complex AI workloads and high-performance video processing. NVIDIA AI frameworks, SDKs, DGX Cloud, and AI Enterprise on Azure, along with generative AI content tools, are driving the shift to cloud workflows for broadcasters, leagues, and rights holders. NVIDIA solutions offer flexible, scalable, AI-enhanced processes that support the industry's transition from hardware-based systems to agile, software-defined infrastructures, empowering innovation in content creation, production, and delivery while optimising costs and resources."

Sepi Motamedi
Live Media Industry Marketing, NVIDIA

Chris Hodgson
Co-CEO, OBT Live

"At OBT Live, we're empowering media organisations to redefine viewer engagement through ScreenFlow AI, a cloud-based solution built on Microsoft technology. ScreenFlow AI transforms traditional broadcasts into interactive, dynamic experiences by overlaying AI-driven engagement elements onto video content. Media professionals can now harness real-time insights to tailored content, boost audience interaction and create new revenue streams – all while enjoying the scalability, flexibility and reduced costs of cloud infrastructure. This cutting-edge platform seamlessly integrates with existing workflows, ensuring that broadcasters can captivate audiences like never before."

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Raising the bar

PARUL BHANDARI: MICROSOFT

The world of media and entertainment is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by rapid technological advancements and evolving consumer behaviours

The media and entertainment industry is fiercely competitive, but Microsoft is at the forefront of empowering organisations to excel. The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence is unlocking limitless opportunities for innovation and efficiency, driven by the ever-growing demand for digital content and AI-powered streaming services. As the landscape continues to transform, Microsoft's cutting-edge solutions are enabling media companies to not only keep pace but to set new standards in creativity and operational excellence.

The AI market within the media and entertainment sector is experiencing remarkable growth. According to IDC, global spending on AI, including AI-enabled applications, infrastructure, and related IT and business services, is projected to reach $632 billion by 2028, with a compound annual growth rate of 29 per cent from 2024 to 2028. Continuing this momentum, the drive to incorporate AI across the industry is set to revolutionise how media companies operate, innovate and engage with their audiences.

Microsoft is leading this transformation with its suite of innovative solutions. By harnessing the power of AI and cloud computing, we enable media companies to streamline content production, enhance creativity and transform audience insights. Our products, such as Microsoft Azure AI and Azure Video Indexer, are pivotal

in automating and optimising content production processes. These tools allow media companies to extract meaningful insights from audio and video files, facilitating the efficient creation and management of large volumes of content.

AI-driven transcription and translation services significantly reduce the time and cost associated with manual processes, allowing creators to focus on producing high-quality content. Generative AI is transforming traditional creative processes, making tools like Microsoft Copilot a game-changer for the industry. Microsoft remains committed to driving innovation and efficiency in the media and entertainment industry, empowering companies to excel in this dynamic market alongside our partners.

Our AI tools are revolutionising the creative process by assisting in generating scripts, storyboards and visual effects. This accelerates production timelines, allowing creators to experiment and innovate in unprecedented ways.

Simon Crownshaw, worldwide media and entertainment strategy lead at Microsoft, says: "Copilot revolutionises media and entertainment by streamlining production, enhancing storytelling and enabling automation with AI-driven tools. It supports both out-of-the-box AI queries and custom workflows for innovation."

Understanding audience preferences and behaviour is crucial for media companies aiming to deliver highly personalised experiences. Copilot in Microsoft Dynamics 365 Customer Insights unifies data sources to provide a comprehensive view of audience behaviour. This enables media companies to tailor their content and marketing strategies to meet the specific needs of their viewers, driving both engagement and loyalty.

By integrating AI capabilities into everyday workflows, it enhances productivity and collaboration across teams, offering media workers increased efficiency and greatly enhanced decision-making abilities.

The media and entertainment sector stands at the threshold of unparalleled growth and innovation, propelled by Microsoft's comprehensive suite of tools and solutions. By streamlining content production, enhancing creativity and delivering audience insights, Microsoft empowers media companies to dominate in a fiercely competitive market. As AI continues to evolve, the potential for groundbreaking advancements and heightened efficiency in the media and entertainment industry is limitless. ∎

Learn more at: bit.ly/3Bxtt02

Parul Bhandari leads the partner strategy for telecommunications, media and gaming worldwide at Microsoft

Photo: iStock/gorodenkoff

IN SUMMARY: AI'S ROLE IN MEDIA

Microsoft Copilot is powering fundamental change within the media and entertainment industry. Here are some ways Copilot is adding value:

Improved collaboration

Copilot facilitates seamless collaboration by providing real-time insights and recommendations. For example, during the content creation process, Copilot can suggest relevant assets, highlight potential issues and offer solutions, enabling teams to work more efficiently and cohesively.

Photo: iStock/gorodenkoff

Enhanced decision-making

Media companies can leverage AI-driven analytics with Copilot to make informed decisions. Whether it's optimising content distribution strategies or identifying new revenue opportunities, Copilot provides actionable insights that help organisations stay competitive in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Photo: Adobe Stock/pressmaster

Increased efficiency

Content creators can automate routine tasks and processes with Copilot so they focus on the more strategic and creative aspects of their work. This not only boosts productivity but also enhances the overall quality of the content produced.

The power of partnering

BETH ADAMO LENHOFF: COGNIZANT

Cognizant provides the resources and agility to propel businesses forward. Leveraging extensive experience with Microsoft Cloud platform, the firm advances cloud modernisation journeys with focus, simplicity and scale

Cognizant has harnessed the power of Microsoft 365 Copilot to craft tailored experience journeys for various use cases within the media industry. This partnership has led to groundbreaking solutions that enhance user engagement and drive notable efficiencies in both cost and process management.

We found that one of the key benefits of deploying Copilot in the media sector is its ability to automate and optimise essential processes. Tasks such as content tagging, metadata extraction and quality control can be dramatically accelerated through AI-powered automation, saving time and improving the accuracy and consistency of media asset management. Additionally, Copilot's advanced analytics provide deep insights into audience behaviour and content performance, empowering media companies to make data-driven decisions, and to adapt their strategies to meet evolving viewer needs.

Copilot's features also extend to enhancing security and compliance within media operations. Tools like deepfake detection, content authenticity verification and digital rights management help protect assets from unauthorised use and ensure content integrity – critical safeguards in a digital landscape vulnerable to manipulation.

These experience journeys highlight how Copilot's sophisticated AI capabilities can seamlessly integrate into daily workflows, enabling media professionals to focus on strategic and creative initiatives by automating routine tasks and delivering predictive insights. By optimising operations and enhancing content experiences, Copilot empowers media organisations to elevate their offerings.

Looking ahead, Cognizant aims to further leverage Copilot to drive ongoing innovation within the media industry. With anticipated cost savings and operational efficiencies, this partnership underscores Cognizant's commitment to utilising cutting-edge technology to add value and foster transformation across the media landscape. ∎

Read more about Cognizant's alliance with Microsoft and the AI-driven solutions available to customers at: bit.ly/4fgUfHM

Beth Adamo Lenhoff is principal consulting partner for communications and media technology at Cognizant

Photo: iStock/gorodenkoff

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PARUL BHANDARI: MICROSOFT

The telecommunications industry is at the cusp of a digital revolution, driven by the need for innovation, efficiency and enhanced customer experiences

Microsoft Copilot is at the forefront of an industry transformation, providing telecommunications firms with artificial intelligence tools to streamline operations and foster a culture of innovation.

Businesses are taking advantage of new technology to create 'personas' to drive change. These AI-generated entities demonstrate near-human qualities, and are able to perform tasks previously only achievable by human personnel. EY's recent white paper *Copilot for Telcos: cost or opportunity?* showcases a wide range of personas within telecommunications organisations, all of which are actively utilising Copilot to drive efficiency and deliver improved services.

Copilot is proving to be an invaluable tool for frontline workers. By automating a range of administrative tasks, the tool allows workers to spend more time engaging with customers, to enhance effectiveness and greatly improve customer outcomes.

Engineers responsible for maintaining the performance and reliability of telecommunications infrastructure are finding that Copilot can assist by streamlining complex network management tasks.

By providing real-time insights and automating routine checks, Copilot helps to ensure network performance and reliability and allowing operators to proactively address potential issues before they impact customers.

Marketing teams are leveraging Copilot to automate content creation, enhance analytics and personalise customer interactions, reducing time-to-market and improving the overall effectiveness of marketing strategies. Copilot's analytic capabilities provide marketers with deeper insights into campaign performance and success.

IT professionals using Copilot can automate information management processes, such as data entry and reporting, freeing up time for more strategic initiatives. Copilot can generate summaries and action items, ensuring that meetings are productive, and outcomes are clearly documented. Copilot's capabilities in code generation and debugging also help accelerate development processes and improve the quality of software products.

Copilot is fundamentally changing the telecommunications industry by providing AI-driven solutions to help businesses stay competitive and deliver value. However, its integration into operations is not just about automation; it's about transforming the way work is done. The shift in focus leads to higher job satisfaction, better customer experiences and, ultimately, a stronger bottom line for the organisation.

The use of Copilot in network operations ensures that firms can maintain high levels of service reliability and performance. By providing real-time insights and automating routine checks, Copilot helps operators proactively manage their networks and address issues before they escalate. Moreover, business leaders are learning that Copilot's automation capabilities can free up valuable time which can then be redirected towards strategic initiatives, from improving cybersecurity measures to developing entirely new services and opening new markets to sell into.

Copilot is proving to be a game-changer for the telecommunications industry and by leveraging its capabilities, businesses are not only improving their operational efficiency but also delivering superior value to customers. ∎

Parul Bhandari leads the partner strategy for telecommunications, media and gaming worldwide at Microsoft

IN BRIEF: MICROSOFT SOLUTIONS IN ACTION

Lumen Technologies redefines customer success

Lumen Technologies has been a pioneer in adopting Microsoft Copilot to redefine its customer success and sales processes. By automating routine tasks such as data entry, scheduling and follow-ups, Copilot has significantly reduced employee workload. This automation allows employees to focus on higher-value activities, such as building relationships with customers and developing strategic initiatives. The result is a notable increase in productivity and a strengthened competitive edge for Lumen.

Vodafone transforms workplace productivity

Vodafone's adoption of Microsoft 365 Copilot has transformed workplace productivity across the organisation. Early trials revealed that Copilot saved employees an average of three hours per week by drafting emails, summarising meetings and searching for information. These time savings have enriched the employee experience, allowing them to focus on more creative and strategic tasks. Additionally, improved efficiencies have led to better work quality and faster decision-making processes. Vodafone's experience highlights the potential of Copilot to enhance both individual and organisational performance.

Read more at: bit.ly/3D6O3ot

The power of partnering

CYRIL VART: EY

Using multi-competencies talents, technologies and operational know-how to design and execute transformation programmes in the AI era, while respecting people, society and the planet, EY helps clients build their future with confidence

The gradual improvement of AI and the irruption of generative artificial intelligence offers telecommunications companies new opportunities to drive competitive gains at every organisational level. To stay ahead of competition, firms need to infuse this technology into their organisation with three scales of projects, which can be parallelised to maximise enhanced competitiveness and profitability: organisation-wide efficiencies through AI (Everyday AI), function-specific optimisation points, and game-changing AI initiatives.

In an era where telecommunications companies face relentless pressure to innovate and streamline operations, versatile tools able to unleash productivity gains and save time at scale are critical. Microsoft Copilot, with its multifaceted aspects and integration into everyday productivity tools, has potential to deliver value across the board.

Research from EY indicates that generative AI technology such as Copilot accelerates the development of less-experienced workers, swiftly bringing them up to the skills frontier. This rapid enhancement in capabilities not only increases overall productivity but also fosters greater social inclusion and economic growth. By bridging skill gaps and facilitating a more efficient workforce, Copilot helps telecommunications companies stay competitive in a fast-paced market.

While time gained through increased efficiency thanks to generative AI is a significant advantage, the return on investment will depend on how each company chooses to utilise this saved time. Whether through organisational shifts, reducing staff turnover, or helping enhance individual output, the strategic deployment of Copilot will determine its ultimate impact.

With experience conducting technological transformation and organisational efficiencies at large corporations around the world, EY teams are collaborators of choice for businesses' implementation and rationalisation of Microsoft Copilot projects. ∎

Read more about EY's alliance with Microsoft and the AI-driven solutions available to customers at: bit.ly/3BBANb0

Cyril Vart is a partner at EY

Photo: iStock/recep-bg

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Lights, camera, innovate

Samantha Minish from AVIXA explains how the association is creating opportunities for organisations to explore the possibilities of broadcast technology

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

The merging of broadcast technology and audiovisual (AV) solutions is transforming how organisations across industries communicate with and captivate their audiences, according to the Audiovisual and Integrated Experience Association (AVIXA), which has embraced broadcasting at its own trade shows.

"The convergence between broadcast and AV technology is happening at lightning speed right now," says Samantha Minish, vice president of content delivery at AVIXA. "Corporations have realised the power of tying broadcast production capabilities with their collaboration efforts – studio technology is one of their top five areas of investment, according to AVIXA's quarterly *Market Opportunity and Analysis Report*."

AVIXA hosted its first AVIXA TV Studio at InfoComm 2024 to highlight the benefits of bridging broadcast and AV technologies. From podcasts and marketing content to virtual keynote stages, the studio showcased a variety of solutions for broadcasting, ranging from turnkey setups to advanced customisable studio options. For many organisations, these live demonstrations offered a glimpse into what is possible.

"It's critical to be able to see working solutions that are both feasible and inspirational," says Minish. "The AVIXA TV Studio is designed to do just that, whether you're considering starting a podcast, creating marketing content or delivering a global keynote from a virtual stage."

However, adapting broadcast technology to a trade show environment is challenging.

"We had to consider how to balance the temporary nature of trade shows with high-quality production capabilities," explains Minish. "But these same challenges exist with corporate applications as well. Many businesses do not have the luxury of a purpose-built space to create and broadcast content."

At InfoComm, AVIXA tackled these challenges by partnering with key industry players.

"We added a virtual stage and augmented reality elements by working with Ross Video and cranked up the professionalism with partners like Shure, Ikan and Sharp NEC," says Minish. "These innovations not only enhanced the event but also demonstrated real-world applications that companies could adapt for their own needs."

The hands-on workshops at InfoComm 2024 turned curiosity into confidence for attendees. "Often while we're creating content in the studio, we have a crowd – but they're almost always clustered behind our production crew," says Minish. "This is an industry that wants to 'nerd out' with you by seeing how you set up and operate."

"It's critical to be able to see working solutions that are both feasible and inspirational"
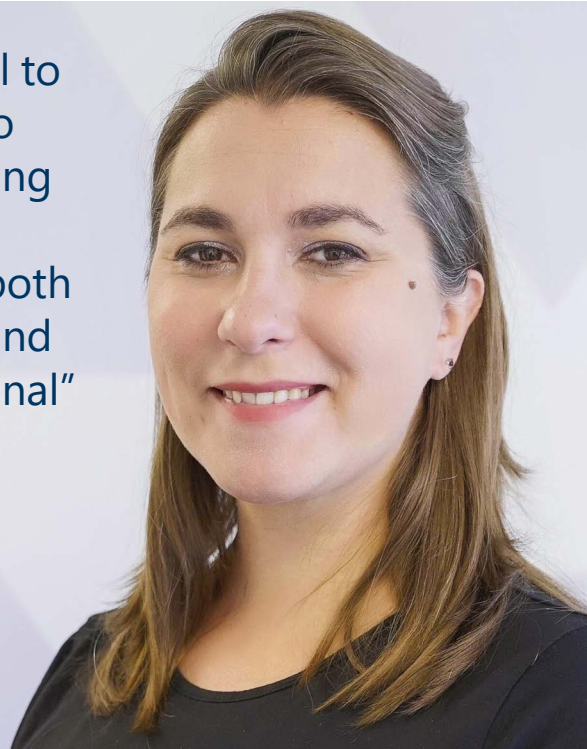
Workshops were intentionally intimate, allowing attendees to explore the technology up close. "Rather than just pointing at the technology, we were able to actually walk them behind the desks, into the storage area and across the set," says Minish.

Following a positive response from attendees at InfoComm, AVIXA plans to expand the studio model for future events like Integrated Systems Europe 2025, which will showcase new partnerships and additional focus areas like podcast production. "We'll be demonstrating the versatility of solution options," says Minish. "We'll have the anchor desk and virtual stage green screen present again. We're centring the whole experience around our production crew and technicians because audiences really want to see how the magic is made. Whether you're starting small, or you've got a 'blank cheque' budget, you'll see something for you at the AVIXA TV Studio in Hall 8.1."

While trade shows offer vibrant, high-energy opportunities to highlight innovations, it is also important to offer organisations learning opportunities year-round to help them understand the potential of broadcast technology. AVIXA's permanent broadcast studio in Fairfax, Virginia, USA, serves this purpose.

"Trade shows will always be incredible places for engagement and learning, but it simply can't be the only time we connect, create, engage or learn," says Minish. "Together with our partner Ross Video, we've developed a production solution that rivals some of those used by media entities, all from existing infrastructure. One key use case for this studio will be the continued development and updates to our educational courses, which are utilised by AV professionals around the world, serving as a backdrop for virtual classes."

The studio is also a hub for creative projects like podcast series *How'd They Do That?* and *AV Explains*, which break down complex concepts of AV technology in engaging ways.

"One of our key responsibilities is to grow the diversity of voices in the industry, whether we develop the rocket ourselves or whether we fuel and boost rockets to help others reach new heights," says Minish. "We can highlight voices and trends from around the globe, from multiple key verticals and diverse backgrounds. We can, so we must!" ∎

The AVIXA TV Studio at InfoComm 2024 aimed to show attendees the benefits of bridging broadcast and AV technologies

How **AI** is democratising public services

Microsoft's Eric Basha outlines how AI is helping government-led organisations to provide more accessible and inclusive services to every member of the community

BY REBECCA GIBSON

City officials in Gamle Oslo, Norway, must provide residents with access to healthcare, employment, housing and multiple other public services. Like any other municipality, there is a limit to its budgets and resources, which makes it challenging to fairly distribute assistance to those who need it most. What Gamle Oslo did have was data. And lots of it.

Working with Microsoft partner Ingraphic, the city deployed Microsoft Fabric to unify the data it was collecting about employment, education and social issues in Microsoft SharePoint, Power BI and Dataverse into one central repository. Now, it can manage the strategic development of services and prioritise investments. For example, it can use colour-coded maps to pinpoint where minor issues such as graffiti are being reported, correlate this information with data about employment rates within the area, and use this information to proactively help those responsible to find gainful employment.

Gamle Oslo in Norway unified its data in Microsoft Fabric so its employees can find information easier to better serve citizens

Gamle Oslo isn't the only city authority to have recently deployed new technologies to improve how it delivers services to the public.

"The Covid-19 pandemic forced government-led organisations to accelerate their adoption of technologies such as AI and the cloud to ensure they could continue delivering vital public services during mandatory lockdowns," says Eric Basha, director of business strategy for worldwide government at Microsoft. "Although the restrictions on in-person contact lifted long ago, these virtual services have remained popular and people now use them for everything from booking medical appointments to applying for driving licences, building permits and financial aid, or reporting issues such as crimes, potholes and water leaks."

Putting the power in citizens' hands
One of the primary ways government-led organisations are using generative AI is within self-service tools that enable members of the public to rapidly access services and information.

The City of Burlington in Ontario, Canada, for example, has developed an AI-based assistant named CoBy in collaboration with Microsoft partner MNP Digital. Created using Microsoft Copilot Studio, CoBy is available 24/7 and provides residents with real-time responses to frequently asked questions, as well as information about public services.

Derby City Council in the UK has also introduced two chatbots built on Azure OpenAI with the help of Microsoft partner ICS.AI. The council hoped the chatbots would automatically handle 20 per cent of its phone conversations when they launched in 2023, but resident uptake has surpassed expectations. Now, over 43 per cent of conversations are automated and the chatbots have managed over 1.1 million telephone and web queries.

Chatbots are becoming increasingly effective – and popular – now that they run on generative AI, according to Basha. "In the past, chatbots were programmed to respond to frequently asked questions but were easily confused if someone communicated in a different language or didn't use specific phrasing. Now they run on generative AI, they can understand natural language queries and conduct human-like conversations, making them more intuitive and helpful. Consequently, members of the public are more inclined to use them."

Photo: Madrid Destino

Just as they are doing with chatbots, government-led organisations are leveraging generative AI's natural language processing abilities to enhance interactive voice response (IVR) systems they use to automate operations in their contact centres. When a member of the public calls the contact centre, the AI-powered IVR system can understand everyday language, perform real-time speech translation and quickly find the information the caller needs. In addition, AI enables sentiment analysis to sense when a caller is upset or frustrated and immediately escalate it to a live agent who has the skills, knowledge and availability to resolve the caller's issue. It does this by using intelligent routing technologies.

"AI can also automate costly and tedious tasks

VisitMadridGPT provides tourists with 24/7 access to accurate and real-time information about the city of Madrid

"Microsoft is committed to decreasing the digital divide, so all our software has built-in accessibility features"

such as transcription, conversation summaries of audio files, and more," says Basha. "The combination of automating mundane tasks and enabling the public to self-serve is dramatically reducing the workload of contact centre staff and enabling them to focus on resolving more complex service requests. This all leads to

significantly improved customer satisfaction, reduced wait times and increased first contact resolution rates."

In addition, generative AI is also powering new language translation capabilities, which is particularly beneficial for governmental organisations serving immigrant populations or residents in countries like India, where there are 22 official languages. In India, just 11 per cent of the 1.4 billion citizens speak English – the language of the government, business and public life – so most of the population is unable to access around 20,000 government programmes. However, a new solution developed by government-backed research group AI4Bharat allows residents to use WhatsApp to send a text or audio message to the Jugalbandi chatbot, which uses tools including Azure OpenAI Service to retrieve information on relevant government schemes and relay it back to the citizen in their own language.

"Generative AI is making real-time translation of both text and speech incredibly easy and affordable for governments, opening up new opportunities for them to engage with residents who have been historically excluded from assistance due to language barriers," says Basha.

Similarly, governmental organisations can use chatbots to assist tourists visiting their cities. In Madrid, Spain, municipal office Madrid Destino

has collaborated with Microsoft partner iUrban to create VisitMadridGPT, an Azure OpenAI Service-based AI assistant that provides tourists with 24/7 access to accurate, personalised and real-time information about the city in more than 95 languages. "The service improves the visitor experience significantly and frees up workers to focus on higher-value tasks," says Basha.

A helping hand
AI assistants are helping government employees behind the scenes too. "Public sector organisations around the world are struggling to meet increased demand for services due to issues such as budget cuts and worker shortages, but AI technologies can relieve some of this pressure by empowering them to do more with less," says Basha. "Tools such as Microsoft Copilots – AI-powered virtual assistants – can automate repetitive and time-consuming tasks, which significantly reduces the administrative burden on staff, boosting their productivity and freeing them up to focus on delivering more responsive care to citizens.

"As with the new generation of chatbots and IVR systems, these AI-powered virtual assistants for government workers are greatly enhanced by even more AI technology to enable them to retrieve comprehensive and accurate information from knowledge databases. For example, tools

Microsoft has built tools such as screen readers into its products to make them more accessible for users with visual impairments

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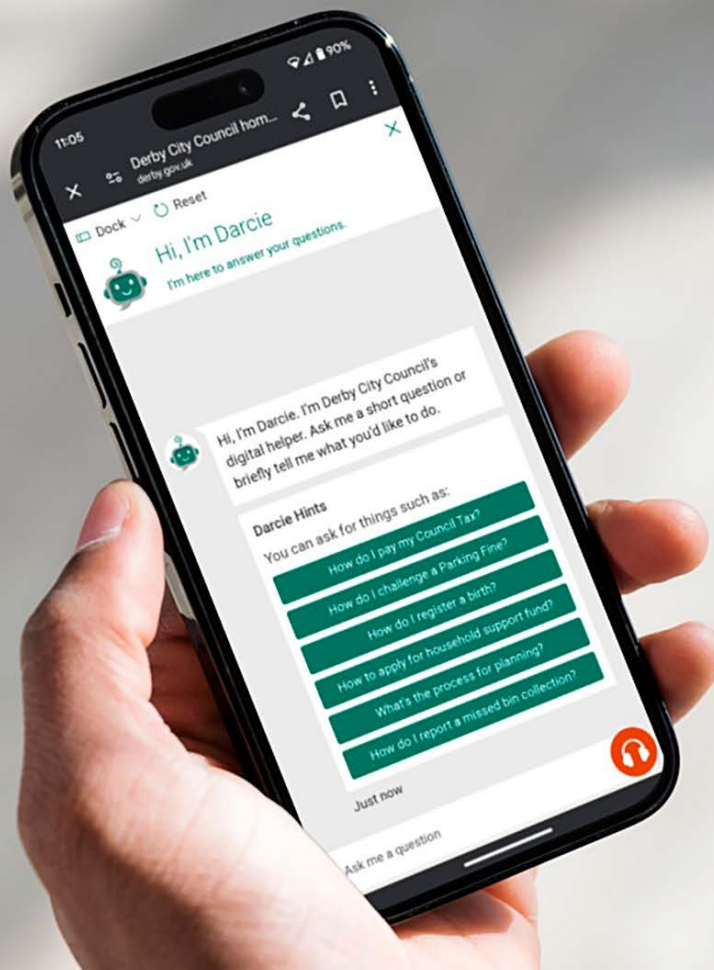
such as Azure AI Search and Azure AI Document Intelligence extract key information stored in various government documents and multiple siloed customer relationship or case management systems to help government workers deliver accurate, personalised services in real time."

Several councils in the UK are already reaping the benefits of implementing Microsoft 365 Copilot to streamline and automate back-office processes and decrease the time employees spend on tasks such as transcribing meetings, drafting reports and creating presentations. For instance, Copilot enables every project manager in Buckinghamshire Council's technical team to save an estimated 30 hours per month and is also empowering Torfaen County Borough Council to enhance service provision while achieving "fantastic time savings". Similarly, Aberdeen City Council predicts it will generate a 241 per cent return on its Copilot investment in improved productivity and time savings, while decreasing operational costs by an estimated $3 million annually.

Elsewhere, Qatar's national postal service provider Qatar Post has worked with robotic process automation expert SquareOne to implement Microsoft Power Automate and Azure Cognitive Services to automatically

complete more than 1,000 dispatch documents every day. According to Qatar Post, this has had a "massive" impact and led to "heightened efficiency and increased accuracy", saving valuable time for all employees. Qatar Post has also saved its human resources team weeks of time by automating overtime activity reporting for nearly 1,000 employees.

Meanwhile, lawyers at The Attorney General's Office in São Paulo, Brazil, are using GPT-4 technology embedded in Azure OpenAI Service to review an average of 10,000 summonses and 80,000 subpoenas per day. The solution generates summaries and analyses of processes, helping lawyers to prepare appeals and decisions quickly.

"Virtual assistants are game-changers for government workers," says Basha.

Purpose-built for accessibility
To ensure virtual services are as accessible as possible to all members of the community, governmental organisations can develop them using technologies and solutions from Microsoft and its partners. All Microsoft products have built-in tools allowing users to customise the visual and audio experience by adjusting screen brightness, colour contrast, the size of the text, audio channels and multiple

Derby City Council's chatbots have managed more than 1.1 million queries from residents since they launched in 2023

other settings to suit their needs. Other notable accessibility features include a screen reader that works with braille devices, automatic live captioning, an Immersive Reader mode, Focus Sessions, and voice and eye command.

"Microsoft is committed to decreasing the digital divide, so all our software has built-in accessibility features to make the user experience more intuitive and inclusive," says Basha. "These tools make it easier for the neurodiverse community or people with visual, hearing or physical impairments to easily interact with devices, navigate applications, understand information, improve productivity and communicate and collaborate effectively."

Using AI safely and responsibly

Many government-led organisations have concerns that the AI technologies used to transform operations and service delivery could potentially introduce risks if important measures aren't taken to implement them correctly, says Basha. Consequently, Microsoft has established six principles to guide the responsible development and implementation of AI technology.

"Microsoft is committed to advancing AI technology in compliance with the principles of fairness, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, reliability and safety, and privacy and security," says Basha. "Working with our partners, we've developed a wide range of proven techniques and best practices to ensure AI technologies are deployed securely and compliantly."

Committed to security

In addition, many of the employee- and citizen-facing solutions developed by Microsoft and its extensive ecosystem of partners have built-in data security, governance and sovereignty capabilities to help governments overcome the traditional cybersecurity challenges they face.

"Government-led organisations are a key target for cybercriminals because they have a lot of sensitive data and operate critical infrastructure and services," explains Basha. "To fortify their security, they can follow the Zero Trust Framework and the Azure Well-Architected Framework when developing their cybersecurity strategies, and deploy tools from Microsoft's portfolio of security solutions.

"Cyberthreats continue to evolve and escalate, but security is Microsoft's top priority and we're working with our partners to integrate robust protection measures across our product portfolio. This ensures both governments and their citizens can fully trust that their data will remain safe and secure as they use AI to power innovative new applications and services."

Equal opportunities

While solutions such as AI assistants are opening up new opportunities to deliver more innovative online and virtual services, research from around the world suggests that many people are unable to take advantage of them. Data from the World Economic Forum shows that around 2.6 billion people worldwide – almost one-third of the global population – remain unconnected to the internet, depriving them of access to essential services. Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation reports that approximately 1.3 billion people – about 16 per cent of the global population – have a significant disability that makes it difficult for them to do the same.

"Microsoft's mission is to empower governments to use technology as a catalyst"

Older generations are often disadvantaged too – for example, charity Age UK's 2024 *Offline and Overlooked* report indicates that 4.7 million people aged 65 or over in the UK don't have the basic skills to use the internet successfully and safely. This makes it difficult – and sometimes impossible – for them to access public services.

"Microsoft's mission is to empower governments to use technology as a catalyst for transforming how they operate, deliver services and interact with citizens and our AI-infused products are doing just that," says Basha. "However, to ensure they are delivering accessible, inclusive and equitable services, government-led organisations must also continue to provide offline options for people who are unable – or don't want – to interact with technology. Providing multilingual, omnichannel options will empower individuals to interact with government-led services in a way that is most convenient and comfortable for them, preventing discrimination and ensuring no one feels disregarded, disempowered or left behind." ■

Partner perspectives

We asked selected partners how they are using Microsoft technology to help public sector organisations deliver more inclusive and accessible services for all members of the community

Photo: ABS CBN Foundation

Gary Wong
Global Segment Leader of Power, Utilities and Infrastructure, AVEVA

"Adopting technologies like cloud, industrial internet of things (IoT) and AI enables infrastructure operators and city planners to move from reactive to proactive decision-making across environmental, societal and business levers. A structured industrial infrastructure can boost sustainability and stability in service networks, enhancing citizens' quality of life. For example, Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation in India used AVEVA Unified Operations Center to establish a centralised unified operations centre powered by cloud analytics, which has greatly enhanced civic services and infrastructure systems in the growing city. And in the Philippines, the ABS CBN Foundation is engaging citizen scientists with IoT on the cloud to monitor sensitive marine environments, like coral reefs and mangroves."

"Using Copilot, we're helping public sector organisations offer services that are more inclusive and accessible. For example, with Copilot's real-time language translation, we can overcome language barriers and provide resources in users' preferred languages. This makes essential services more accessible for everyone. For users with disabilities, we offer features like voice commands and screen readers to ensure they can navigate services independently.

   Our solutions are also designed to support personalised interactions, and they're compatible with assistive technologies across different devices, creating a user-friendly experience for all. By offering proactive service suggestions, we help organisations connect vulnerable users with relevant resources at the right time, supporting them in delivering vital services to the community."

Paul Holden
Vice President of Sales, EMEA, CallTower

Andrew Turner

Chief Technology Officer, ArcGIS Hub, Esri

"Esri is leveraging Microsoft Azure AI services to power numerous ArcGIS AI Assistants across the ArcGIS platform. This enables municipal and regional governments to make their open data more accessible and understandable for all community members. The ArcGIS AI Assistants translate authoritative and up-to-date geospatial data into natural language responses, create accessible visualisations and offer multilingual support. By combining Microsoft's AI capabilities with Esri's geospatial expertise, we're helping government agencies break down barriers to information access and create more inclusive digital services that meet the diverse needs of their communities."
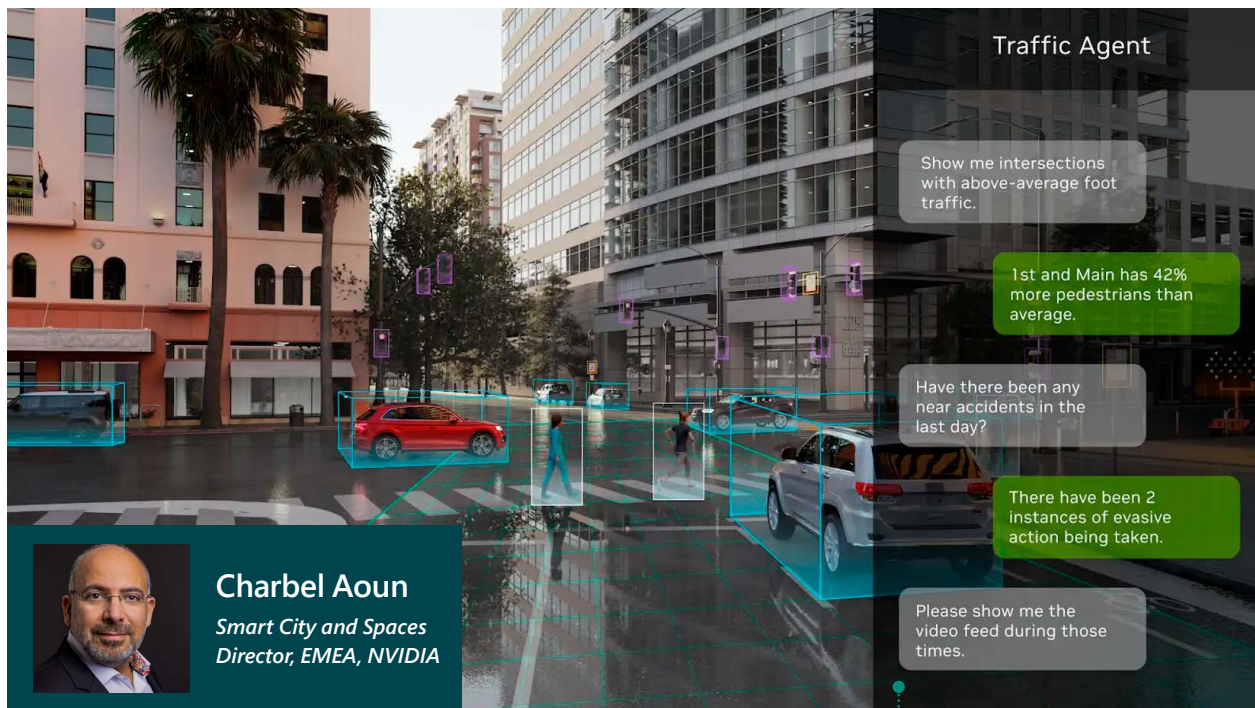
Charbel Aoun

Smart City and Spaces Director, EMEA, NVIDIA

"At NVIDIA, we're committed to democratising AI and making it available to everyone. We're broadening the reach of AI tools, improving accessibility in public spaces and reducing technical barriers. We're also expanding our educational efforts through the NVIDIA Deep Learning Institute, offering comprehensive training and certification programmes. Our partnerships with universities worldwide are helping to integrate AI curriculum and hands-on projects into various disciplines. By addressing the technical and educational aspects, we're working towards an inclusive future where AI is open to all, regardless of background or resources."

Accelerating healthcare transformation

SALLY ANN FRANK: MICROSOFT

Microsoft and NVIDIA's programmes equip health startups with AI-driven tools to ultimately provide better patient care

Artificial intelligence has the potential to transform healthcare by accelerating drug discovery, personalising medicine and improving patient care. Yet, startups often lack the resources and expertise needed to scale solutions and healthcare operations.

Microsoft for Startups, a global and free programme, aims to bridge this gap by providing free access to technology, training and mentoring. Similarly, NVIDIA Inception supports startups with advanced technology.

> "The partnership between Microsoft for Startups and NVIDIA Inception is a testament to the power of collaboration in driving innovation"

With a shared goal of advancing innovation, Microsoft has partnered with NVIDIA to equip health and life sciences (HLS) startups with industry-specific tools to grow their businesses.

The primary aim of this partnership is to drive AI-powered innovation in the HLS sector. Several startups are already engaged in both programmes, including hospital automation solution developer Artisight and Pangaea Data, provider of an AI platform (Pallux) configured on clinical guidelines to find more untreated patients across hard-to-diagnose conditions at the point of care.

"Working with both Microsoft for Startups and NVIDIA Inception has been transformative for

Pangaea Data," says Dr Vibhor Gupta, founder and CEO of Pangaea Data. "By combining resources and access to cutting-edge AI models, we are able to accelerate development and deliver real-world value to our joint customers. Leveraging AI tools from Microsoft and NVIDIA, we apply clinical guidelines to find previously overlooked patients at the point of care who need treatment or access to clinical trials, ultimately improving patient outcomes."

Andrew Gostine, co-founder and CEO of Artisight, says that: "Collaborating with Microsoft for Startups and NVIDIA Inception represents an incredible opportunity for Artisight to elevate healthcare delivery. We can use the combined tools to transform productivity for healthcare providers and deliver meaningful outcomes to our customers. This partnership enables us to scale our smart hospital solutions more rapidly, from operating rooms to patient rooms, ultimately creating a future where technology empowers clinicians to focus more on patient care and less on operational hurdles."

Other startups benefiting from both programmes include Beekeeper AI, which provides secure access to real-time healthcare data, and Niramai, a firm that produces medical devices for breast cancer screening. Beekeeper AI's EscrowAI is a secure collaboration platform for healthcare providers where an algorithm is protected as it is sent by the algorithm owner to computer on curated, encrypted, information in the data provider's environment. The result is both the IP and

data remain secure. Meanwhile, Niramai has developed a novel AI-based medical device to detect breast cancer at a much earlier stage than traditional methods or self-examination. Its imaging method is radiation free, non-touch, not painful and works for women of all ages. This unique solution can be used as a cancer diagnosis test in hospitals, for regular preventive health checkups, and for large-scale screening in rural and semi-urban areas.

One of the key benefits for eligible startups participating in these programmes is access to up to $150,000 in Microsoft Azure credits. These credits can be applied towards leading AI models, including Azure OpenAI Service, Meta's Llama and Microsoft's own small language model, Phi. This enables rapid and efficient scaling using cloud services tailored for AI, big data and healthcare applications. Furthermore, startups will also receive 10,000 credits on NVIDIA's GPU resources. This includes discounted access to the NVIDIA AI Enterprise Stack, which encompasses the full suite of NVIDIA Clara HLS computing platforms, software and services. Startups will also benefit from bespoke HLS go-to-market support, ensuring they have the necessary tools and guidance to bring their innovative solutions to market.
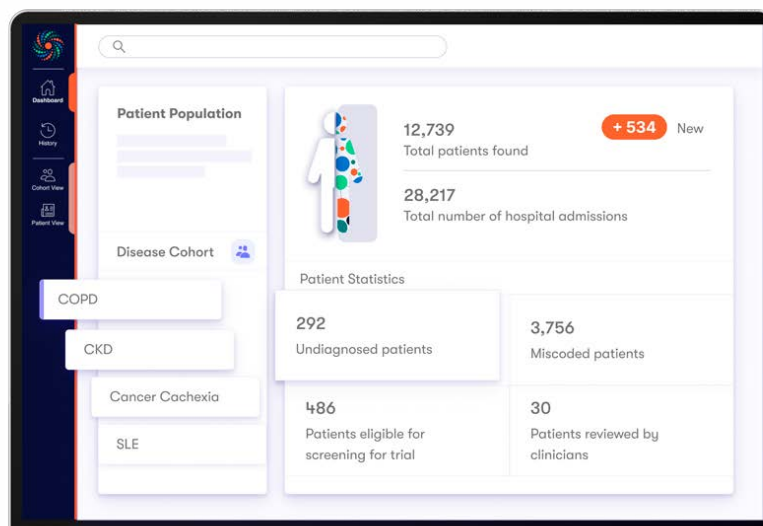
The partnership between Microsoft for Startups and NVIDIA Inception is a testament to the power of collaboration in driving innovation, especially in highly regulated industries like HLS. By combining strengths and resources, Microsoft and NVIDIA are creating a supportive ecosystem for startups to thrive. This collaboration is not just about providing tools and resources; it is about empowering startups to make a real difference and improve access to high-quality care, around the globe. ◼

Sally Ann Frank is worldwide lead for health and life sciences at Microsoft for Startups

Pangaea Data's Pallux platform leverages AI tools from Microsoft and NVIDIA to find more untreated patients for screening and treatment at the point of care

Adapting to thrive

The traditional storefront still holds value for shoppers, but retailers must examine how technologies like AI can take the in-store experience to the next level to ensure they remain relevant as e-commerce continues to grow. Microsoft's Shanthi Rajagopalan discusses

BY AMBER HICKMAN

Whilst it may seem like online shopping has become more prevalent than ever in recent years, a large portion of the population still rely on traditional brick-and-mortar retailers.

For example, the online share of total retail trade in 2023 was 26.7 per cent in the UK (according to the Office for National Statistics), 15 per cent in the USA (US Census Bureau) and an average of 15 per cent across the European Union (Centre for Retail Research).

However, these figures are gradually rising, due to a growing number of e-commerce outlets, availability in more rural areas and increased awareness of the benefits to online shopping, such as convenience to product choice.

Consequently, retailers must focus on evolving their physical stores to introduce new appeal for customers and keep them coming back.

According to Shanthi Rajagopalan, senior director and global head of strategy for worldwide retail and consumer goods at Microsoft, physical stores have the potential to become "micro-fulfilment and experience centres that provide opportunities for customers to browse, discover and try products, whilst developing a very effective advertising surface."

To unlock this value and maintain a dedicated customer base, retailers first need to ask the question: what do consumers seek from a positive in-store experience?

"Customers want stores to be clean, well-lit and well-merchandised," says Rajagopalan. "They want products to be easy to find and available for purchase, and they expect to be able to checkout and pay with as little friction as possible."

In addition, says Rajagopalan, customers visiting physical stores wish to have unique

experiences that an online purchase wouldn't provide to make the journey and physical effort worthwhile. "This could include stores offering a better price or selection of products, or value-added services such as subscriptions, personalisation or repairs," she says.

Operating physical stores alongside e-commerce channels also provides retailers with an opportunity to deliver omnichannel experiences. "For example, they can offer ship-from-store and click-and-collect services to customers, which delivers additional value," says Rajagopalan.

The term 'digital transformation' is one now heard frequently as a variety of organisations adopt and streamline technology solutions that provide new opportunities and optimise their operations. The key to achieving this lies in utilising data. However, for retailers working in traditional storefronts, this is proving difficult.

"It has always been a challenge for retailers to get data from physical spaces, so as customers go from online (known) to in-store (often unknown), they struggle to connect the dots and leverage data to improve the shopper experience," says Rajagopalan. "This gap extends beyond the customer to areas like inventory as well. Getting an accurate count of items on the shelf or in the back room can be elusive for many.

"In addition, operational data, often focusing on temperature, lighting or foot traffic, is much harder to measure in stores where network connectivity might be limited, sensors have to be maintained, and data has to be collected in batches and then uploaded."

UK retailer Asda improved its inventory processes with RFID technology from Microsoft partner SML

"Retailers have to start thinking about the store as a node in the omnichannel network"

SHANTHI RAJAGOPALAN

Photo: iStock/NicolasMcComber

Digital solutions and platforms such as Microsoft Cloud for Retail and Dynamics 365 can support retailers with this process by collecting and connecting information from all parts of the business.

"To bring the best experience to the customer, retailers must really know their customer, and data platforms like Microsoft Cloud for Retail can serve to aggregate insights," says Rajagopalan. "From there, analytics can be used to optimise experience and operations whilst additional business applications can improve assortment, service and commerce."

To add further value to the data platform, retailers can use a range of solutions from Microsoft's partner ecosystem that are tailored towards the specific needs of physical stores, such as shelf analytics, sensors and more.

UK retailer Asda, for example, has improved its inventory processes with radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology from Microsoft partner SML. The firm's solutions, including its RFID tags and Clarity software, helped Asda to increase the availability and stock tracking of its George clothing line, which improved customer satisfaction.

"RFID has been the biggest piece of strategic change the George business has seen in the last ten years," said Kirsty Buxton, senior manager of RFID for George transformation at George Clothing. "This sentiment was echoed across the business with positive feedback from various stakeholders, from store floor employees to executive management, all noting the profound impact of this technology on daily operations.

Other Microsoft partners supporting retailers with the digital transformation of in-store experiences include Blue Yonder, which is combining the planogram capabilities on its platform with in-store customer data to help retailers optimise inventory and improve on-shelf inventory accuracy. The platform runs on Microsoft Azure to ensure a seamless connection between data and insights.

Furthermore, Xpand (formerly 1MRobotics), is helping retailers deliver autonomous checkout experiences. The virtual store interfaces allow customers to shop and collect their products at one terminal, providing convenience for the shopper and reducing workload for employees. The terminals can also be installed in third-party marketplaces,

providing an omnichannel experience and enabling further benefits such as courier delivery services.

According to Rajagopalan, one of the advantages of physical storefronts is that they are often more "service-rich" than their online counterparts. However, providing great customer service requires people, time and training, which can be a challenge in a tight labour market. Retailers that have an established data platform with a comprehensive set of sources can harness the power of generative AI to take it to the next level.

"Generative AI and chatbots are a great way to level the playing field for all associates and help them provide excellent service," says Rajagopalan. "If they have a question, they can ask it with natural language and get a response immediately. Likewise, if they spot a problem, they can create a task just by describing it, or if they want to better understand sales performance and root causes, they can just ask the question."

AI is also paving the way for more intelligent technology such as robots that can further alleviate the day-to-day workload for some store employees.

Earlier this year, Canadian Tire Corporation collaborated with Microsoft partner Sanctuary

AI to start the development and introduction of humanoid robots into its stores. The general-purpose robots are designed to alleviate tedious tasks in retail stores and distribution centres so that employees can focus on more valuable work. For example, the robots will be able to help with picking and packing items in stores, which will allow employees to spend more time on tasks such as customer service. According to Geordie Rose, CEO of Sanctuary AI, the results were "spectacular".

Generative AI also has the potential to streamline the shopping experience for customers. Tools typically seen online such as conversational product discovery chatbots are being brought into in-store kiosks for services such as digital stylists. These in-store tools have the capacity to collect data on local customers to help retailers get a better understanding of their direct target audience's needs.

"If everyone in town is talking about an upcoming event, stores now have a way to extract those insights and use it to better plan for local assortments, inventory levels and staffing needs," says Rajagopalan.

Whilst economy struggles remain prevalent, physical storefronts can be costly for retailers to maintain. Throw digital transformation investments into the mix and it may be difficult for retailers to identify how they can gain a positive return on their investments.

"Retailers have to start thinking about the store as a node in the omnichannel network, and less as a physical space where the investment put in must be offset by the revenue gained," says Rajagopalan. "The revenue influence and impact from stores reaches far beyond the products physically purchased on that trip and retailers must weigh the value of the store based on customer loyalty, lifetime value, basket size and total revenue for the geography.

"This is now more vital than ever as customers learn about products from different sources, gather information from external influences or make purchases outside of the place of discovery through other online marketplaces."

Rajagopalan explains that digital transformation can bring additional benefits that may not be visible at first glance.

"Investing in data and technology can help to improve operations from optimising inventory levels to reduce waste to improving energy efficiency and space utilisation," she explains. "All these things help keep costs in balance while allowing the store to play a unique role in the customer's omnichannel journey." ◼

Canadian Tire Corporation is introducing humanoid robots into its stores with Microsoft and Sanctuary AI

Predict, stock and succeed

Kyndryl's Kayla Broussard explains how AI helps retailers to analyse customer buying habits and improve inventory management, and shares her tips for easily adopting the technology

BY AMBER HICKMAN

Over 70 per cent of customers expect personalised services from retailers, according to McKinsey & Company. Furthermore, 76 per cent report feeling frustrated when their experiences lack a personal touch. The key to meeting these expectations lies in leveraging artificial intelligence technology.

"With AI, retailers can offer a personalised shopping experience with hyper-relevant product recommendations to each customer," says Kayla Broussard, chief technology officer for retail at Kyndryl. "This is not just about addressing them by name but also understanding their shopping patterns and preferences, which can be as detailed as predicting what products they might need based on past purchases or their size and colour preferences. This level of personalisation significantly enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty, which are key drivers of retail success today."

AI is making an impact across all sectors for retail. For example, AI-powered tools help retailers to plan store layouts by analysing customer traffic patterns from heat maps to ensure that high-demand products are placed in high-traffic areas.

Store managers can also monitor stock numbers, analyse purchases and order more products with the help of AI.

"One of the revolutionary aspects of AI is its ability to integrate across various points of sale and inventory systems to provide a unified, real-time view of inventory levels," says Broussard. "This helps retailers to maintain the right amount of stock based on predicted demand, reducing the cost of overstocking. It

"AI systems are only as good as the data they process"

also allows for predictive restocking, where AI inventory management algorithms forecast when stock will run low and automatically trigger replenishment orders."

Loss prevention is another critical area where AI is driving real change.

"Using machine learning models, AI can identify patterns that might indicate fraudulent
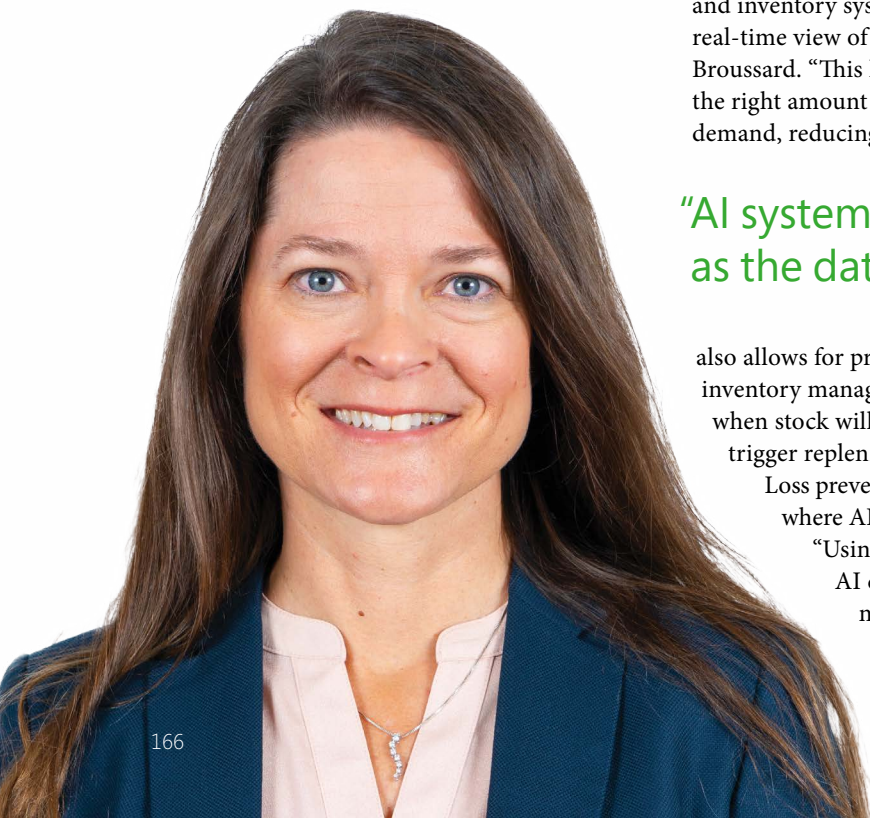
Photo: iStock/Kupicoo

activities or shoplifting," explains Broussard. "For instance, AI-powered surveillance cameras can detect unusual behaviours and alert staff immediately. Additionally, AI can be integrated into radio-frequency identification tags to track items in real time throughout the store, which helps prevent theft."

To capitalise on the many potential benefits of implementing AI, retailers must gather high-quality, accurate data from a variety of sources.

"AI systems are only as good as the data they process," says Broussard. "AI models trained on incomplete data may develop biases and produce inaccurate predictions. Data must be cleaned and organised to feed into AI systems for effective and reliable retail insights."

Data centralisation ensures that any analytics tools based on that data produce accurate, actionable insights. Kyndryl helps retailers to get AI-ready, assisting them with data integration by consolidating applications and systems onto a unified platform. For example,

Kyndryl helped one of the largest Germany-based retailers – which has over 10,000 stores across 15 countries in Europe – to better connect its IT locations.

"The retailer had previously taken a pragmatic, hands-off approach to IT, allowing each operating company to build and run its own infrastructure," says Broussard. "This fragmented approach gave each entity control, but it did not support new business objectives such as the creation of a company-wide mobile application for cashiers."

Kyndryl helped the retailer to adopt a centralised cloud strategy by migrating 170 apps from across 75 legal entities in eight countries.

"We moved all appls onto one cloud system without any business disruption," says Broussard. "Since the migration, the firm has improved performance across all departments by over 30 per cent. The consolidated data has simplified supply chain logistics, reduced IT spend on new hardware and enabled the firm to grow with new customer demands." ◾

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Technology Record

Welcome to the featured partners section of *Technology Record*. Our intention is to highlight a selection of Microsoft partners and provide information on the innovative solutions and services they are delivering to help meet your enterprise technology needs. We hope that you find this a valuable insight into the Microsoft partner community and look forward to spotlighting more partners in future editions.

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Andy Byers, Senior Director Strategic Partnerships

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When visionary companies need to know how their world-changing ideas will perform, they can close the gap between design and reality using Ansys simulation. For more than 50 years, Ansys software has enabled innovators across industries to push the boundaries of product design by using the predictive power of simulation. From sustainable transportation and advanced satellite systems to life-saving medical devices, Ansys powers innovation that drives human advancement.

Anywhere365

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Anywhere365 is an omnichannel dialogue management and cloud contact centre platform exclusively for the Microsoft 365 ecosystem. It is the world's first solution certified by Microsoft in the Contact Center programme for Microsoft Teams. Anywhere365 has been recognised as a powerful Teams-native solution in cloud contact centre reports by analyst firms such as Gartner and ISG, and is trusted by over 2,000 global enterprises, like Toyota, Philips and DHL.

Anywhere365 integrates with any customer relationship management and IT service management systems to help enterprises engage with their customers across any channel, at any time, from anywhere. It also helps to optimise the warehouse of time in communication and agent productivity.

Avalara
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Avalara makes tax compliance faster, easier, more accurate and more reliable for over 41,000 business and government customers in over 75 countries. Tax compliance automation software solutions from Avalara leverage over 1,200 signed partner integrations across leading e-commerce, enterprise resource planning and other billing systems to power tax calculations, document management, tax return filing and tax content access.

AVEVA
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AVEVA is a global leader in industrial software, sparking ingenuity to drive responsible use of the world's resources. The company's secure cloud platform helps businesses harness information and improve collaboration with customers, suppliers, and partners. Over 20,000 enterprises in more than 100 countries rely on AVEVA to help them deliver life's essentials: safe and reliable energy, food, medicines, infrastructure and more. By connecting people with trusted information and AI-enriched insights, AVEVA enables efficient engineering and optimised operations, driving growth and sustainability.

Named as one of the world's most innovative companies, AVEVA supports customers with open solutions and the expertise of more than 6,400 employees, 5,000 partners and 5,700 certified developers. Headquartered in Cambridge, UK, AVEVA operates globally.

Backbase
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Backbase is on a mission to re-architect banking around the customer. We are the creators of the Engagement Banking Platform – a composable platform that empowers banks to accelerate their digital transformation through progressively modernising their main customer journeys. From onboarding to servicing, lending and investing, our platform streamlines every aspect of the customer and employee journey. Pre-integrated with leading core systems and fintechs, it enables institutions to unlock innovation at scale, driving instant value creation. Over 150 financial organisations around the world have embraced the Backbase Engagement Banking Platform – including First National Bank, Navy Federal Credit Union, Raiffeisen, BPI, Banco Nacional, MCB and many more.

CallCabinet
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CallCabinet delivers comprehensive and customisable compliant call recording and analytics solutions to enterprises using platforms such as Microsoft Teams. Uniquely equipped with AI-driven conversation analytics, call quality management tools and custom business intelligence reporting, the platform meets end-to-end compliance needs for any calling, conferencing, and contact centre environment. CallCabinet serves various industries, including financial services, healthcare, retail, manufacturing and government.

CallCabinet provides solutions that enhance operational effectiveness, efficiency and regulatory compliance, making it a go-to choice for organisations seeking high-performance compliant call recording and powerful analytics technology.

CallTower

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Since its establishment in 2002, CallTower has evolved into a global cloud-based, enterprise-class cloud communications (unified communications, contact centre and collaboration) solutions provider, catering to the needs of expanding businesses globally. CallTower delivers seamless Microsoft Teams voice solutions elevated by the integration of AI technology, comprehensive contact centre solutions and one-click failover, marking a significant milestone in the communication landscape. It offers and supports solutions such as Operator Connect for Microsoft Teams, Microsoft Teams Direct Routing, GCC High Teams Direct Routing and Microsoft 365.

CentrePal

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CentrePal is a certified contact centre solution for Microsoft Teams, delivering enterprise-grade customer engagement capabilities natively within Teams. As a Microsoft IP Co-Sell partner, CentrePal empowers organisations globally to transform their customer experience through a complete, cloud-native solution that unifies voice, chat, email, SMS and AI self-service channels.

Built for seamless integration with the Microsoft ecosystem, CentrePal eliminates the complexity traditionally associated with contact centre solutions. Its modern cloud architecture ensures scalability and resilience, while its native Teams integration enables organisations to leverage their existing Microsoft investments to enhance agent collaboration, boost productivity and deliver exceptional customer experiences. Headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, CentrePal serves organisations worldwide.

Delinea

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Delinea is a leading provider of privileged access management (PAM) solutions for modern, hybrid enterprises. The Delinea Platform seamlessly extends PAM by providing authorisation for all identities, granting access to an organisation's most critical hybrid cloud infrastructure and sensitive data to help reduce risk, ensure compliance and simplify security. Delinea removes complexity and defines the boundaries of access for thousands of customers worldwide. Our customers range from small businesses to the world's largest financial institutions, intelligence agencies and critical infrastructure companies. With Delinea, privileged access is more accessible.

DTEN

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Since 2015, DTEN has provided award-winning technology that elevates video meeting experiences with intuitive touchscreen collaboration, lifelike video and crystal-clear audio.

DTEN's professional video collaboration solutions are simple to use, quick to set up, and work right out of the box.

DTEN is headquartered in San Jose, California, with regional offices throughout the USA, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Asia Pacific and Japan.

Hexagon

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Hexagon is the global leader in digital reality solutions, combining sensor, software and autonomous technologies. The company is putting data to work to boost efficiency, productivity, quality and safety across industrial, manufacturing, infrastructure, public sector and mobility applications. Hexagon's technologies are shaping production and people-related ecosystems to become increasingly connected and autonomous, ensuring a scalable, sustainable future.

Hexagon's Asset Lifecycle Intelligence division helps clients design, construct and operate more profitable, safe and sustainable industrial facilities. We empower customers to unlock data, accelerate industrial project modernisation and digital maturity, increase productivity and move the sustainability needle.

Holistic AI

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Holistic AI helps enterprises confidently adopt and scale AI. The Holistic AI Governance Platform accelerates AI transformation by integrating governance seamlessly with all data and AI systems across the organisation. It automatically discovers AI projects in progress, simplifies inventory management, assesses technical and regulatory risks in development, and offers actionable risk mitigation strategies. With automated reporting, continuous monitoring and an executive-level dashboard, the platform gives leadership oversight and control of their AI workloads. This enables teams to move from concept to deployment faster, maximising return on investment for the enterprise. Holistic AI is part of Microsoft's Pegasus Program and is available via the Azure Marketplace.

Huddly

Huddly

www.huddly.com

Combining its industry-leading expertise in artificial intelligence, software, hardware and user experience, Huddly crafts intelligent camera systems that enable inclusive and productive teamwork. Huddly cameras are designed to provide high-quality AI-powered video meetings on major platforms, including Microsoft Teams. With upgradable software, durable hardware, and engaging user experiences, they are the ideal choice for organisations seeking a future-proof, scalable, and sustainable solution. Founded in 2013, Huddly is headquartered in Oslo, Norway, with presence in the US, Europe, Middle East and Africa, and Asia-Pacific, and global distribution.

Infosys
Navigate your next

Infosys
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Infosys is a global leader in next-generation digital services and consulting. Over 300,000 of Infosys' people work to amplify human potential and create the next opportunity for people, businesses and communities. Infosys enables clients in more than 56 countries to navigate their digital transformation. With over four decades of experience in managing the systems and workings of global enterprises, the company expertly steers clients as they navigate their digital transformation powered by the cloud. Infosys enables them with an AI-powered core, empowers the business with agile digital at scale and drives continuous improvement with always-on learning through the transfer of digital skills, expertise and ideas from its innovation ecosystem. Infosys is committed to being a well-governed, environmentally sustainable organisation where diverse talent thrives in an inclusive workplace.

isolved

isolved
Amberly Dressler, Vice President, Corporate Marketing

www.isolvedhcm.com

isolved is the most trusted human capital management technology leader, providing the best combination of software and services to meet the needs of today's 'people heroes' – human resources, payroll and benefits professionals. From talent acquisition to workforce management, our solutions are delivered directly or through our HR partner network to more than seven million employees and 177,000 employers across all 50 US states, who use them every day to increase productivity, accelerate decision-making and ensure performance, while reducing risk. isolved People Cloud automates the entire employee experience by design, so that organisations can engage, empower and energise their talent while freeing their people heroes to exceed their goals and grow their careers.

jamf

Jamf
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A comprehensive device management and security platform is critical to empowering IT and security teams while securing work for end users. As a member of the Microsoft Intelligence Security Association, Jamf's purpose is to simplify work by helping organisations manage and secure an Apple experience that organisations trust with solutions hosted on Microsoft Azure. Jamf is the only company in the world that provides a complete management and security solution for an Apple-first environment that is secure for enterprises, simple for consumers and protects personal privacy.

kyndryl

Kyndryl

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Kyndryl is an IT infrastructure services provider. The company designs, builds, manages and modernises the complex, mission-critical information systems the world depends on every day. Kyndryl's nearly 90,000 employees serve over 4,000 customers in more than 60 countries around the world, including 75 per cent of the Fortune 100 businesses. Together, Kyndryl and Microsoft aim to bring to market advanced solutions built on the Microsoft Cloud that will accelerate hybrid cloud adoption, modernise applications and processes, support mission critical workloads and further enable modern work experiences for customers.

Lanteria

Lanteria
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Lanteria is the human resources (HR) platform that works your way. A Microsoft Gold partner since 2018, Lanteria offers a comprehensive HR management system that centralises employee data, streamlines processes and tracks time, attendance, performance, learning and recruiting in one easy-to-use HR management solution designed to make your business run smoother. Organisations can use Lanteria's systems to free up the HR team's time to focus on people, not paper pushing, and gain insight into human capital management data and analytics to better plan for the future and create a culture of happy, high-performing staff.

Lenovo

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Lenovo is a $57 billion revenue global technology powerhouse that is ranked 248 in the Fortune Global 500 and serves millions of customers every day in 180 markets. Focused on a bold vision to deliver smarter technology for all, Lenovo has built on its success as the world's largest PC company with a full-stack portfolio of AI-enabled, AI-ready and AI-optimised devices (PCs, workstations, smartphones, tablets), infrastructure (server, storage, edge, high-performance computing and software-defined infrastructure), software, solutions and services. Lenovo's continued investment in world-changing innovation is building a more equitable, trustworthy and smarter future for everyone, everywhere. Lenovo is listed on the Hong Kong stock exchange under Lenovo Group Limited.

Metafile Information Systems

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MetaViewer is an accounts payable automation/ document management solution that is essential for companies looking to eliminate manual data entry and automate processes. A Microsoft AppSource preferred solution, MetaViewer is integrated with Microsoft Dynamics ERP systems and enables end users to perform everyday tasks with greater proficiency and accuracy. MetaViewer offers functionality including Touchless Invoice Processing and Intelligent Recognition which reduces costs, increases efficiency and provides a significant return on investment. Data analysis and reporting features provide executives with a complete and detailed view of financial processes, from invoice to payment, empowering better data driven decisions and spend management. MetaViewer is customisable and easily expands across the entire enterprise.

M-Files

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M-Files is the leading platform for knowledge work automation. With the M-Files platform, knowledge workers can find information faster, work smarter and achieve more. With its integration with Microsoft products, the M-Files knowledge work automation platform helps organisations optimise investments in Microsoft 365 by providing complementary capabilities for business processes and information governance. M-Files makes Microsoft 365 the single point of access for all enterprise data, regardless of its storage repository, through Microsoft 365 user interfaces. For more information, learn about the M-Files solution in the Microsoft Azure Marketplace.

Miro

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Miro is the Innovation Workspace that enables teams of any size to build the next big thing. The platform's infinite canvas enables teams to quickly move from idea to outcome. Miro is co-headquartered in San Francisco, USA, and Amsterdam, Netherlands, and serves more than 80 million users worldwide. Miro was founded in 2011 and currently has more than 1,500 employees in 12 hubs around the world.

Project Management Institute

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Project Management Institute (PMI) is a leading authority in project management and is dedicated to guiding the way to project success. Since 1969, PMI has shone a light on the power of project management and the people behind the projects. With a global community, gold-standard professional certifications and career-long learning opportunities, PMI empowers current and aspiring project professionals, as well as organisations, with knowledge and resources to lead effectively and create an impact in the communities they serve. Join PMI in elevating our world – one project at a time.

Q-SYS

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Q-SYS is a cloud-manageable audio, video and control platform built around a modern, standards-based IT architecture. Since its inception in 2009, it has been designed to deliver personalised, connected and engaging audiovisual experiences. With established solutions across corporate, education, hospitality, events, cinema, government, healthcare and transportation sectors, Q-SYS redefines what is possible for live and virtual experiences by uniting hardware and software partners, developers, and creators. Q-SYS is working to try and make the audiovisual industry smarter.

Shure
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Shure has been making people sound extraordinary for nearly a century. Founded in 1925, the company is a leading global manufacturer of audio equipment known for its quality, performance and durability. It makes microphones, wireless microphone systems, in-ear monitors, earphones and headphones, conferencing systems and more. For critical listening, high-stakes moments on stage, in the studio and the meeting room, you can always rely on Shure.

   Shure is headquartered in Niles, Illinois, in the USA. It has nearly 40 manufacturing facilities and regional sales offices throughout the Americas, Europe, Middle East and Africa, and Asia.

Spectralink
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Spectralink develops and delivers leading edge wi-fi and DECT networks for enterprises of all sizes. For over three decades Spectralink has provided comprehensive mobile solutions that simplify complex workflows and accelerate business operations. With its advanced technology, intuitive design and its team of dedicated experts, Spectralink delivers the tools needed to empower mobile workforces and drive exceptional results. From robust devices to seamless connectivity and rich analytics, Spectralink provides insights, not just data, about the performance of mobile operations. Leading organisations worldwide trust Spectralink to modernise their mobile infrastructure, enhance employee productivity and deliver unparalleled digital experiences.

Synergy Technical
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Synergy Technical is a Microsoft Gold Partner with project experience in all 50 US states and in over 70 countries. The firm offers expertise in every aspect of cloud and IT strategy including providing licencing, managed services, technology assessments, cloud migrations and more.

   Recognised as an expert in Microsoft technologies, Synergy Technical was named the Microsoft 20/20 M365 Security Partner of the Year in 2023. As a FastTrack Ready Partner, certified Cloud Solutions Provider, member of the EMS Elite Partner Program and Microsoft Modern Desktop Partner Advisory Council member, Synergy Technical is well positioned to provide technology implementation services.

Thales
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In today's digital landscape, organisations rely on Thales to protect what matters most – applications, data, identities, and software. Trusted globally, Thales safeguards organisations against cyber threats and secures sensitive information and all paths to it – in the cloud, data centres, and across networks. Thales offers platforms that reduce the risks and complexities of protecting apps, data, identities and software, all aimed at empowering organisations to operate securely in the digital landscape. By leveraging Thales's solutions, businesses can transition to the cloud with confidence, meet compliance requirements, optimise software usage, and deliver exceptional digital experiences to their users worldwide.

Tollring
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Tollring is a market-leading software developer that helps global organisations to drive their business performance and improve customer experience. With offices in the UK, the USA, India and Australia, Tollring has a portfolio that includes business communications analytics, call recording, collaboration analytics, scam call detection and telecommunications network fraud protection solutions.

   The Analytics 365 product suite offers call analytics, collaboration analytics, and AI-powered recording for Microsoft Teams. The trio of analytics tools helps users to unlock the full potential of Teams to gain insights into collaboration patterns, call trends, productivity drivers and customer interactions.

Zebra Technologies
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Zebra Technologies empowers organisations to thrive in the on-demand economy by making every frontline worker and asset at the edge visible, connected and fully optimised. With an ecosystem of more than 10,000 partners across more than 100 countries, Zebra serves customers of all sizes with an award-winning portfolio of hardware, software, services and solutions that digitise and automate workflows. Supply chains are more dynamic, customers and patients are better served, and workers are more engaged when they utilise Zebra innovations that help them sense, analyse and act in real time.

How AI can boost the economy

As we head into 2025, how does the technology community view the global economic landscape?

BY ANDY CLAYTON-SMITH

For many nations around the world, 2024 presented significant challenges, from coping with political upheaval and armed conflict, to navigating economic uncertainty based upon shifting responses to environmental and political pressures.

Whilst many saw a general decline in their fortunes throughout the past 12 months, others passed the year-end enjoying solid signs of economic growth. Encouraging news comes from the International Monetary Fund, which expects the global economy to grow by 3.2 per cent in 2025. Although, this prediction comes with a warning that a modestly improving picture of easing inflationary pressure and falling interest rates will be subject to ongoing political upheaval around the globe.

So how can civic and commercial leaders around the world learn from 2024's frontrunners, and structure their operations in a way which will render them more able to generate growth and prosperity in 2025? The common consensus within the technology community is that artificial intelligence will continue to be the main agent of change across all sectors and likely a key driver of economic growth. This said, as the AI adoption cycle reaches an early level of maturity, words of caution are already suggesting prudent usage of this revolutionary set of cloud-based tools.

In its series *Predictions 2025*, Forrester Group suggests that AI early adopters should "continue to be bold in planning your roadmaps but also take into account those prior lessons learned when making decisions and plans". Furthermore, the same report sounds a word of caution to those expecting immediate AI wins, predicting that organisations "fixated on AI" will be tempted to scale back investment prematurely in the coming year as clear wins prove slow to materialise. Even with tools as powerful as these, growth comes at a measured pace.

IDC's 2024 *AI opportunity study* shows that more companies expect to build custom AI solutions tailored directly to industry needs in the next 24 months, including custom copilots and AI agents. For example, retailers are increasingly leveraging tailored AI solutions to enhance customer engagement and streamline operations. Gartner's *Top Strategic Technology Trends* for 2025 forecasts that by 2028, 20 per cent of digital storefront interactions will be conducted by AI agents, with 15 per cent of daily decisions being made autonomously by AI powered solutions. This shows a growing maturity in AI fluency as companies realise the value of out-of-the-box use cases and expand to more advanced scenarios.

Technology will undoubtedly play an important role in transforming enterprise and public sector landscapes in 2025, with obvious impacts upon the general economic health of the planet. However, as always, the real wins will be made by those with the clearest vision and the fortitude to embrace change. ■
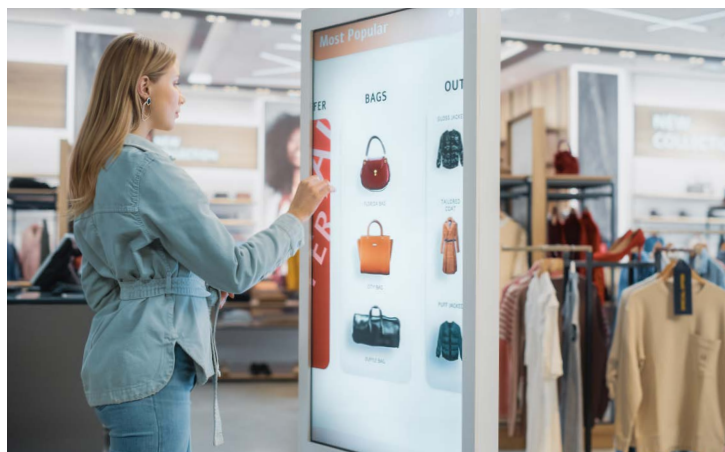

Photo: iStock/gorodenkoff

kyndryl consult

Accelerating digital transformation
from the heart
of your business

Kyndryl consultants
work at the heart of your
digital systems, with a unique
ability to quickly understand
the right opportunities
to power your
organization's progress.

kyndryl

When aspiration becomes impact

Seize your moments.
aveva.com/moments

AVΞVA
Industrial Intelligence