

Technology Record

ISSUE 36: SPRING 2025

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■ ■ ■ ■ The best of enterprise solutions from the Microsoft partner ecosystem

Delivering a secure future

Businesses are strengthening their security efforts and assessing how AI affects their vulnerabilities



Rupert Stuetzle explains how agentic AI is unlocking new value for manufacturers



Andrew Jenks discusses the need for authenticity in the media industry

PLUS:

Coretek's Todd Fortwengler reveals the essentials for AI security

LSEG and Microsoft are working together to transform financial services with AI

Armor Defense's Chris Drake highlights how to safeguard against increasing cyberattacks

CONNECT

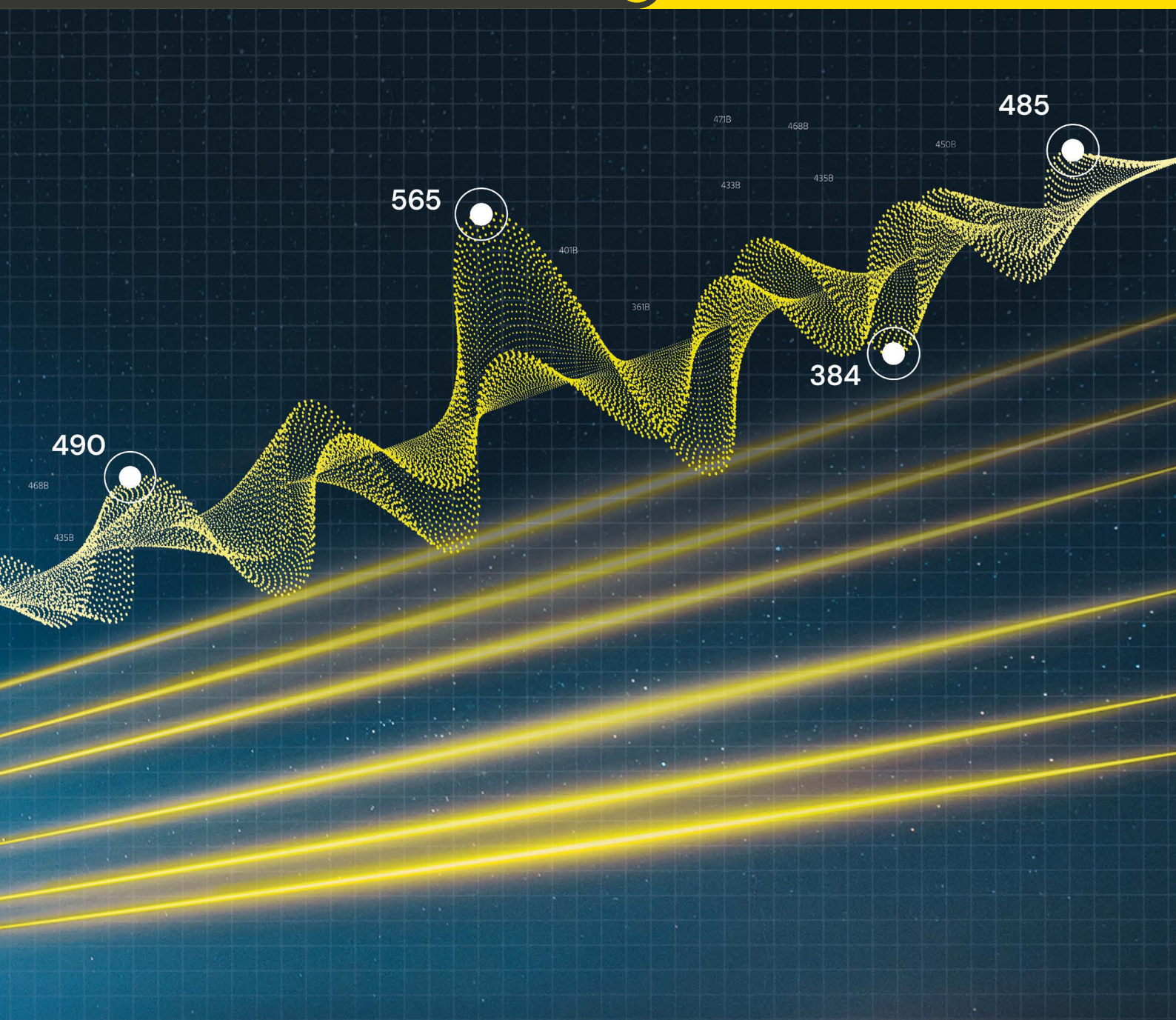
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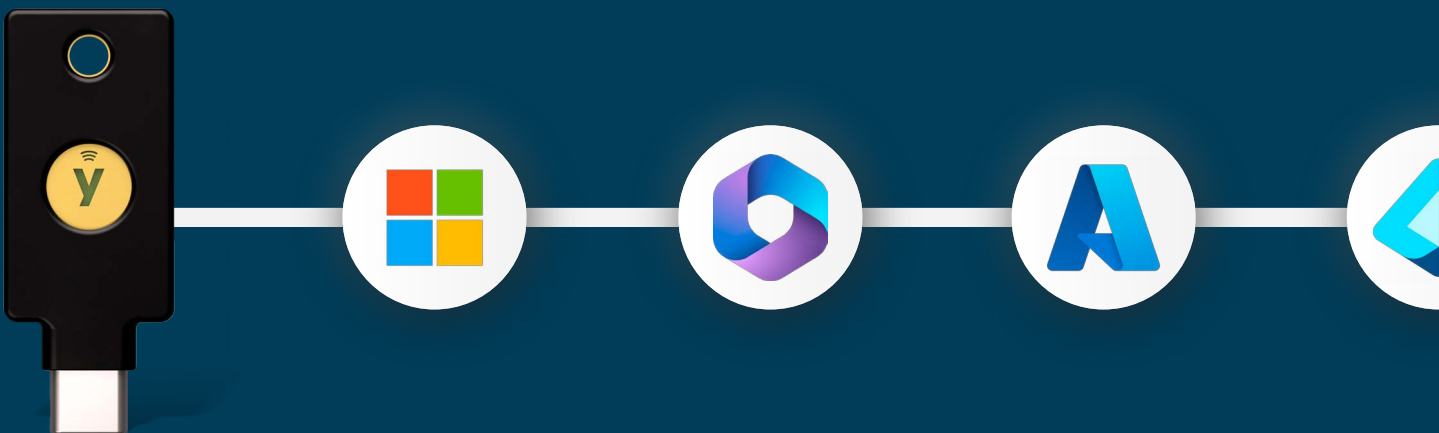


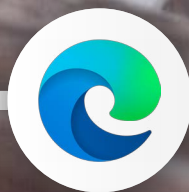
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Maintaining a steady course

ANDY CLAYTON-SMITH: EXECUTIVE EDITOR



Welcome to the Spring 2025 issue of *Technology Record*.

Industry leaders continue to guide their businesses through challenging times created by both political and economic unrest. While they are considering the impact of ongoing events upon global markets, for most leaders, the main goal remains unchanged – to drive business forward.

Enterprise and public sector organisations are banking on technology to drive innovation and, with rapidly evolving generative AI tools powering a broadening spectrum of task automation, many early adopters are already reaping the rewards. As the global manufacturing community prepares for Hannover Messe in Germany, Microsoft's EMEA general manager for manufacturing and mobility, Rupert Stuetzle, joins us for the first time to explain how tools like Microsoft Cloud for Manufacturing, Azure AI Agent Service and Copilot are helping to make factories smarter by utilising legacy data. You'll find that feature beginning on page 86.

And on page 106, Dr. David Rhew, global chief medical officer and vice president of healthcare for Microsoft, tells us how cloud and generative AI tools are augmenting human capabilities to enable new ways of improving healthcare.

At the heart of this technological evolution is Microsoft, a company that has been driving innovation for decades. On 4 April 1975 Bill Gates and Paul Allen formally established their company 'Micro-Soft' in Albuquerque, New Mexico. From humble beginnings the company has grown to become one of the largest organisations on the planet, fundamentally changing the ways in which commercial and public sector organisations operate. On page 18, we look at significant milestones in Microsoft's journey so far.

As always, it's a packed magazine with a broad range of content for all tastes. I hope you enjoy the read.



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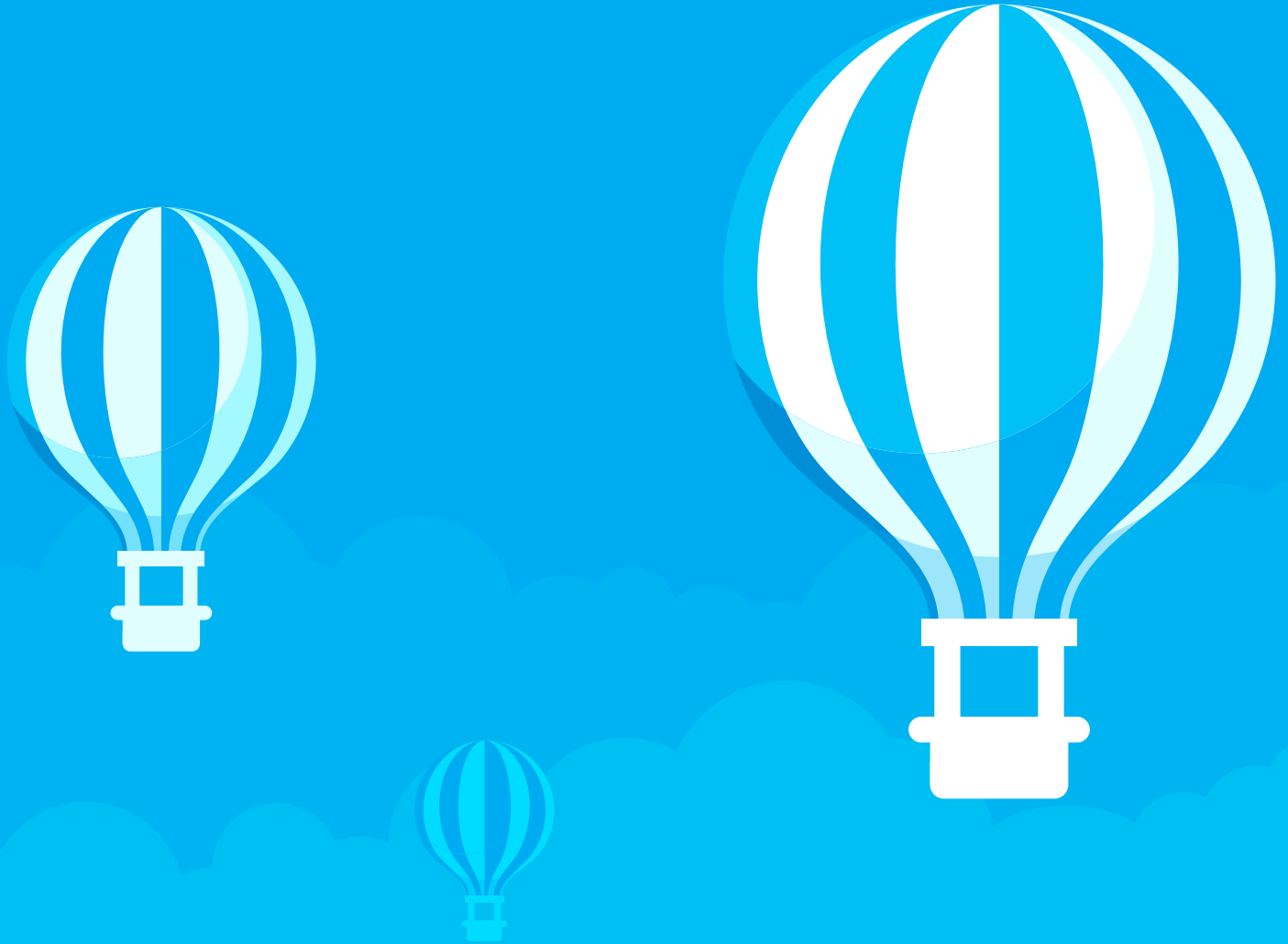
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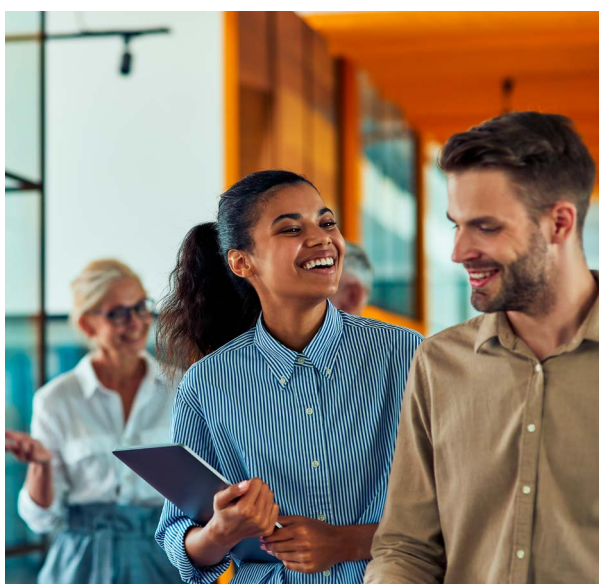
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Start your Copilot Journey with a trusted guide

Prepare to harness AI's power and revolutionize your business operations with the unparalleled technology of Microsoft Copilot. Engage our elite team of experts to meticulously evaluate your organization's readiness for Copilot integration, ensuring a seamless transition within your corporate ecosystem. We prioritize the safeguarding and governance of your data, establishing a strong foundation before you embark on this transformative journey. Soar to new heights with Microsoft Copilot, where innovation and security take flight together.

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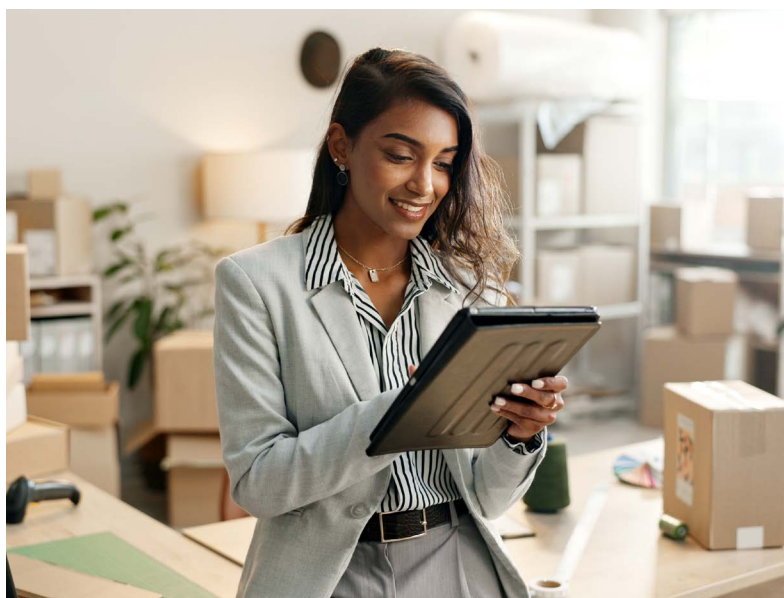
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Equipping B2B sales teams with AI tools can significantly improve how they operate and engage with customers, but it can also bring challenges. Microsoft's Mike Edmonds discusses how retailers can overcome these barriers to achieve success

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Technology Record

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Coretek is a leading Microsoft AI Cloud Provider, renowned for solving complex business challenges through high-performance consulting, managed services, security and AI-driven innovation.



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



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

SPONSORS



Microsoft turns 50

Technology Record summarises Microsoft's key innovations, and reports on the company's role in shaping the future of technology

Microsoft is marking its 50th anniversary in 2025, celebrating five decades of technological innovation that have shaped the digital landscape. Founded on 4 April 1975, by Bill Gates and Paul Allen, Microsoft (originally named Micro-Soft) has grown from a small software venture to a global technology powerhouse with continued advancements in personal computing, cloud services, AI, cybersecurity and enterprise solutions.

"We were founded in 1975 with a belief in creating technology that would enable others to create their own," wrote Satya Nadella, current CEO and chairman of Microsoft,

in Microsoft's *Annual Report 2024*. "And, nearly 50 years later, this belief remains at the heart of our mission to empower every person and every organisation on the planet to achieve more."

In its early days, Microsoft entered a technology landscape dominated by bulky mainframes and emerging personal computing concepts. The company made its mark by developing software for early PCs and by 1981, its MS-DOS operating system was a key component of IBM's first PC. The subsequent release of the first version of the Windows operating system in 1985 then established Microsoft as a leader in computing.

Over the years, Microsoft expanded its product and services portfolio, launching Microsoft Office in 1989, Encarta in 1993, Xbox in 2001 and Microsoft Bing in 2009. Its transformation accelerated in the 2010s under Nadella's leadership, who has shifted Microsoft's focus towards cloud computing and AI since becoming CEO in 2014. For example, the rebranding of Windows Azure to Microsoft Azure in 2014 signalled Microsoft's commitment to cloud services, and the acquisitions of LinkedIn in 2016 for \$26 billion and GitHub for \$7.5 billion in 2018 reinforced its influence in professional networking and software development.

Microsoft co-founders
Paul Allen (left) and Bill
Gates pictured in 1975



MICROSOFT

1975

MICROSOFT

1980

MICROSOFT

1982

Microsoft®

1987

Microsoft

2012



Microsoft's growth has been spearheaded by three CEOs, including Bill Gates (left) from 1975 to 2000, Steve Ballmer (right) from 2000 to 2014, and Satya Nadella from 2014 to the present day

AI has become a major focus for Microsoft, with the company investing \$13 billion in OpenAI since 2019 and integrating AI-powered tools into its products. The introduction of Copilot in Bing and Microsoft 365 is part of Microsoft's broader effort to make AI accessible to businesses and individuals. Nadella has also emphasised that AI will play a central role in shaping the company's future strategy, further strengthening its competitive edge in the evolving technology landscape.

Beyond technology, Microsoft has demonstrated a commitment to corporate social responsibility. Since launching its Giving Campaign in 1983, the company and its employees have raised over \$1.3 billion and supported more than 23,400 organisations in Washington State, USA, through grants, technology donations and corporate match of employee giving and volunteer time. Microsoft is also actively giving back to the area where it was first formed by giving grants of \$50,000 to support 'champions' in the region.

"We will work across the Puget Sound to honour the people and organisations that help make our region such a vibrant centre of innovation, creativity and inclusion," said Brad Smith, vice chair and president of Microsoft in a blog post titled "Thank you, Puget Sound". "And we will invest in new and existing partnerships to help ensure that we move forward, together, to One Future, One Sound."

Considering Microsoft's milestone, Nadella said: "I've found myself reflecting on how Microsoft has remained a consequential company decade after decade in an industry with no franchise value. And I realise that it's because – time and time again, when technology paradigms have shifted – we have seized the opportunity to reinvent ourselves to stay relevant to our customers, our partners and our employees. And that's what we are doing again today."

A lasting impact for partners

Microsoft's commitment to innovation continues to shape the partner ecosystem, which currently has more than 500,000 members, including cloud solution providers, volume licensing distributors, solution partners and original equipment manufacturers.

// Alongside our joint venture Avanade, we help our clients innovate and reinvent their businesses with Microsoft technology. As the world enters the intelligence era, we believe that deep strategic partnerships like ours are a competitive differentiator and together, we can help accelerate value for every enterprise, government and citizen for the next 50 years and beyond. //



Karthik Narain
*Group Chief Executive,
Technology, Accenture*

// Microsoft has transformed the way we work and communicate by establishing industry standards with its innovative technologies and platforms. Its collaboration tools have enhanced productivity for businesses and organisations worldwide. The partnership between Shure and Microsoft has resulted in advanced solutions for Microsoft Teams Rooms, significantly improving collaboration experiences and addressing customer challenges. //



Julie Crawford
*Senior Manager, Strategic
Alliance Marketing, Shure*

// As a proud Microsoft alum, I've seen firsthand how our collaboration has evolved to drive meaningful change for businesses across industries. From strategy through engineering and implementation, PwC and Microsoft drive innovation and deliver real business outcomes for clients worldwide. //



Stephanie Mosticchio
Principal, Implementation, PwC



LG and Microsoft to create AI agents that predict user needs

LG Electronics (LG) has partnered with Microsoft to integrate AI technology into its products and co-develop AI agents for use in various spaces, including homes, vehicles, hotels, offices and factories. The agents will not only understand and interact with customers but also predict their needs and preferences using what's known as 'affectionate intelligence'.

LG has already applied Microsoft's voice recognition and speech synthesis technologies to its Self-Driving AI Home Hub,

enabling it to understand diverse accents, pronunciations and colloquial expressions. It also plans to improve customers' commutes by suggesting alternative routes to avoid accidents and recommending they hold a video conference inside the vehicle if traffic delays will make them miss an important meeting.

Microsoft will also work with LG to improve its AI data centres, making them more energy efficient and sustainable by using LG's thermal management systems and advanced chiller technologies.

DID YOU KNOW?

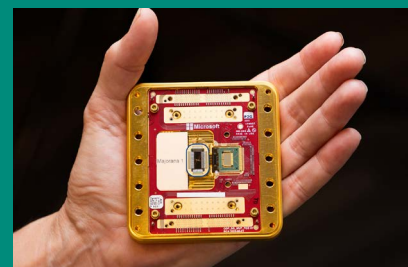


Microsoft is to invest
\$3 billion
 in India's cloud and AI infrastructure.
 It will also train
10 million people
 in the country with AI skills by 2030.

Microsoft unveils its first quantum processor chip

Microsoft has developed its first quantum processor chip, Majorana 1, which is based on new architecture that has been 17 years in the making and is able to solve "meaningful, industrial-scale problems in years, not decades".

The Majorana particle powers the chip, which Microsoft says is the world's first 'topoconductor', a new type of material that is neither a gas, liquid nor solid, but a topological state. Microsoft says the particles produce "more reliable and scalable qubits", which are at the core of a quantum computer. Majorana 1 has



the potential to fit a million qubits onto a single chip, which would be "capable of tackling the most complex industrial and societal problems", according to Microsoft.

Copilot is the UI for AI



Microsoft launches new division to drive AI innovation

Led by former Meta engineering chief Jay Parikh, the CoreAI team will develop an AI stack to empower Microsoft and its customers to build and run apps and agents

Satya Nadella, chairman and CEO of Microsoft, is establishing a new engineering division to focus on building AI applications and agents for both Microsoft and its customers.

The new CoreAI – Platform and Tools division will be led by former Meta engineering chief Jay Parikh with input from leaders of multiple Microsoft teams. These executives will include Mustafa Suleyman CEO of Microsoft AI; Scott Guthrie, executive vice president at Microsoft; Kevin Scott, chief technology officer; and Charlie Bell, executive vice president of security. The new team will work to create an “end-to-end Copilot and AI stack for our first-party and third-party customers to build and run AI apps and agents”, according to Nadella.

This will enable operators to build with agents and use multiple agents at the same time, all under a new user interface.

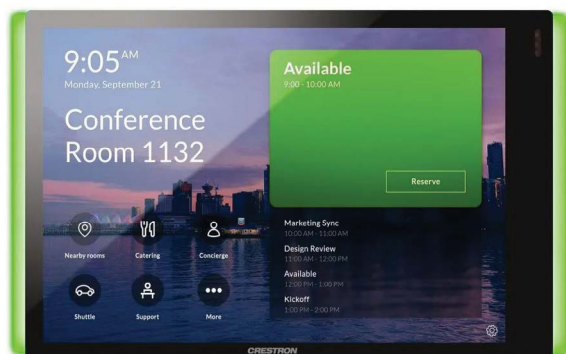
“It’s an honour to support a team that has already built such an incredible foundation during this pivotal moment in AI,” said Parikh. “CoreAI must lead in defining and building what software application development for humanity will look like.”

Microsoft has also a new arrangement with its longstanding partner OpenAI, which it hopes will “drive the next phase of AI”. Key elements of the 2019 agreement will remain in place until 2030, including the existing revenue sharing arrangements, Microsoft’s right to use OpenAI’s intellectual property within products such as

Copilot, and OpenAI’s access to Azure. However, the new agreement gives Microsoft the right of first refusal to host new OpenAI work on the cloud, as well as an Azure commitment to continue to support all OpenAI products and training.

OpenAI and Microsoft will also partner on Stargate, a \$500 billion project to build new AI infrastructure in the USA over the next four years. The project, which will receive an investment of \$100 billion “immediately”, is being funded by lead partners OpenAI and SoftBank, as well as Oracle and MGX, and will use chips designed by NVIDIA. Development is underway in Texas with further potential sites across the country still under evaluation. The project is expected to create 100,000 new jobs.

Crestron and Microsoft to enhance workplace technology



Crestron is to expand its digital workplace platform to include devices powered by Microsoft Device Ecosystem Platform (MDEP). MDEP is open to device manufacturers and software developers that follow Microsoft's trust, security and management standards.

"By joining MDEP, we're taking the next step in delivering purpose-built solutions that combine Crestron's expertise in workplace technology with Microsoft's enterprise-grade security and management capabilities," said Brad Hintze, executive vice president of global marketing at Crestron. "This will enable us to create more specialised, secure and manageable devices that address the specific needs of modern workplaces, while maintaining the seamless integration our customers expect."

Cybercriminals shift to data theft as ransomware tactics evolve

Huntress, a cybersecurity platform provider, has released a new study suggesting that attackers are turning to data theft and extortion as improved defences reduce ransomware profits. The *Huntress 2025 Cyber Threat Report* found that:

18 actions

on average were taken by cybercriminals before launching ransomware, with data exfiltration occurring first in 71% of cases

17 hours

was the average time to ransom, with some groups deploying ransomware in as little as six hours

29%

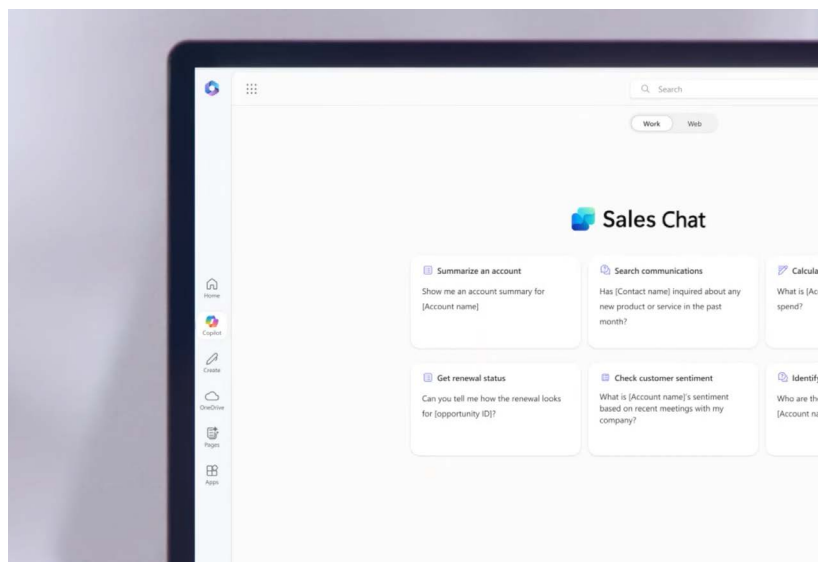
of phishing attacks impersonated e-signature requests, while 8% embedded malicious QR codes, showing that attackers are evolving beyond traditional email scams

38%

of attacks targeted healthcare and education, making them the most affected industries

Read the full report at: bit.ly/41zQsIx

Microsoft launches new tools to help sales teams close deals faster



Microsoft has launched its new AI Accelerator for Sales to help customers transform their sales organisation with Copilot and agents. The programme will include two new agents – Sales Agent and Sales Chat – designed to help teams close deals faster.

Sales Agent can turn contacts into qualified leads enabling sales representatives to close deals while the agent ensures no lead is left behind. It works autonomously to research leads, set up meetings and reach out to customers. Meanwhile, Sales Chat aims to speed up the sales cycle to enable teams to spend more time selling by providing "actionable takeaways" to simple, natural language prompts like 'what should I know going into tomorrow's meeting with this customer?'.



Agile Alliance joins Project Management Institute

Agile Alliance, a global non-profit membership organisation, has joined the Project Management Institute (PMI). Together PMI and Agile Alliance, now operating as PMI Agile Alliance, aim to strengthen the project management profession by expanding access to resources, broadening skill sets and fostering a flexible mindset.

“Project management requires mastery of multiple approaches,” said Pierre Le Manh, PMI president and CEO. “PMI and Agile Alliance have collaborated for several years, including on the *Agile Practice Guide* publication. As Agile Alliance sought ways to increase its global impact, PMI was a natural partner to provide the resources needed for this new phase of development.”

VIEWPOINT: SHARON KO, ARMOR DEFENSE

In the Wild West of AI models – both homegrown and purchased – data security risks have never been higher. The threat landscape is evolving faster, the stakes are higher and the window for response is shrinking. Eradicating these threats in real time requires close collaboration between organisations and their managed detection and response providers. Armor developed and launched the Nexus portal to give customers a view into Armor’s security operations center (SOC). Customers can now see the targeted threats against their unique environment and how Armor SOC uses these same insights to neutralise sophisticated threat actors and apply new protection, detection and response actions. It’s time for true partnership and shifting from reactive measures to preemptive defence.

Read more about Nexus on page 44

Sharon Ko is vice president and head of product management at Armor Defense



Synergy Technical facilitates AI integration

Cloud solutions provider Synergy Technical is helping businesses to harness AI effectively through its AI Transformation Strategy Engagement initiative. The initiative evaluates AI opportunities within an organisation, assesses vendor solutions and develops a tailored roadmap for AI adoption.

Organisations can gain valuable insights into AI integration, including how to:

- Ensure AI adoption stays within regulatory boundaries and is compliant.
- Tailor strategies for unique business needs.
- Drive innovation while maximising AI investments for efficiency.

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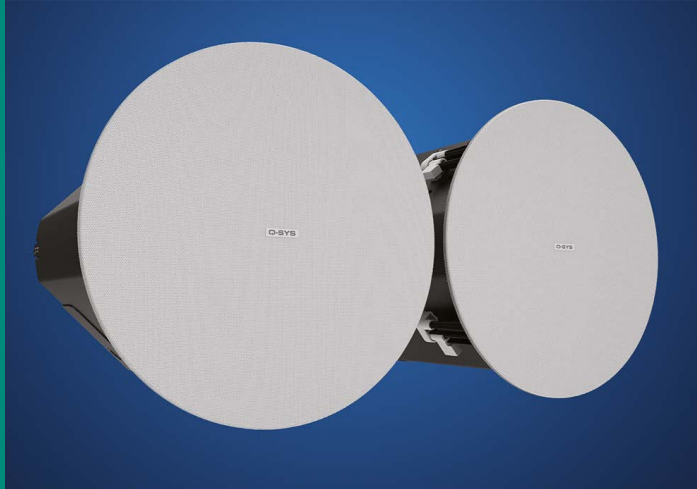
Jabra launches PanaCast 40 VBS

Jabra has extended its video collaboration portfolio with the PanaCast 40 VBS, an Android video bar designed for small rooms that captures the space with a 180-degree field of view.

The Jabra PanaCast 40 VBS is powered by a single speaker and six beamforming microphones to ensure every word is captured clearly and accurately. The video bar is easy to set up and use, ensuring first-time users can be up and running rapidly. It can be fitted quickly using Express Install for Microsoft Teams Rooms.



Q-SYS expands AcousticDesign series



The Q-SYS AcousticDesign series is expanding with the introduction of three new large-format ceiling loudspeakers designed to deliver high-fidelity audio across major communication platforms, including Microsoft Teams.

The expansion features a two-way, full-range ceiling-mounted loudspeaker with a coaxial compression driver, a ceiling-mounted subwoofer and a high-power two-way loudspeaker.

The devices deliver consistent tonal characteristics, allowing integrators to design audio solutions tailored to the needs of different spaces. In addition, deploying the loudspeakers as part of the Q-SYS platform provides access to intrinsic correction voicings, optimising the performance and installation process when used with Q-SYS processors or network amplifiers.



Shure introduces new conferencing solutions at ISE 2025

Audio solution manufacturer Shure introduced a series of new conferencing and collaboration solutions at Integrated Systems Europe, which took place at the start of February 2025 in Barcelona, Spain.

Additions to the Shure portfolio include the new IntelliMix Room Kits for small to large meeting rooms, as well as the Microflex Wireless neXt 4 and neXt 8, which are the successors to the neXt 2 released in 2024. Shure has also expanded the Microflex Ecosystem portfolio with products including four new passive speakers.

Read more information about Shure's new solutions at: www.shure.com/en-US/conferencing



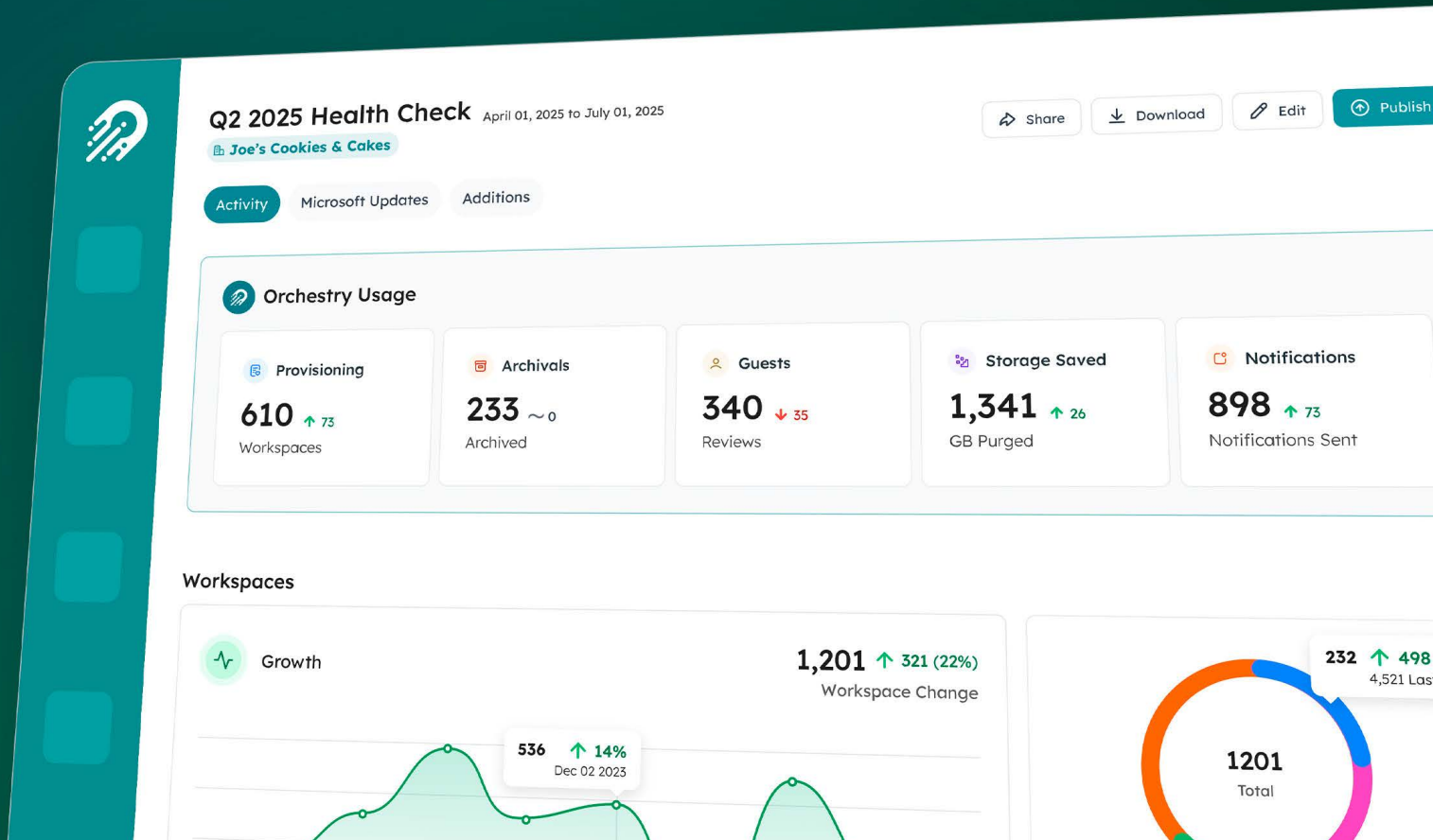
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- ✓ Get curated, dynamic insights about your tenant
- ✓ Minimize security risks and reduce overall cost
- ✓ Automate and standardize governance tasks



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New AI agents from Microsoft to improve design and collaboration in the automotive industry

Microsoft's new Azure Innovation Accelerator AI agent for the automotive and mobility industry will reduce time to value for design and engineering departments and can be used as a collaboration platform to allow different teams to develop automated driving platforms and advanced driver-assistance systems.

The new tools will support design, collaboration, testing and customer service.

To further support the design and development of software-defined vehicles

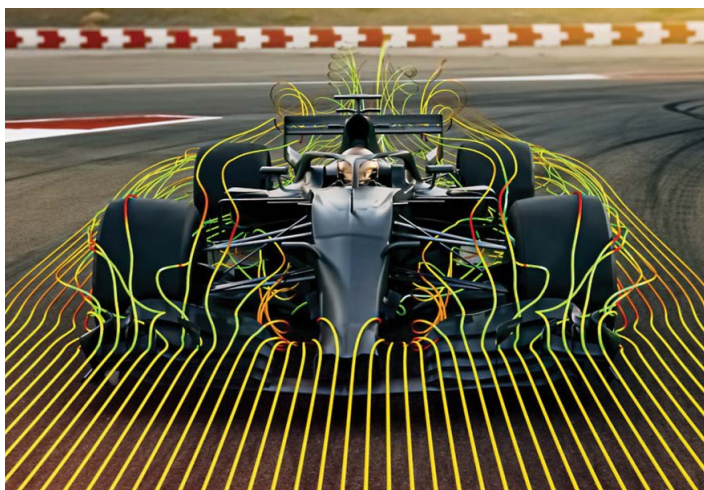
(SDVs), three additional new AI agents have been released. The SDV reference architecture enables cloud-native software development that leverages Microsoft's developer-centric tooling, while the Digital Cockpit reference architecture integrates AI services to enhance customer in-vehicle experiences. Meanwhile, the Autonomous Vehicle Operations provides a digital testbed for autonomous driving development to create an efficient environment for performance and safety testing.

Lastly, there are new agents designed for improving customer experience. The Mobility Agents reference architecture allows organisations to deploy agents that can seamlessly integrate into user experiences to enhance customer and employee interactions. Meanwhile, the Connected Mobility reference architecture provides access to vehicle and asset data by generating analytics and actionable insights regarding vehicle operations and efficiency.

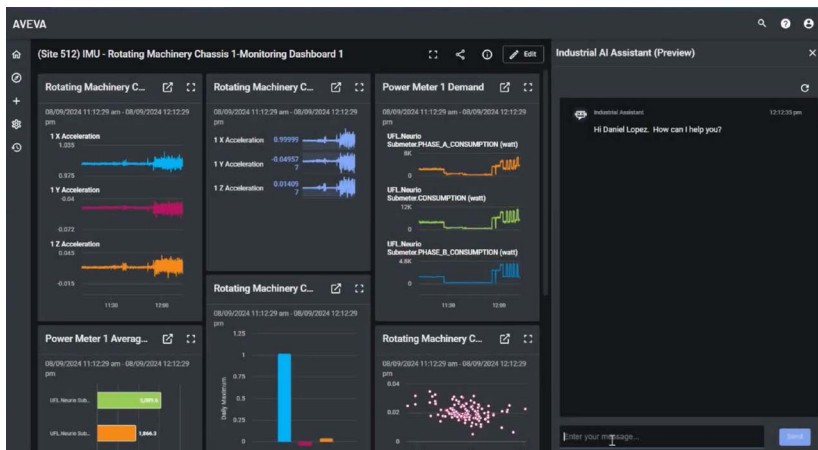
New Azure-based solution to improve automotive safety

Race teams including Ferrari, Oracle Red Bull Racing and Porsche are benefiting from Ansys' new virtual homologation toolchain – a simulation solution designed to help automotive manufacturers meet global regulatory compliance and safety standards. The tool has enabled them to accelerate decision-making by automating workflows, shortening design cycles and reducing development costs for cars.

Launched in December 2024, the solution is the result of a collaboration with Microsoft, TÜV SÜD and Kontrol, which provided advanced compliance management solutions. It has been designed for software-defined vehicles, advanced driver assistance systems, electromobility, and full vehicle and component development. The solution, which uses Microsoft Azure cloud platform infrastructure and AI-powered analytics, has delivered time and cost reductions associated with physical prototyping.



AVEVA and Microsoft: driving digital transformation at the AI Summit in Sydney



AVEVA showcased the future of industrial AI and data innovation at the Microsoft AI Conference in Sydney, Australia, in December 2024.

The organisation sponsored the event and demonstrated how its solutions – including the CONNECT Industrial Platform, Industrial AI Assistant and CONNECT Data Services with Databricks – are empowering industries like mining, construction, and oil and gas to unlock new possibilities in digital transformation. In addition, AVEVA discussed sustainability and the integration of IT and operational technology, and hosted meetings with Microsoft leadership.

“With the power of AVEVA and Microsoft strategic partnership, we’re excited to continue driving innovation, sustainability and growth in industries across the Pacific,” said Alexey Lebedev, vice president for the Pacific region at AVEVA.

Read more about AVEVA’s Connect solutions at: bit.ly/3QxFKpd

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



Hannover Messe
31 March - 4 April 2025
Hannover, Germany
www.hannovermesse.de/en

NAB Show
5-9 April 2025
Las Vegas, Nevada, USA
www.nabshow.com

TechEx America
4-5 June 2025
Santa Clara, California, USA
www.techexevent.com/northamerica

ARC European Forum
5-7 May 2025
Barcelona, Spain
www.arcweb-europe.com

ARC Asia
7 August 2025
Singapore
www.arcweb.com/events/arc-industry-leadership-forum-asia-singapore

Lighthouse and BlueVoyant launch strategic alliance

Cybersecurity solutions providers Lighthouse and BlueVoyant launched their strategic alliance during a joint Sip & Security event at Microsoft TechConnect in Seattle, Washington, in February 2025.

The two organisations aim to bring together security, compliance and data governance expertise whilst providing a seamless end-to-end Microsoft Security customer journey. The slogan for the alliance is ‘better together’, which reflects Microsoft’s commitment to nurturing a robust partner ecosystem.

Learn more about the first joint Lighthouse and BlueVoyant solution at: bit.ly/Lighthouse-BlueVoyant





Hannover Messe

31 March - 4 April 2025 | Hanover, Germany

Hannover Messe, an industrial trade fair with over 200 organisations from the mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, digital industries and energy sector, will focus on the theme of 'the future's here' for 2025.

The event will focus on IT and operational technology (OT) security, with developers showcasing solutions to address both current and future cyberthreats. In addition, cybersecurity experts, including the German Federal Office for Information Security (BSI), the German Cybersecurity Organization (DCSO), and companies like Eye Security, Infodas, Rhebo, and Secunet, will converge in the 'Industrial Security Circus' arena in Hall 16 to discuss escalating cyber risks.

The main exhibiting areas will focus on smart manufacturing, digital ecosystems, energy for industry, compressed air and vacuum technology, engineered parts and solutions, the future hub and international trade and investment.

In the IT/OT security exhibition area in Hall 16, attendees can learn more about hydrogen and fuel cells, Energy 4.0 and power engineering during demonstrations from manufacturers and solution providers. These demonstrations will give attendees an in-depth understanding into topics including digitalisation, decarbonisation, energy efficiency, electricity self-generation, cost reduction and more.

Microsoft will also be exhibiting at the event alongside various



partners, including Avanade, AVEVA, Databricks, Kongsberg Digital, Litmus, PTC and Rescale. Canada is the partner country for this year's event and will highlight its industrial strength in areas such as automation, energy, digital transformation and green technology at the Canada Pavilion.

Brazil will be the partner country for Hannover Messe 2026.

To find out more and register for Hannover Messe 2025 visit:
www.hannovermesse.de/en

NAB Show

5-9 April 2025 | Las Vegas, USA

Decision-makers from 163 countries will come together to learn about the latest technologies in the media and entertainment industries at NAB Show on 5-9 April at the Las Vegas Convention Centre in Nevada, USA.

The show will cover emerging trends including AI, the creator economy, sports, streaming and cloud virtualisation during conference sessions and workshops led by companies including Adobe, Cognizant, Microsoft, NBC, NFL, NVIDIA, Panasonic, Sony and YouTube.

On the main stage, attendees can expect an array of sessions from industry professionals offering perspectives on industry shifts and opportunities, as well as the

future of media, entertainment and technology. There will also be conversations with executives, creators and innovators leading the next era of content.

The 'Simple Content, Captivating Stories: Crafting Brand Engagement through Narrative' session will delve into the power of storytelling in brand engagement and how to craft compelling narratives from simple footage. Attendees will learn how to transform everyday content into captivating stories that connect with audiences on an emotional level, whether for social media, corporate branding or advertising.

The keynote, led by programming leaders, will cover the evolution of content creation and distribution, how to reinvent production,



distribution and monetisation models, and how to create programming for a multimedia audience.

There will also be specialised sessions on broadcast management, Creator Lab, small and medium market radio and startups. Plus, summits will focus on NAB Sports, streaming, post-production techniques and programming.

To find out more and register for NAB, visit: www.nabshow.com



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MARKETWATCH: EVENTS

Women in Tech Global Conference

20-22 May 2025 | Virtual

The global WomenTech Network is hosting its sixth edition of the Women in Tech Global Conference for over 100,000 females, minorities and their allies. The conference will feature technology professionals, industry innovators, around 9,500 ambassadors from 179 countries and at least 700 speakers.

The theme for this year's conference is further expanding on technology leadership, innovation and career growth. These will be addressed in three virtual summits, one in-person summit and various side events across locations in North America and Europe.

The conference includes the 'Chief in Tech Summit', where senior leaders from technology companies will address industry challenges; the 'Key Tech Summit', which will cover the latest technology trends and skills; and the 'Career Growth Summit' for professional development.

To find out more and register for the Women in Tech Global Conference, visit: www.womentech.net/women-tech-conference



Photo: Nadine Tschira via WomenTech Network

Gitex Europe

21-23 May 2025 | Berlin, Germany

Gitex Europe will take place at Messe Berlin and unite technology innovators, government leaders and others 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 AI, 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, including Gitex Green Impact, which is focused on technology for sustainability; AI Everything, which will explore the latest innovations driving the industry's evolution; and North Star Europe, which will connect startups with investors.

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

Infocomm

7-13 June 2025 | Orlando, Florida



InfoComm 2025 will bring together manufacturers, integrators, dealers and end users from around the world to showcase the latest audiovisual technologies, products and services at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida, from 7-13 June. Over 30,000 people are expected to attend.

The event, which is hosted by the Audiovisual and Integrated Experience Association (AVIXA), will offer education workshops, tours, panel discussion and training courses.

Meanwhile, the exhibition floor will be open on 11-13 June. InfoComm had 833 exhibitors in 2024, and this year's event aims to be just as big with Microsoft partners like Cisco, Crestron, Huddly, Jabra, Lenovo, Logitech and Shure all scheduled to attend.

To find out more and register for Infocomm, visit: www.infocommshow.org



The Future of AI is Secure

AI is changing the game, but unsecured AI is a liability. Without the right security measures, organizations risk data breaches, compliance failures, and AI model manipulation.

At Coretek, we empower enterprises to embrace AI confidently, integrating cutting-edge solutions while fortifying security at every level.

Don't let security concerns slow your AI transformation. With Coretek, you can build, deploy, and scale AI solutions with confidence.

Coretek is the #1 Microsoft Azure Cloud Provider in the United States. We've earned our world-class reputation by partnering with our clients and solving complex business challenges, while leveraging Microsoft and strategic partner solutions with high-performance Consulting, Managed Services, Security, and AI-driven innovation.

coretek.com | inquiry@coretek.com

Delivering a secure future

Businesses are strengthening their security efforts and assessing how AI affects their vulnerabilities

BY ALICE CHAMBERS



Cybersecurity has become a collective duty that spans both the public and private sectors, said Brad Smith, vice chair and president at Microsoft, when opening his testimony before the US House Homeland Security Committee in June 2024. His statement was underscored by a year of escalating cyberthreats. The *Microsoft Digital Defense Report 2024* identifies Russian-backed hackers, such as Star Blizzard, as having advanced their attempts to target governments, journalists and researchers with spear-phishing tactics like personalised emails. North Korean actors siphoned billions from cryptocurrency markets to fund state initiatives and Iranian groups have adopted ransomware and criminal tactics to disrupt firms around the world. These threats, plus those from non-nation-state hackers, highlight the urgency for businesses to rethink their security strategies, balancing resilience with rapid response to safeguard critical systems and data.

“We recognise that Microsoft plays a unique and critical cybersecurity role,” said Smith to the House Homeland panel. “Not only for our customers, but for this country. And not only for this country, but for this nation’s allies. This role reflects the wide range of products and services Microsoft provides to individuals and organisations, including cloud services that operate through data centres located in 32 countries around the world. It also reflects the

broad cybersecurity work we undertake every day, including for and in close collaboration with the US and numerous allied governments.”

Microsoft tracks threat actors to understand their attack targets, techniques and motivation. In 2024 alone, the number of actors traced increased by more than five times, according to the *Digital Defense Report*. Password attacks occurred at a rate of more than 7,000 per second (up from 579 per second in 2021), and the mean time for the average organisation to identify a data breach was 194 days with containment at 64 days. That’s more than sufficient time for bad actors to exploit vulnerabilities, compromise sensitive data and cause significant financial and reputational damage.

“If 2024 taught us anything, it’s that a proactive, no-compromises approach to security is essential for 2025 and beyond,” writes Joy Chik, president of identity and network access at Microsoft, in a blog titled ‘Three priorities for adopting proactive identity and access security in 2025’. “Adopting proactive defensive measures is the only way to get ahead of such determined efforts to compromise identities and gain access to your environment.”

Microsoft launched the Secure Future Initiative in November 2023 to improve how it builds and operates its technology to meet security standards. In May 2024, chairman and CEO Satya Nadella made security Microsoft’s top priority and dedicated the equivalent of 34,000 engineers to the





"A proactive, no-compromises approach to security is essential for 2025 and beyond"

JOY CHIK, MICROSOFT



“largest cybersecurity engineering project in history” to address high-priority security tasks.

The initiative is based on six pillars that protect identities and secrets; protect tenants and isolate systems; protect networks; protect engineering systems; monitor and detect cyberthreats; and accelerate response and remediation.

To lead by example, Microsoft is strengthening its own defences. As part of the ‘protect tenants and isolated systems’ pillar, Microsoft carried out a full inventory of its own environment in a process Chik refers to as a “thorough spring cleaning” and subsequently deleted 730,000 unused applications and removed 5.75 million inactive tenants.

Microsoft also implemented multifactor authentication (MFA) to encourage secure-by-default practices with customers, a key principle of the initiative. In a 2023 research paper, *How effective is multifactor authentication at deterring cyberattacks?*, Microsoft reveals that over 99 per cent of MFA-enabled accounts remained secure during its investigation. It also found that MFA reduces the risk of compromise by 99 per cent.

“Based on these results, we strongly advocate for the default implementation of MFA in commercial accounts to increase security and mitigate unauthorised access risks,” writes Microsoft’s research team.

Microsoft has required MFA for any user signing into the Azure portal and the Microsoft Entra and Intune admin centres since October 2024 and enforced the mandate for the Microsoft 365 admin centre in February 2025. Phase two will roll out later in 2025, extending MFA enforcement to Azure CLI, Azure PowerShell, Azure mobile app and infrastructure-as-code tools, with recommendations to migrate user-based service accounts to workload identities.

Safeguarding AI initiatives

In 2024 alone, generative AI usage jumped from 55 to 75 per cent among business leaders and AI decision-makers, according to IDC’s *2024 AI opportunity study*. As AI adoption accelerates, many organisations have begun using AI tools to answer customer service questions, automate repetitive or mundane tasks, speed up product development and more.

“Over 95 per cent of organisations are implementing or developing an AI strategy, which necessitates the need for accompanying

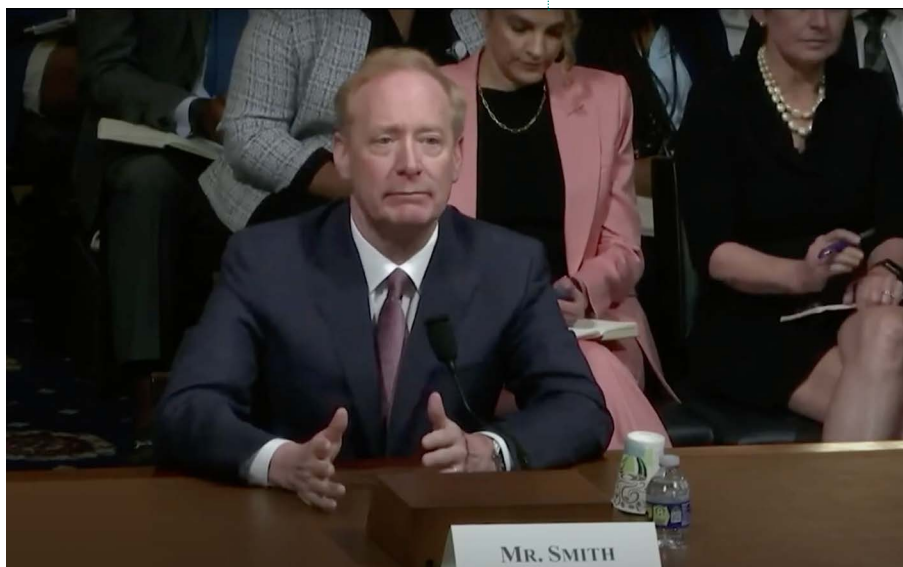
data protection and governance strategies,” says Vasu Jakkal, corporate vice president of Microsoft Security.

For example, global telecommunications provider Vodafone is using a virtual assistant called TOBi, powered by Microsoft Azure and Copilot, to handle its large number of customer enquiries. Lloyds Banking Group has developed an application with Microsoft Power Apps and Azure AI Services for its customers to communicate with employees in their preferred language. However, if unmonitored, these tools have the potential to render organisations vulnerable to malicious prompt attempts. Cybercriminals achieve this by tricking AI models into ignoring system rules.

“There are two types of prompt attacks,” writes Vanessa Ho in the Microsoft blog post on ‘Safeguarding AI against jailbreaks’. “One is a direct prompt attack known as a jailbreak, like if the customer service tool generates offensive content at someone’s coaxing, for example. The second is an indirect prompt attack, say if the email assistant follows a hidden, malicious prompt to reveal confidential data.

“To help protect against jailbreaks and indirect attacks, Microsoft has developed a comprehensive approach that helps AI developers detect, measure and manage the risk. It includes Prompt Shields, a fine-tuned model for detecting and blocking malicious prompts in real time, and safety evaluations for simulating adversarial prompts and measuring an application’s susceptibility to them.”

Brad Smith presented testimony on behalf of Microsoft before the US House Homeland Security Committee in June 2024





While generative AI can create vulnerabilities, it also helps to combat cyberthreats. Microsoft's Azure AI Foundry helps AI developers detect, measure and manage the risk of jailbreaks and indirect attacks. "We launched Microsoft Security Copilot in April 2024, which helps level the playing field," says Jakkal. It does this by using Microsoft's security data and OpenAI's GPT models to simplify tasks. "That's why I love generative AI – because I think this tool is going to make it easy for everyone to become a defender."

Organisations using Security Copilot experienced a 30 per cent reduction in average time to resolve security incidents, according to Microsoft's *Generative AI and Security Operations Center Productivity: Evidence from Live Operations report*. And IT admins using Copilot in the Microsoft Entra admin centre spent 45 per cent less time troubleshooting sign-ins and increased accuracy by 47 per cent.

Oregon State University, for example, is using Security Copilot alongside Microsoft Sentinel and Defender to automatically process security incident tickets. Automation allows the university to more efficiently query ticket generation so that security analysts can concentrate on higher-priority incidents like system intrusions or potential data breaches instead of routine administrative tasks. Meanwhile, materials manufacturer Eastman is using the solution to upskill its security analysts with step-by-step guidance for response and faster threat remediation. The team also uses

Defender solutions to protect workloads in its apps across its Microsoft 365 E5 license.

"We work in a world where every second matters," says David Yates, senior cybersecurity analyst at Eastman. "Attackers can move very quickly, so we need to understand how the attack is being deployed and where. Efficiency is crucial."

Security Copilot uses AI to trace security incidents to specific IP addresses, relating clues that may at first seem random and unconnected to expose a larger threat.



"We launched Microsoft Security Copilot in April 2024, which helps level the playing field"

VASU JAKKAL, MICROSOFT SECURITY

"AI gives the asymmetric advantage to the defender over the attacker," says Charlie Bell, executive vice president of Microsoft Security. "We don't have access to all the data, and we can't see the whole environment. [This means that we] can't see how an attacker would get from one thing to another. The beauty of AI is that it can see everything, and we can finally reason across a vast space that no human can get to because we can't perceive everything within our surface area." ■

Organisations need to monitor AI models designed to improve customer experiences, such as those who bank online, to avoid cybercriminals manipulating the technology

Partner perspectives

We asked selected Microsoft partners how they are working with Microsoft to better protect organisations from cyberthreats



David Fatovic

*Director, Strategic Alliances
Armor Defense*

"Armor's deep partnership with Microsoft as a security solutions partner empowers organisations to combat cyberthreats better. As a member of the Microsoft Intelligent Security Association, we collaborate with Microsoft's go-to-market, product and specialist teams to optimise the deployment and management of Microsoft's security tools. Armor's 24/7 security operations centre (SOC) integrates with Microsoft Defender, Purview and Sentinel delivering proactive protection. Through Armor's customer portal, Nexus, clients gain real-time visibility into SOC operations, incident management and key cybersecurity performance indicators. This synergy maximises Microsoft investments, reduces risk and drives stronger security outcomes – ensuring Microsoft's solutions perform at their best while Armor manages them for superior results."

"We're working with Microsoft by enhancing Defender with Huntress's fully-managed endpoint and identity threat detection and response for Microsoft 365 environments, managed by Huntress's 24/7 elite team of threat hunters. These two offerings maximise the value of existing Microsoft licenses and add an extra layer of protection from endpoint threats, session hijacking, credential threat and more.

Second, we're helping customers to make the most of their Microsoft products. If they're not cybersecurity experts, they will likely have a hard time understanding what it is that they need to stay secure. Huntress can manage all their security alerts so our customers don't even need to think about it."



Chris Bisnett

*Chief Technology Officer
and Co-Founder, Huntress*



Nathan Jamieson
Chief Information Security Officer,
Atech x Iomart

"Microsoft's security ecosystem enables us to take a holistic approach to helping businesses strengthen their security posture. With comprehensive protection across endpoints, email and cloud through Defender, organisations can secure their entire digital environment. Identity protection is reinforced with multifactor authentication, conditional access and zero-trust principles, ensuring only the right people have access to the right resources.

With Microsoft's constantly evolving security solutions and the combined expertise of Atech and Iomart, businesses can stay ahead of emerging threats and build a resilient, future-ready defence against cyberattacks."



Microsoft's Herain Oberoi presented Lighthouse's Tara Ragan and Erick Bronson with the Compliance & Privacy Trailblazer award at the Microsoft Security Excellence Awards 2024



Ron Markezich
CEO, Lighthouse

"At Lighthouse, our deep collaboration with Microsoft is a strategic advantage in protecting organisations from cyberthreats. We work directly with Microsoft Security engineers, marketing teams and advisory councils to stay ahead of evolving risks in data security, compliance and generative AI. Cybersecurity requires more than just strong tools, it demands a proactive, embedded approach. By aligning closely with Microsoft, we help customers move from reactive defence to intelligent risk mitigation, delivering scalable, cost-effective solutions that strengthen resilience and reduce complexity."



To outsmart hackers, two heads are better than one.

Priority	Type	Detected Event
Medium	Shield	Rule Name: [REDACTED] Threat Name: [REDACTED] OS Resources: ["file: C:\\Users\\[REDACTED]\\COUNTY\\Documents\\[REDACTED]64.exe"] Process Name: C:\\Windows\\System32\\svchost.exe
Critical	Shield	Rule Name: CobaltStrike Threat Name: CobaltStrike OS Resources: ["behavior: _process: C:\\Windows\\System32\\cmd.exe", "process: _pid:24932,ProcessStart:133530838411004978"] Process Name: C:\\Windows\\System32\\cmd.exe
Critical	Shield	Rule Name: CobaltStrike Threat Name: CobaltStrike OS Resources: ["file: \\127.0.0.1\\ADMIN\$\\8746352.exe"] Process Name: Unknown
	Shield	Rule Name: [REDACTED] Threat Name: [REDACTED] OS Resources: ["file: C:\\Users\\[REDACTED]\\COUNTY\\Documents\\[REDACTED]"] Process Name: C:\\Program Files (x86)\\ScreenConnect Client\\[REDACTED]ScreenConnect.WindowsClient.exe

Cobalt Strike beacon

ScreenConnect
persistence

Huntress Managed Defender configuration stops a remote access attack

Microsoft Defender layered with Huntress Managed EDR is a smart, hybrid approach that crushes hackers and maximizes your Microsoft investments.

Huntress manages **3.5M+** endpoints and counting, including Microsoft 365 environments, and our Security Operations Center of elite threat hunters supports it all.



Demo Huntress FREE

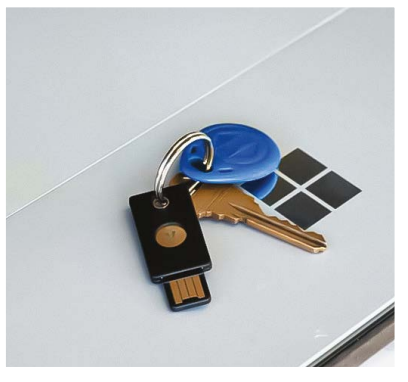
Cybersecurity for all businesses, not just the 1%.

COVER STORY



Ville Somppi
*Senior Vice President,
Industry Solutions, M-Files*

"M-Files has been built with Microsoft technologies, runs on Azure and is monitored by Fabric. We tap into all the available security, threat detection and cyber capabilities in the Microsoft stack. We also complement that stack with automated permissions, automated audit trails and built in compliance controls, mitigating the impact of a potential breach."



Derek Hanson
*Vice President, Standards
and Alliances, Yubico*

"Users with Microsoft environments can use YubiKey, a hardware security key by Yubico, for phishing-resistant, multifactor and passwordless authentication. The YubiKey is currently the only FIPS certified phishing-resistant solution available for Entra ID on mobile. In addition to compatibility with Microsoft solutions such as Azure, Microsoft 365 and Surface Pro for Business, the YubiKey integrates with more than 1,000 applications, services, platforms and devices to ensure users are protected across every digital touchpoint."

Tools are only as good as the hands that wield them.



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BETWEEN YOU AND THE THREAT





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Microsoft Intelligent
Security Association

 Microsoft Security

Winning the cyber war

Armor Defense's Chris Drake discusses the company's mission, founded upon his cyberattack encounter, and how its newly launched Nexus portal offers clients visibility into the preemptive defences that effectively mitigate ongoing cyberattacks

BY LAURA HYDE

According to Microsoft's *Digital Defense Report 2024*, its customers are confronted with over 600 million cyberattacks each day. This alarming statistic underscores the critical need for organisations to take decisive action against these attacks. They need the right expertise, tools, policies, processes and robust user training to effectively and efficiently combat these threats.

Cybersecurity experts like Chris Drake, founder and CEO of Armor Defense, are essential allies in this fight. "Armor was founded in 2009 after a hard lesson: a customer at my previous company was hacked; it wasn't just business – it was personal," says Drake. "That breach became the spark that created Armor, which has one mission: to ensure no company suffers like that again."

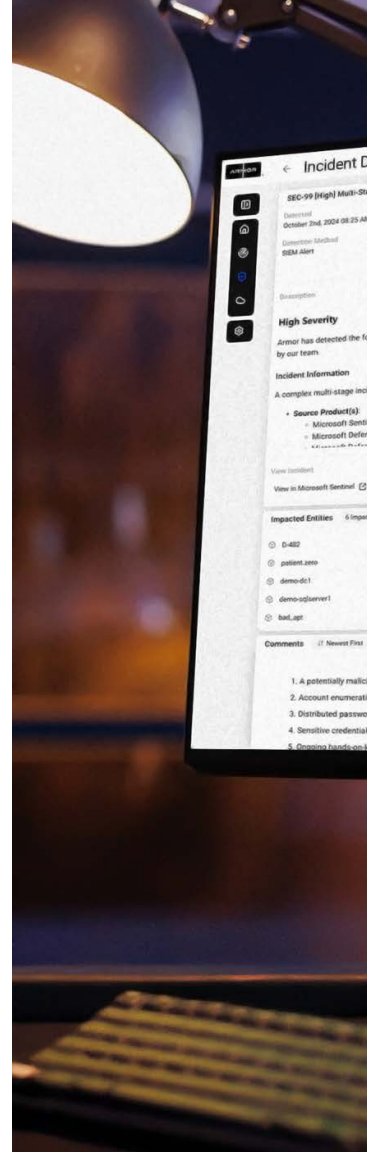
Drake and his team of experts now protect over 1,500 companies across 40 countries, outmanoeuvring threats in the cybersecurity battleground. "We are trusted by Fortune 500 companies, fast-growing startups, and everything in between," says Drake. "Between you and the threat is our promise to shield our customers from cyberthreat actors looking to cause them harm."

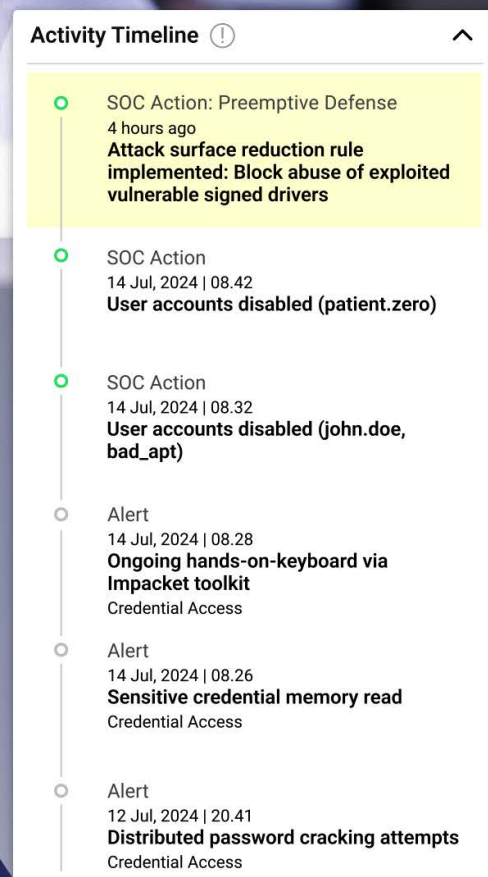
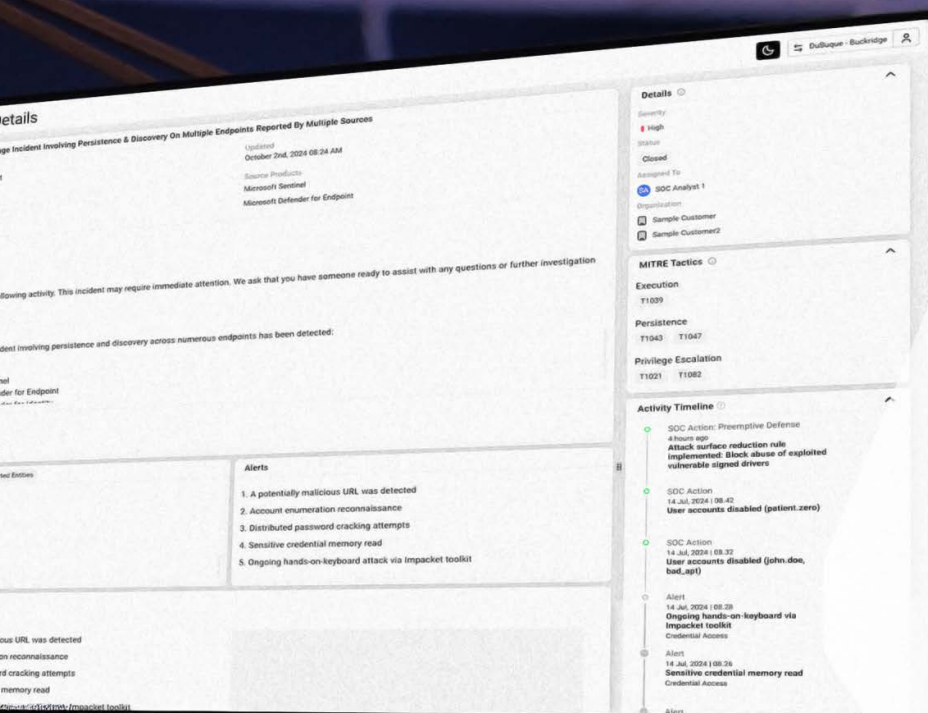
Armor works continuously to adapt its services to stay ahead of sophisticated actors. "We gather intelligence from a wide array of sources and follow up with enrichment, research, investigation and correlation to ensure accuracy and relevance," says Drake. "Upon synthesising the data, we tune controls

and rules to enhance detections without increasing the number of false positives. This tuning is an essential part of our promise to our customers. We show them meaningful and actionable alerts without creating alert fatigue."

Armor customers get peace of mind with this comprehensive approach. "Our goal was to find a managed detection and response partner we could trust to safeguard our organisation and show us the actions taken to protect our unique environment," says Keith Buck, chief innovation officer at ViTel Net, a telehealth provider. "Armor provides this security intelligence and optimises

"Between you and the threat is our promise to shield our customers from cyberthreat actors"





the tools we already have, eliminating redundancy, which helps us save money. Its security operations centre (SOC) gathers the insights without moving our data, so there is no vendor lock-in. We can now focus on growing our company.”

In 2022, Armor formed a strategic partnership with Microsoft. Armor holds a Microsoft Specialist Designation in Cloud Security and Threat Protection and is a member of the Microsoft Intelligent Security Association (MISA). “As a MISA member, we provide Microsoft with input on the threat intelligence we are gathering and we benefit from its continuous investment in cybersecurity research and development, ensuring our clients receive world-class solutions,” says Drake.

In early 2025, Armor released its Nexus portal, designed to give customers a window into the heart of Armor’s SOC, allowing organisations to view every action taken to neutralise threats in real time. The portal also

shows detailed threat hunter findings and tailored recommendations.

“Nexus helps organisations with global operations or multiple subsidiaries to see what’s happening across their organisation,” concludes Drake. “Our holistic approach ensures we address every threat. We guarantee

“Armor provides this security intelligence and optimises the tools we already have, eliminating redundancy, which helps us save money”

that a customer will be notified of a critical security incident within minutes of Armor’s identification of a security incident. With Nexus, cybersecurity is no longer a reactive measure but a proactive and adaptive strategy that grows with our clients.” ■

Essentials for AI security

Todd Fortwengler from Coretek shares insights on safe AI integration, risk mitigation strategies and the role of Microsoft's security solutions in Coretek's CoreDefend

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

The 2024 *AI opportunity study* by IDC found that generative AI usage jumped from 55 to 75 per cent between 2023 and 2024. As AI adoption accelerates, businesses need to proceed with caution, particularly when it comes to security. Todd Fortwengler, director of security at Coretek, is helping firms safeguard their data, identities and systems as they invest in AI.

What are the most important things to consider when planning to adopt AI?

The first step is choosing a technology partner to identify AI use cases and drive rapid efficiencies using both custom-built and ready-made AI platforms to achieve organisational goals.

The next, and possibly most important, step is to secure your data estate. It's also essential to organise the ongoing management of threat detection and rapid response. We believe Microsoft is the right platform provider and Coretek is the trusted partner to get you there.

What foundational steps should an organisation take to integrate AI securely into its data security framework?

First, I would emphasise the importance of carrying out a comprehensive assessment that covers data security, identity protection, device security, servers and identities. Conducting a thorough assessment of the current security posture is essential too. This involves evaluating existing security measures, identifying potential vulnerabilities and understanding the organisation's readiness for AI adoption. It's important to establish a clear baseline to measure progress and identify areas that need improvement.

For example, devices play a significant role in data security. Ensuring that all devices connected to the network are secure and compliant with security policies is vital. This includes implementing endpoint protection solutions and regularly updating software to protect against vulnerabilities.

When it comes to data, it's important to classify and tag data based on its sensitivity and importance. This helps in applying appropriate security measures to protect critical data assets. In addition, leveraging Microsoft Purview for governance along with data encryption, both at rest and in transit, should be a standard practice to safeguard data from unauthorised access.

Servers are the backbone of any IT infrastructure and securing them is paramount. This involves implementing strong authentication mechanisms, regularly patching and updating server software, and monitoring server activities for any signs of compromise. Additionally, employing AI-driven security solutions can help in detecting and mitigating threats in real time.

Lastly, managing identities is crucial for maintaining a secure environment. Implementing identity and access management (IAM) solutions ensures that only authorised users have access to specific resources. Multifactor authentication (MFA) adds an extra layer of security, making it more difficult for attackers to gain unauthorised access.

By addressing these key areas, firms can create a solid foundation for adopting AI along with their data security strategies. This comprehensive approach not only enhances security but also ensures that the organisation is well prepared to leverage the full potential of AI technologies.

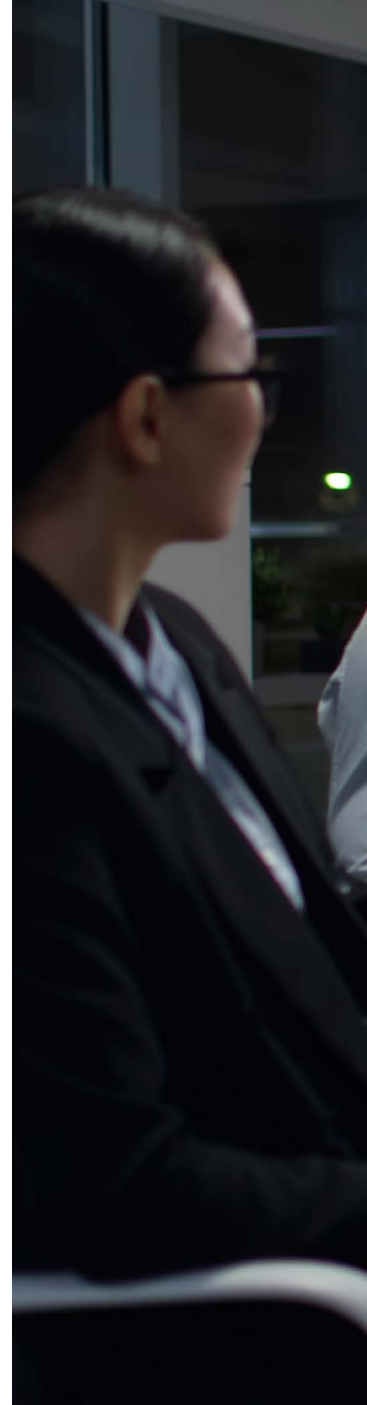




Photo: iStock/Nimito

Which key Microsoft security solutions power Coretek's CoreDefend offering, and how do they enhance AI-driven data security?

Coretek's CoreDefend 360 is a managed security services offering, which uses Microsoft security solutions including Sentinel, Purview, Defender XDR (Extended Detection and Response) and Defender for Identities.

Microsoft Sentinel is a critical component of CoreDefend. It offers AI-driven monitoring and threat detection, providing real-time visibility into potential security threats. Sentinel's advanced analytics and machine learning capabilities enable proactive threat hunting and rapid incident response, ensuring that threats

are identified and mitigated before they can cause significant damage.

Microsoft Purview plays a vital role in data governance and protection. By leveraging Purview, CoreDefend ensures that data is classified, tagged and protected based on its sensitivity and importance. This helps in applying appropriate security measures and maintaining compliance with regulatory frameworks.

Microsoft Defender XDR is another essential technology within CoreDefend. Defender XDR provides comprehensive protection across endpoints, networks and cloud environments. It integrates seamlessly with other Microsoft security solutions to deliver a unified security



Photo: iStock/Nimito

experience, enabling organisations to detect, investigate and respond to advanced threats more effectively.

Meanwhile, Microsoft Defender for Identities focuses on identity protection, which is crucial for maintaining a secure environment. By implementing IAM solutions, CoreDefend ensures that only authorised users have access to specific resources. MFA adds an extra layer of security, making it more difficult for attackers to gain unauthorised access.

Coupled with security operations centre and security orchestration, automation and response platforms and services from Coretek, these technologies work together to deliver real-time threat intelligence, threat hunting, comprehensive data protection and secure identity management. This ensures that organisations can achieve enterprise-grade security and compliance without the operational burden of managing their own security operations centre.

How should businesses address potential challenges and risks associated with AI adoption and ongoing risk mitigation?

Businesses should take a proactive and comprehensive approach. At Coretek, we believe that building a trusted partnership with our clients is key to navigating these complexities effectively.

One of the critical aspects of risk mitigation is ensuring that AI systems themselves are

secure. This includes implementing robust security measures to protect AI models from adversarial attacks, data poisoning and other threats. At Coretek, we leverage advanced AI-driven security solutions to monitor and safeguard your AI use cases and systems in real time, ensuring they remain resilient against evolving threats.



“It’s important to establish a clear baseline to measure progress and identify areas that need improvement”

Another important consideration is data governance. Organisations must ensure that data used for AI training and operations is properly classified, tagged and protected. Coretek uses Purview to provide comprehensive data governance and protection, ensuring compliance with regulatory frameworks and safeguarding sensitive information.

Ongoing risk mitigation requires continuous monitoring and adaptation. Coretek’s CoreDefend Managed Security uses Sentinel, enabling firms to proactively identify and respond to potential threats, ensuring that their AI systems remain secure and compliant through continual adaptation. ■



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Navigating security and compliance obstacles



SAMPPA LAHTINEN: M-FILES

M-Files' knowledge work automation platform offers a solution to the high-stakes challenge of maintaining security and compliance

Today's digital landscape means that navigating your organisation to a destination of top-level security and compliance can often feel like being trapped in a maze. One wrong turn can lead to crippling fines, loss of reputation and business closure. However, there is a way out – implementing a knowledge work automation platform that can not only enforce compliance and significantly reduce business risk but also automate compliance and data processes for superior productivity and data accuracy.

“M-Files Aino is a natural language assistant that enhances security and compliance by providing easy access to information”

Organisations face several challenges in maintaining security and compliance. Data leaks and non-compliance are major issues. Many organisations struggle with enforcing data retention rules and ensuring that only the right people have access to sensitive information. Inefficient compliance tools create huge workloads without guaranteeing results, and poor document control leads to inefficiencies and bottlenecks. Compliance often doesn't keep pace with the speed of business, resulting in unnecessary workloads and stressed employees.

Organisations struggle with data leaks and non-compliance due to unauthorised access to sensitive information, poor control over

document duplicates and versions, and lack of adherence to procedures. Without a systematic approach to record retention and disposal, they face regulatory breaches, data security risks and operational inefficiencies. These issues can lead to data breaches, regulatory fines and reputational damage.

Furthermore, the use of unmanaged AI tools such as ChatGPT has increased significantly in corporate environments. Using unmanaged AI tools can lead to several potential consequences, including data breaches due to inadequate security measures, loss of confidential information as free external AI services may not enforce strict privacy policies, and compliance issues from utilising unapproved AI tools that result in non-compliance with industry regulations. All of this can severely damage your company's reputation.

M-Files addresses these challenges with a flexible approach to managing access and permissions, ensuring only authorised personnel access sensitive data and reducing data leak risks. It provides complete control over document versions, publishing and distribution, preventing unauthorised changes and duplication. Additionally, M-Files enforces compliance controls, ensuring employees follow procedures and records are retained and disposed of per regulations. This comprehensive approach enhances data security, ensures regulatory compliance and improves operational efficiency.

A common mistake in many organisations is employees accidentally emailing the wrong

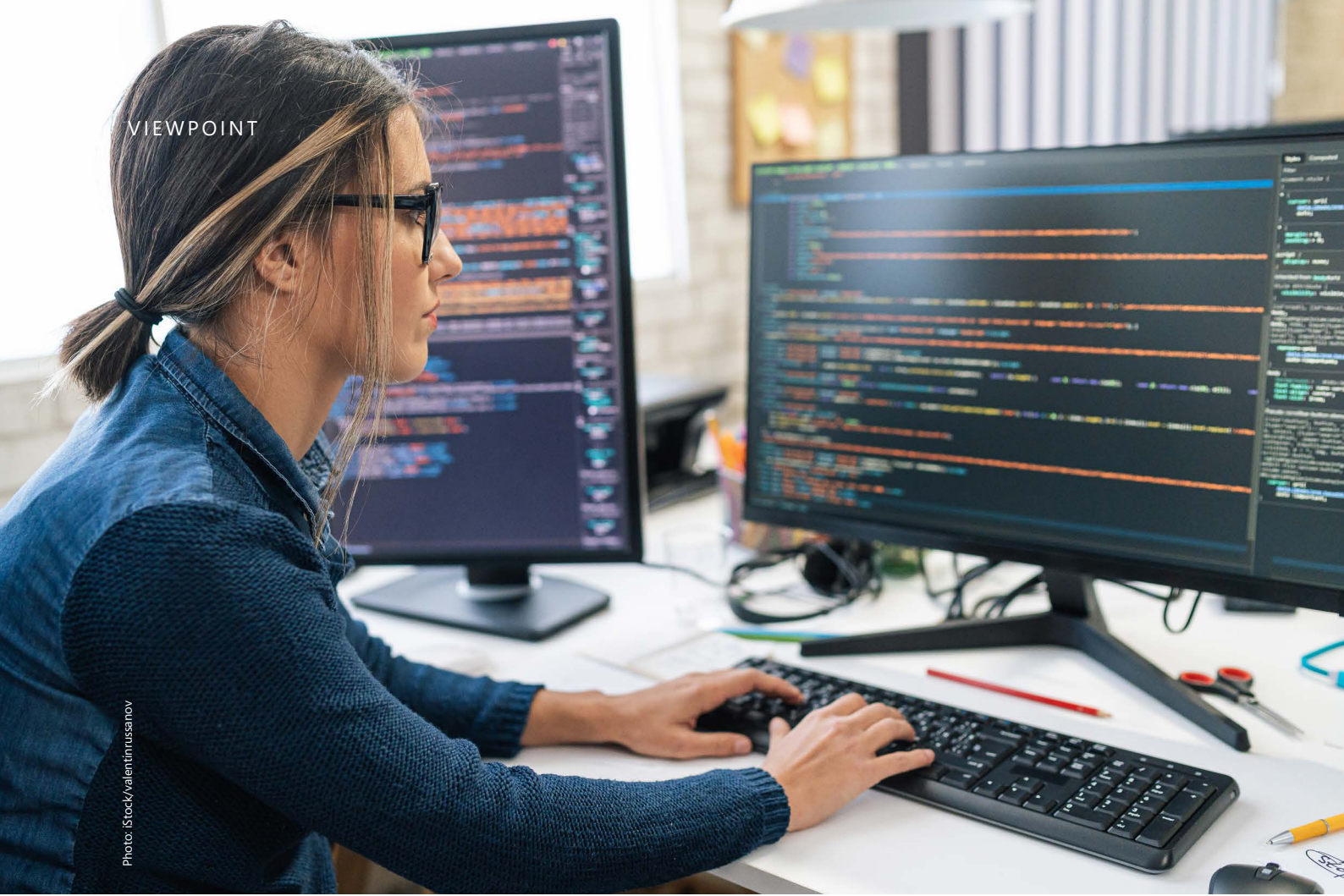


document to external parties. M-Files mitigates this risk by using external access through Hubshare, which ensures that external users authenticate into the system before they can access shared documents. This reduces the number of document copies floating around, significantly improving operating efficiency. Incorporating AI capabilities further enhances these benefits by automating and streamlining document management processes. M-Files Aino is a natural language assistant that enhances security and compliance by providing easy access to information while ensuring all interactions are protected and governed by organisational policies. It automates compliance processes, mitigates risks and helps maintain data confidentiality and regulatory adherence.

Organisations often struggle with inefficient compliance tools that create substantial workloads without guaranteeing results. These tools frequently lack robust data retention rule enforcement, making it difficult to systematically manage and retain critical information. Also, there is often an inability

to ensure that only authorised personnel have access to sensitive data, leading to potential security breaches and non-compliance with regulatory requirements. These inefficiencies can result in increased operational costs, reduced productivity and heightened risk of regulatory penalties.

To address these challenges, M-Files offers a comprehensive solution that provides full 360-degree views across existing and new data repositories, ensuring complete visibility and control over all information. The platform includes automated process controls and electronic audit trails, which streamline compliance activities and provide clear, traceable records of all actions taken. Additionally, M-Files features automated document permissions and approval workflows, ensuring that only the right people have access to sensitive information and that all documents are properly reviewed and approved. This automation enhances efficiency, reduces workloads and significantly improves compliance outcomes.



Organisations can also often face significant difficulties due to poor document control, which arises from separated document management and compliance systems. This separation leads to inefficiencies and bottlenecks, as compliance processes struggle to keep pace with the speed of business. As a result, audits create unnecessary workloads, and employees feel stressed, believing they need to perform extra, manual tasks to manage compliance effectively. These issues can severely impact productivity and increase the risk of non-compliance.

To overcome these obstacles, M-Files offers a solution that helps only the right people find the right information through access limits, ensuring data security and reducing the risk of unauthorised access. The platform improves productivity by implementing workflows that automate compliance logging, minimising manual tasks and reducing employee stress. Furthermore, M-Files streamlines the audit process with automated audit trails and immediate access to critical information, making compliance more efficient and less burdensome. This comprehensive approach

enhances overall operational efficiency and ensures that compliance processes align with the speed of business.

Navigating the complex landscape of security and compliance is no easy task, but with the right tools, it becomes manageable. M-Files provides a robust array of built-in security and compliance

“M-Files offers a solution that helps only the right people find the right information through access limits”

capabilities, including permissions management, to help enforce security and compliance. M-Files’ quality management solution makes audits even more effective by enforcing a set of quality processes, resources and controls.

For organisations looking to enhance their security and compliance measures, M-Files offers a solution that can deliver more efficient and reliable results. ■

Samppa Lahtinen is senior industry solutions manager at M-Files

Addressing security needs

John Collins and James Hart discuss the challenges of managing data access against regulations and how Lighthouse is positioned to help

BY AMBER HICKMAN

Digital transformation has allowed organisations to utilise AI and the cloud on a new, unprecedented level. However, AI platforms require real-time access to massive amounts of data, which can increase the risk of data interception or unauthorised exposure.

According to John Collins, executive director of advisory services and technical consulting at Lighthouse, one of the main challenges organisations currently face is “maintaining pace with an increasingly stringent compliance and privacy landscape while simultaneously embracing new technologies like generative AI”.

This concern is pushing many organisations to rethink their data access and governance strategies. But how do they approach this?

“Organisations can implement a robust multilayered security strategy that includes strong encryption, advanced threat detection and continuous data monitoring,” says Collins. “Creating a zero-trust architecture with customised implementation of the Microsoft Security tools ensures quality risk mitigation.

“In addition, tools like SharePoint Advanced Management can help firms to understand current data-sharing practices and inform policies. Employee training is also critical to foster a culture of security awareness.”

Lighthouse works with its clients to support them through this process and provide them with the knowledge and tools they need to keep their cloud environments secure.

“We combine deep technical acumen with hands-on legal, compliance and security experience,” says James Hart, senior director of identity governance solution development and operations at Lighthouse. “The power of this

combination has helped many organisations to navigate the tension between software functionality and business needs.”

Lighthouse has been a Microsoft partner for over 25 years and in that time, it has built a strong alignment with its engineering and product teams.

“We were also the first to deliver a Copilot readiness assessment that is designed to help organisations understand the impact of implementing Microsoft 365 Copilot on their data security and governance,” says Hart. “We also leverage key Microsoft programmes such as the Microsoft Intelligence Security Association and partner development initiatives to build the right alliances. These collaborations create win-win-win opportunities for partners, Microsoft and our customers because, at the end of the day, security is a team sport.” ■



James Hart (left)
and John Collins

Navigating the complexities of cloud security



NATHAN JAMIESON: ATECH X IOMART

The cybersecurity landscape is changing. But how can organisations best protect their data?

The global threat landscape is projected to become more sophisticated, with cybercrime expected to cost the world \$10.5 trillion annually by 2025, according to Cybersecurity Ventures.

In addition, total global data storage is expected to exceed 200 zettabytes (200 trillion gigabytes) by 2025. Cloud environments, once seen as a solve-all for digital infrastructure, have become both a critical business asset and a prime target for sophisticated cyberattacks that demand a strategic, multifaceted approach.

At the foundation of cloud security lies the CIA triad: confidentiality, integrity and availability. As organisations increasingly adopt multi-cloud strategies, maintaining these three pillars becomes more complex. According to Gartner's latest forecasts, global cloud spending is expected to grow significantly in the near future, making it more important than ever to address security concerns.

The challenge of securing data both in transit and storage remains paramount. Organisations must implement robust encryption protocols and access controls while maintaining seamless service delivery.

Many of the organisations Iomart speaks with struggle to manage security across multiple cloud platforms. These organisations often find themselves balancing different security postures across various environments, from private clouds

to hyperscale platforms like Microsoft Azure. This complexity is compounded by the need to maintain consistent security standards while leveraging each platform's unique capabilities.

Recent data from IBM's 2024 security report indicates that multi-cloud environments experience 50 per cent more security incidents than single-cloud setups. However, the financial and operational benefits of multi-cloud strategies often outweigh these challenges when properly managed from the start.

Another challenge organisations are currently facing is the ever-evolving regulatory landscape, with mandates like the General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act and the Digital Operational Resilience Act in the financial services industry all shaping cloud security requirements. Organisations must maintain compliance across multiple jurisdictions while ensuring their cloud environments remain agile and efficient.

A particularly interesting development is the rising influence of cyber insurance providers. Insurance firms are increasingly dictating minimum security requirements, effectively becoming external arbiters of organisational risk appetites. This trend has led to a more standardised approach to security controls.

Another trend that is becoming increasingly common is organisations embracing zero-trust architecture. This approach, which is



particularly well-implemented through solutions like Microsoft Entra ID, provides continuous verification rather than traditional perimeter-based security. The model operates on the principle of ‘never trust, always verify’, and conducts constant authentication checks based on multiple parameters, from device identity to geographic location.

“The most successful organisations will view security not as a technical burden, but as a key enabler of digital innovation”

These insights tell us that strategic cloud security requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond traditional IT practices. Organisations must thoughtfully invest in security and understand that different types of data need distinct levels of protection. This means creating strong security measures to safeguard sensitive information while keeping systems efficient and flexible.

Developing robust backup strategies that can't be compromised by

ransomware is also crucial, as is taking advantage of built-in security features from cloud providers and maintaining consistent security policies.

Lastly, it is key to involve a wide range of stakeholders in security planning. This includes not just technical teams, but also legal, risk management and compliance experts. By bringing together these

diverse perspectives, organisations can create more effective security strategies that protect their digital assets, support business growth, and adapt to changing cyberthreats.

James Pearce, our chief technology officer at Atech x Iomart, states that “while organisations can leverage AI for real-time threat detection, adversaries are using the same technology to launch more sophisticated attacks and businesses must take a proactive,

intelligence-led approach to cloud security to stay ahead”.

The most successful organisations will view security not as a technical burden, but as a key enabler of digital innovation and resilience.

The future of cloud security lies in finding the right balance between protection and operational efficiency. As organisations continue to expand their cloud footprints, the focus should be on building resilient security architectures that can adapt to evolving threats while supporting business growth.

Success isn't about implementing the most stringent controls everywhere, but rather about understanding where to apply security friction and where to optimise for performance. The most successful organisations will be those that can maintain this balance and stay ahead of regulatory requirements and emerging threats, all while keeping their cloud environments efficient and cost-effective. ■

Nathan Jamieson is chief information security officer at Atech x Iomart

Establishing trust in a digital world



SACHIO IWAMOTO: KYNDRYL

With concerns over the deceptive use of AI rising, how can organisations protect their employees' identities and assets?

More than four billion people participated in major elections worldwide in 2024. At the same time, the concern about deepfake attacks spreading deceptive political information and compromising security grew.

Today, more than 350 vendors provide solutions for rapid content automation and code generation online. Whilst the accessibility and affordability of many of these tools has made it easier for organisations to enable new use cases and improve efficiencies, it has also made it simpler for users with malicious intent to develop tools and models designed to infiltrate privacy and security.

There are two main risks that arise from the deceptive use of AI: fake content that influences our thoughts and fake identities that compromise people's privacy and rights.

Authentication mechanisms have evolved significantly over the past few decades with the development of technologies such as single sign-on, social login and passkeys, which provide a more secure and user-friendly login experience.

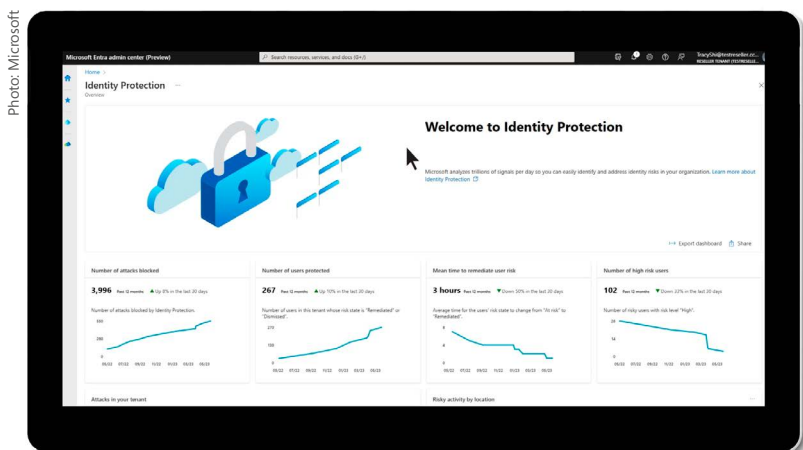
However, these mechanisms are designed to interact solely with IT systems, and they do not solve the gap between trust in the physical and digital world. Who is the author of the news article? Are the photos and videos real? Is the source of the sensor data from internet of things devices trustworthy? It can be impossible to tell whether the content or person we are interacting with is a real human.

To solve this issue, we need digital identities that work like a real-world identity for humans and things with no intermediaries.

A decentralised identity service such as Microsoft Entra Verified ID is an excellent starting point of your journey. It's an easy-to-use platform providing a trustworthy, user-centric and scalable digital identity verification solution and it also integrates with ID verification partners for remote onboarding.

The key to success in digital ID innovation lies in achieving stronger and more sustainable security. Kyndryl can further support organisations using Microsoft's security technology with its Zero Trust Services, which helps customers integrate across various components and collaboratively build modern solutions tailored to customers' needs. ■

Sachio Iwamoto is director, principal architect and research lead for financial technology at Kyndryl





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Building cyber resilience with phishing-resistant MFA

Identity is a fundamental part of a zero-trust strategy. Yubico's Derek Hanson explains how businesses can meet Microsoft's MFA regulations with passwordless authentication solutions

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

Research by Microsoft shows that multifactor authentication (MFA) can block over 99.2 per cent of account compromise attacks. This statistic alone was enough for Microsoft to encourage secure-by-default practices with its customers by implementing an MFA mandate for all Microsoft Azure sign-in attempts. However, organisations are struggling to meet these requirements.

"There are a whole host of challenges that hinder security," says Derek Hanson, vice president of standards and alliances at Yubico, a provider of hardware authentication security keys that integrates its tools with Microsoft Entra ID and Microsoft 365 to help customers with their zero-trust strategies. "Many businesses expose themselves to risks by relying on traditional usernames and passwords and legacy MFA tools, which are vulnerable to phishing and credential theft. Others struggle with the complexities of managing password policies, leading to frequent password resets and user frustration."

Microsoft now requires MFA for all users signing into the Azure portal, and the Microsoft Entra and Intune admin centres. The mandate was enforced in October 2024, followed by the same for the Microsoft 365 admin centre in February 2025. A second phase of MFA mandates will roll out later in 2025, extending MFA enforcement to Azure mobile applications, Command-Line Interface and PowerShell.

"This decision is driven by the goal to significantly reduce account takeover threats and enhance security," explains Hanson. "By

mandating that Azure users employ some form of MFA, Microsoft aims to protect user accounts from unauthorised access and reduce the risk of security breaches."

Yubico is helping businesses achieve their authentication goals through its hardware security keys, called YubiKeys. They stop account takeovers, reduce security breaches, improve user productivity and provide a smoother transition to passwordless authentication.

"By adopting YubiKeys, organisations across various industries have significantly enhanced



"By eliminating passwords, organisations reduce their attack surface"

their security posture through the gold standard for phishing-resistant authentication and streamlined user experiences," says Hanson. "The seamless integration of YubiKeys has enabled thousands of satisfied customers to implement strong, hardware-based MFA across their IT infrastructure and create phishing-resistant users to become truly phishing-resistant enterprises."

"It's also become clear that organisations must go beyond only addressing moments of authentication – they need to focus on building phishing-resistant users. Fostering phishing-resistant users is not just a reactive measure,



but a proactive enterprise strategy aimed at removing the risk of phishing by eliminating all phishable events from the entire user lifecycle – thus ensuring even the least security conscious users are protected in their day-to-day activities. Yubico is committed to helping organisations create phishing-resistant users for their entire employee account lifecycle, by empowering enterprise security and bolstering protection against account takeovers through easily deploying the highest-assurance modern hardware security keys – in turn enabling passwordless authentication at scale.”

Passwordless authentication – part of the MFA process – is crucial for protection against cyberthreats and aligns with Microsoft’s vision for secure and efficient access management.

“Microsoft emphasises securing identities as the foundation of a zero-trust strategy,” says Hanson. “Passwordless authentication strengthens this perimeter by ensuring that only legitimate users can access resources without the need to manage complex passwords. By eliminating passwords, organisations reduce their attack surface, making it harder for attackers to gain unauthorised access.”

Yubico’s security solutions, including its Yubico Enrollment Suite made up of two primary solutions – Yubico FIDO Pre-reg and YubiEnroll – integrate with Microsoft environments to provide passwordless MFA solutions.

“Yubico FIDO Pre-reg offers a turnkey service that delivers pre-enrolled YubiKeys directly to users, whether they are in corporate offices or remote locations,” says Hanson. “Meanwhile, YubiEnroll provides a versatile client application that allows IT administrators to enrol YubiKeys on behalf of users. The Microsoft compatibility of these solutions allows enterprises to implement strong security measures consistently. By adopting Yubico’s technology, business decision-makers can significantly enhance their organisation’s security posture, ensuring both protection and operational resilience in the face of evolving cyberthreats.”

With the MFA mandate set to take full effect by mid-2025, Yubico will continue its partnership with Microsoft, collaborating with joint customers on their zero-trust journey.

“By working closely with Microsoft, we ensure that our products are fully compatible with Azure, Entra ID, Microsoft 365 and other critical services,” says Hanson. “This integration is crucial for organisations aiming to adopt a zero-trust architecture, as it provides strong, phishing-resistant authentication that is essential for verifying user identities before granting access. Our goal is to empower enterprises to operate as phishing-resistant organisations while confidently navigating the evolving cybersecurity landscape, leveraging the strength of our partnership with Microsoft and our commitment to zero-trust principles.” ■

Enterprise-level security for all businesses

Chris Bisnett shares how Huntress is protecting Microsoft environments, addressing new threats, and supporting both outsourced and in-house security teams

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

The *Huntress 2025 Cyber Threat Report* reveals a surge in sophisticated cyberattacks on businesses of all sizes and industries in 2024. Committed to defending organisations without enterprise budgets, cybersecurity firm Huntress helps all businesses secure their Microsoft environments, combat emerging threats like session theft and complement in-house security teams. Chris Bisnett, chief technology officer and co-founder of Huntress, explains how.

What is Huntress's mission and primary goal?

We started in 2015 with three founders doing government contracts, but competing with big companies led us to ask: 'Who are they not selling to, and why?'. Talking to businesses outside of large enterprises, we found that implementing cybersecurity measures was too expensive for them – not just buying and deploying the tools but also developing the expertise to manage them. That led us to an underserved market: businesses below the Fortune 500 that struggle to afford cybersecurity tools or hire experts yet remain prime targets for attacks.

For these businesses, cybersecurity isn't a priority; it's a burden. A restaurant owner, for example, is focused on taxes, not security. So, we built solutions tailored to their needs, helping them move above the cybersecurity poverty line.

How are you managing and protecting Microsoft environments?

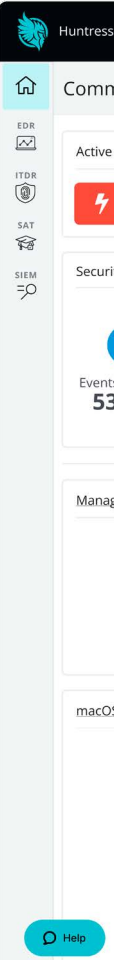
We protect endpoints with our endpoint detection and response agent and collect logs into our security information and event management product to detect malicious activity. Over the past five years, we've focused on securing Microsoft 365 as more businesses migrate from on-premises solutions to the cloud. This shift removes traditional network firewalls, making security more complex. When files are accessible from anywhere, strong controls like multifactor authentication and conditional access are essential. We help businesses implement these measures to secure their workloads.

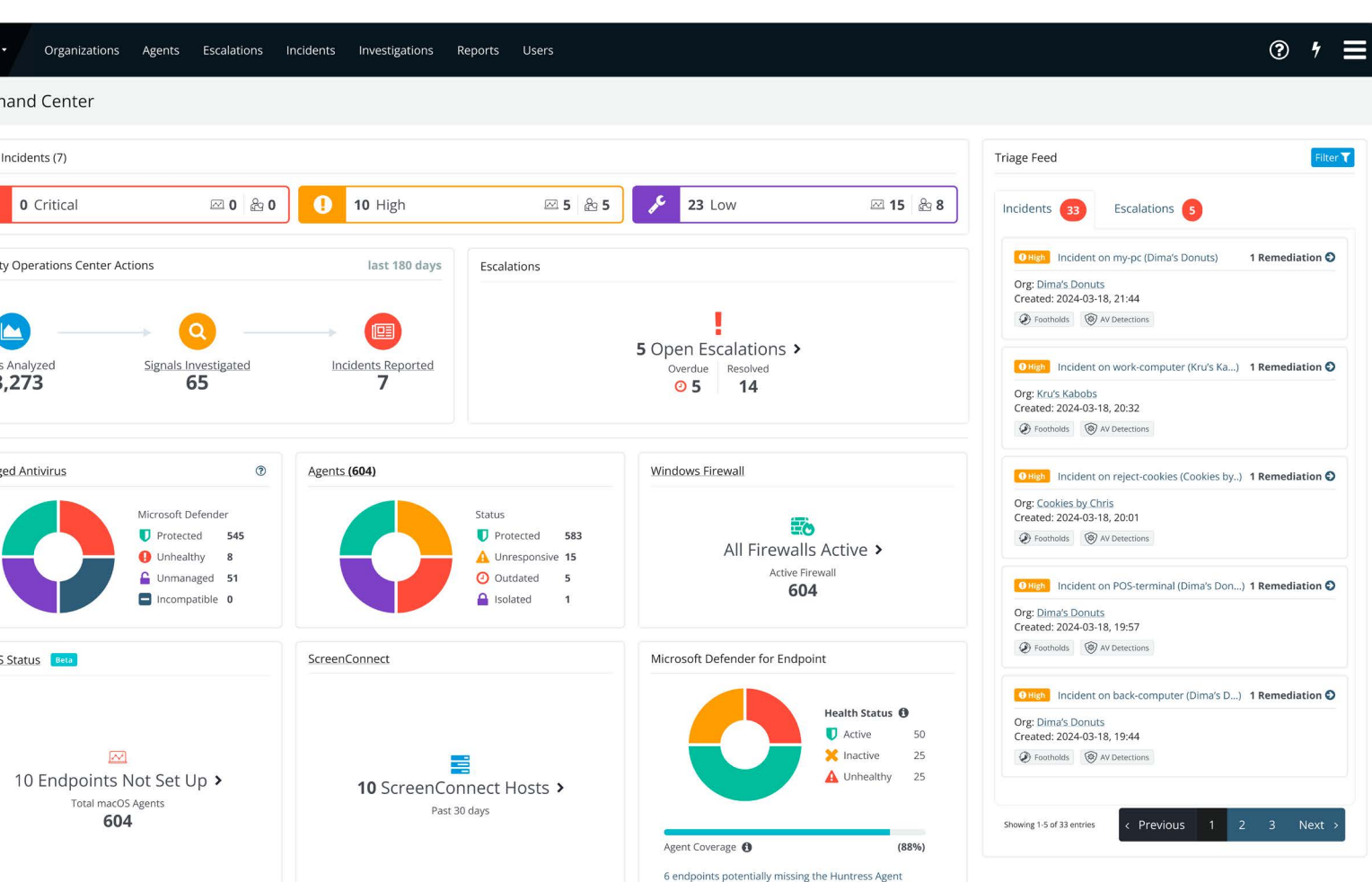
Why is session theft a growing concern for cloud security, and how do you detect and respond to these breaches?

We focus on detecting and responding to security breaches. When attackers steal active sessions, often through phishing, they can access cloud data in Microsoft 365 and OneDrive without passwords. Instead of giving them time to exploit this, we alert customers immediately, shut down compromised sessions and force password resets to prevent further damage.

If a company already has a security operations centre team, how does Huntress add value to their security strategy?

We're often asked, 'if we use Huntress, what happens to our security team?'. My response is





always ‘what else is on your cybersecurity to-do list?’. Companies have a long list of tasks but lack the resources to complete them. Huntress’s fully managed security solutions, combined with its 24/7 security operations centre fuelled by an elite team of threat hunters, oversee routine security alerts, freeing up skilled analysts for more complex work.

Another common question is, ‘if I use Microsoft Defender, why add Huntress?’. We believe in defence in depth. No single tool catches everything. Defender detects some threats we don’t, and vice versa. That’s why Microsoft partners exist. We enhance Defender’s data, layering it with our own insights to improve security management. Our experts then refine this approach, combining automation with human intelligence. It’s not about replacing Defender but strengthening it.

What have you achieved so far as part of the Microsoft Intelligent Security Association (MISA) initiative?

When Microsoft analysed its security product usage, it found that non-enterprise organisations weren’t using their licenses effectively because they didn’t know how to respond to alerts. Our role in the MISA

initiative is to help these customers maximise their existing tools to crush hackers.

We’ve also integrated Microsoft’s security tools into our own. Today, we monitor and manage over 1.5 million endpoints, including Microsoft systems, helping our customers get real value from their investments.



“We believe in defence in depth. No single tool catches everything”

Our partnership was solidified at Microsoft Ignite in November 2024, where Microsoft introduced a new SMB designation within the Microsoft Intelligent Security Association. This gives us access to exclusive security events and insights from Microsoft product managers, allowing us to align our services with their roadmap and strengthen the ‘better together’ approach. ■

Learn about Huntress’s endpoint detection and response solution at: bit.ly/4kmS7Sz

Huntress provides organisations with an overview of their security operations

Planning for business survival

Kyndryl's Duncan Bradley explains why organisations should consider implementing greater protection for their critical data and platforms on Azure and Microsoft 365

BY ALEX SMITH

Whether it's a fire, data corruption or the disruption of vital platforms, disaster can strike an organisation at any time, causing potentially catastrophic losses of critical information. While cost and the demands for greater availability has ended the days of taking tapes to a recovery centre to provide resiliency, the rise of 'highly available' systems which replicate data from one centre to another has exposed organisations to new, unforeseen threats.

"This setup essentially provides only one copy of the data," explains Duncan Bradley, director, and UK and Ireland security and resiliency practice leader, at Kyndryl UK. "Even with multiple replicated copies, it is still just the same data being replicated. In 2017, the NotPetya attack demonstrated how malware could infiltrate an organisation. While this attack corrupted the operating systems, it would have been far worse if it had corrupted organisations' actual data, as this corrupted data would then replicate to its secondary data centre, or even to platforms like Microsoft Azure, meaning the information is effectively lost or not available without paying ransoms or for lengthy forensic recovery. This highlights the critical need for organisations to be able to restore data from cyberattack-tolerant backups."

Bradley suggests organisations should consider enhancing their business continuity plans to take account of threats to these highly available platforms such as Microsoft 365 (M365) and Microsoft Azure, especially if their business is covered by new regulations such as DORA.

"M365, for example, is an excellent platform, designed with flexibility so you can adopt its features as needed," says Bradley. "However,

the responsibility for protecting your data lies with you, not Microsoft. While M365 provides a recycle bin to recover deleted data, it would not be effective in the event of a mass deletion or corruption attack. Regulated customers, or those with critical business processes in M365, should definitely plan for potential outages caused by cyberattacks and consider how they would recover in such scenarios. This is where Kyndryl and Microsoft can collaborate effectively to advise on the desired outcomes in case of risks such as a cyberattack within M365."

Kyndryl advises that when assessing their business continuity plans, organisations should consider more scenarios they would need to protect themselves from, including ransomware data attacks, develop their strategies accordingly.

"Most national or regional regulations emphasise planning for three main scenarios,"



"The responsibility for protecting your data lies with you"

says Bradley. "The first involves traditional disasters, like a flood affecting a Microsoft data centre. The second scenario revolves around stored data becoming corrupted. Finally, the third scenario is related to the failure of a critical third party, such as the collapse of a network provider."

Many organisations also do not know how long it would take to recover, or the



Photo: iStock/Kerkez

interdependencies between all the data and platforms associated with an important business service, which introduces critical uncertainty into their planning. To avoid this, Kyndryl leverages its expertise and works with its customers to assess the recover point objective – the maximum amount of time before data loss exceeds an acceptable threshold – for their cloud-based workloads.

“The first step, which can also be a fun and team-building event for the customer, is to conduct a cyber simulation,” says Bradley. “The scenario could involve, for example, experiencing both a denial-of-service attack and a ransomware attack at the same time. Everyone then comes together in mission control to plan and execute a recovery. Based on the size of the enterprise, whether it serves 10,000 or 100,000 customers, we can then simulate how long that recovery could take, and whether it meets their business impact tolerances or recovery point objectives.”

“Depending on the storage types being used, we utilise our advanced Mass Restore Modeling tools to calculate how long the process would take to recover,” says Bradley. “With this simulation

as a use case, we can assess recovery timelines for critical business services, such as an order or dispatch solution. In some instances, recovery might only take 18 hours, while in others, it could take eight days or longer. This exercise also helps us collaborate with the business to determine what an ideal recovery process would look like.”

Ultimately, a well-prepared and tested business continuity plan can be the difference between a minor data loss and a public relations disaster. Understanding the real business impact can save millions.

“Recovering a business process within two hours while losing only 10 minutes of data might cost \$10 million,” says Bradley. “However, if the business can tolerate a 24-hour recovery timeline with a 24-hour data loss, the cost might be as little as \$100,000. It ultimately becomes a business decision. Should you accept some level of risk and potential loss or should you invest heavily to minimise it? It’s important for business leaders to make that informed decision, knowing that in six months’ time, bad actors may develop a new attack vector that renders that investment less effective.” ■

Why choose a Microsoft managed partner?



CLINT ADKINS: CORETEK

Coretek's partnership with Microsoft helps its customers strengthen cloud security, access funding and ensure compliance

Selecting the right technology partner can make or break an organisation's journey to the cloud. Coretek – a proud Microsoft managed partner with advanced specialisations and participation in programmes such as Certified Security Investigator (CSI), the Microsoft Intelligent Security Association (MISA) and Azure Expert Managed Services Provider (MSP) – understands the paramount importance of aligning with a partner that can unlock funding capabilities and securely manage workloads.

The significance of attaining advanced specialisations is a testament to a partner's expertise and proven success in specific areas

“Selecting the right technology partner can make or break an organisation's journey to the cloud”

such as cloud security, identity and access management and more. These specialisations ensure the partner possesses deep technical knowledge and has met rigorous standards set by Microsoft. For businesses, this means peace of mind and knowing they are working with a partner that has demonstrated proficiency and reliability in critical areas of cloud infrastructure and security.

Being part of initiatives like MISA and Azure Expert MSP solidifies Coretek's position as a leader in the field. These programmes are

designed to recognise and support partners who deliver high-quality, innovative solutions.

For example, MISA members are experts in cybersecurity, providing advanced solutions and services that protect organisations from evolving threats. Coretek's membership in MISA highlights our dedication to securing clients' digital environments. In addition, being recognised as an Azure Expert MSP indicates that Coretek has met stringent requirements for delivering top-tier managed services on Azure. This designation assures clients of our ability to manage and optimise Azure environments effectively.

Our Microsoft-verified managed extended detection and response (MXDR) solution status is the first engineering verification of its kind for the managed security service provider (MSSP) partner community. Partners with this elite status have an MXDR solution that meets a high bar of criteria of security managed services across XDR technology, providing continuous security operations centre monitoring, incident response, proactive threat hunting, configuration management, and security information and event management offerings.

Another benefit of partnering with a Microsoft managed partner is access to funding opportunities. We can leverage Microsoft's funding programmes to help clients offset the costs of cloud migration, optimisation and security enhancements. This financial support can be a game-changer for businesses looking to modernise their infrastructure without overextending their budgets.



Lastly, in today's regulatory environment, working with a MSSP that is compliant with key standards such as ISO-27001, and System and Organization Controls 2 (SOC2 Type 2) is crucial. These certifications ensure that the MSSP follows best practices for security, risk management and compliance. This is particularly important for organisations operating in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), GCC-High and Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program environments, where strict security and compliance requirements must be met.

For example, the ISO-27001 standard specifies the requirements for establishing, implementing and maintaining an information security management system. It ensures that Coretek has a systematic approach to managing sensitive company information and data

security. Meanwhile, SOC2 Type 2 compliance guarantees that our systems and processes meet rigorous criteria for security, availability, processing integrity, confidentiality and privacy. This compliance provides clients with the assurance that their data is managed with the highest level of care and integrity.

Overall, we believe that choosing a Microsoft partner with advanced specialisations and achievements in programmes like CSI, MISA and Azure Expert MSP is a strategic decision that unlocks tremendous value. Coretek's commitment to excellence and deep partnership with Microsoft empower organisations to confidently move to the cloud, securely manage their workloads and maximise available funding opportunities. ■

Clint Adkins is chief revenue officer at Coretek

How projects make or break organisations



PIERRE LE MANH: PMI

Organisations must shift their mindsets and approach projects in a new way to deliver successful, worthwhile transformation

Project Management Institute (PMI) completed its biggest research study in its 55-year history at the end of 2024. The reason? A hard truth: successful organisations are built on successful projects, but project success is rarely well defined.

The world is changing at a pace we can barely keep up with, due to AI, climate urgencies, innovation, geopolitical shifts and regulatory instability. Every business, government and institution is scrambling to adapt. For most, it is either transform or face irrelevance.

Transformation means projects, and lots of them. Some small, some massive, some important and some critical. These projects

“A successful project is one that delivers value that is worth the effort and expense”

mobilise scarce resources and their success determines whether real change and progress happen. That’s why projects currently sit very high on every CEO’s agenda as the enabler of the transformation inherent in their mandate.

For too long projects have mostly been judged by three rigid metrics: time, cost and scope. This is no longer enough in the current age of innovation. What matters now is whether key stakeholders such as executives and customers see an outcome that makes their investment worthwhile. In short, a

successful project is one that delivers value that is worth the effort and expense.

Our research also shows that project professionals and executives can drive success by focusing on what really matters. This includes going beyond checklists to ensure projects align with broader strategic goals, deliver social impact and develop strong, motivated teams that push projects forward.

But more than anything, success requires a mindset shift among project professionals and the executives who empower them. To achieve this mindset, they can adopt a call for action that we at PMI abbreviate as MORE: manage perception, own success beyond project management, relentlessly reassess and expand perspective.

First, it’s critical to manage perception. A project isn’t successful just because it’s ‘done’. Stakeholders must be able to see the value generated by the project, which means project professionals need to actively shape and communicate outcomes, not just execute tasks.

Second, project professionals must own success beyond project management success. It’s no longer enough to simply manage schedules, predefined scopes and budgets, and project leaders must take full accountability to minimise waste and ensure there is a clear alignment with business priorities.

Third, there is a need to relentlessly reassess as consumer needs, competition, technologies and regulations evolve. Teams must continuously evaluate whether the project is still solving the right problem and doing so efficiently. If not, then it is time to make changes.



Photo: Adobe Stock/Kostiantyn

Last, project professionals need to expand their perspective. The best project leaders think beyond their immediate task; they can see the bigger picture outside of their organisation and understand how their project holds value in the wider world to drive results that truly matter.

The key point to take away from the research is that it's time for project professionals to step up. It is evident they hold great potential for driving meaningful and successful transformation, but to capitalise on this they need to challenge outdated thinking and take ownership of value creation.

There is a clear message for executives too. Projects are the engine of transformation but if executives want meaningful results, they must empower project professionals and hold them accountable to not just deliver, but also own, success. Give them a real voice, invest in them and expect them to challenge assumptions to maximise value and reduce waste. ■

Download the Maximizing Project Success report at: bit.ly/project-success-report

Pierre Le Manh is president and CEO of PMI

Switch up your data management game



CHRIS WEINFURT: SYNERGY TECHNICAL

Having been tried and tested by Synergy Technical for its own operations, the firm recommends Microsoft Fabric as a strategic investment in efficiency, innovation and long-term success

All businesses need to grow. But with growth comes vast amounts of scattered data that are challenging to manage at the best of times. If the data is not handled properly, it leads to inefficiencies, missed opportunities and delays in decision-making.

Extracting insights and processing data in real time is essential for maintaining a competitive edge and responding to market changes effectively. Microsoft Fabric addresses these challenges by creating a more streamlined, accessible and automated approach to data management, ultimately benefiting employees and the overall business.

Fabric is a powerful suite of tools designed to transform an organisation's data management and analysis. At Synergy Technical, the impact of Fabric has been significant, enabling our teams to work more efficiently and intelligently. By simplifying data processes and reducing manual effort, employees can focus on higher-value tasks rather than spending time on repetitive data management. This shift has led to increased productivity, better collaboration, and faster decision-making across the business. The ability to integrate and access critical business insights in real time has improved operational efficiency and allowed teams to make data-driven decisions confidently.

We have also seen a growing customer demand to achieve similar results. Organisations and industries are recognising the value of a more connected and automated approach to data, which directly impacts their ability to innovate, improve customer experiences and drive business success. The transformation we've experienced after using Fabric reinforces how modernising data processes can enhance employee performance and business outcomes.

By improving collaboration and making critical insights more accessible, businesses can better position themselves for sustained growth and agility in an ever-evolving market. Fabric is not just a technology solution – it's a strategic investment in efficiency, innovation and long-term success. ■

Chris Weinfurt is chief of staff at Synergy Technical



Better data, better results

Quality data improves efficiency and reduces business errors, leading to enhanced customer experiences, says Melissa's Greg Brown

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

Every country formats addresses differently. For example, the building number precedes the street name in Canada but it is placed afterwards in Germany. So, if a marketer takes the same approach when sending promotional mail to prospects around the world, they may struggle to reach everyone. However, if they have access to quality data, they can easily adapt their approach to ensure they reach every individual.

"Quality data is data that is suitable and adequate for its intended use," says Greg Brown, vice president of global marketing at Melissa, which provides address management, data quality and identity verification solutions. "It measures how well a dataset meets the six criteria for completeness, accuracy, consistency, uniqueness, validity and conformity."

Ideally, data should fulfil all six criteria but often does not. For example, the data may be complete or accurate but inconsistent.

"Having clean, accurate data is important because it helps organisations to make better decisions, save money and comply with regulations," says Brown. "Inaccurate customer data can lead to undeliverable mail, which wastes postage, materials and time. Meanwhile incorrect shipment details cause delays and frustrate customers."

While inconsistent data creates siloes and inefficiencies, manually correcting errors is both time-consuming and costly.

"Data quality is important because customer data is always in flux," says

Brown. "Over 33 million Americans move each year, 37 million phone numbers are recycled annually and 10 per cent of customer records in the average database are duplicates. In the course of just one year, approximately 25 per cent of the customer data in a system will be out of date or incorrect."

Consequently, address verification is central to many organisational activities – from customer delivery to effective sales and marketing efforts, says Brown. "Address verification tools that are available include real-time address verification and address autocomplete and suggestion functionalities."

Address verification works by comparing customer addresses against a comprehensive database of verified addresses, including postal authority data from organisations like the US Postal Service, Canada Post and the UK's Royal Mail.

Melissa's solution integrates directly with Microsoft Dynamics and Office to automatically validate shipping addresses, geocode addresses and improve the user experience by adding autocomplete to address fields for data entry or sign-up forms.

"Instead of manually inputting each component of an address, such as street name, city and postal code, our Address Autocomplete product suggests an accurate, verified address as the user types to reduce the time and effort needed to enter an address by as much as 75 per cent," says Brown. "This improves website and online application conversion rates, as well as call centre data entry, while ensuring only correct addresses enter your system."

Melissa also has a robust partner programme for system integrators and resellers, enabling them to seamlessly provide data quality solutions to their customers and enhance their service offerings.

"We offer training and system integrator certification, access to a developer portal, expedited technical support, pricing discounts and co-branded marketing opportunities," says Brown. "By equipping businesses with both technology and support, Melissa helps organisations enhance their data quality strategies, ensuring accurate, consistent and reliable customer information." ■



"Having clean, accurate data is important because it helps organisations to make better decisions"

The smart workplace imperative

Businesses must enhance collaboration spaces and AV-IT integration to support hybrid work. AVIXA's Peter Hansen discusses meeting equity, seamless conferencing, managed service models and more

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

Collaboration spaces are vital for offices, and 39 per cent of organisations plan to upgrade these areas in the next year, according to the *Market Opportunity Analysis Report (MOAR)* produced by the Audiovisual and Integrated Experience Association (AVIXA). Meanwhile, 31 per cent aim to update individual workspaces, corporate training facilities and control rooms. Peter Hansen, economist at AVIXA, explains how businesses are overcoming the challenges of hybrid meetings and supporting both remote and in-person participants.



"The biggest challenges for an effective hybrid meeting room is bring-your-own-device compatibility and ease of use"

Please give us a brief overview of what the smart workplace of today looks like, and an insight into how you see it evolving in the future.

A smart workplace is where an employee is happy and productive and has all the technology they need to be successful serving them in a seamless way. Critical challenges are seen in hybrid meetings, where too often the

remote workers have a better presence than in-person attendees, and in efforts to compress the space used by workers occasionally in the office.

Employees expect the in-person workplace to be better than the at-home one – and the latter is usually pretty solid, so this is a high bar to compete with!

What types of office spaces are being upgraded to support hybrid work?

Collaboration spaces are a priority, with organisations focusing on increasing usability and meeting equity. High-quality audiovisual

is also growing, with 52 per cent of organisations planning to increase their investment in software, according to *MOAR*.

Why are organisations shifting towards managed services/operational expenditure (OPEX) models for conference rooms?

There are so many motivations behind the movement towards managed services/OPEX for conference rooms. Especially early on post-pandemic, end users were paying for conference-rooms-as-a-service out of uncertainty; they knew they needed some kind of hybrid setup, but the norms were so far from established that they didn't want to commit to a big, long-term, capital expenditure-style solution. The as-a-service approach was a way to stay up to date with minimal friction and predictable costs.

Another key motivation has been the rise of Microsoft Teams. It has motivated a movement towards managed services/OPEX in a few ways. To start, the ongoing evolution of the software platform often necessitates hardware upgrades to maintain full compatibility. Then, the physical layout of the rooms makes it easier to swap new equipment as needed rather than the old, wholesale revamp of the traditional capex model.

Beyond external factors, the AV industry has long been interested in



recurring revenue models. While building out managed service offerings has been a challenge, new incentives are accelerating adoption, benefiting both providers and end users with predictable costs and improved service.

How are AV and IT teams working together to improve conference room technology?

The biggest challenges for an effective hybrid meeting room is bring-your-own-device compatibility and ease of use, followed by audio quality. This level of complexity demands strong cooperation between AV and IT professionals. A well-equipped conference room that ensures meeting equity often requires multiple cameras, microphones, screens and speakers, all of which must be integrated seamlessly into the network. This level of complexity demands strong cooperation between AV and IT professionals.

For high-end modern conference rooms, external AV providers typically play a key role, working closely with end users over the long term. The ultimate goal is to create a frictionless experience where employees can walk into a room and launch a video conference effortlessly, regardless of the platform or device they are using. Achieving this level of seamlessness requires both technical expertise and a focus on the user experience.

What are the biggest challenges in building a smarter workplace and how does AVIXA help businesses to overcome them?

Two major challenges are knowledge gaps and collaboration. The workplace has undergone significant disruption in the past five years and best practices for hybrid work are still emerging. Organisations need to work with experts and stay informed on evolving trends. AVIXA provides resources such as trade shows, webinars and AVIXA Xchange – a global collaboration platform that connects thought leaders, solution providers and manufacturers with technology buyers – to help businesses navigate these changes and identify the best solutions.

Collaboration remains a challenge, particularly between AV and IT, as well as between technical experts and end users. AVIXA's certification programmes help bridge these gaps. The Audiovisual Network Professional certification ensures AV professionals have the IT skills needed to manage networked AV systems effectively. The Certified Technology Specialist suite also emphasises end-user engagement, ensuring that technology solutions truly meet workplace needs. Through these initiatives, AVIXA plays a crucial role in supporting businesses as they build smarter, more effective work environments. ■

Redefining workspaces

Crestron's Brad Hintze explains how companies can use AI and other technologies to create equitable meeting experiences and make going to the office a preferred option rather than an obligation

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

Businesses striving to bring employees back to the office must make the transition from remote to in-person work seamless. A frictionless experience fosters collaboration and productivity, making the commute worthwhile for employees.

"We've learned that in-person, face-to-face collaboration is incredibly effective, but when an employee walks through the entrance, they need to be as instantaneously productive as they are at their home workstation," says Brad Hintze, executive vice president of global marketing at Crestron. "Is desk space easy to reserve and readily available? Are digital connections immediate and reliable? Starting the day with a call to the help desk is never good for the employee, their productivity, or the potential tenure of that employee."

A well-designed workspace that integrates with advanced technologies can make all the difference to the employee's overall experience. "If an employee can walk into the office and begin collaborating in a one-touch (or no-touch) manner with anyone in the world – seeing every gesture their remote colleague is making, and vice-versa – and if that workspace is as welcoming as the environment they've created at home, then you've made the commute worth it," says Hintze. "Employees can work more effectively with seamless bring-your-own-device options, zero-latency audiovisual and unified communication solutions, excellent lighting and shading, the right climate, and furniture designed and arranged for both comfort and efficiency."

At the same time, remote employees need to have an equally easy work set-up experience to their in-office colleagues.

"We speak a lot about high-impact spaces at Crestron – those big, complex rooms where important information is shared and vital decisions are made," says Hintze. "Everyone needs to see and be seen, to hear and be heard. That's why we've developed (and continue to refine) speaker-tracking cameras and systems that can follow a conversation around the room, constantly presenting the remote viewer with a head-on look at the individual who's speaking, showing their every gesture and facial expression. The remote worker should feel as much a part of the 'room' as the in-person attendees."



"Everyone needs to see and be seen, to hear and be heard"

Creating a seamless meeting experience

Crestron offers tools to help businesses improve the office and meeting experience with meeting solutions, including video conferencing, collaboration and presentation technologies. Attendees at the Crestron Masters event in Madrid, Spain, in May 2025 can get hands on training with these solutions. The new Crestron Modern Workplace Certification at that event will offer even more opportunities and a similar learning track will be available at InfoComm in Orlando, Florida, in June 2025.

"It's an opportunity for workplace designers, salespeople, consultants and on-site IT and



audiovisual professionals to learn how to create intuitive and user-friendly workspaces that enhance productivity and the employee experience,” says Hintze. “This includes room design, technology integration, and customising user interfaces.

“Without giving too much away, we’ll be featuring some pretty significant updates to our Automate VX multi-camera speaker solution,” says Hintze. “Beyond that, InfoComm will be a continuation of our approach to trade shows: It’s no longer about a collection of black boxes. It’s about what these systems and solutions can accomplish – working in concert with partners like Microsoft – and presenting that holistic experience to the attendees. We’ve been very focused on solutions that speak to our three biggest areas of expertise: content, collaboration and control, and we’ll be demonstrating our latest advances in all three of those areas.”

Integrating AI for the future of work

AI is set to play a key role in enhancing workplace efficiency, but organisations must be prepared to integrate it effectively.

“With all of the hype and popular culture drama that has traditionally surrounded AI – and some of the early results of its applications – we need to do some myth-busting,” says Hintze. “First, we need to understand this

technology is in its infancy. When you first used dial-up internet, did you ever imagine having broadband on your phone? I don’t think many of us did, and that’s where we are with AI. In retrospect, future iterations will be so advanced that the current experience will seem utterly primitive.”

Hintze emphasises AI should be seen as an assistant, rather than a replacement, for employees. “It’s not going to replace you – AI is a true virtual assistant when it’s applied properly,” he says. “As we continue to develop AI agents, these solutions will become more helpful. Think of agents as specialists – we need them to handle specific tasks, from retrieving an email chain to creating lines of code. We’ll be able to converse with those agents in an increasingly natural manner until it’s as intuitive as asking a coworker to send you a document.

“It’s vital to mentally and culturally prepare for AI as a partner and not a replacement in the modern workplace. Those who can express the potential benefits of AI to their employees will be ahead of the game. People do their best work when they trust the available technology, and AI and its agents will soon be able to be a trustworthy virtual assistant that can handle a variety of mundane, time-consuming tasks, giving us more time to collaborate, ideate and create.” ■

Is AI killing remote work?



NIGEL DUNN: JABRA

AI is having a significant impact on the modern workplace, but organisations must ensure they use it in a way that meets their employees' needs to succeed

The rise of AI in the workplace has sparked debates about its impact on the way we work.

For example, some believe that AI is advancing so quickly that communication delays between colleagues are now the biggest bottleneck when trying to get work done, meaning that in-person collaboration is essential for problem-solving and productivity. With big businesses mandating the return to the office as a result, many are asking if this could be the end for flexible working.

These concerns are not substantiated though. In fact, evidence shows that while fully remote roles are declining, hybrid work is still thriving. According to Jabra's *Mind the Gap* report, nearly 80 per cent of workers say they are currently in jobs that offer them the freedom to choose their daily workplace location. Not only does this suggest that organisations are continuing to offer the autonomy to decide when to go to the office, but also that employers realise flexibility is essential to meet the needs of the modern worker.

"AI isn't killing remote work like some fear but instead redefining the way we work entirely"

The research also found a flexible work location is ranked as the most important consideration for employees, over three times more than salary. In fact, it's so important that workers are willing to look elsewhere if

they are unable to achieve the right balance. Meanwhile, more than one-third of workers are planning to switch jobs within a year, and 74 per cent of Generation Z believe changing jobs is a driver for career development. It's clear that employees, particularly the younger generations, have one foot out the door and will not hesitate to change jobs if their current employer doesn't meet their needs.

So, what impact is AI having and how can it drive positive change?

Firstly, the technology could become the ultimate enabler of this growing demand for autonomy, with the report suggesting that workers want to use the time saved by AI to prioritise self-care, family and flexible schedules. This suggests AI isn't killing remote work like some fear but instead redefining the way we work entirely.

However, the challenge for businesses right now is figuring out how to tap into AI's potential and create hybrid environments where employees can connect, collaborate and thrive. It is a critical challenge too, as providing employees with this environment will not only create happier, more productive teams, but a more successful business.

Jabra's research shows that 80 per cent of leaders are already willing to delegate tasks to, or collaborate with, AI. Generative AI tools such as Microsoft Copilot are making a significant impact in this space and transforming how we manage tasks such as real-time transcription and meeting summaries.



However, AI tools are only as good as the source material they are provided with. Voice interaction, for example, is four times faster than typing and is one way to maximise AI's full potential and boost productivity. However, if the employee is using a low-quality microphone, the AI won't be able to pick up exactly what is being said which could lead to inaccuracies in the results.

Jabra's professional Evolve2 and Engage headsets come with powerful microphones that cancel surrounding noise and enhance voice clarity, delivering 97 per cent transcription

accuracy with AI tools. This is a stark contrast compared to standard consumer earbuds, which average only 64 per cent accuracy, and drop as low as seven per cent in noisy environments.

Businesses must carefully evaluate the benefits that AI can offer and actively involve their employees in this journey. Those who listen and adapt will not only keep up but also lead the way, enhancing productivity and building a more connected and capable workforce. ■

Nigel Dunn is vice president and managing director for EMEA North at Jabra

Jabra's Evolve2 and Engage headsets help teams to communicate without background interference

A century of sound

As Shure approaches its centennial, Tyler Troutman discusses how it continues to evolve its solutions to cater for employee needs in the modern workplace

BY AMBER HICKMAN

Shure was founded in 1925 with the goal of redefining and reshaping audio technology. Now, as the firm approaches its 100-year anniversary, it is reflecting on the rich history that continues to influence its work today.

“Our culture is focused on building the best audio products and that continues to grow every year,” says Tyler Troutman, manager of strategic market development at Shure. “It’s easy to say that we’ve just come out with new devices such as a wireless microphone system, but we’ve been building wireless microphone systems for 70 years. It’s not a new kind of vertical for us and our history has driven us to where we are today.”

Workplace collaboration and communication is one of Shure’s key focus areas. Over the years it has launched a variety of solutions to support employees wherever they are working, from home office microphones to ceiling arrays and loudspeakers designed for boardrooms.

At ISE 2025, which took place in Barcelona, Spain, at the start of February, Shure exhibited some of its new solutions designed for various collaborative scenarios.

For example, the new series of IntelliMix Room Kits are complete Microsoft Teams Room systems that are designed for small to large meeting rooms to help users hold virtual meetings and support every participant, no matter where they are located.

“We want to make sure that we’re not just building products for the sake of it,” says Troutman. “We aim to build products that solve problems our customers are facing in the real world, and make sure that we’re enabling fantastic audio not just for office collaboration space but for remote employees too.”

Other new solutions showcased at ISE included the Microflex Loudspeaker lineup designed for conference rooms, and Shure’s next generation of wireless microphones featuring the Microflex Wireless neXt 4 and 8.

“It’s always so fascinating to walk through the booth at events and see all these new products and how they have developed over the past 100 years,” says Troutman.

The way we work and collaborate has evolved over recent years, and it is likely to continue evolving further as new technologies and tools are developed.

According to Troutman, this presents an opportunity for organisations to invest in their collaborative spaces and create an environment that encourages employee communication and connection.

“We’re all used to meeting on our laptops, but getting into a room and collaborating alongside other people is such an important experience,” he says. “However, this raises the question: how can we help our customers to scale their environments as quickly as possible?”

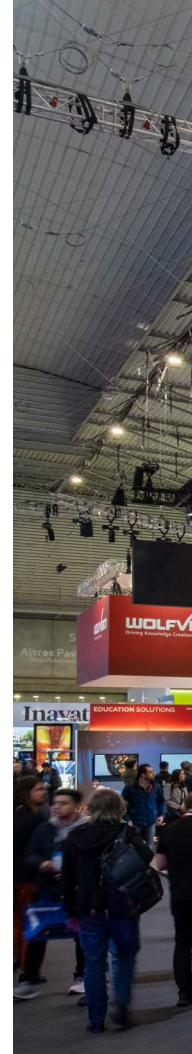
Part of Shure’s mission is to make it easier for organisations to create high-quality collaborative spaces by incorporating features such as out-of-the-box functionality and customisation.



“We want to build products that solve problems our customers are facing in the real world”

“The room kits are a perfect example,” explains Troutman. “They are a scalable solution that can fit into rooms of varying size, yet with minimal setup needed. This means there’s no new learning curve for users, little to no training and no major construction costs.”

Investing in collaborative spaces and high-quality audio solutions is also beneficial as the use of AI on platforms such as Teams grows.





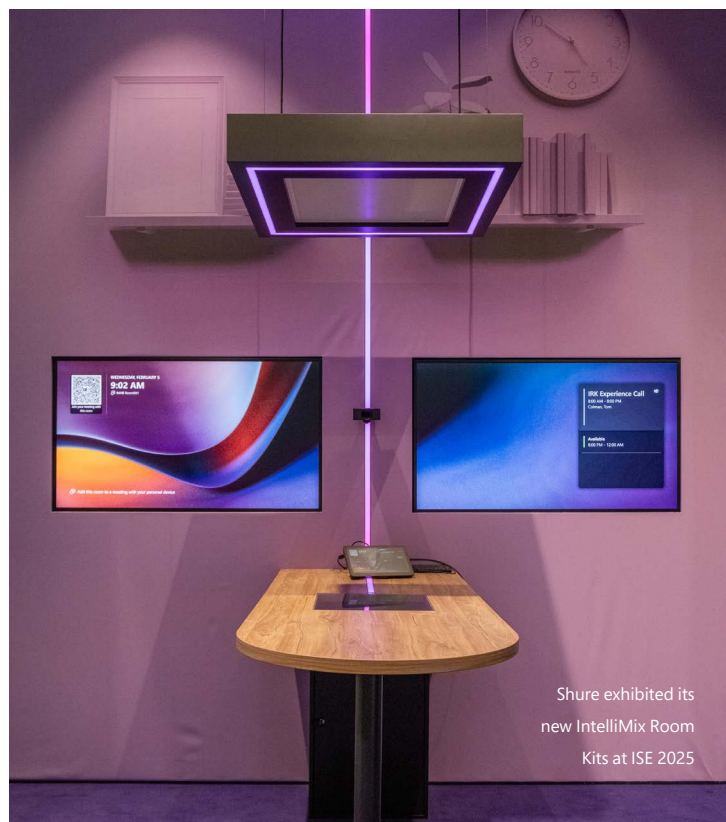
For example, organisations can use Copilot in Teams for tasks such as meeting transcription. However if the audio quality within the meeting isn't high enough, it's more likely that Copilot will not pick up, or misinterpret, words, leading to an inaccurate summary.

"Copilot plays a part in most of the work we do nowadays, but we are seeing the return on investment in Teams especially," says Troutman. "However, we must consider what technology we are using in that space and whether it is going to supercharge these AI tools to ensure we are getting the most out of it."

Between a milestone anniversary, new product releases and a range of events, what's next on the agenda for Shure?

"Launching these new products was just the start," says Troutman. "There are so many features and enhancements we want to deliver that will streamline deployment and bring flexibility and ease to our customers."

"We're going to be heading to more events, including Infocomm which is taking place in Florida, USA, in June, to showcase some of these tools and help users really supercharge their collaborative experiences." ■



Shure exhibited its new IntelliMix Room Kits at ISE 2025

Real change starts with data

Microsoft's Matthew Sekol and Peter Hazou explain how Microsoft Azure, AI and data lakehouses are helping banks, capital markets and insurance firms achieve financial inclusion and other ESG goals

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

Over one billion people around the world are unbanked, according to the World Bank Group's *Financial Inclusion Overview*. That's one-eighth of the global population. For these individuals, financial inclusion is more than just access to banking – the World Bank identifies it as a “catalyst” for seven of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as it “fosters economic growth and employment, economic empowerment of women and contributes to eliminating poverty”. Accelerating equality was a key takeaway from the group's 2024 annual meeting. As financial institutions work to expand access to their services, technology – particularly AI – is emerging as a powerful tool to drive inclusion and support responsible growth.

“Financial inclusion is an important part of every institution's strategy,” says Peter Hazou, director of business development for worldwide financial services at Microsoft. “It can open doors to new and underserved markets. Across banking, capital markets and insurance there are opportunities to

expand existing products and solutions to new, traditionally marginalised groups. This represents a sustainable opening for firms while expanding economic opportunity equitably.”

A mortgage lender, for example, could translate its forms into other languages to increase accessibility for marginalised groups and use a multi-language chatbot to provide them with support throughout the process.

“For a long time, we've had AI tooling in the form of machine learning, which is good at dealing with quantitative information, but enabling financial literacy is a conversation and happens in the qualitative realm,” says Hazou. “With natural



“The starting point for change is the data, yet we can't be so mired in it that we don't act”

MATTHEW SEKOL, MICROSOFT





Photo: World Bank Photo Collection

language generative AI capabilities, financial literacy can be fostered through new agentic experiences and a single chatbot interface.

“However, it is important to recognise that financial inclusion requires programmatic and well-governed strategies to understand the use cases and investments needed to bring them to life. When it comes to AI-enabled financial inclusion, governance processes will be crucial in ensuring fairness, accessibility and the application of domain expertise when serving diverse communities.”

Microsoft’s AI technology is enabling financial institutions to make their services accessible to more customers. For example, credit risk company Trusting Social is using Microsoft

Azure services to reach unbanked individuals in Asia. The firm first partnered with Microsoft to build its data foundation using Azure Kubernetes Services, Database for PostgreSQL and Databricks. Next, it used Azure Synapse Analytics to unify insights in its data warehouse and leveraged autonomous AI-powered agents in Azure Agent Foundry to boost customer acquisition in emerging markets and among underbanked consumers.

“By leveraging cloud technologies, stringent governance models and AI, Trusting Social was able to tune its credit scoring model with a new e-Know Your Customer solution and build agents to provide a personalised experience for customers at scale,” says Hazou.

The ‘Women Transforming the World’ panel was one of many sessions at the World Bank annual meetings in October 2024 that highlighted the need for financial equality

Increasing financial inclusion is just one small part of the industry's broader environmental, social and governance (ESG) efforts. While banks and insurance firms are not the heaviest users of environmental assets themselves, according to the World Economic Forum, they do finance projects and companies that are.

"Financial services firms sit at a unique intersection of ESG because they have their internal operational metrics, as every company does, but they also provide capital or insure projects and assets for other companies," says Matthew Sekol, sustainability global black belt at Microsoft. "As a result, they have a broad value chain that they can have varying levels of influence over. We've seen a mix of regulatory pushes globally from a disclosure perspective, and also governments building programmes to support a sustainable transition, often involving partnerships with lenders."

Any company approaching an ESG initiative should first focus on the ESG factors that are most relevant and impactful to their business, stakeholders and industry. For financial services firms, this could mean prioritising areas such as climate risk and sustainable investing, diversity, equity and inclusion, and regulatory compliance. Once these priorities have been established, the focus can then switch to what the data says about those areas.

"The firm must lead with how their functions intersect with ESG topics to help identify risks and opportunities, otherwise they may find themselves in over their heads on efforts they cannot sustain," explains Sekol. "The starting point for use cases is the data, yet we can't be

so mired in it that we don't act," says Sekol. "Data is critical to making an informed decision and ESG represents new data points that firms may be unfamiliar with. When used to drive a compelling use case, data is the proof to trace through to success."

Financial services providers might interpret data differently depending on their unique risks and opportunities.

"A bank may plan for a percentage of loans to be aligned with a sustainable transition, meaning the metrics would be found in the lending portfolio and may collect borrower data like financed projects' goals rather than internal metrics," says Sekol. "For insurance, they may not be as focused on operational reductions and instead want to ensure that the



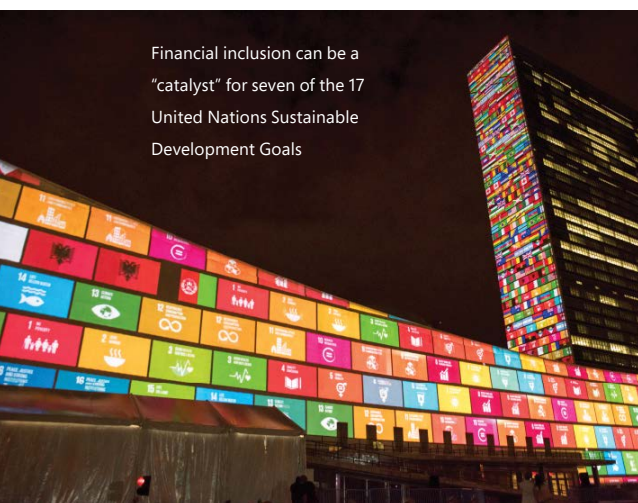
"Financial inclusion is a critical part of every institution's strategy"

PETER HAZOU, MICROSOFT

companies and communities they support are building in climate resilience and adaptation planning. The data points here would be acute and chronic climate risk and adaptation efforts that can be taken, rather than mitigation efforts. Across the whole financial services industry though, the data to showcase ESG efforts will largely come from the credit or investment vehicles used but be supported by metrics outside of the company."

Measuring growth is a key step towards sustainability goals, risk management and opportunity creation. But much of the material data that banks are working with will come from outside their company.

"Data, technical debt and a complex but necessary regulatory environment are some of the challenges that surface when a bank attempts to integrate something new like an ESG data set and perspective," says Sekol. "Historically, these challenges have been met with point solutions like purpose-built data lakes. For example, an ESG analyst would ask for access to the loan book, a data lake would be created with just the information needed,



Financial inclusion can be a "catalyst" for seven of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Photo: UN Photo/Cla Pak



and the analyst would add in relevant ESG metrics to create a risk score.

“However, this only adds another challenge as a lack of data centralisation, endless data copies and poor governance models lead to the creation of outdated data swamps. Following the example, the ESG analyst might be missing critical datapoints or may be using outdated information to deliver that score!”

Bringing together the firm’s internal and external datasets requires eliminating technical debt with a data lakehouse. Microsoft Fabric is built around this idea with solutions including Azure Synapse Analytics, Azure Data Factory and Power BI to connect data from multiple sources.

“Fabric brings together data tooling, storage, data science tooling, governance controls and a cybersecurity plane so that a company can work from one copy of the data, ensuring it is consistent, clean and controlled,” says Sekol.

While no data modernisation is a small undertaking, data lakehouses powered by Fabric aim to ease the pain of upgrading data systems

so that banks can integrate AI into their business.

“Financial services firms are finding that there is a lot of value to be had in the data when they start digging,” says Sekol. “Some of this is coming from the firm’s sustainability office. For example, the process to collect data to support its goals involves going around to the firm’s functions, gathering activity data and calculating it into ESG metrics. Some sustainability offices also integrate into the credit, lending or insurance lines of business, providing unique insights.”

As a result, the sustainability office sees everything the firm does, recognising the value they can provide if they could democratise the data and opening up the conversations to do just that.

“While the reporting has been the focus over the past few years, this new data trend to support insights around risks and opportunities is nascent,” concludes Sekol. “It moves beyond the goals into integrating ESG information into the firm’s decision-making as another data point.” ■

Trusting Social is using AI-powered agents in Azure Agent Foundry to reach unbanked individuals

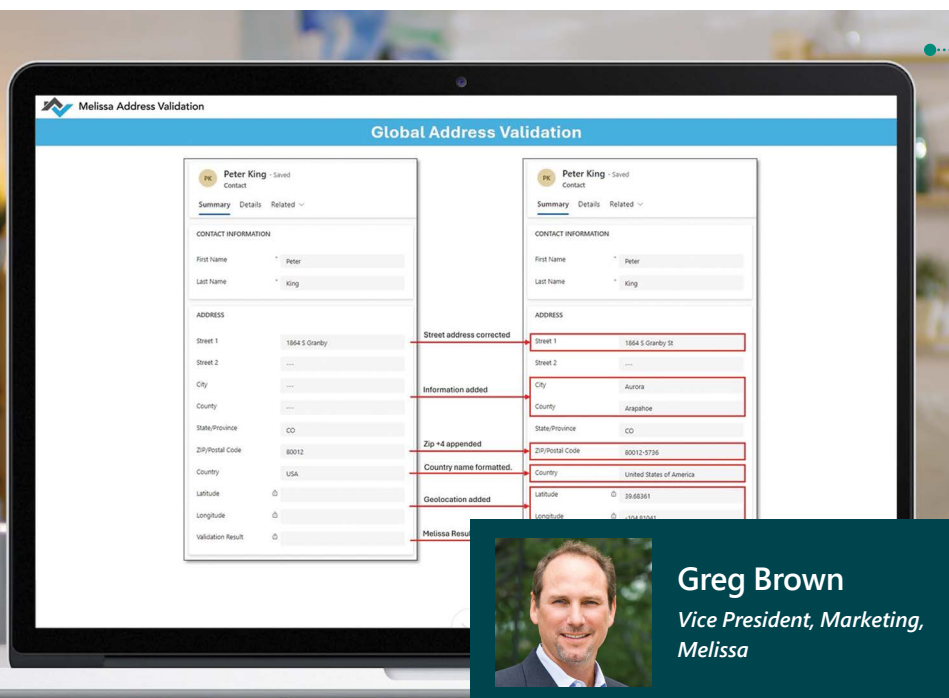
Partner perspectives

We asked Microsoft partners LSEG and Melissa how they are helping financial services firms achieve their sustainability goals

"We are partnering with Microsoft to help financial services firms through co-developing new cloud data and modelling services using Azure services and LSEG's advanced data modelling and analytics capabilities. We provide optionality for financial institutions to move towards less carbon-intensive operations in the cloud, enabling businesses to scale efficiently without the need for complicated processes and systems that often require extra servers – as well as providing best-in-class data and analytics to inform investment decisions that incorporate sustainability principles at their core. Sustainability in AI is improving through advancements in energy-efficient model architectures, the use of renewable energy in data centres, and innovations like model distillation, which reduces computational power without sacrificing performance."



Emily Prince
Group Head, Analytics,
LSEG



Greg Brown
Vice President, Marketing,
Melissa

"Every year, six million trees and more than 300 million pounds of paper are wasted on undeliverable mail. Melissa's Microsoft-powered solutions for address verification and change-of-address help financial services firms keep their address data clean, accurate and up to date. Over 33 million Americans move each year, so making sure mail reaches its intended recipient is challenging if firms are not using an address hygiene service like Melissa. All that undeliverable mail isn't just wasteful; it's also costly. Last year, undeliverable mail cost mailers nearly \$6 billion. By using Melissa's tools – whether in Office 365, Dynamics or via Rest API – firms can meet sustainability goals while protecting their bottom line."

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Make more possible with a global partner that combines leadership and partnership to drive your business forward. LSEG plays a vital role in the world's financial system, guiding you to opportunities that work for your business. Our cutting-edge markets infrastructure, open approach and unmatched data and analytics capabilities empower you to create sustainable growth. With a 300-year track record of stability, resilience and innovation, we're here to help you achieve more.

As one of the world's leading providers of financial markets infrastructure, we deliver financial data, analytics, news and index products to more than 40,000 customers in over 170 countries. Operating across every point of the trade lifecycle, LSEG can help you seize opportunities and stay ahead of changing markets.

In collaboration with Microsoft, we are building next-generation data and analytics solutions using innovative technology. Together, we are reshaping the future of global finance.

Find out more



LSEG

Make more possible



Overcome industry challenges with AI

AI is having a profound impact on business strategy, according to LSEG's David Schwimmer and Microsoft's Satya Nadella. While challenges such as data sovereignty and regulatory constraints remain, AI's potential to drive efficiency, innovation and competitiveness remains significant

There is a growing demand for data and AI investment across all industries, but especially for financial services firms. Since 2019, data consumption has increased by about 40 per cent annually for LSEG's customers, according to its CEO David Schwimmer, who spoke alongside Satya Nadella, CEO and chairman of Microsoft, during a live fireside chat on AI trends for LinkedIn in early 2025 in Davos, Switzerland.

Businesses are increasingly investing in AI; driven by both the potential opportunities it provides and the fear of being left behind. Companies are looking to benchmark themselves against competitors and adapt to change. "People want to understand how others in the industry are navigating this [AI] challenge and disruption," said Schwimmer.

The partnership between LSEG and Microsoft is helping navigate these challenges in the financial markets by equipping the industry with the right tools, solutions and insights, combining LSEG's breadth and depth of trusted data and analytics with Microsoft's global cloud and strong AI capabilities.

AI as a new factor of production

AI is also transforming from a technology that merely enables business processes to one that is having a fundamental influence on worker productivity.

"In the past, companies may have

thought of technology or IT as an enabler, but now it's a new factor of production," said Nadella. "If you're a pharmaceutical company, it's about accelerating science; in financial services, it's about leveraging knowledge."

For Nadella, AI adoption is about translating it into meaningful business outcomes. "The need for this new infrastructure, to translate into transformation, is self-evident at this point," he said.

Challenges with data sovereignty

Industries that have not traditionally focused on AI-driven investments are adopting the technology to stay competitive, according to Schwimmer. The consensus from the fireside chat was that companies across all sectors are re-evaluating strategies to integrate AI meaningfully into their operations, but concerns remain about data sovereignty and regulatory challenges.

For instance, payment service providers need to remain compliant with evolving anti-money laundering and know-your-customer regulations. Schwimmer pointed out that strict data localisation requirements create barriers for global businesses.

"Criminals don't respect national boundaries, so the notion that data has to respect national boundaries is really like tying your hands behind your back," he said, highlighting how these regulations complicate efforts to prevent financial crime. "Data sovereignty is an important topic that deserves to get attention."

The LSEG-Microsoft partnership demonstrates how companies can effectively address data sovereignty and regulatory challenges through robust data management and compliance solutions. It empowers customers by enhancing data trust, data sovereignty, and providing a secure, scalable platform, all while adhering to responsible AI principles. Also, LSEG's World-Check platform helps compliance teams to pinpoint potential crime and minimise false positives, and its compliant identity verification solutions help firms to onboard customers faster.

AI's role in finance

One exciting application for AI technology in the financial services industry is to drive customer service improvements. LSEG,

"Data sovereignty is an important topic that deserves to get attention"

DAVID SCHWIMMER, LSEG





for example, manages a vast amount of data and analytics and has developed a large language model leveraging this data, which processes internal documentation, making customer service teams 50 per cent more productive. Schwimmer also highlighted the new Financial Meeting Prep app developed by Microsoft in collaboration with LSEG, which generates comprehensive meeting reports within seconds using Microsoft's generative AI technology. The product features market-leading data, news and analytics from LSEG Workspace and enables users to streamline client communications, improve engagement and save time by creating customised reports, using LSEG's trusted data sources and AI-generated email drafts.

During the fireside chat, Nadella highlighted AI's impact and outlined three key considerations for AI-driven productivity: the need for AI models to evolve quickly so companies can maintain up-to-date platforms, seamless integration into existing workflows and effective change management.

"How we change-manage all this is going to be the most important thing," he said. "How to inject these solutions so that there is real adoption and where the human should be in the loop. Microsoft Copilot to me is the UI for AI [...] you need to be able to know which tasks are going to be fully automated and when the agent needs some feedback from me."

He described how Copilot has transformed his own workflow. "Now, instead of searching through emails and documents, I just go to my Copilot and say, 'Hey, I'm meeting with David from LSEG, tell me everything about LSEG.' Not only does it

query my Microsoft 365 system, but it also goes to my customer relationship management system, queries the web and brings all that information to me in real time."

This shift, he argued, represents a fundamental change in how work gets done. While AI-powered tools like Copilot are reshaping individual productivity, the financial services industry is also undergoing a broader transformation.

"The industry has been using the same financial desktops for 20-25 years with systems stuck in that type of legacy," said Schwimmer. "What we're building as part of the LSEG Workspace is a fully interoperable solution with Microsoft systems, natural language search, AI functionality and consumer engagement. What we're building is a dramatic transformation."

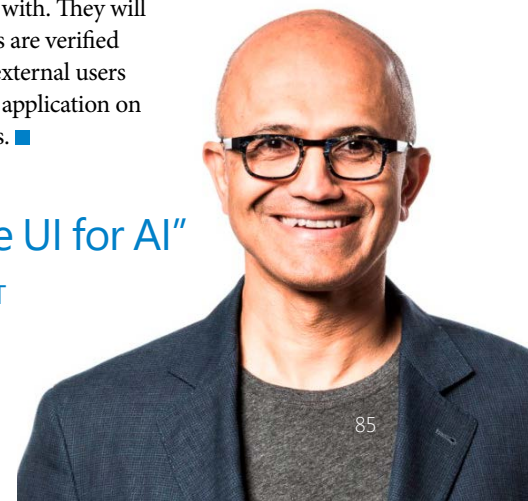
LSEG is also integrating LinkedIn functionality into its Open Directory pilot app, which is accessible within Microsoft Teams. The integration enables regulated finance professionals across different companies to collaborate. When a user is in Teams and clicks on Open Directory, they will be able to view a list of people they are already connected with. They will then be able to identify which ones are verified by LinkedIn, and chat with those external users in real-time and in one messaging application on topics essential for daily workflows. ■

For more details on the LSEG-Microsoft partnership, visit: lseg.com/en/microsoft-partnership

Watch the session on demand at: bit.ly/4i7GbCu

"Copilot to me is the UI for AI"

SATYA NADELLA, MICROSOFT



Agentic AI unlocks new value for manufacturers

Rupert Stuetzle explains how Microsoft is bridging the gap between legacy data and modern AI-driven insights, thereby enabling the manufacturing industry to become smarter, more responsive and highly connected

BY RICHARD HUMPHREYS

Industrial enterprises around the world produced nearly two zettabytes (one billion terabytes) of data in 2023, and that figure is expected to double within five years, according to ABI Research, which provides market research on transformative technologies. However, much of this valuable information remains underutilised across the manufacturing industry. But with the rise of new technologies and AI, manufacturers can now harness this data in unprecedented ways, unlocking efficiency, agility and innovation across their operations.

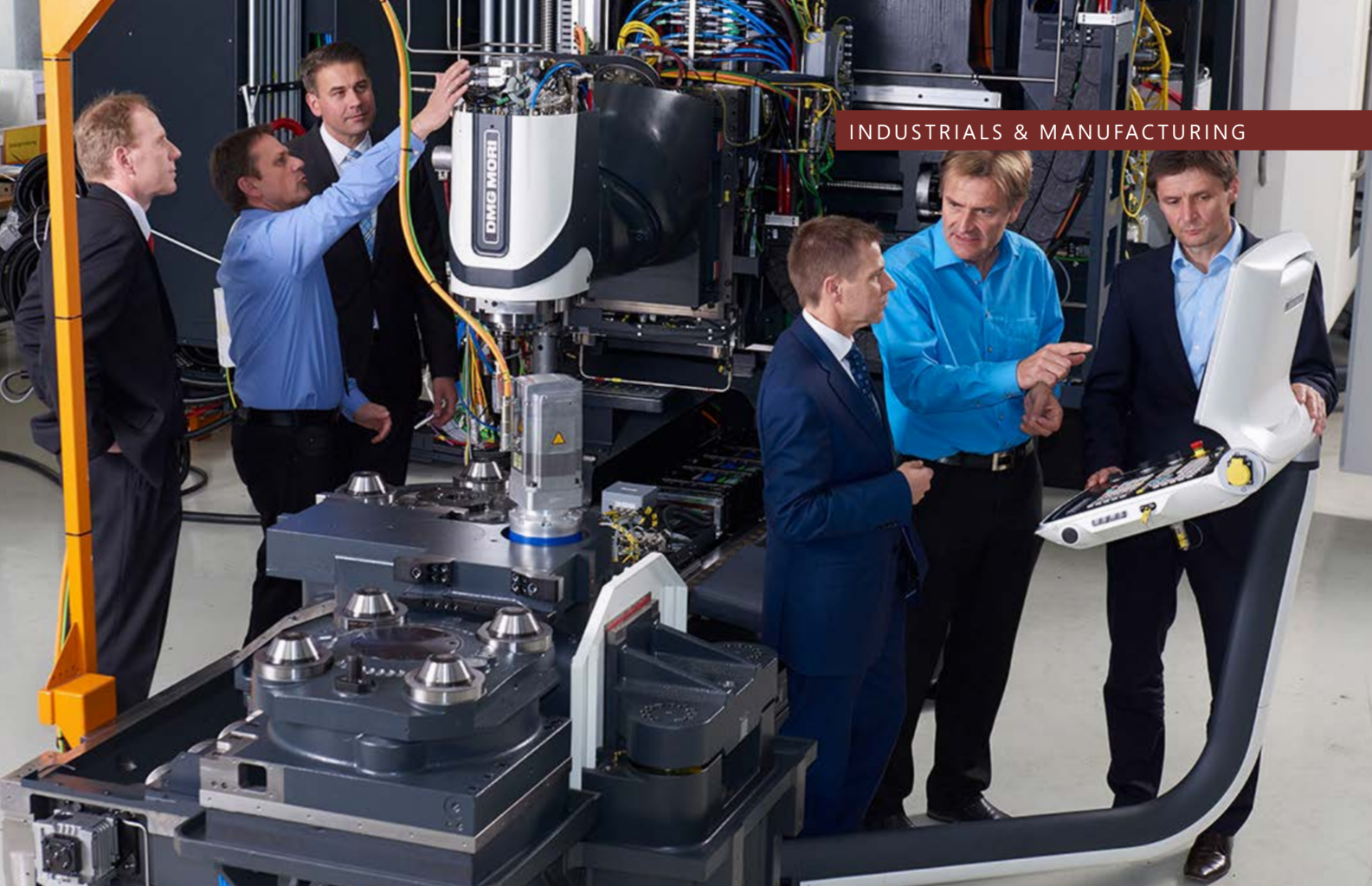
Technologies like Azure IoT Operations, Microsoft Fabric, Azure AI and Copilot Studio are bridging the gap between legacy data and modern AI-driven insights, enabling factories to become smarter, more responsive and highly connected. But what is at the heart of this transformation? The digital thread.

“The digital thread revolutionises manufacturing and quality control by seamlessly connecting data across the entire product lifecycle, enabling real-time problem-solving, enhanced efficiency and improved customer satisfaction,” says Rupert

Stuetzle, general manager of manufacturing and mobility in EMEA for Microsoft Germany. “Imagine you are the quality control manager at a large electronics manufacturer. You have received reports of a serious, recurring component issue for a newly released product, which unfortunately has led to a recall. Historically, the only solution would be to issue a full recall, which has significant financial, operational and reputational consequences. However, with the digital thread to provide comprehensive visibility into your organisation’s data you can trace the entire production history of the defective product, from design to final assembly, within a few simple clicks.

“The digital thread helps you to quickly identify a fault in a specific batch of components sourced from a single supplier. Armed with this insight, you can determine the exact scope of the affected products, work with the supplier to amend the situation and initiate an extremely precise, targeted recall. This swift, data-driven response mitigates customer inconvenience, and helps preserve a brand’s reputation.”





A digital thread connects data, processes and information across a product's entire lifecycle, making it easier to track and improve decisions. It links everything from research and development to production and even end-of-life management. By combining operational technology (OT) – like sensors, machines and factory systems – with information technology (IT), the digital thread gives manufacturers a complete view of their operations in real time.

The first step in building the digital thread is data collection. “To create the thread, manufacturers must develop a seamless flow of data from the physical environment of the factory to the digital environment of the cloud,” says Stuetzle. “As a smart factory can generate up to a petabyte of data per day, it is critical to ensure all industrial data is collected, consolidated and processed in a consistent manner across the cloud-to-edge continuum.”

Microsoft Azure IoT Operations helps break down old barriers between OT and IT systems, making it easier to collect the data needed for the digital thread. Once this data from factory equipment is stored in the cloud, it can be organised and structured to a set standard with tools like manufacturing data solution

in Microsoft Fabric. There, generative AI can analyse the data to uncover valuable insights that help improve operations.

“Manufacturing data solutions in Microsoft Fabric brings disparate pieces of information together, from OT sources like factory sensor telemetry to IT data like inventory details, into a unified data foundation, following an industry standard information model,” says Stuetzle. “By providing a scalable and repeatable pattern to address all factory domain data projects, this data flow creates the digital thread: a consolidated view of all customer relationship management, product lifecycle management, enterprise resource planning and manufacturing execution system, just to name a few. With each of these key pieces of IT, OT and engineering technology data under one roof, manufacturers

Schaeffler, a manufacturer of precision mobility components, uses Microsoft Fabric to maximise the value of its factory data



“The digital thread revolutionises manufacturing and quality control”

FEATURE

are empowered with more visibility into their enterprise and factory data than ever before. When a large language model is layered on top of this foundation, employees can access the digital thread using conversational input and receive answers in real time in their native tongue.”

Manufacturing data solutions on Microsoft Fabric allow organisations to explore insights anywhere along digital thread. Manufacturers like Schaeffler, Bridgestone and IPG are already leveraging this technology to unlock the full value of their factory data.

Schaeffler, which manufactures precision mobility components, uses this technology to modernise data management processes and generate valuable insights across various IT and OT systems. AI-driven insights maximise machinery uptime, improve product quality and increase output by giving employees quick, useful information in real time.

Bridgestone, the world’s largest tyre and rubber company, leverages manufacturing data solutions in Microsoft Fabric to accelerate

the productivity of its frontline workforce. “As a private preview customer, and in collaboration with Avanade, Bridgestone uses the digital thread and AI technology to address key production challenges, like yield loss,” says Stuetzle. “The query system solution enables frontline workers, with various levels of experience, to easily interact with their factory data, and efficiently uncover insights to improve yield and enhance quality.”

Furthermore, agent templates in Microsoft Copilot Studio provide a low-code, customisable solution, designed to minimise time spent on menial tasks to allow frontline employees to dedicate their time to more rewarding work.

“Agent templates in Microsoft Copilot Studio provide the foundation for custom copilots, which act as the user interface for the digital thread,” says Stuetzle. “Agent templates are low-code solutions specifically designed to address key challenges manufacturers face, like ensuring workplace safety, skilled labour shortages and enhancing operational efficiency. For example, to improve occupational health and

safety compliance a manufacturer can leverage the Factory Safety Agent in Copilot Studio, customise it to reference the unique documentation of their organisation, and embed it into familiar platforms, like Microsoft Teams, to facilitate a seamless user experience. Then, when a frontline worker has a safety question, they can get immediate answers in natural language without skipping a beat.”

Meanwhile, for a plant manager or operations manager, agent templates are a valuable tool to improve operational efficiency, as the Factory Operations Agent provides real-time factory floor insights in natural language. “By making it quicker than ever before to uncover answers, agent templates save time for the people of manufacturing, from the shop floor to the top floor,” says Stuetzle.

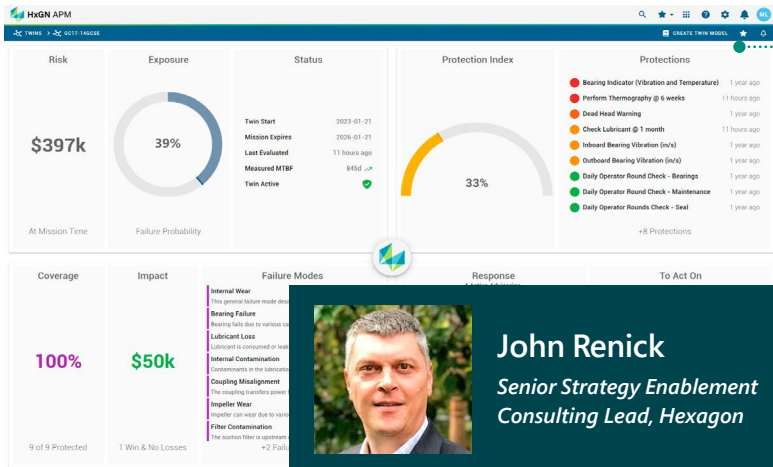
“With tasks like data pulls and finding documents handled by AI, employees can devote their time to their most impactful work. In this way, agent templates on Copilot Studio create more productive organisations, and unlock new value for manufacturers.” ■

The screenshot displays the Microsoft Copilot Studio interface for the 'Factory Safety (Preview)' agent. The top navigation bar includes 'Home', 'Create', 'Agents', and 'Library'. The main content area is divided into tabs: 'Overview', 'Knowledge', 'Topics', 'Actions', 'Activity', and 'Analytics'. The 'Knowledge' tab is selected, showing a 'Test your agent' section with a chat interface. The chat shows a greeting from the 'Factory safety assistant' and a list of suggested topics: 'Questions about safety', 'Report and manage incidents', 'Safety audit', and 'Train new hires'. Below the chat, there's a section for 'Suggestions (preview)' with three cards: 'Add knowledge sources', 'Improve answer rate', and 'Track knowledge use'. To the right of these cards is a summary of knowledge source use: 'Total knowledge source use 50%', 'Error rate 0%', and 'Total answer rate 100%'. At the bottom, there's a search bar and a list of knowledge sources, including 'https://www.iloencyclopaedia.org/' and 'Public website'.

Manufacturers can leverage the Factory Safety Agent in Copilot Studio to ensure workplace safety and enhance operational efficiency

Partner perspectives

We asked selected Microsoft partners how they are using Microsoft Cloud for Manufacturing, Copilot and Azure AI Agent Service to help manufacturers transform legacy data into actionable insights, enhance production processes and drive innovation



John Renick
Senior Strategy Enablement
Consulting Lead, Hexagon

"Hexagon's asset performance management solution, HxGN APM, is a key component of Hexagon's Smart Digital Reality, which merges the physical and digital worlds to unlock unprecedented value from data. By integrating real-time data capture, advanced analytics and machine learning, HxGN APM enables organisations to optimise asset performance, enhance productivity and ensure safety and sustainability. Built using Microsoft Azure, HxGN APM takes a holistic approach to transform data into actionable insights, providing a unified, real-time view of industrial assets. The result is improved decision-making, reduced human intervention and a seamless feedback loop that drives continuous improvement."

"M-Files leverages Microsoft technology to help manufacturers transform legacy data into structured, actionable information. First, M-Files pulls in enterprise information across various business systems and organises documents around a specific industry and business context. Second, business processes related to this content can then be automated with M-Files for improved productivity. Finally, all this information can be harnessed by Microsoft Copilot for actionable insight and innovation."



Ville Somppi
Senior Vice President,
Industry Solutions, M-Files



Dan Finn
Vice President, Sales,
Synergy Technical

"At Synergy Technical, we help manufacturers transform legacy data into actionable insights using Microsoft Cloud for Manufacturing and Microsoft Copilot. By integrating AI-powered predictive maintenance and real-time internet of things analytics, we enable manufacturers to reduce downtime, optimise workflows, and improve product quality. Copilot streamlines operations by automating tasks and providing real-time insights for smarter decision-making. With enhanced data security and operational visibility, manufacturers can detect anomalies, reduce waste and strengthen supply chains. Our expertise in Microsoft solutions empowers manufacturers to modernise operations, enhance security and drive innovation, ensuring long-term success in an evolving industry."

Trends beyond generative AI



COLIN MASSON: ARC ADVISORY GROUP

The role of AI in manufacturing and industrials is evolving. Companies that attract, train and retain data scientists and AI specialists will be better positioned to capitalise on major investments being made in these industries

Over 50 per cent of manufacturing companies say that AI and machine learning (ML) will have the biggest impact on their operations in the next five years, according to ARC's *Accelerate Digital Transformation with Industrial AI Initiatives and Technologies Survey*. AI and ML are predicted to be more impactful than cloud infrastructure, clean energy technologies and physical robots.

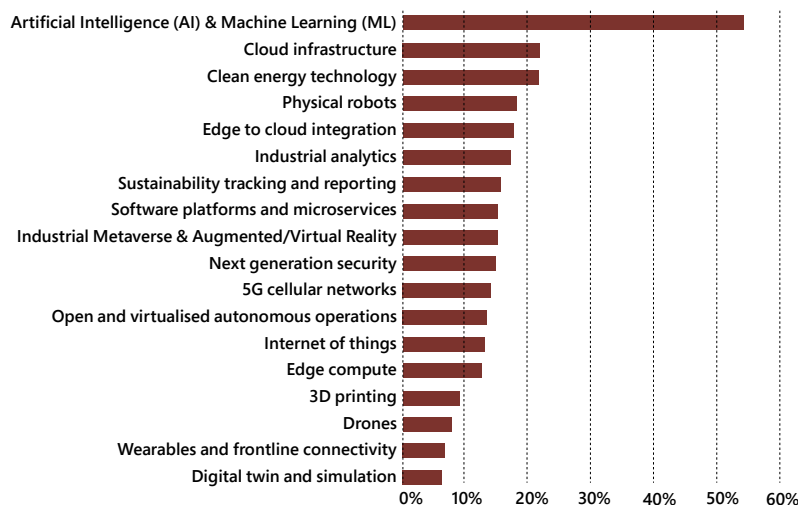
The broadening of the industrial AI toolset beyond the specific use cases and limitations of generative AI is a key trend to watch. While generative AI is attracting significant attention,

other AI techniques, such as causal AI, neuro-symbolic AI and traditional ML algorithms, are equally important for addressing the complex needs of the industrial sector. Causal AI, for example, helps to identify cause-and-effect relationships, enabling more explainable and trustworthy AI solutions. Neuro-symbolic AI combines the strengths of neural networks and symbolic AI, allowing for more accurate and transparent AI solutions for mathematical and engineering use cases.

One more trend to look out for is the competition for industrial-grade data scientists. The demand for AI experts who understand the nuances of manufacturing and industrial processes is growing exponentially. These specialists are essential for developing the accurate, explainable, predictable, low latency and domain-specific AI skills that the industrial sector needs to capitalise on the massive investments being made in edge and cloud infrastructure. They are crucial for bridging the gap between AI technology and practical application. The ARC survey confirms that organisations identified as 'leaders' are more likely to attract, recruit and train data scientists and AI specialists to advise them internally. Industrial organisations are increasingly establishing in-house Industrial AI Centers of Excellence (AI CoE) to attract, train and retain 'industrial grade' data scientists. ■

Technologies that will change manufacturing

ARC's *Accelerate Digital Transformation with Industrial AI Initiatives and Technologies Survey* shows that manufacturers feel AI and machine learning will have the biggest impact on operations



Colin Masson is the director of research at ARC Advisory Group



The Connected Factory

Powering Manufacturing's Future

Explore the Manufacturing Vision Study and witness the transformation of the traditional factory floor into a smart, agile network ready to meet the demands of the digital age.

The Top Forces Shaping Tomorrow's Factories

Decision-makers rate industry challenges

1.

Digitalization of operations

2.

Investment in technology to improve supply chain visibility and traceability to support production

3.

Needing more immersive technologies to support workflows and assembly lines

4.

Accommodating sustainability in the manufacturing process

Hidden Hurdles: The Quest for Visibility

 **86%**

of decision-makers find it challenging to securely integrate the devices, sensors, and technologies necessary for enhanced visibility in their facilities and supply chain



Tech Speed Surges

 **86%**

of decision-makers agree the pace of technological innovations is accelerating at a rate that their organization is struggling to keep up with

AI is The Rising Growth Engine

41% | **61%**

2024

2029

Percentage of decision-makers that expect AI to drive business growth by improving performance, workflows and maintenance



The Digital Imperative

 **92%**

of respondents agree digital transformation is a strategic priority for manufacturers

Desired Outcomes for Plant Floor Automation

Percentage of decision-makers

48% Provide flexible scale to meet fluctuating demands

47% Increase worker efficiency and productivity

42% Deploy within existing facilities without major infrastructure changes

42% Improve overall competitiveness

39% Reduce production line errors

To learn more about Zebra's Manufacturing Solutions, visit **Hall 9, Booth H71** at **Hannover Messe 2025**.

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Is agentic AI the key to autonomous operations?

AVEVA's Lori Warda explains why agentic AI has the potential to revolutionise industrial operations and shares how the company plans to work with Microsoft to advance the technology

BY REBECCA GIBSON

Designed to understand complex workflows and execute actions to achieve goals autonomously with minimal guidance from humans, agentic AI solutions are set to make automating industrial operations easier than ever before. Lori Warda, AI product director at AVEVA, gives an insight into the benefits, challenges and potential future applications for the technology in the industrial sector.

What is agentic AI and how does it differ from generative AI?

Generative AI focuses on creating content by using large language models to generate text. It is an invaluable technology for improving access to industrial information and presenting it in a human-friendly and intuitive way. On the other hand, agentic AI is more autonomous. It can make decisions, take actions and operate in a loop, continuously improving and adapting. Agentic AI marks the next level in AI development and has the potential to revolutionise industrial operations.

Agentic AI follows a four-step process: it gathers and processes data, performs reasoning, takes action – whether making recommendations or executing tasks – and continuously learns to improve outcomes. The key difference is its autonomy. It handles more complex tasks than generative AI and allows for the integration of different functions and agents, making it even more powerful.

Can you provide examples of how agentic AI is used in industrial operations?

One major area we're exploring is the early stages of digital twin development. Currently, mapping data between different systems is a manual process. For example, if one system labels a piece of equipment as Pump 101 and another calls it Pump 101A, an individual must manually establish that connection. With agentic AI, we aim to automate this mapping



process. If we can achieve 70 to 80 per cent accuracy, human reviewers can focus on the more complex cases, significantly reducing their workloads and accelerating digital twin implementation.

Another use case is enhancing AVEVA's Industrial AI assistant. Right now, it can answer queries like 'What was the average power usage in this area over the past 24 hours?'. With agentic AI, we want it to perform deeper analytics – collecting data, running calculations and generating insights autonomously.

In the future, we will see agentic AI monitoring systems, identifying issues and sending alerts when something goes out of tolerance, adding immense productivity and efficiency benefits.

What are the potential risks and challenges of deploying agentic AI in industrial environments?

One major challenge is ensuring reliable results. Unlike traditional software, where repeated tests yield the same output, AI models can produce varying results. This makes building a robust test framework challenging, especially as AI takes on more autonomy.

Another barrier is user acceptance. Most AI solutions today require human validation. As AI makes more decisions independently, developers must build trust with users and ensure they feel comfortable with the technology.

Overcoming these issues will require careful design, transparency and working closely with customers.

How embedded is agentic AI in AVEVA solutions today?

At this stage, we're in the experimental phase, conducting proof-of-concept work. We expect to release some initial capabilities as part of our planned roadmap.

An AVEVA team recently attended Microsoft's Customer Advisory Board Conference, where we learned about



the latest advancements. Seeing how different industries apply AI helped validate our approach and introduced us to new tools we can build upon.

Tell us how AVEVA is collaborating with Microsoft to advance agentic AI.

Our partnership with Microsoft allows us to radically collaborate, combining our expertise and resources. Innovation thrives when diverse minds – and data sets – come together, and breakthroughs often stem from building on each other's ideas. The more we collaborate, the greater our capacity for true innovation. For instance, our engineers worked alongside Microsoft's to co-develop some features of our AVEVA Industrial AI assistant. This process accelerates development and ensures we leverage the latest advancements.

While we haven't collaborated on agentic AI yet, we expect to take a

similar approach once our current projects are complete. Microsoft's conferences and industry insights also help shape our strategies.

What future agentic AI developments can we expect from AVEVA and Microsoft?

As part of our roadmap, agentic AI will be integrated into our Industrial AI assistant (which runs on Microsoft Azure OpenAI service), enhancing analytics capabilities. Unlike predictive analytics, where AI models are trained for specific assets or processes, our goal is to support dynamic queries and analysis, allowing users to perform a wide variety of tasks on the fly. We also see agentic AI playing a role in monitoring systems and building digital twins, embedding automation across industrial software solutions. ■

To learn more, visit: bit.ly/3ZzcBhE

Creating a Smart Digital Reality with Microsoft technology



MARCELO PAGELLA: HEXAGON ASSET LIFECYCLE INTELLIGENCE

Hexagon Asset Lifecycle Intelligence is using Microsoft AI and cloud technology to transform industrial operations using real-time, AI-powered data insights from both the physical and digital worlds

Across the industrial sector, organisations are grappling with the same challenge – how to move on from outdated, manual and siloed data practices. The answer is simple and complex in equal measure: digital transformation.

Digitalisation enables industrial operations to grow and thrive. There are countless exciting opportunities, but capitalising on them is not always simple. You need to be equipped with the right tools and know-how, brought about by close strategic collaborations between industry experts.

This is the foundation of Hexagon's longstanding alliance with Microsoft. Since the early 1990s, this collaboration has enabled us to cross many key milestones. Our product development teams work together and, as Microsoft technology evolves, so do our projects leveraging these digital tools.

Notably, Microsoft has played a crucial role in the development and deployment of our Smart Digital Reality vision. Hexagon's Smart Digital Reality brings the physical and digital worlds together, with data at the core. By harnessing the right

technologies and sensor software systems, organisations tapping into the Smart Digital Reality ensure they are capturing optimised, actionable data. Industries can analyse, contextualise and visualise data into a unified, real-time view of both physical and digital realities.

Hexagon's HxGN SDx2 is one of the key solutions that drives the Smart

Willis, corporate vice president of energy and resources industry at Microsoft, said: "Our collaboration with Hexagon exemplifies the transformative power of combining technology and industry expertise to deliver actionable AI-powered insights."

Collaboration with Microsoft's cloud-based services continues to be fundamental in helping us to realise

"Hexagon's Smart Digital Reality brings the physical and digital worlds together, with data at the core"

Digital Reality. This multi-tenant software-as-a-service solution is cloud-native, integrates real-time data and advanced analytics, and is hosted on the Microsoft Azure platform. Implementing the solution in a large-scale facility increases data visibility and predictability, improves time and cost savings, boosts team collaboration and facilitates smarter decision-making.

Creating this smart reality would not be possible without the Microsoft collaboration. When we released HxGN SDx2 on Azure in 2024, Darryl

our Smart Digital Reality because it enables our digital portfolio to be multi-tenant, scalable and flexible. These traits are foundational to who we are as a company.

By combining the best minds and innovations from both companies, we have built a digital toolkit for our customers worldwide – many of which are essential, large-scale organisations that contribute to all of our day-to-day lives. With smart, real-time insights, these industry giants get a clearer look into their operations than ever before.



INDUSTRIALS & MANUFACTURING

Customers no longer need to deploy on-premises infrastructure to support their Hexagon applications in the regions where they operate. This reduces the time and effort needed to get started with a new project or operational facility, while empowering our customers to collaborate on a wide range of devices from virtually any location.

With Microsoft, we can accelerate and improve our technological innovations. By shifting resources to new capabilities, and away from supporting and maintaining multiple product versions, we can allocate more time and resources to look ahead at what the market needs. Dynamic software architecture also provides us with consistent user experience and dedicated resources.

Microsoft's platforms are also enabling our AI capabilities. Today, HxGN SDx2 leverages machine learning (ML) to identify tags and metadata from engineering documents and contextualise this critical information around the appropriate assets. A similar approach is used to 'smartify' previously unintelligent images like point clouds and panoramas.

In addition, we're using ML technology to develop AI agents that will deliver greater access and insights into industrial data. We are democratising access to industrial data

contained in HxGN SDx2 by leveraging Azure AI solutions to develop generative AI agents. Initially, these agents will function as digital interns, quickly locating and retrieving relevant information, before evolving to engineer-level assistants capable of supporting complex technical tasks.

By embracing the latest and greatest technology and data features, we can build a strong security base that supports data segregation, data sovereignty and compliance – an essential requirement in our ever-growing digital environment.

Technological innovation is driving success across industrial facilities around the world and data optimisation is helping organisations to reach their full potential. Our collaboration with Microsoft has helped us build our reputation as an industrial technology leader. As we look ahead to expand our Smart Digital Reality, Microsoft will be close by our side. ■

Learn more about Hexagon Smart Digital Reality at: hexagon.com/products/product-groups/smart-digital-reality

Marcelo Pagella is senior alliance partnership consulting lead at Hexagon Asset Lifecycle Intelligence

Why automation unlocks manufacturing excellence



SAMPPA LAHTINEN: M-FILES

By automating time-consuming manual tasks, manufacturers can help their knowledge workers become more efficient and effective

Increasing growth and profitability in competitive markets requires solid execution of plans and strategies. That execution, however, is often hindered by inefficient manual processes, fragmented information management, and limited ability to enforce quality and compliance controls.

To achieve operational excellence, manufacturers need to establish a digital backbone spanning across departments, systems and processes. Having transparency and control over data allows for the systematic improvement of processes, leading to better flow and reduced response times, errors and risks. This challenge can be addressed with a comprehensive knowledge work automation (KWA) platform that helps knowledge workers improve their efficiency.

Knowledge workers in the manufacturing sector primarily deal with information, data and intellectual tasks rather than manual labour. Examples include engineers, data analysts, quality control specialists and supply chain managers. KWA refers to the automation of manual tasks that allows these workers to focus on value-adding activities, leveraging technology to automate processes and improve the efficiency and quality of work.

M-Files is a KWA platform that offers document management, automated workflows and robust permission management. It

integrates business objects and connects with enterprise resource planning and customer relationship management systems, eliminating information chaos and enhancing process accuracy. By unifying enterprise data and providing personalised views, M-Files streamlines information management, reduces errors and boosts operational efficiency, making it a powerful tool for modern manufacturing organisations.

Generative AI is revolutionising the manufacturing industry by addressing key challenges and driving efficiency. With labour shortages, rising costs and changing customer demands, AI-driven, near-autonomous systems have become essential. AI agents, both virtual and embodied, play crucial roles in enhancing operational efficiency and flexibility. Adopting a value-driven approach to technology is vital, supported by strong organisational foundations. Embracing frontier technologies like M-Files Aino ensures manufacturers secure a competitive advantage in the future. M-Files Aino uses AI to automate tasks, improves process efficiency and ensures data security, while M-Files Hubshare provides customisable workspaces for seamless collaboration and centralised information access, which boosts productivity and innovation.

In today's competitive market, growth and profitability hinge on flawless execution.

However, many manufacturers face significant challenges, the first of which is information fragmentation. Information scattered across various systems and departments leads to inefficiencies. Employees struggle to find the right information, are hindered by access control issues and face confusion due to duplicates and inconsistent folder structures.

The best way to eliminate information chaos is with enterprise search and automation. By unifying visibility to enterprise data, automating document management and providing personalised views, you can streamline information management processes.

Reliance on manual processes can also present a challenge for manufacturers, as they may be slow and error prone. Automated workflows offer significant improvements in efficiency and accuracy, ensuring timely task completion, increasing information accuracy and integrating external collaboration seamlessly.

Another common obstacle is the manual application of document access and sharing rules, which can lead to breakdowns in audit trails. Manufacturers can reduce business risk with automated controls and audit trails. These allow for organisations to automate permissions based on document type or process phase, include quality and compliance controls in daily workflows, and establish a single source of truth.

The manufacturing sector is also impacted by several potentially challenging trends, including supply chain disruptions, the rise of smart factories, a growing emphasis on sustainability, and talent obstacles.

Supply chain disruptions can be particularly significant in times of global upheaval, and prolonged lead times for critical production materials necessitate robust solutions for operational continuity. M-Files helps to ensure operational continuity by centralising critical documents and data, enabling quick responses to disruptions with automated workflows and facilitating real-time data visibility.

Embracing digital transformation to create smart factories has also become increasingly essential for competitive, efficient and agile production processes. M-Files supports digital transformation by integrating intelligent information management into workflows, optimising logistics and streamlining tasks for greater efficiency and agility.



Today's manufacturers are also driven to reduce their environmental impact while maintaining profitability, requiring meticulous documentation and compliance. M-Files promotes sustainability through paperless operations and meticulous documentation, ensuring compliance with environmental regulations and reducing the environmental footprint.

In order to stay at the forefront of these advances, it's crucial for manufacturers to attract and retain skilled workers. By automating manual processes, M-Files enhances the work environment, helping to improve productivity and provide robust training and onboarding capabilities to attract talented workers.

In the quest for manufacturing excellence, leveraging KWA and AI is crucial. M-Files stands out as a comprehensive solution, addressing key challenges such as information fragmentation, manual processes and compliance issues.

As manufacturers navigate supply chain disruptions, the rise of smart factories and the growing emphasis on sustainability, M-Files provides the digital backbone needed to achieve operational excellence and drive growth and profitability in competitive markets. ■

Samppa Lahtinen is senior industry solutions manager at M-Files

The M-Files platform automates manual processes for workers, allowing them to focus on value-adding tasks

Full lifecycle digital twins are changing the game for chemicals

Modern advanced process simulation enables manufacturers to optimise operations, cut costs and expedite development times, says Stephen Reynolds of AVEVA

BY REBECCA GIBSON

Advanced process simulation (APS) is transforming how chemical companies operate by decreasing the time it takes to test and scale new chemical formulations and empowering them to optimise operations, cut costs, drive innovation and remain compliant with industry regulations. Stephen Reynolds, industry principal for chemicals at AVEVA, explains why the technology offers such potential, particularly when combined with cloud and AI solutions.

What is the state of the global chemicals industry and what are the biggest challenges it faces?

The global chemicals market is fast-moving and shaped by dynamic pressures. The industry must constantly innovate within tight time frames while managing volatile demand, supply chain disruptions and ever-increasing regulations.

Amid rising global costs and a high compliance environment, manufacturers are looking to boost operational efficiency while meeting sustainability key performance indicators. In practice, this means introducing solutions for agile and reliable operations, while reducing emissions and energy consumption. Firms are also looking to optimise yields, reduce waste and enable green chemistry to sharpen their competitive edge.

Chemical companies must keep up with evolving red tape and legislation, which requires ongoing investment in technology and process adaptation. Additionally, the industry is under

pressure to undertake digitalisation to help attract, train and retain a new generation of engineers. The need for faster time-to-market and expedited R&D processes is also paramount.

How is APS revolutionising the digital twin?

APS, specifically AVEVA APS, enhances digital twins by integrating engineering models, real-time data and operational visualisation tools to provide a continuous digital representation of physical assets, ensuring a smooth transition from basic design to detailed engineering and then to operations.



"APS helps chemical companies innovate faster, reduce costs and stay competitive"

Engineers have historically grappled with using multiple specialised simulators, between commercial and in-house tools and often a lack of customisation capabilities. However, modern APS brings all the relevant tools together in one place. It unifies multiple processes into a single, integrated platform to design a chemical plant, predict its future dynamic behaviour and improve operations after the plant startup. All of this adds up to transformative accuracy, efficiency and speed

gains, enabling chemical manufacturers to gain ground amid a crowded global stage.

Traditionally, digital twins have been used to build plants. How can 'lifecycle' digital twins optimise benefits from project phases to operations support?

APS enables the lifecycle digital twin by creating a simulation model at the conceptual design phase, which then evolves throughout the project's lifecycle. This model integrates sizing, control loops and all necessary information up to the plant's startup.

After commissioning, the same model can connect to real-time data, enabling troubleshooting and operational optimisation. This approach eliminates the need for separate design and operations process simulators, streamlining efficiency and accuracy.

Can you give us an insight into how APS is supporting and transforming the industrial chemicals sector specifically?

The technology enables quick process modelling and iteration, reducing the time required for testing and scaling new chemical formulations. Engineers benefit from an open-model writing environment that allows them to create new operating units when they need to, without complicating coding.

APS can connect to real-time operational data through AVEVA PI System, allowing companies to adjust operations based on actual chemical plant performance.

Critically, APS also helps companies reduce energy consumption and optimise chemical reactions, lowering operational costs and carbon footprints. In addition, APS can be incorporated into integrated AI-driven analytics solutions, which help identify inefficiencies and opportunities for improvement while predicting chemical hazards before they occur.

How does APS, running on Microsoft Azure, enable agile development of new processes and products to support chemicals customers?

APS running on Azure leverages the power of the cloud to provide fast, flexible and scalable process simulation, allowing companies to reduce time to market and develop more innovative and sustainable products.

Historically, process engineers may have had to carry several heavy laptops and wait days for



Photo: iStock/janyu wu

model results. With the cloud, engineers simply require a browser and a high-speed internet connection to run complex models.

APS running on the cloud allows global teams to work on the same digital twin model, ensuring consistency. This saves time, costs, and valuable personnel hours, particularly in a landscape where chemical engineering resources are increasingly scarce. Companies can also scale their computing power based on project needs, reducing reliance on expensive on-premises infrastructure.

By speeding up design cycles, enabling AI-driven process optimisation and ensuring sustainability, APS helps chemical companies innovate faster, reduce costs and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

How is AI shaping the future of process simulation within chemicals?

AI is revolutionising process simulation by making models smarter, predictive and self-optimising. APS can be connected with popular machine learning packages like Open Neural Network Exchange for high-speed simulated modelling, allowing the digital twin to analyse trends, optimise conditions and recommend real-time adjustments. ■

To learn more, visit: bit.ly/3QLzDhi

Fighting the fakes

At a time when tools for manipulating media are more accessible than ever, Andrew Jenks of Microsoft discusses how organisations are working to ensure the authenticity of their content

BY ALEX SMITH

The use of misinformation to cause chaos and disruption is far from a new phenomenon – false and misleading stories have been weaponised to create doubt and manipulate public opinion since ancient times. The digital world, however, has unlocked new and faster ways of spreading fake stories using tools that can alter or fabricate media.

Misinformation has therefore become more dangerous than ever, with faked media being used for everything from financial scams and revenge porn to political propaganda and conspiracy theories. The impact upon trust in media has been stark.

According to the Reuters Institute's *Digital News Report 2024*, trust in the news is at just 40 per cent across the 47 countries surveyed, with

59 per cent of respondents saying they are concerned about fake news online.

Rebuilding that trust will be no easy task and will require the efforts of organisations across many different sectors, says Andrew Jenks, director of media provenance at Microsoft.

"All organisations, not just media companies, must create more transparency to help their employees, customers and broader audiences quickly navigate and feel more confident about the information they're consuming," says Jenks. "Some of this is achieved through technology like tools and classifiers, but organisations should think through education opportunities as well. People do not consume media the same way they did 20 years ago or even five years ago. This shift warrants new ways of thinking about how organisations can help people keep informed and navigate this transformation."

Microsoft has been working to develop the necessary solutions for certifying the

"People do not consume media the same way they did 20 years ago or even five years ago"



provenance – the origin, authenticity and history – of online media since 2019. Efforts by researchers and engineers in the Microsoft Research team led to the development of the Authentication of Media via Provenance (AMP) system, in which a manifest for each piece of media is uploaded by a content provider to a central database. These manifests can then be quickly searched by applications such as browsers to help verify the integrity of that piece of media in the future.

To build upon the AMP system, Microsoft then worked with companies including Adobe, the BBC, Truepic and others to found the Coalition for Content Authentication and Provenance (C2PA), in February 2021. Collaborating as part of C2PA, the partners developed Content Credentials, an industry standard system that follows the AMP system of creating a detailed manifest that logs any actions taken to edit or convert the media, along with a cryptographic signature to make tampering detectable.

“C2PA serves as a standards body and is responsible for creating the interoperable, open technical specification for Content Credentials, guidance in its usage, and recommendations for implementation which enables organisations

to use provenance technology,” says Jenks. “The organisation has grown from a handful of members in 2021 to over 250 today, including Amazon, Google, LinkedIn, Meta, OpenAI, Samsung, and many more. Microsoft is a steering committee member and continues to be active across the organisation.”

Microsoft also helped to found Project Origin, an alliance of organisations from the publishing and technology sectors that are working together to create a process

“As history has taught us, we need to proactively address risks”

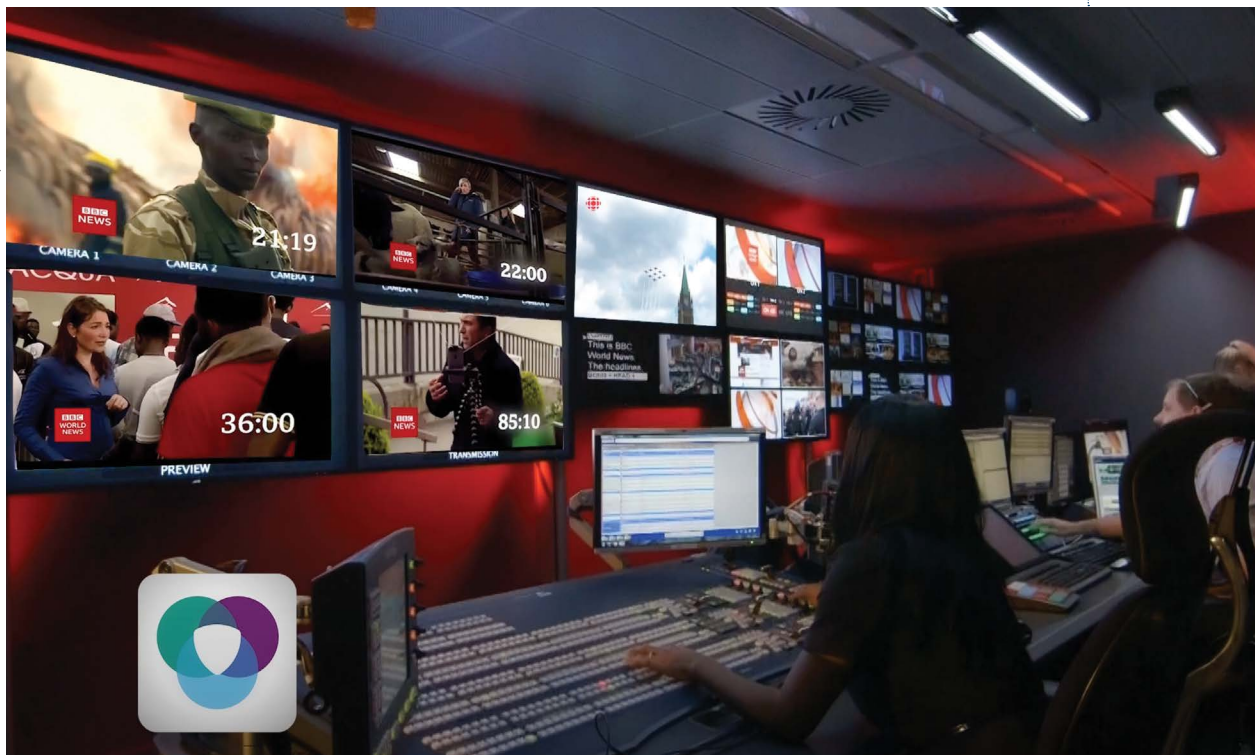
where the provenance of news content can be confirmed. Now an International Press Telecommunications Council project, the alliance aims to maintain confidence in news from verified providers.

“Microsoft is proud to continue to support its work with media organisations and journalists worldwide,” says Jenks.

Collaboration between technology and media partners will also be required to find solutions for new sources of misinformation,

Media providers such as the BBC are building tools to track the origin of media and help rebuild trust in reporting

Photo: Youtube/Bruce MacCormack



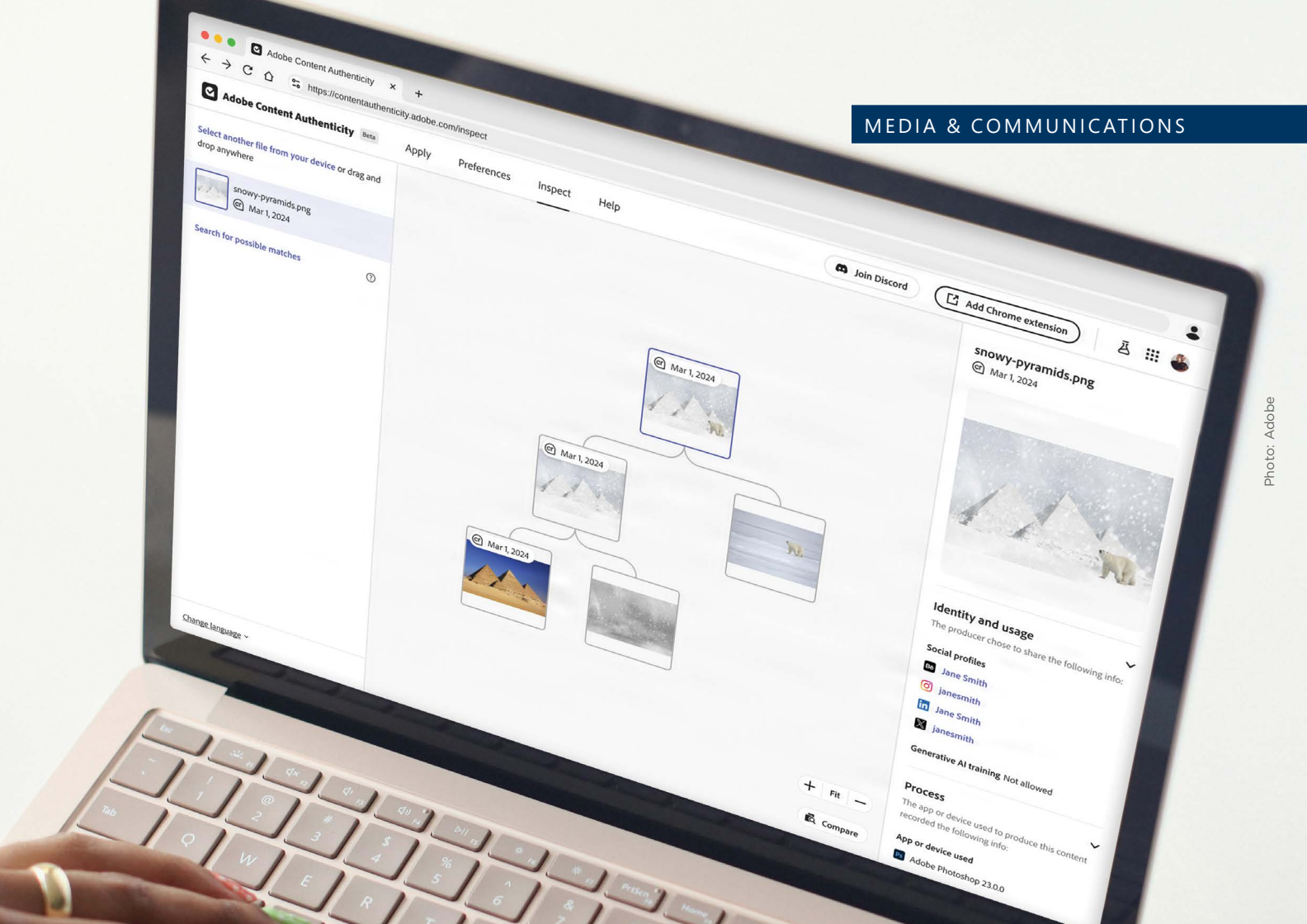


Photo: Adobe

including the growing use of AI tools for media manipulation. Recent developments in AI have had a transformational impact on media production and distribution, as well as enabling significant breakthroughs in healthcare, education, manufacturing and other industries. But in the wrong hands, AI could also prove to be a powerful weapon that can be used to create fake stories, images or videos.

As a leader in AI development, Microsoft has a significant role to play in ensuring the technology is used safely. It has engaged with non-profit and civil society organisations to help and support broader industry standards for synthetic media. One example is its participation in work led by the Partnership on AI to establish a framework for responsible practices, including a case study on LinkedIn Content Credentials implementation.

“As history has taught us, we need to proactively address risks,” says Jenks. “Our strategy to protect people and communities from harmful AI content is based on six focus areas: a strong safety architecture;

lasting media provenance and watermarking; safeguarding our services from abusive content and conduct; robust collaboration across industry and with governments and civil society; modernised legislation to protect people from the abuse of technology; and public awareness and education.”

According to Jenks, combating the proliferation of fake media will ultimately require a multilayered approach similar to that used for security and privacy, with both technology and education having a role to play.

“Content Credentials is a powerful tool that is even stronger when combined with other technologies, such as watermarking and fingerprinting, to create a durable Content Credential,” he explains. “Beyond technology, we believe that public education is imperative due to fundamental changes in information sharing and media consumption. From children to senior citizens, we need to ensure that everyone has strategies to help identify the origin of the content and think critically about the content they consume.” ■

Content Credentials is an industry standard provenance system developed by partners in the Coalition for Content Authentication and Provenance

How to integrate Teams across an enterprise

Chris Bischoff of Republic Services explains why establishing AV standards is crucial for ensuring consistency, scalability and a seamless user experience when integrating Microsoft Teams with AV technology in meeting spaces

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

Over the last five years, Republic Services, a North American waste collection company, has transitioned its enterprise collaboration platform to Microsoft Teams. As part of this, it has built collaboration spaces for the organisation across various sites and its most recent project integrated Teams with audiovisual (AV) technology in two boardrooms, seven training spaces and 30 conference rooms. The transition highlighted the importance of having clear AV standards to ensure dependable collaboration experiences across all meeting spaces, as well as consistent room design and best practices for Microsoft Teams Rooms.

“AV standards are essential for ensuring seamless and scalable collaboration across an organisation,” says Chris Bischoff, senior manager of infrastructure engineering at Republic Services. “Without established standards, the user experience becomes distorted because it introduces an inconsistent meeting experience and interaction with AV technology. They enhance usability, which allows IT teams to support systems at scale and ultimately enables a frictionless, unified experience in the modern workplace.”

This variability is crucial, as different workplace environments have unique needs that require a balance between standardisation and flexibility.

“AV standards vary across the workplace because they help minimise the impact of customised or one-off builds,” says Bischoff.

“No two spaces are the same, nor are the user requirements, especially when considering span across an enterprise. While deviations from standards are necessary, having a flexible AV framework allows organisations to scale efficiently while maintaining a consistent design approach.

“The most critical consideration when implementing AV standards across various workplace environments is supportability. Organisations should prioritise cloud-enabled and remotely accessible solutions to simplify maintenance, minimise downtime and enhance the user experience.”



“Building a meeting room is easy but maintaining and scaling it is the real challenge”

To prepare its rooms for AV integration and optimise the meeting spaces, Republic Services first considered the user experience and expected outcome.

“One of the most crucial components of AV design is the acoustics,” says Bischoff. “A well-designed room with acoustic treatments for example, enables a better meeting through improved audio clarity, benefiting both in-room and remote participants.”



And room layout is equally important. “Factors like wall angles, furniture placement and display positioning significantly impact usability and engagement,” explains Bischoff. “For example, simple things like articulating mounts for displays allow users to adjust the display to their preference. Plus, proper placement of microphones, speakers and cameras enhances the overall meeting experience and ensures all participants feel included.”

When establishing best practices for deploying team collaboration rooms, Bischoff recommends organisations focus on standardised room templates, tiered cost models, and remote support and monitoring.

“Users expect a flawless collaboration experience, which requires careful planning and strong support,” he says. “Building a meeting room is easy but maintaining and scaling it is the real challenge. Organisations must consider long-term support, lifecycle management and financial alignment to ensure a sustainable and successful collaboration environment.”

Ensuring AV standards are consistently applied across different workplace environments is key to enabling effective collaboration, particularly as hybrid work models continue to evolve.

“AV standards bridge the collaboration gap between in-office, hybrid and remote employees by ensuring a consistent AV experience across work environments,” says Bischoff. “A good



example of this enablement is seen by the volume of quick and easy collaboration-certified devices out on the market today. Along these lines, lower hardware costs, coupled with a solution for every need, has made it easier to access equipment.

“By focusing on wellness, sustainability and flexibility, organisations can create AV standards that enhance meeting equity, simplify collaboration and support long-term scalability, ultimately leading to an effective hybrid work environment.” ■

Bischoff will deliver a session on enterprise Teams integration at InfoComm 2025. Find out more at: infocommshow.org

Republic Services has integrated Microsoft Teams across its boardrooms, training spaces and conference rooms across various sites in North America

Pairing humans with AI for better healthcare



From soaring costs to staff shortages, increasing wait times and regulatory pressures, healthcare providers face multiple operational challenges. However, generative AI, cloud and data solutions are helping them to deliver faster, more cost-efficient and more accurate care, says Microsoft's Dr. David Rhew

BY REBECCA GIBSON

Every year, millions of people around the world undergo detailed and time-consuming examinations to assess the health and functionality of their eyes. But what if AI could rapidly identify multiple medical conditions that extend beyond the eye from a single retinal image? Topcon, which manufactures the optical equipment used by most of the world's eye specialists, has now made that a reality.

Topcon's Harmony platform runs on Microsoft Azure and enables AI models to evaluate retinal images "for diabetic retinopathy and potentially several other conditions, including cardiometabolic, neurovascular and ophthalmologic disorders," says Dr. David Rhew, global chief medical officer and vice president of healthcare at Microsoft.

Topcon's solution makes the diagnostic process "fast, fully automated and inexpensive", says Rhew,

adding that the AI models for detecting diabetic retinopathy have been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration. "Several sites across the USA have deployed this approach and it has the potential to be most impactful for individuals living in rural and underserved communities."

This is just one example of how human healthcare specialists are augmenting their work with AI and cloud technology. From disease screening to analysing test results, developing new precision medicines, automating administrative tasks and personalising patient experiences – these technologies provide insights into vast volumes of multimodal data, allowing healthcare organisations to transform the way they deliver care to the public.

"During the pandemic, we observed that one of the most successful approaches to delivering care across large populations involved connecting public health with community-based organisations



and healthcare,” says Rhew. “Public-private partnership was essential, but success was also dependent on applying a nimble technology infrastructure that leveraged cloud, data interoperability, and AI.

“Cloud enabled a rapid scale-up and scale-down platform that was secure, and both time and cost efficient. Data interoperability, specifically around HL7 FHIR [Health Level 7’s Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources] standards, enabled data communication between healthcare systems and public health organisations. AI helped public health agencies to efficiently manage data sets that were often incomplete, inaccurate, or required manual data entry into computer systems.”

Capitalising on the potential of AI

Microsoft has developed the Microsoft Cloud for Healthcare to bring together cloud and AI capabilities from its Azure, Dynamics 365, Power Platform, and Microsoft 365 solutions to provide healthcare organisations

with the industry-specific workflows, data insights and tools they need to enhance care delivery. Organisations can use the platform – combined with healthcare-specific solutions from Microsoft’s partners – to rapidly build and deploy solutions that boost operational efficiency, improve patient outcomes, reduce clinician burnout, drive research and innovation, and more.

“Microsoft Cloud for Healthcare provides a comprehensive technology stack that clients and partners can leverage to enable more efficient healthcare delivery,” says Rhew.

“Data security is at the core of the Microsoft

Topcon’s Harmony solutions uses Microsoft Azure and AI technologies to review retinal scans taken during routine eye tests and detect conditions such as diabetic retinopathy



“People need to feel confident that AI will not cause harm to individuals and society”

technology stack. Microsoft provides the technology infrastructure and tools that decrease the risk and impact of cyberattacks. Building on top of that, we provide high-performance storage and compute capabilities to help organisations manage large data sets and multimodal AI models. Further up the technology stack, we enable efficient data management by leveraging interoperability standards such as HL7 FHIR and offering secure environments that promote privacy-preserving data collaboration.”

In October 2024, Microsoft updated Microsoft Cloud for Healthcare with new AI tools, including healthcare application templates for Microsoft Purview and solutions to make data more accessible in Microsoft Fabric. There are also new healthcare multimodal healthcare models in Azure AI Studio and GitHub, and organisations can use healthcare agent services in Microsoft Copilot Studio to build their own secure copilots with healthcare-specific features. They can be used for applications such as scheduling appointments and allocating treatments.

“AI is dependent on data sets – and the more sources of data that are available, the more robust the AI models become,” says Rhew. “Microsoft Fabric enables organisations to ingest, transform and manage multimodal data sets, while Microsoft Purview enables streamlined governance of the data.

“Microsoft facilitates the deployment of AI models by connecting multimodal data sets to AI development environments such as Azure AI Studio and GitHub. Healthcare agent services integrated in Microsoft Copilot Studio can help enable the creation of agentic AI.”

A helping hand

One key benefit of AI technology for healthcare is its ability to automate routine tasks, which boosts operational efficiency and productivity, while reducing the administrative burden on workers and freeing them up to focus on patients. For example, AI can be used to risk-stratify patients.

“A major challenge in healthcare is the shortage of clinicians, which contributes to increasing wait times and both patient and clinician dissatisfaction,” says Rhew. “The wait time problem is further compounded by inefficient triage methods. In a busy emergency department AI applied to radiology images can help identify

high-risk individuals requiring urgent attention. The technology can also identify low-risk patients who could potentially be managed through an alternative pathway. AI-enabled risk-stratification followed by triage and capacity building help make care more efficient, and in the process, improve outcomes.”

In addition, AI can be used to rapidly analyse clinical data and help clinicians and nurses write reports and other documents.

“Public healthcare can be highly fragmented, administrative, and dependent on large data sets,” says Rhew. “The process of acquiring, curating and analysing data, and reporting results is time consuming and inefficient, but generative AI can help in many ways. First, administrative tasks such as data collection, report writing and presentation of results can be performed by generative AI. The technology can also write programming code that can help automate tasks.”

Generative AI can also power virtual assistants with natural language capabilities to allow both patients and healthcare professionals to quickly access the information or service they need.

“Chatbots powered by generative AI may be used to help individuals answer questions and sort through complex problems,” says Rhew. “AI-based chatbots can communicate with individuals in their own language and at their grade level, which enables this technology to be used by anyone, anywhere.”

“AI is dependent on data sets – and the more sources of data that are available, the more robust the AI models become”

Microsoft’s Dragon Ambient eXperience (DAX) Copilot, for example, is helping hundreds of healthcare organisations to streamline administrative tasks and document patient visits directly in electronic health records. DAX Copilot combines Dragon Medical’s natural language voice dictation capabilities – used by more than 600,000 clinicians worldwide – with ambient and generative AI to automatically convert multiparty conversations into speciality-specific standardised draft clinical summaries that integrate with existing workflows.

In 2024, 77 per cent of 879 clinicians surveyed by Microsoft said using DAX Copilot





saves them an average of five minutes per patient encounter, while 70 per cent credited it for reducing burnout and fatigue, and 62 per cent stated that they are now less likely to leave their organisation. DAX Copilot is positively impacting the patient experience too. When Microsoft surveyed more than 400 patients whose clinicians use the tool, it discovered that 93 per cent reported a better overall care experience.

Microsoft integrated DAX Copilot's ambient listening capabilities with Dragon Medical's natural language voice dictation capabilities into a new Dragon Copilot in March 2025. The AI assistant allows clinicians working across ambulatory, inpatient, emergency departments and other care settings to streamline documentation, automate key tasks, and conduct general-purpose medical information searches from trusted content sources.

Healthcare providers around the world are using Microsoft OpenAI Service to build generative AI assistants too. In Australia, tertiary referral and teaching hospital Liverpool Hospital has created an assistant that enables cardiologists to query vast volumes of literature to answer clinical questions. US-based healthcare system

Mercy has built chatbots to allow workers to find policy and procedural information, as well as to complete tasks such as scheduling appointments when taking patient calls. Meanwhile, Chi Mei Medical Center has used AI assistants to cut the time it takes for doctors to write medical reports from 60 to 15 minutes, enabled nurses to document bed transfers in fewer than five minutes rather than 20, and empowered pharmacists to serve double the number of patients per day. Other AI assistants are helping staff to identify patients at risk of falls, supporting nutritionists to produce diet recommendations and creating personalised educational materials for patients with comorbidities.

Rhew expects more healthcare applications to emerge as generative AI technology continues to evolve. "The generative AI outputs demonstrate increasingly higher levels of performance as a result of improvements in the AI model technology and in the application of more sophisticated safeguards," he says.

Overcoming trust barriers

While many patients and healthcare professionals acknowledge the potential of AI-powered solutions to significantly improve

Doctors, nurses and other staff at Chi Mei Medical Center are using copilots to streamline administrative tasks and enhance patient care

the healthcare experience, they also cite concerns regarding data privacy, risks of the technology causing unexpected harm, and more.

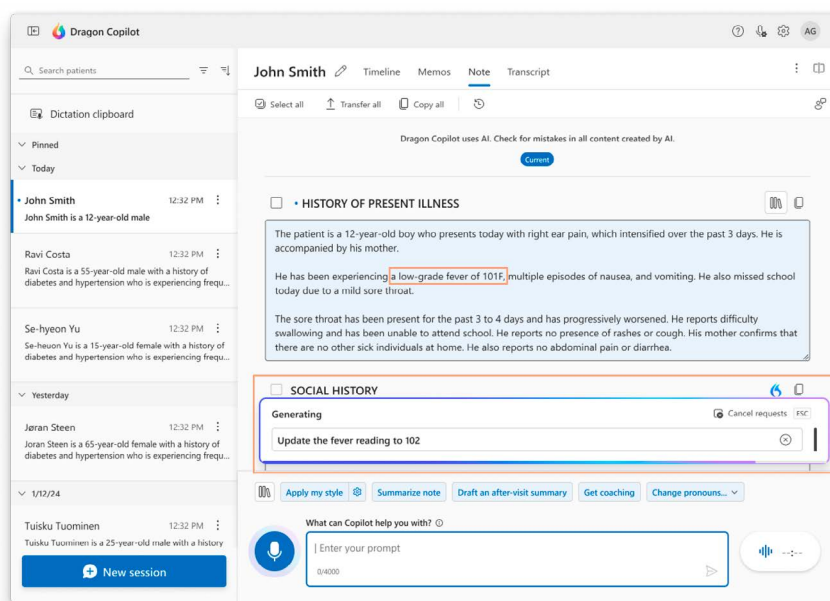
Forrester's *Generative AI Impact On Clinicians: Bringing The Fever Down* study highlights that 40 per cent of physicians claim AI is overhyped and will not meet expectations. An October 2024 survey by The Alan Turing Institute found that while 52 per cent of UK doctors are optimistic about AI's potential in healthcare, nearly one-third do not fully understand the risks and almost 70 per cent have not received adequate training on their responsibilities when using these systems.

Patients are similarly sceptical. PwC's *Healthcare Survey 2024* suggests that only one in five is willing to use AI tools for routine tasks, such as booking appointments or refilling prescriptions. The enthusiasm for the remaining 80 per cent is "tempered by worries about data privacy and the quality of care". Likewise, the 'Patients' Trust in Health Systems to Use Artificial Intelligence' research paper published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association Network Open* in 2025 indicates that almost 66 per cent of US adults have low trust in healthcare systems to use AI responsibly and 57.7 per cent are doubtful they would be protected against AI-related harm.

"There are two major reasons individuals and organisations may not trust AI: concerns it may cause harm and fear of the technology taking their jobs," says Rhew.

To overcome concerns about AI replacing humans, the healthcare sector must address the widening AI skills gap, advises Rhew. "We have to develop AI skilling and reskilling programmes that allow individuals to secure a job in a world that is becoming increasingly AI-enabled," he says. "The first step is to improve AI literacy in the workforce. The second is to train individuals on how to use AI, starting with how to do prompt engineering. And the third is to define new AI-enabled job requirements and develop career programmes that allow people to secure these roles."

Building trust in AI is also essential to drive the widespread adoption of the technology. "People need to feel confident that AI will not cause harm to individuals and society," says Rhew. "Operationalising responsible AI principles, transparency of goals and processes, and continued multi-stakeholder dialogue will help with this."



In 2024, Microsoft joined forces with 16 healthcare providers and two community health organisations to form the Trustworthy & Responsible AI Network (TRAIN) to make high-quality, safe and trustworthy AI tools equally accessible to every healthcare organisation.

"TRAIN is a healthcare system-led consortium whose primary aim is to operationalise responsible AI principles in a time-, resource- and cost-efficient manner," says Rhew. "Members may apply three approaches to accomplish this goal: one, leveraging technologies that promote and enable responsible AI use; two, redistributing workloads involved with testing; and three, monitoring AI models through standardised collaborations with other TRAIN members. They can also partner with other members and AI developers to share the cost, time and resources involved with testing and monitoring AI models. Today, approximately 50 health systems in the USA and several more in Europe are members of TRAIN.

"When it comes to AI's tremendous capabilities, there is no doubt the technology has the potential to transform healthcare. However, the processes for implementing the technology responsibly are just as vital. By working together, TRAIN members aim to establish best practices for operationalising responsible AI, helping improve patient outcomes and safety while fostering trust in healthcare AI." ■

Physicians can use Microsoft's new Dragon Copilot to expedite tasks such as writing up notes following consultations with patients

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Clean Operations

Select the operation(s) you want to perform:

Select Operation(s):

- ☒ Check Address
- ☒ Verify Contact
- ☒ Move Update
- ☒ Append

Next

Listware for Excel

Output Columns

Specify what data you would like to output. New columns will be inserted to the right of the input range for these new columns.

- Name
- Salutation
- Address
- GeoLocation
- Phone
- Email
- Address Information
 - ☒ Address Type
 - ☒ Delivery Indicator
 - ☒ Extra Address Information
 - ☒ Suite
 - ☒ Private Mailbox
 - ☒ Urbanization (PR only)
 - ☒ City Abbreviation
 - ☒ State Name
 - ☒ ISO Country Code
 - ☒ Carrier Route
 - ☒ Delivery Point
 - ☒ Universal Time Code
- Census Information
- Demographics
- Parsed Address

Get detailed reporting on your project, including result codes, counts & descriptions.

Listware for Excel

Results

Check the result below based on the count that we're calculating. We're collecting the result codes and counts from the Results column.

Total Records: 34

	Address	Company	Email	Name	Phone
Appended	0	0	4	0	8
Bad	8	0	0	0	0
Corrected	25	0	0	0	0
Empty	1	0	30	0	26
Good	25	0	4	0	8
Moved	3	0	0	0	0
Verified	22	0	4	22	8

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The role of AI in the operating theatre



SALLY ANN FRANK: MICROSOFT

How are Microsoft partners supporting healthcare providers behind the scenes? AI solutions from Artisight and Opmed.ai are enhancing experiences for both patients and hospital staff

When patients and their families prepare for a surgical procedure, they typically meet the surgeon, review the risks, discuss possible outcomes and develop a recovery plan. However, they rarely consider the extensive preparation required for the surgical suite or the workflows needed to ensure a safe and effective outcome. Behind the scenes, there are people, processes, medical devices and supplies that must be orchestrated to achieve the best possible outcome for the patient.

In the age of AI, surgical suites are increasingly infused with technology to streamline processes, mitigate risks and ensure that all necessary resources are optimised for each operation. One company leading this transformation is Artisight. It offers an AI-powered Smart Hospital Platform that captures precise, real-time data to enhance operations, reduce costs and allow clinicians to focus on patient care. Its platform combines computer vision, multi-sensor networks and industry-defining AI to create ambient intelligence that adapts to specific environments and workflows. Artisight's operating room (OR) solution provides real-time automation, acting like an air

traffic control system for the OR by capturing surgical timestamps, tracking workflows and notifying staff when rooms are ready for turnover. Seamless integration with the patient's health record ensures complete, automated documentation without adding any administrative burdens.

The solution also provides video de-identification capabilities so physicians can securely review, label and archive surgical footage for educational purposes,

Artisight's Smart Hospital Platform extends beyond the OR, transforming patient rooms into intelligent care environments that enhance safety, efficiency and clinician support. Using computer vision, ambient intelligence and AI-driven automation, Artisight powers virtual nursing, fall-risk monitoring and predictive analytics, enabling hospitals to scale care delivery without increasing staff burden.

Hospitals leveraging Artisight's real-time video and AI-powered bedside

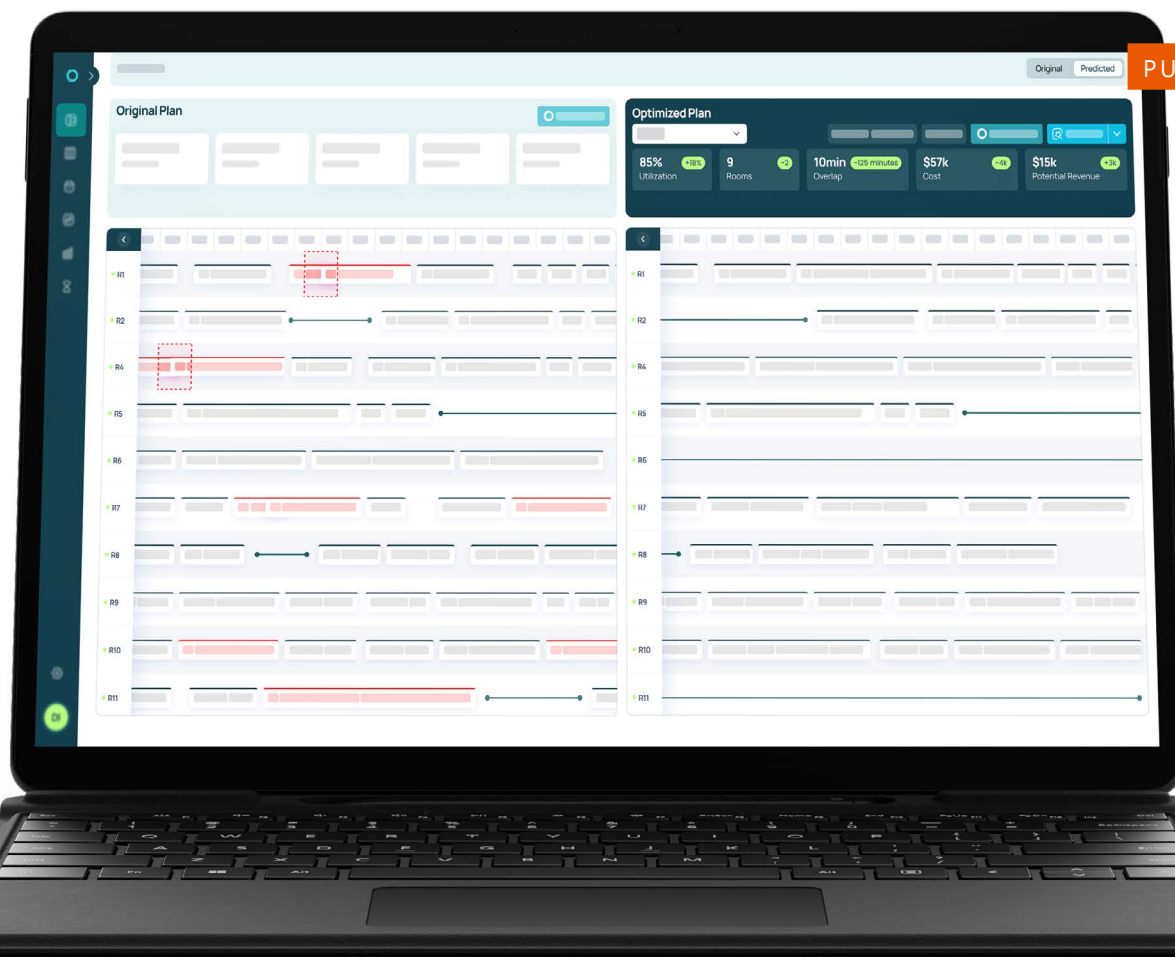
"Surgical suites are increasingly infused with technology to streamline processes"

peer collaboration and quality improvement. Artisight's computer vision and AI-enhanced case analysis transforms raw surgical video into actionable insights while protecting patient privacy.

Artisight also uses AI-powered case length predictions to optimise OR scheduling, minimising downtime and improving throughput. Real-time location system solutions for tracking staff, patients and surgical equipment helps hospitals improve resource utilisation, enhance patient flow and reduce inefficiencies.

monitoring have seen a 48 per cent reduction in nurse turnover, a 31 per cent decrease in documentation time and an average of 5.5 hours saved per nurse per day. By integrating seamlessly with healthcare software company Epic and other leading electronic health records, Artisight reduces clinical inefficiencies while improving patient outcomes and staff satisfaction – making hospital operations smarter, safer and more scalable.

Another leading healthcare automation platform is Opmed.ai,



Opmed.ai helps healthcare providers to schedule operations based on room availability

which transforms healthcare operations through AI-driven planning. Its platform goes beyond simple recommendations – it builds the most efficient schedules possible by analysing billions of permutations to construct optimised work plans. Opmed’s powerful AI engine doesn’t simply rely on historical data, as it is able to identify patterns using a variety of individual case requests to predict durations with over 90 per cent accuracy. Opmed.ai helps hospitals maximise the OR by creating usable blocks of time that can be used either for additional procedures or cost reduction through room closures. The platform includes a scheduler builder; a block architect, which identifies hospital blocks that are likely to go unused; a post anesthesia care unit planner that sources available resources and recovery rooms; and a multi-site balancer to help patients get seen quicker while

reducing staff and room idle time. It also includes an ‘Opmed staff’, which manages staff assignments by predicting requirements, coordinating across departments and creating equitable schedules that balance organisational needs with staff preferences.

Opmed.ai customers – including global medical group Mayo Clinic and Geisinger, a regional healthcare provider in Pennsylvania – are seeing remarkable results. At Mayo Clinic, Opmed.ai’s AI model reduced the time it takes to predict medical cases from 60 to 34 minutes per case, saving more than 200 hours annually per OR. At Geisinger, the platform achieved 96 per cent scheduling accuracy in daily case predictions and a 90 per cent success rate in block release recommendations, with significant monthly time savings across their facility types.

“Opmed.ai’s advanced platform aligns with our mission to make

healthcare more accessible and efficient,” said Jeffrey Adams, chief administrative officer for surgical and medical services at Geisinger. “We’re already seeing first results and are confident this technology will help us maximise our OR capacity and accelerate patient care.”

Both Opmed.ai and Artisight are using Microsoft Azure AI in trailblazing ways, which is impressive given the high bar for security, compliance and confidentiality in the healthcare industry. And while the application of AI in the surgical theatre from organisations like Artisight and Opmed.ai is behind the scenes, the patients, their families and hospital staff are already experiencing improved patient outcomes, reduced staff burdens and maximised efficiency. ■

Sally Ann Frank is worldwide lead for health and life sciences at Microsoft for Startups

Healthcare systems for the modern age

To tackle challenges in the healthcare sector, organisations should embrace the transformative power of technology. Kyndryl's Trent Sanders tells us more

BY AMBER HICKMAN

Supply chain costs, high inflation rates and workforce shortages are just a few of the challenges continuing to affect the healthcare industry.

It's a precarious situation and according to Trent Sanders, vice president of healthcare at Kyndryl, "any change to the ecosystem has the potential to cause a major impact", for better or for worse.

One way healthcare organisations can tackle these challenges is by embracing technology and pursuing digital transformation. While this can seem like a daunting task, Sanders recommends organisations simplify it by focusing solely on four key platforms.

"The first platform, and first priority, should be their electronic health record system," he explains. "The second platform should be their clinical workflow which involves clinical collaboration using the Microsoft stack. The third should be an enterprise resource planning system such as Workday, and the fourth should be ServiceNow for AI integration.

"When you build an organisational strategy around these four key platforms, it simplifies the layers of data and AI as well as the security that will be needed to protect everything."

Sanders also believes a key trend in 2025 will be the emergence of chief information officers (CIOs) adopting a role more akin to a chief financial officer, which he says will "emphasise leveraging technology as a vehicle to enhance margin performance".

As part of this, there is a core set of key performance indicators (KPIs) for CIOs that will prove vital over the next year to ensure organisations are on the right track with the modernisation process. Some of the most important KPIs will include volumes, claim denials and quality metrics, which can impact reimbursement or charge capture.

"While these KPIs are not traditionally associated with IT operations, they play a crucial role in ensuring the month-to-month financial sustainability of a healthcare organisation," says Sanders.

CIOs can turn to Microsoft for support in these areas, thanks to its significant healthcare investments that ensure the entire clinical workflow can be optimised.



"Organisations need to standardise key platforms as that's the only way to truly leverage generative AI"

"At the point of care, there are technologies such as DAX Copilot," says Sanders. "Then, tools such as generative and agentic AI enable automation in areas such as pharmacy billing and charge capture. Finally, Microsoft Fabric serves as the foundational data layer that ties everything together. This cohesive workflow impacts





Photo: iStock/Nensuria

the entire clinical process and demonstrates Microsoft's ability to design with intent."

However, as technology grows, and organisations increase their digital presence they can also become more susceptible to cyberattacks. For some healthcare providers, this can be catastrophic not just for the business, but for the employees and patients too.

"Non-profits are currently living on the fringe," states Sanders. "A cyber event will not just cause a major distraction but will also have a major financial impact due to recovery costs. In addition, it shifts the organisation's focus away from key priorities that are crucial for maintaining longevity."

To tackle this, Sanders recommends working with Kyndryl and Microsoft to benefit from their combined knowledge and strengths.

"Our deep engineering and industry expertise paired with advanced technology supports initiatives like platform consolidations and cyber resilience," he says. "This can be paired with Microsoft Azure, which enables a unified

platform that allows organisations to optimise their security posture and data management."

According to Sanders, healthcare organisations can ensure success by focusing on two main paths over the next year: standardisation and behavioural change.

"Organisations need to standardise key platforms as that's the only way to truly leverage generative AI while maintaining a strong business posture," explains Sanders. "It is this focus on endurance that forms a solid foundation for the company. Secondly, we can't wait around to see the impact of tools like Microsoft Copilot in hospital systems. Clinicians need to rethink how they approach their day and consider how Copilot can influence various workflows. This is essential not just for the organisation but for work-life balance too.

"Change is essential, and while it can be challenging Microsoft and Kyndryl are poised to help CIOs and leadership teams drive this transformation by removing obstacles and pushing forward." ■

Transforming B2B sales with AI

Equipping B2B sales teams with AI tools can significantly improve how they operate and engage with customers, but it can also bring challenges. Microsoft's Mike Edmonds discusses how retail and consumer goods companies can overcome these barriers to achieve success

BY AMBER HICKMAN

While business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) sales models share similarities in their focus on customer needs, marketing-sales alignment and data driven strategies, they diverge significantly in execution and audience engagement. B2B sales cycles are typically longer, engaging multiple stakeholders and involving detailed evaluations of business needs, while B2C sales models are characterised by shorter, more emotional and impulsive decision-making processes that target individual customers.

However, both B2B and B2C retail are transforming significantly with the introduction of ever-advancing technologies such as AI.

"There is a growing emphasis to provide a seamless and personalised experience to B2B customers," says Mike Edmonds, senior strategy director for the worldwide retail and consumer goods industry team at Microsoft. "With AI, B2B sales teams have the opportunity to deliver highly

personalised experiences by analysing customer data and predicting their needs."

Changing customer expectations have also been a key influence on industry transformation following the emergence of AI. McKinsey & Company's 2024 *B2B Pulse Survey*, for example, reports that B2B customers are now shifting towards consumer-like purchasing behaviour and demanding a more sophisticated buying experience.

AI also has the potential to optimise sales processes by automating repetitive tasks such as data entry, lead scoring, follow-up communications and engaging customers directly. This allows B2B sales teams to shift from focusing on transactions to prioritising strategic activities to improve customer engagement. For example, new sales agents accessible in Microsoft 365 Copilot streamline the sales process by converting contacts into leads and providing actionable insights from various data sources. Sales Agent and Sales Chat empower sales representatives to focus more on selling rather





than searching for information, significantly improving efficiency and productivity.

But how can B2B retailers optimise their use of AI technology to ensure it enhances their sales models?

“They should take a people-first approach to evolving their sales models in the era of AI transformation,” says Edmonds. “Working backwards from key personas and the unmet expectations for each, retail and consumer goods companies can identify ways to unlock value in end-to-end processes and workflows to drive productivity.”

For example, key account managers can adopt AI tools to enhance joint business planning, orchestrate cross-functional teams, analyse sales data to refine strategies and training, and optimise territory management and pricing through simulation and predictive insights.

Meanwhile, field sales teams can utilise real-time data for on-the-spot decision-making,

leverage AI-powered tooling to strengthen retailer partnerships and employ AI-driven tools to enhance customer visit planning, interactions and satisfaction. As these tools become increasingly prevalent, Edmonds believes that the outbound salesperson will “continue to become more of an advisor than an order taker”.

Lastly, pricing managers can deploy dynamic pricing models driven by real-time data analysis and implement data-driven promotional strategies to maximise return on investment, and customer service teams can capture and elevate customer



“There is a growing emphasis to provide a seamless and personalised experience to B2B customers”



service calls with AI insights and automate follow-ups to improve customer satisfaction.

Using Microsoft tools such as Fabric, Dynamics 365 and Copilot can help B2B organisations to leverage AI tools within their sales processes. Microsoft provides the tools needed to support organisations with their adoption process through resources such as its e-book *AI Strategy Roadmap: Navigating the stages of value creation*.

For example, Microsoft supported Grand & Toy, a Canadian provider of workplace products and solutions, when it replaced its disparate CRM solutions with Dynamics 365. The company wanted to use a single system that would provide a 360-degree view of its customers, reduce inefficiencies, increase productivity and improve customer experiences.

The organisation chose Dynamics 365 due to its end-to-end capabilities, out-of-the-box AI potential and the continuous investment Microsoft makes in updates and new features.

Phases one and two of the migration took place between winter 2023 and spring 2024 and focused on implementing Dynamics 365 Sales and Dynamics 365 Customer Insights. Phase three involved implementing Dynamics 365 Customer Service and was completed in summer 2024.

Now, Grand & Toy is using Copilot to generate summaries and perform sentiment analysis to further improve customer service and increase employee satisfaction. According to Eduardo Fajardo, CRM product owner at Grand & Toy, Dynamics 365 has “introduced a new way

of operating” for the firm, and they plan to leverage the platform and AI to “stay ahead of the curve”.

B2B organisations like Grand & Toy can also implement Microsoft’s latest agentic AI tools to enhance their operations, drive growth and provide superior customer experiences.

“AI agents can transform workplace management by automating tasks, which helps to optimise costs and improve employee engagement,” says Edmonds. “This leads to a more efficient and motivated workforce and ultimately enhances customer satisfaction.

“Retail and consumer goods companies can also significantly boost employee productivity by integrating agents into existing workflows and offering real-time insights and personalised support. AI-driven productivity tools align with an individual’s work style, which helps to streamline tasks and improve decision-making, enhancing overall efficiency.”

In addition to leveraging Microsoft’s own tools and resources, B2B organisations can implement specialised solutions developed by its comprehensive partner ecosystem.

For example, Fractal provides a range of AI-powered analytics solutions, such as the Customer Analytics Suite. These solutions offer capabilities such as call summarisation, which has helped its customers reduce agent call handling time by an average of 20 per cent and improve agent occupancy rate. This has led to a better understanding of customer

issues, expectations and emerging trends and an average of 20 per cent improvement in customer retention and satisfaction.

Another partner is SymphonyAI, which provides AI software-as-a-service applications that focus on data integration and visibility, collaboration and growth across the entire production and supply chain. The firm's solutions have helped clients achieve an average of five per cent category sales growth, 11 per cent increase in on-shelf availability and 23 per cent improvement in planogram compliance.

While the opportunities for B2B organisations are plentiful, there can be challenges involved with any organisational transformation. According to Forrester's *The State of AI Infrastructure*, which was commissioned by Microsoft in 2024, half of executives believe their organisation doesn't have the proper infrastructure to support their desired workloads.

To ensure a smooth adoption process, Edmonds says "retail and consumer goods companies need to make sure their current systems are compatible with AI technology, and this starts with having a unified data estate to enable AI use cases that drive efficiencies for sales teams."

The Forrester report also discovered only 33 per cent of leaders believe they have

employees with the knowledge and capabilities to use AI effectively, so they must upskill or reskill sales teams.

It is also important that organisations maintain a human touch when implementing AI. McKinsey & Company's *B2B Pulse Survey* recommends retailers follow the 'rule of thirds' to effectively balance automation and human interaction. In short, one-third of customers hope for in-person interactions, one-third want remote communications and one-third prefer digital self-serve options – and organisations should cater to all three.

Organisations must also implement robust cybersecurity measures when deploying AI and other technologies to protect sensitive information that could be compromised in case of a cyberattack.

"Ensuring the security and privacy of customer data is paramount," says Edmonds. "However, once B2B organisations have established a strategy for AI adoption and meeting new customer expectations, they are in a prime position for rapid growth and transformation.

"Establishing this framework sooner rather than later will help organisations to better adapt to an evolving industry." ■

Partner perspective

XTEL's Cédric Guyot shares how the company is working with Microsoft to develop solutions that improve operations for B2B retailers

"XTEL recently launched MAX AI for enterprise planning in the retail and consumer goods industries, a solution that fundamentally disrupts traditional analytical, transactional and workflow-driven strategy and planning systems.

Based on a custom copilot that extends Microsoft 365 and is accessible through Microsoft Teams, MAX AI offers an intuitive, prescriptive, natural language interface to employees across all departments to seamlessly engage with comprehensive commercial plans. They can test strategies, adjust tactics and respond to competitive or external events, while MAX AI evaluates the sales and margin impact at the company level and constructs an optimal, detailed and ready-to-execute plan in real time."



Cédric Guyot
Chief Strategy Officer,
XTEL

Stop losing sales

Synq's Nolan Wheeler and Zebra Technologies' Tim Fox explain how the companies are collaborating with Microsoft to help retailers equip frontline workers with the right tools and improve customer experiences

BY ALICE CHAMBERS

Walking into a store, a customer searches for an item – perhaps a last-minute gift or an essential household product – but when they check the shelves, it's not there. A sales assistant offers to help by searching the inventory system and sees that the item is in stock. However, after a long search in the storeroom and several radio calls to colleagues, the assistant returns empty-handed. Frustrated, the customer leaves, choosing to buy from an online competitor instead.

This scenario happens frequently in retail where inefficient systems result in lost sales and unhappy shoppers. But for Nolan Wheeler, CEO of Synq, a technology provider for retailers, this type of experience highlights a larger issue: frontline retail workers play an important part in delivering great customer service, but they lack the tools they need to work efficiently. Without the right technology, they struggle with three key challenges: communication breakdowns, an inability to access information and staffing shortages.

"Inefficient or outdated tools make it difficult for teams to collaborate and have visibility into shared tasks," he says. "This leads to missed requests, duplicated efforts and unhappy customers. Another critical issue is the lack of integration between systems – today's associates are forced to jump between too many disparate tools to do their jobs. And the high turnover of staff makes these challenges even more acute, with employees being asked to do too much with too little."

When frontline workers don't have the proper technology to complete tasks, it's the customers who ultimately suffer.

"Every missed customer request is driving more people out of stores and towards online giants like Amazon," says Wheeler. "Processes

like inventory management become slow and error-prone without the right technology in place, leading to lost sales. By some estimates, out of stocks cost retailers hundreds of billions of dollars annually. The kicker? Most of the time those products are somewhere in the building. These inefficiencies not only increase labour costs and waste resources, but they also force workers to spend more time manually checking inventory or correcting mistakes instead of focusing on serving customers."

Recognising these challenges, Synq is working with Zebra Technologies and Microsoft to empower frontline workers. By leveraging Microsoft's cloud capabilities, Zebra's hardware and Synq's retail-focused platform, the trio is developing integrated solutions that improve task management, streamline communication and power actionable insights.



"Every missed customer request is driving more people out of stores"

NOLAN WHEELER, SYNQ

"Our collaboration ensures that frontline employees have the technology they need to be effective in real time," says Tim Fox, global alliance manager for Zebra Technologies. "With Microsoft Teams Adaptive Cards and Azure AI capabilities at the core, Synq's solution enables instant updates, task assignments and escalations all within a single, intuitive platform. Zebra's hardware puts these solutions directly into the hands of frontline workers, ensuring timely notifications, efficient task management and device security."





The impact of these solutions is already evident in real-world applications, with retailers reporting a 68 per cent reduction in picking times, between eight and 13 times more actionable data and a 15 per cent increase in sales, according to Zebra Technologies.

One of the largest general retailers in the world has leveraged the jointly developed solutions to transform its customer experience, with locked and oversized items on the shop floor. “Synq’s Frontline Hero is the front end that customers and associates interact with,” explains Wheeler. “This all sits on top of Microsoft Azure, and notifications are delivered to associates via Microsoft Teams on their Zebra handheld devices. The results have been amazing, with increased sales and significant labour savings.”

Fox adds: “Ultimately, the partnership between Synq, Zebra Technologies and Microsoft is not just about improving efficiency – it’s also about reshaping the frontline experience for employees and customers alike.

With the correct technology aiding daily tasks, retail workers can focus on what truly matters: delivering outstanding service that keeps customers coming back.”

There is also potential for these tools to extend into other industries, such as healthcare and hospitality.



“Our collaboration ensures that frontline employees have the technology they need to be effective in real time”

TIM FOX, ZEBRA TECHNOLOGIES

“We’re excited about the future,” says Fox. “By continuing to innovate together, we can bring these transformative solutions to new sectors, driving meaningful improvements in frontline operations across various industries.” ■

Managing the sales transformation surge



BRENDA CONNELL: AVALARA

Avalara for Dynamics 365 Commerce provides key capabilities for retailers as they look to reshape their strategies in a changing retail landscape

Sales models have undergone considerable change in recent times, with the increasing customer demands being addressed by the adoption of digital transformation tools. That's especially true in the retail sector, which, according to National Retail Federation research, is the USA's largest private sector employer, contributing more than \$5 trillion to annual GDP and supporting more than one in four US jobs.

The changing retail landscape, spurred by these customer demands, is pushing businesses to reshape their strategies to respond. Generative AI and machine learning technologies are helping retailers discover and cater to consumer preferences. According to NielsenIQ's *Guide to 2025* report, 40 per cent of consumers would accept a product recommendation from an AI assistant.

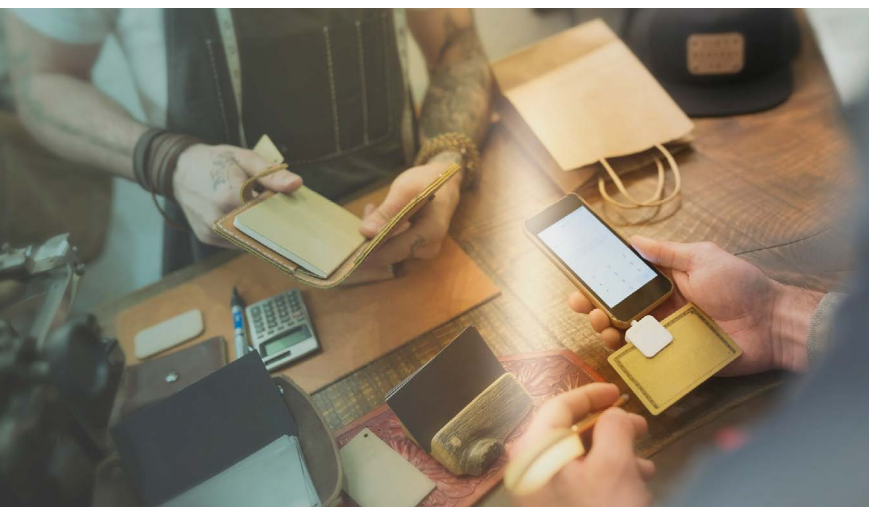
Figuring out how to rise above the competition and meet these customer demands with digital transformation is a top priority for retailers in 2025. As always, navigating complex sales and use tax requirements will be another. The right tools can help retailers succeed in both areas – and help keep consumers happy.

Improving the customer experience is as important as the challenge of getting sales and use tax right. Tax compliance is one of the biggest challenges facing retailers, as keeping up with the multitude of rate, rule and policy changes presents a monumental task. In addition, changing economic nexus and marketplace laws, the explosion of sales tax holidays, and new measures like retail delivery fees are all complicating the compliance landscape in the retail industry.

Solutions like Avalara for Microsoft Dynamics 365 Commerce connect with existing business systems and help to offload the complexity of end-to-end tax compliance for global retailers. As businesses embrace Dynamics 365 Commerce to help streamline digital commerce and amplify omnichannel retail engagement, the Avalara connector ensures businesses can calculate rates, prepare returns, manage exemption certificates and more, right from their Dynamics 365 Commerce account.

Businesses can find Avalara AvaTax on AppSource to learn more about its full suite of Microsoft integrations. ■

Brenda Connell is strategic partner director for Microsoft at Avalara





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.

Please visit www.technologyrecord.com for a comprehensive partner directory and the latest news and views from hundreds of Microsoft partners across all business sectors.



Atech and Iomart

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Atech and Iomart have joined forces to deliver secure, high-performance cloud and managed services, combining Iomart's industry-leading infrastructure with Atech's deep Microsoft expertise.

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Armor Defense

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Armor is a global leader in managed detection and response, and compliant cloud solutions. Armor is a trusted partner to more than 1,500 organisations in over 40 countries. With a team of industry-leading experts, Armor leverages Microsoft technologies to safeguard your assets, eliminate redundant tools, and build resiliency.

Our Nexus portal lets organisations view every action taken to neutralise threats, allowing you to focus on your business. We take your protection personally. Our founder started Armor in 2009, after a customer of his previous company was hacked. It wasn't just business – it was personal. For us, cybersecurity is personal.



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.



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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.



Coretek

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Coretek is a leading Microsoft AI Cloud Provider, renowned for solving complex business challenges through high-performance consulting, managed services, security and AI-driven innovation.

We know the race to leverage AI is here, and those that are able to adapt will out-innovate their competition and broaden their competitive edge. However, those that are slow to act are burdened with higher costs and slipping relevance and will find it harder than ever to catch up. We believe that choosing the right partner and building a well-defined AI plan that includes security, a solid data foundation and agile cloud infrastructure is a critical priority. Coretek and Microsoft are the right partners. Together, we'll help you reduce risks, accelerate adoption and drive innovation.



Hexagon

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Hexagon is the global leader in digital reality solutions that combine 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.

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Huntress

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Huntress is a fully managed cybersecurity platform built to protect Microsoft 365 environments in organisations of all sizes. Our enterprise-grade EDR, ITDR, SIEM and SAT solutions are never separated from our 24/7 human-led security operations centre, so organisations that fall below the Fortune 1000 are protected from high-profile cybersecurity threats with nearly zero effort on their part, and at a price that makes sense.



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.



Lighthouse

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For more than 25 years, Lighthouse has provided global security and compliance advisory solutions that combine decades of industry experience and best practices with technology-driven approaches to help organisations to confidently achieve scalable, practical success.

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LSEG is headquartered in the UK, with significant operations in over 60 countries across EMEA, North America, Latin America and Asia Pacific. We employ 25,000 people globally, more than half of whom are located in Asia Pacific.



Melissa

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With AI-enabled contact data quality tools, Melissa is advancing the narrative on address data intelligence to slash costs, boost engagement and skyrocket revenue. We validate billions of addresses, phone numbers and email addresses daily and our 40 years of deep domain expertise spans software, reference data and data services. Our APIs and integrations for Microsoft Azure, Dynamics 365 and Office 365 help thousands of Microsoft professionals synthesise holistic insights and analysis, grow business and strengthen customer relationships.



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. Via 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.



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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, venues and events, cinema, government, healthcare and transportation, Q-SYS redefines what is possible for live and virtual experiences by uniting hardware and software partners, developers, and creators. Q-SYS is part of Acuity Intelligent Spaces, a business segment of Acuity Brands.



Shure

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For 100 years Shure has been making people sound extraordinary and has excelled with a wide range of modern audio solutions for all professional environments. For conferencing spaces, Shure offers products that guarantee superior audio clarity, confidentiality, ease of use, straightforward installation and seamless integration with leading audiovisual (AV) and video conferencing platforms and AI productivity tools. Shure's focus on collaboration, reliability, advanced technology and enhanced security has made it a trusted partner for IT and AV professionals, driving high-quality, efficient communication and collaboration for business, corporate and educational organisations.



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.



Yubico

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The YubiKey from Yubico is a hardware security key supporting smart card (Personal Identity Verification) and Fast Identity Online that delivers an optimised user experience with phishing-resistant multi-factor authentication and passwordless authentication at scale across Microsoft environments. The YubiKey is currently the only external device that supports certificate-based authentication on Android and iOS, and is the only Federal Information Processing Standards-certified phishing-resistant solution available for Microsoft Entra ID on mobile. In addition to being compatible with Microsoft solutions such as Azure, Microsoft 365 and Surface Pro for Business, the YubiKey integrates with more than 1,000 applications, services, platforms and devices to ensure users are protected across every digital touchpoint.



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.



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The industrial AI battleground



COLIN MASSON: ARC ADVISORY GROUP

'AI Wars' will be prominent in the manufacturing space this year as companies strive to overcome industry challenges

Several key battlefronts are emerging as companies strive to establish dominance in the industrial AI space, including the realm of edge AI hardware and software. The demand for real-time data processing and analysis in harsh industrial environments is driving investment in hardware edge devices with local inferencing capabilities. These edge solutions – which range from intelligent automation systems to robotics, drones and other forms of physical intelligence – are increasingly critical for a wide range of industrial applications, including quality control, safety and predictive maintenance.

Another major battleground is in cloud AI, where cloud hyperscalers are vying to monetise their massive data centre investments through ever more valuable industrial partner ecosystems. These companies are rapidly expanding their AI

infrastructures and developing new tools and services to support the modernisation of virtually all software applications.

The multi-agent orchestration of autonomous AI agents is taking industrial copilots and assistants to new levels of functionality and integration with core business processes. For example, Siemens is developing a generative AI-powered assistant for industrial engineering called the Siemens Industrial Copilot. Microsoft is incorporating fine-tuned small language models into in-vehicle digital assistants. It is also partnering with companies like Rockwell Automation to provide industry-specific AI models, such as the FT Optix Food & Beverage model, to frontline workers. And Sight Machine is releasing the Factory Namespace Manager, which helps manufacturers integrate plant floor data with corporate systems for end-to-end optimisation. These initiatives point towards a future where AI is seamlessly integrated into existing workflows, making it easier for industrial organisations to leverage the power of the technology.

To achieve this, manufacturers need to shop for industrial AI talent. The demand for skilled data scientists with experience in industrial settings will continue to grow in the years to come. Companies that can attract and retain these individuals will be well-positioned to lead the next wave of innovation and transformation in the industrial sector. ■

Colin Masson is director of research at ARC Advisory Group



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