



# CLOUD REALITIES

## CRLIVE 14

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[00:00:00] So here it is. He's, he's Rob and I, with three amazing guests live on stage in Edinburgh from earlier in September, that's four amazing guests, Dave. No, let's stick with three.

Welcome to Cloud Realities, a conversation show exploring the practical and exciting alternate realities that can be unleashed through cloud driven transformation. I'm David Chapman. I'm Sjoukje Zaal, and I'm Rob Kernahan.

And Sjoukje, while you were away moving house over the summer, Rob and I were lucky enough to do a live show in Edinburgh, right Rob?

Moonlighting on the podcast. Yeah. Yeah. That was good. It was a good show. It was probably [00:01:00] the biggest live that we've done in terms of, you know, full on stage, with some, you know, visuals behind us and some nice music and things like that. So it was great and we were lucky enough to have some amazing guests that Rob will cover in a second.

And the general gist of what we were talking about was applied AI. Of course. Yeah, exactly. It is the subject of the moment, and we talked about it with a company called Sage, Sage of the market leader for integrated accounting, payroll and payment systems, supporting the ambition of the world's entrepreneurs and Sage have been working with AI for quite some time now.

So we were lucky enough to have one of their chief data scientists on with us talking about what they're doing. And we had some additional guests who joined us who were speakers elsewhere in the conference, and they brought their different perspectives. So, Rob, who did we have [00:02:00] with us? A diverse set, like you said.

We have, Ahmed Salin, who's a principal data scientist from SAGE. We had, Fiona Sweeney from Women in Data. We had Theo Priestley, who's been on the podcast before, who's a futurist. And we had Robert Engels, who is a gen AI magician. And, it was a really good conversation. And I think a few of the key things for me that came out was sort of like the new accessibility to AI, the human interface to it, sort of rise of what ChatGPT fuels the revolution.

, The need for confluent technology to bring it all together as good points there, around the, how do we integrate it all to make true value and not think in technology silos. And let's not forget another opportunity for you to use the word confluent. Indeed, yeah. Well, this is where it came from.

So I did actually pinch it from Theo. So thank you, Theo. I'm overusing the phrase in many conversations that I have, we've brought up the data bias in AI, from, with Fiona about making sure you have diverse teams [00:03:00] managing data so you don't get positive reinforcement on that. And then there's a wider point there about we were already, you know, , Sorry, there's an edit point there.

That's , for you to say, Rob. Yeah, yeah, indeed. But there's a whole thing about we're already consoled by, digital transformation and that's hard enough already for, for a lot of us. And then we throw in a bit of AI just for fun over the top of it to say, everybody's got to do this because it can transform your business and can the human system with all that is going on.

So a good conversation, from the guests. So would you like to hear the conversation, Sheldon? Yes, of course. Well, so here we are. So he's Rob and I with four amazing guests on stage in Edinburgh from earlier this month.

Great to see you, [00:04:00] Ahmed, do you wanna say a little bit about yourself and just introduce who you are? So, I'm Ahmad Salin. I'm a principal data scientist at Siegel. And, if



you're not from the UK, Sage is, the market leader in business management, software. So we, we have accounting, payroll, HR HCM products and payment systems.

We operate in 20 over 20 countries, and we have a little bit over 11, 000 colleagues worldwide. And in terms of like the market just to put in perspective, so around 40 over 43 percent of UK businesses. Pay their colleagues through Sage AdMob. And at the moment, you guys are engaging in the beginning of a fairly substantial transformation.

Yes, absolutely. So before we get into, like the AI embedding, maybe just say a word about what you guys are trying to do and what kind of experiences you're trying to create. So just like we're trying to enhance like the Sage experience, through the Sage network. It's, [00:05:00] it's our, our product right now.

It's a platform that connects, Sage, customers. To their customers and to their vendors, so trying to unify that experience and, and, and make it, make it solid and like good experience. So the, if, let's say, let's say that you want to interact, as a customer with your customers and vendors and on board them, you're not in isolation.

If they are already in the network, that makes it easier in terms of like communication and interaction, moving, moving on. Very good. So in terms of the experience then, so I'm a, I'm a, I'm a mechanic or I'm a hairdresser and I'm using search software to try and interact in a way that I don't want to go on, you know, I'm not a bookkeeper, I'm not an accountant.

I don't want to go on and actually have to think about, how I do that. How, how you embed it, what do you just take us through your process of, of, of how you're using experience design. And AI to help me as one of your customers. Yeah, absolutely. So we, we have been investing in, [00:06:00] , in AI for several years now.

So it's, it's not new to us. So we released our first, AI powered chatbot. It wasn't generative, AI in the sense that was back in 2016, and then we developed, like, more solutions that we integrate with, with our products. So what, what Sage is trying to do is that... Business owner, for example, like run account and the they were multiple hands like during the day doing multiple tasks, the jping from task to task bookkeeping, like doing like vast submissions, bank reconciliation, and that really drains their time.

And we are trying to use AI to automate that, but also like provide them a capacity that they can add to their teams, saving, saving time so they can focus on more of the high value strategic Thank you, strategic aspects of their businesses that you don't have basically the time, the time to do.

And, Capgemini did some work with you on open AI recently. You just want to give us a quick little smary of what that was and how that fit [00:07:00] into your overall portfolio. So our, , it's like the, the perspective that we have, as I said, like was a sage network, that we are trying, trying to do.

And, it was, generative AI products that we are, we're trying like to embed, we have our own, we have experts, AI experts in more than seven countries around the world and all their focus is to look at customer needs is just relating to what Theo talked about. It's not, it's not just like finding use case and then just doing, doing it, but really looking at the pain points, like the customer needs.

And we find something that. It's worth doing by E. I. N. S. Even more secure way in an ethical way than the team start developing, developing and deploying it to our customers on that kind of like partnerships. Like in the ecosystem of the businesses also helps like us connecting to the outside world and [00:08:00] understanding it.



And as you were going on that journey, interestingly, as you've developed your experience and more mastery around AI, was there something you reflect on as you look back and you think, well, I wish I did that a bit better? Or the learning cycle, that continuous loop of you tried something, you tried something different, you tried something different and then you got success.

What was the big thing that you maybe thought, Oh, if only I knew before I started. So I think, I think just like looking at the generative AI, this is an amazing example. So we, we started talking about generative AI quite some time ago, but we didn't really, capture like the, how it is transformative and the delivery of the technology, not the technology itself.

So when you look at GBT models, they have been around for quite some time. We have seen them, we have experimented with them for quite some time. But then, when it came to trans GBT and just putting that interface and having that, kind of, delivering the technology to customers in a new way, that's [00:09:00] something that we saw, like, from the market and then we started doing.

So if you go back in time and say, Oh, actually we can realize that earlier than what we have already, like. We have released some generative AI, solutions and we working on a digital assistant that we are very excited to be releasing to the market and then, going to be embedded with an Excel. So we're working hard on that now.

It's very huge. And I think that was the huge leap of interaction for the han with the AI model, wasn't it? It made it very accessible to the masses. And that was a big reason why there was such a, you know, a lot of hype about it. Absolutely. And I give you an example, like, is one of the things like talking about the agents, like It cannot be in, in isolation of other machine learning, solutions as well.

So one, one product that we released, a few years ago is called GL Outlier Detection. And, currently it reviews 15 million transactions per week. And it's, helping customers like detecting errors and correcting them before [00:10:00] posting to the general ledger. And this is traditional machine learning from the sense that it's not, it's non generative and building cash flow forecasting model also traditional.

But then when you look at generative models and then you rely on those and detecting the outliers and doing cash, it's not good at this. It's not meant to be for this, but it can deliver what the agent can do, like in, in terms of like GL outlier detection, cash flow forecasting. So you can ask it. Can you predict like the cash balances in the next three months for me and it would be able to do that for you?

So so when you when you look at that That increased acceleration that we talked about, that Theo talked about, that Rob just outlined as well. What does it feel like as an organization to be in that race? So you're in a race against your competitors who are also probably looking at similar things. Is it, is it a pure acceleration?

Are you looking at functionality and differentiation? It's functionality and differentiation and one element that we are focusing [00:11:00] on, it's, it's actually bits of both, but the element that, we have a maxim, like a seeing at each that. We should, match our investment in automation and technology was an equivalent amount of investment in trust.

And that, that creates workloads, huge workload that we do, but it's very important. So it might slow us down just to make sure that what we deliver responsible AI. So what we deliver to the customers, it's not hallucinating is not, is not doing something that is not supposed. Supposed to do and that differentiate the products at the end and then like get us



like in the competition in a very well positioned.

So I suppose to bring Theo in we see a lot of people get into grips with you had the digital transformation the confluent technology at the bottom and a lot of people are struggling cognitive overload, etc. And then we've just lped AI on top, and we need mastery [00:12:00] everywhere to make it work for the business.

Can we cope as, can the han system keep up, or do we, will we need AI to do all the work for us? Seek your view on that, I think it's, I think it's, it's very dependent, on, on what type of organization you are, I think, and, and the expertise that's within. One of the things that I see an awful lot is there's not a good understanding of the.

Of the skills of the organization to cope with the rate of change, people just don't understand that they do change. To the organization without understanding the landscape of the people in the organization to cope with that, that amount of change at one time, and, and it's really important to take stock of the skills, experiences, the will and the drive that every, every individual han has in the organization to, to, to enact and enable that change.

And it's, you know, I mentioned the han in the loop, which is a very sort of defense based term, but it's very, very, [00:13:00], important to stress that. A han has to be in the loop all the way through, no matter what you're doing. And there's, I suppose, there's huge cultural inertia to some of these things as well.

So very process focused, business focused, IT's kept in the corner type organizations. They've got a lot of work to do to catch up, I feel like. There's a, there's a big change that has to happen. And do you think technology will help, or do you think it's just a, it's a slowly get going, get the flywheel moving?

Eventually, things will happen. I think technology is just one part, you know, you talk about process and keeping it arms length, you know, again, it's a, you know, you talk about one cap Gemini and things like that. It's a very collaborative engagement. That's the thing, when you're doing transformation of any type, whether it's accelerated or whether it's the business of digital, you cannot exclude it.

Yeah. Different areas of the business from, from this and then involve them when it just suits you, they have to be there right from the start. So everything together as one [00:14:00] fusion of, everyone. Well, it has to be. Yeah. Yeah. Just to give a microcosmic example of the use of AI as a, as an assistant, we actually use AI three or four times in the supply chain of just creating an episode of our show.

So we, we use AI at the beginning as part of the research, that we do this, that we then use as a jping off point. in the pre meet with every guest that we do before we do a show, we record on a, on a, cloud platform called Zencastr. Zencastr then uses AI to both auto create transcripts and we can then use, use AI to go from that transcript to a written blog that's consable.

You know, you know, relatively few hundred words, the transcripts of the shows are like 12 pages long. We can turn that into a 500 word blog directly from the transcripts. And then in the, in the technical production of the, of the show, when we do something live and there's a lot of background noise, our, our sound editor uses, uses AI tooling to be able to separate our voices from the, from the background.

So even in just a [00:15:00] tiny. Little thing like this, we're using AI four or five times now. That is taking hours out of work that goes into produce something like this. So we spend about an hour a week on producing a show that goes out every single week, tiny example of



just how powerful it can be, but also just how dangerous.

Because if that... data that we used for some of those questions was biased, then we're going to come off not looking great, let's say. So I want to talk directly about bias in data. So, so Fiona, give us a perspective that what, what are women in data doing? Looking at trying to ensure that the data sets of the past, which undoubtedly have bias built in.

Do not become the future of hantavirus. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, this is this is a key conversation that we need to have. So I'm a, analyst by profession, that makes us pragmatists by nature. It also ensures that what we're really trying to do is simplify stuff. [00:16:00] And this is very much around how do we leverage the value?

And it's the value that's in AI in terms of actually making a difference to individuals, organizations, and society. Now, at the moment, we know that the AI that we're using at the moment, the models and particularly generative AI, as both Theo and Rob said today, has been trained on data that is aged, that has biases in it.

So I think what we really need to do from now on is first of all, recognize those biases and understand that they exist. We can't change history. We can't. We have to live with where we are right now, but it's so important that when we're using the data that we have, we know that those biases exist. We need to bring more diversity into the conversations.

So when we're looking at those images, like Rob showed us with the hamster with the tail or the, the, the scene, which I loved, where you had a knight overlooking, sort of, I don't know where that was, but it was definitely [00:17:00] processed pastoral land, that there is a han, that there is a diverse set of people who are using.

And I think we also mentioned earlier on today, the context, which is so important in terms of the interpretation, the synthesizing of the ideas, and the work. So we bring the han back into the end conversation. We see AI as a hugely powerful tool to help us within women in data to drive towards our goal as well.

So we're very much hoping that as time goes on, that we can get the representation in the room from all diverse angles. So that it is the value that we can leverage out of the tools that we have. And that's a real agenda, right? Because at the moment, from some of the data you shared with us this morning.

We're not in the right place with that at the moment. We're not in the right place with that. And, you know, this morning I said that we have gone backwards. But that's not a reason not to continue. And hopefully the conversations that we're having around this room [00:18:00] and in the wider room today really is a time for us to galvanize behind the, the sort of, interregnum that we had caused by the, pandemic and the changes there.

But that we can really go on that sort of fast acceleration and that the technology is bringing us on or why not bring everybody along on that journey, too. So so if you think about that, we've heard one story from sage. We've heard some complexities removing bias, etc. Can we cope but we also to Robert I'm an organization.

I know I have to do something. Where do I start? Where should I be looking first? Where should I take that first step into my AI journey with all the other stuff going on behind me? Yeah, we're in the middle of that, aren't we? I mean, this is what we're doing for the last five, six months. Yeah. Yeah. So really, I mean, the first thing you will do is just like being flabbergasted.

And this is going to solve everything, you know, like we did in 2007. It is our savior, yeah. Yeah, the cat recognition by Google, the deep learning in 2007, 2008. It was solving the whole



world. It was going to solve our [00:19:00] problems. So you have that wave. Now, I hope we're through that one now. So now we can actually sit down.

We have heard context. Theo says context is very important. You can get it with his large language models. They are good on context. What I tried to show in my presentation is that it is not very good in recognizing the right context every time. That's where we need to start to make sure that we actually can solve this kind of issues with our customers.

But we should not be doing nothing is not an option. I mean, this technology is that will not disappear. It is a very good interface between mankind and the digital world. I, I compare it with the, the transition from the command line to graphical user interfaces with mice for like 30 years ago, that all of a sudden democratized computers.

I mean, before that command line excluded a lot of people, all of a sudden these people came in there. Now we get the next step. So we have all of a sudden got a natural language interface. Honestly, here, I think I'm the only one that is truly [00:20:00] trilingual. I mean, this technology is extremely good in really understanding people that are not native speakers as well.

So it really opens up digital systems and tasks and task solvers for this kind of people that we get more and more in the world. So we are traveling more, we are working together, we're digitally working together. What we have to do, this is the facade, this is the first, the front line. It looks very good, I've shown a lot of examples, visual examples, sound examples, text examples.

But there is a lot of things to be solved on the, on the back end. I mean, there's many topics that are not solved yet. We can solve them, we see paths, but these pathways have to be followed. And that is what we have to do. At the same time, when we're going to our customers and try to transform the business together with them.

So I heard a lot of good points. I mean, we need all the people of an organization to be on boarded, which is difficult in itself. We need management completely to be committed to [00:21:00] this kind of changes and really accept that AI. It's something that we need to bring maybe even to the boardrooms and discuss it.

Honestly, I like the point you make about helping to connect people across boundaries, break the boundaries down and bring it all together. Because that's going to be a great start, isn't it? Make it easy to connect. It's not an easy thing to do. No, but what I used to say, I mean. In my life, this AI life, I showed that meme, my AI experience is all about bringing data to AI models, the AI models to a, to a kind of a scaling with the customer.

It was always very technical and now all of a sudden we got this and we have heard that in all these presentations and all these questions, we have this personal aspect, we have the individual aspect, the sociological aspect and the political and the geopolitical aspect that we never bothered about when we talked about AI.

All of a sudden it comes into play. Yeah, no, absolutely. I think my big takeaways are that, you know, the race is on. This stuff isn't, isn't just for, isn't just for personal use. Though it's [00:22:00] extremely useful for that too. But actually, we are, we're off and running with this, but, but critical thought and human engagement has never been more important in terms of, in terms of not only, using this technology and understanding what you're seeing back.

But when implementing this technology, it needs to be done correctly and responsibly, we end every episode of the podcast by asking our guests what they're excited about doing next. And that could be. They're looking forward to a good restaurant booking they've got at





the weekend, or it could be they're looking forward to something in their professional life.

So very briefly, because we've hit the red zone. We're in the red zone now. Fiona, what are you excited about doing next? I'm excited to visit Zurich next week to see my son who's just moved there for his work, it'll be the first time that I've been to Zurich and I just can't wait. Enjoy. Theo? I'm excited to go home and play more Starfield.

Interesting notes, isn't it? I may be joining you. Let's continue practicing on my guitar, [00:23:00] like, pick up, like, ... Good, man. If we had more time, I'd ask you to play something, but we haven't. I'll join you. Robert. Yeah, so I'm excited to go home and see my wife listening to a podcast on AI after 24 years of marriage.

She'll be delighted!

Sjoukje, over to you.

So a huge thanks to our guests this week, Ahmed, Fiona, Theo, and Robert. Thank you so much for being on the show. Thanks also to our sound and editing wizards, Ben and Louis, our snorkeling producer, Marcel, and of course, to all of our listeners. We're on LinkedIn and X, Dave Chapman, Rob Kernahan, and Sjoukje Zaal.

Feel free to follow or connect with us and please get in touch if you have comments or ideas for the show. And of course, if you haven't already [00:24:00] done that, rate and subscribe to our podcast. See you in another reality next week.

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