EP. 54: PRODUCTIVITY TO CREATIVITY, THE REAL VALUE OF GEN AI PT.1

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] May Habib If you get adoption right, then productivity should be a no brainer at some pretty impressive numbers.

[00:00:14] Teresa Tung Hi. Welcome to another AI Leaders podcast. My name is Teresa Tung. I'm Accenture's chief technologist for Cloud Data and AI, where, like many of you, I'm looking at what Generative AI means for our business and for that of our clients. I'll be your host for this session where we are going to share one of Accenture's case studies where we're applying Generative AI in our marketing and communications. We're going to use our case study to explore two key questions in two parts. So one is, is the value real? And two, can we trust it? So, this is part one: is the value real? First, I'm thrilled to be joined by May Habib. She's the amazing CEO of Writer. May she's a pioneering leader in the space of Generative AI. I've learned so much from her about what it means to deploy generative AI enterprises in at scale. So, May, could you tell us a little bit more about what Writer does?

[00:01:10] May Habib Yeah, Hi, Teresa. So happy to be here. I love the Accenture team, the Accenture approach and what you personally have brought to the field, not just this year but for a decade plus. Your clients are really lucky to have you. Well, Writer, starting from the top, is large language models, plus all of the stuff you need to build really useful things fast. And what that means in the enterprise is three essential components on top of the large language model. And this is what we call our full stack generative AI platform. The first is our rag solution. If you have been building solutions in generative AI, you know that you need to augment your large language model with your own data, it could be structured, it could be unstructured. But the large language model isn't necessarily trained on stuff that your business only knows. And so, you got to connect it. And it can be really cumbersome to use third party tools on top of a large language model to do that. And so, Writer packages that up real nicely. The second piece we call AI Guardrails, and it's a set of pre-built components for brands, for compliance, for editorial, for accuracy that makes sure that the way that AI is used in your company complies with all of the fit rules that you want to put around it.

So that's Writer in a nutshell. We've been doing this for four years. My co-founder and I and some of our core team members have been working together for almost ten, starting in the machine translation and machine learning space.

[00:02:57] Teresa Tung So now let's welcome Marc Appel. You play a pioneering role in shaping how Accenture applies generative AI and marketing and comms. Can you share how we're applying Gen AI and how we're using Writer?

[00:03:08] Marc Appel Yeah, know, I think... Thanks for having me on the show, of course, first timer. You know, there's a lot that we're starting to do now and have been doing for the last probably 6 to 8 months. But I wanted to start first maybe with the strategy that we employed before we jumped in, because I think everybody is extremely excited to try things, which we're definitely finding in a lot of pockets at a company like Accenture. We have so many people, they all collide on this and so we just start with some central thoughts before we found that there was just too much going on that we couldn't really manage. So, I think, you know, just to dive in, it's pretty straightforward. But our central priority was really how do we make our people the focal point of this in every sense of the word, right? So, as we think about the impact that the platform, that all these platforms, generative platforms can have, there's obvious impacts that that could be made, right? Value, efficiency, productivity, all these things. So, we wanted to say how can we enable that with our people, right? And so, we came up with essentially a four-pronged strategy, right?

So how can we make our people more so that they can impact more? And the way we're going to make our people more is through making them more strategic, making them more creative, making them more productive and making them more excited. And with those four pillars, we expect the outcomes that we hope for, which is obviously time saved, efficiency, better brand experiences for our audiences, thinking about how that can lead down the pipe of influencing revenue and all of the things that we want for the business overall. But it starts with our people, so that that's the general strategy. And then in terms of how we're bringing it forward, we have a group of companies that we're working with and Writer for sure is the one that we've scaled the largest within marketing communications, not just in the content space, but also as we start to think about the other types of use cases that are analytical or insights driven. So, it's been really an exciting ride. We've got about 700 people with licenses at this point, which is about half, less than half of our marketing communications team. And we've been with Writer as a platform. We actually started with Writer using their style governance platform and really focusing on how we can make our messaging more consistent. And as the craze Gen AI happened, then we started to turn on some of those others. May was actually begging me to take a look at the platform when all the news came out. And I said, I, I can barely keep my head above water like you're way ahead of me on this. So, you know, with her prodding and others, you know, and then obviously ChatGPT blowing up and everything, we started to dig in and it started, to be fair, as I said, make our people more strategic, creative, productive and excited. It started with productive, right? Everybody starts.

That's the first thing. And, you know, hey, I'm making X amount of blog posts every year. How can I make them faster and make my life easier? I have hundreds of case studies I need to write because we have to credentials ourselves in the space, right? How do I do that faster, more efficiently? And so, it started there. But one thing that was really interesting as we started to introduce Writer and get people more understanding of what that the capability can enable. A couple of examples, if you don't mind me jumping in. As you can tell, I'm excited about it. So, you know, one of the things we have, we've got we produce a lot of stuff, right? And in a lot of cases, that's great. But we've been on a mission for more quality, less quantity. And, you know, one of the things that the capability of Gen AI enables is it actually what we're finding is it's helping us make less, if you can believe it. So as an example, we sent out 745 million emails to our people last year.

[00:07:33] Teresa Tung Wow.

[00:07:34] Marc Appel That is a lot of email per person.

[00:07:36] Teresa Tung Yes.

[00:07:37] Marc Appel And as you can imagine, not all of them get read or clicked on or deeper content concerns. And so, if we had just gone down the more productive route, we would have said, Great, let's make 745 million emails faster. And oh, by the way, we can probably add some more because we can do more. Instead, because of the capability, we took a step back and said, you know what? We can do this differently. Let's get more strategic about it.

And we instead built essentially what's called Good Morning Accenture, which is a personalized newsletter that we now only send to people, I think it's three times a week and it's a personalized content vehicle that we only give the right blurbs within it to the right person in three categories of content. And that has dramatically changed our internal comms effectiveness. And so, as we think about Gen AI and the new capability now, it's made us more strategic, right? And the impact of that is far greater. The retention or education people are actually consuming the content that we need them to consume. And some of that stuff's important. It's, you know, financial stuff, its operations, it's InfoSec, it's all kinds of stuff that are like day-to-day stuff that people need to do. Yeah.

[00:08:53] Teresa Tung I love that, Mark. It is very much you're taking a human perspective first in everything. I get those Good Morning Accenture emails and it's good to know that that's really hyper personalized to me and it would be impossible to do it across our 700,000 plus employee base. And it sounds like that ability of using, you know, one of the capabilities maybe you mentioned with Writer, right, was being able to bring in our own first party data, right? It's not just Gen AI by itself, but it's bringing in that first party data, having that AI guardrails so that we're doing it in still a secure way - like all of that is coming together. So, I guess still continuing with Mark, right, at the end, you started talking about one way we could have gone down this path is measuring just pure productivity.

So, where more is more. More people, more emails. And I think at the end you were talking about that that wasn't really the case. So, can you talk us through the decision-making process in finding this right use case? And how are we measuring value? What was the value that we were able to measure to make the case for things like Writer in our strategy?

[00:10:05] Marc Appel Yeah, I mean, it was maybe a little bit different for us in that we were already a customer of Writer, but we still, you know, to upgrade to the scale that we're at had to make a business case. And so, you know, we had the bones of this strategy in place, right? And we basically picked off about five or six priority use cases across all of Marketing and Communications and just focused in on those set of things and said, okay, on the productivity level, what could we do? Right? How would that be something that would improve? And are there ways that we can self-fund the platform as a result of this new capability that we would have, right? So, we looked at different, you know, areas of budget that we said, okay, you know, hey, if we had this new capability, then we could do the work differently. We could in-house this. We could potentially engage the process of work in a different way, right? And so that would cover this. In another use case that we had, you know, we thought about personalization and what the impact to our reputation and our relationships could be. And we extrapolated what that potential could be for influencing revenue. And so, we looked at a mix of different things, again, not just the productivity. I think that's the obvious one, and that's an easy one to make a business case for everybody. As soon as they use it, they go, oh yeah, this is easier. I get it. This is going to save me a lot of time.

Right? So, it's how do you then equate that to financial impact in some way, whether it's, hey, I don't need as many contractors. It's not that we look to eliminate people. We still need to take that now in-house, and our people now become editors, right? That they're doing stuff instead of outsourcing that work, they're able to do it themselves, right? And then for the influencing revenue component of it, how can they look at the way that they produce what they're making in different ways. So, for servicing clients, being able to tap into a database of things that we know about the client and then serving up a more comprehensive view of their relationship and things that we recommend makes those initial emails, those outreach decks that much more powerful. So, there's a lot of good without spilling the secret sauce business case, you know, work that we did to sort of really connect the dots between productivity and our why.

[00:12:38] Teresa Tung I'm so glad at Accenture that we're thinking beyond productivity. Like you said that's the low hanging fruit. But beyond that it's the impact to revenue, right? It's the increased engagement in your work force. So really happy that we're doing that. May, can you share some additional examples that demonstrate impact in ROI.

[00:12:59] May Habib Yeah, totally. So, productivity, I agree is the low hanging fruit. But it is a big juicy fruit. You know, like just because it's easy to grab off the tree doesn't mean it's not like a big, juicy pomegranate.

[00:13:15] Teresa Tung You got to eat it, right?

[00:13:17] May Habib Yeah. And you know, what we are seeing is about a day a week when teams are really enabled. You know, I'm talking about Marc and his power users at M&C inside of Accenture. Mark, you're probably seeing, you know, 7 to 10 hours a week, right, of like time saves. Is that kind of what... This is what our power users see. I'm curious.

[00:13:43] Marc Appel Yeah. I mean, some of the use cases, you know, we're seeing 30 to 40%, others even higher like 60, 70. It really just depends on what type of activity it is. But yes.

[00:13:55] May Habib the person is then...Yep, exactly. And so that is... If you're getting adoption right and not everybody does, by the way, lots of people... Like AI is a graveyard for tools that don't get adopted. Truly, I think we can say that word. If you get adoption right, then productivity should be a no brainer at some pretty impressive numbers. I love thinking about growth. Time to market and team morale as actually three other buckets and on the last one. Mark touched on it a little bit like the team being more excited and maybe we start there. When the table stakes stuff that may not be the most exciting for our team to do when those tasks and workflows get reinvented AI first and it frees up folks' energy to dream a bit more, be inspired a bit more, be more creative, it really opens up a ton of white space for a team. So, I would say, you know before and after surveys, hand raisers, just like kind of surveying the morale, looking at engagement scores. I think we're going to start to see... It's early. I haven't seen it anywhere, but I think in 24 we're going to see a lot more people thinking about AI enablement and AI tooling as a way to attract, motivate and keep the very best people because of the impact it has on just the quality of life at work. That's kind of one category.

You know, in addition to productivity, being able to look at growth acceleration, business outcomes are definitely something that we help folks do and we want people to collect those positive business outcomes. So, you know, being able to have higher engagement rates on your emails, for example Mark, right? Like right now productivity is going to be about and measured for like the success of that program in terms of how long it takes to produce that content. But guess what? If Teresa is getting much more personalized content, she's that much more likely to respond to an email. She's that much more likely to recommend somebody come work at Accenture, right? There's a big growth set of metrics that you could measure on the back of the content being more, more personalized. And so, in that bucket of outcomes, we like to put in SEO outcomes, revenue outcomes, new product launches, right? Business model inventions due to AI. So, there's a lot of revenue and growth impact that's possible. Another bucket of positive business outcomes that we like to track is speed to market. And what's awesome about speed to market, and this is separate from growth and revenue because you want to ship things and need to ship things sometimes to learn whether it is going to have an impact on growth or revenue. There is such a motivating and accelerating impact to velocity that you get just simply by shipping. And we've really seen generative AI have a positive impact there. You learn faster, which means it gets recycled into the business sooner. It can impact revenue; you can decide whether to scale down or scale up a program based on early results. And it's everything from all of the insights that are possible with AI.

So, the use cases that Mark touched on, being able to analyze survey results faster, user sentiment faster, go through customer feedback faster to being able to ship content faster or product updates faster with AI. So, I do think those four buckets are really a good sampling. You know, productivity, revenue, growth, time to market and then team morale and excitement.

[00:18:22] Teresa Tung Thank you May. So, it sounds like that low hanging fruit of productivity, it's there, It's juicy. Everybody should grab that. That's table stakes and use that to, in some ways, get into using generative AI and then use that to think more creatively about the speed, the increased engagement and the growth potential. So, sounds like it's a win win. Thank you May. Thank you, Mark. Really learned a lot about the value being real. So, the productivity gains are real. And really pleased to learn at Accenture how it's making our workforce much more productive. But it looks like there is even more value to be obtained in the long run as we learn more about how to apply generative AI to create new growth, to create speed to market that enables rapid innovation with your users and with your customers. And then finally, to engage that workforce, right, to really spur that creativity and allow people to really focus on the meaningful work and less on the mundane. So please join us on our next episode, episode two about how can we trust generative AI using the same use case.