



EPISODE 3 - SALESFORCE

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Shiladitya: Hello everyone, welcome to Tech Careers In The New, the new podcast series presented by Accenture. I'm your host Shiladitya Mukhopadhyaya.

In this podcast series, we'll get you the latest and greatest in the world of technology that's shaping the future of business as we know it. We're talking intelligent platforms, cloud, AI, blockchain, extended reality and a whole lot more. Every fortnight on Wednesdays, we'll have for you a hot topic, with expert speakers from Accenture talking about top trends in the space, how these are changing the world and creating growth across industries, and more importantly, we'll tell you how you can learn more, build your skills and expertise to grow and stay relevant in your career.

Today we're here to talk about Salesforce, and of course, Salesforce is this iconic company, brand and platform, one of the very first Cloud, SASS providers in general, and I think an all-around success story which has spawned a generation of SASS and Cloud companies. The fact that it is such a diverse ecosystem of not just platform providers and services and so much automation in this space but also a very big employer of so many different kinds of people in this domain. And, of course, you also have to become a Salesforce professional if you want to dig deeper into this domain. So I think there's a lot to learn from our guest today, Sailaja Bhagavatula, who's going to be talking to us about Salesforce.

Hi Sailaja, welcome to the show, we are of course here to talk about Salesforce and the entire ecosystem around it. Before we get into the product and what it's all about, could you tell us a little about your role, and of course how you came to be in this position here at Accenture?

Sailaja: Sure Shiladitya, thanks for having me on this show. So, I have been with Accenture for the last 15 and a half years. I, in fact, joined when we were just setting up our technology centre in Bangalore. So one of the initial 500. But I did Oracle for the initial 10 years. So up until 2010-11, I was actually working in Oracle like ERP, which was in a pretty good growth phase at that point in time. But 2010-11 when we were expanding our Salesforce practice here in India, one of my bosses came and said, why don't you move into this area? And I was like, why would I move into this area, because in Oracle, ERP is doing very well and I'm fairly experienced in that area. But somewhere my gut told me that well, this probably a new area. It will give me an opportunity to learn a new technology as well as maybe it will hit off and once I have come into this area, there's absolutely no looking back. Today, we are a practice of 5,000 people just in India working on Salesforce. So, it's been an absolutely fantastic journey.

Shiladitya: Wow, in fact, it also looks back to the fact that Salesforce, when it started out, I think we know it today in a lot of ways as the fastest-growing SASS company in the world. They started out as a CRM but they have become so much more. When you mention Accenture as the largest partner for Salesforce, how does this extend to the rest of the ecosystem around this?

Sailaja: Absolutely, in fact, apart from our partnership with Salesforce themselves, we have a very strong partnership with some of the leading ecosystem players. And, to just call out some of the names, Viva, they have been a leader in the pharma segment because most of the pharma players actually implement Viva. All of the large transformational Viva implementations are done by us. Similarly, Velocity, they offer different industry solutions for industries like TELCO, insurance and health, and again, we are the largest and very strategic partner for Velocity. In fact, we have also invested in Velocity along with Salesforce. And then similarly we have strategic partnerships, the nCino which I was talking about and also Aptis which is a CPQ player, so it extends far into the ecosystem.



Shiladitya: And they have always been, they have grown so large and acquired such a large customer base working with partners such as Accenture and Accenture is actually the largest partner for them. So how is that practice been, since you have been involved since inception?

Sailaja: Yes, almost since inception. So the interesting thing again is that Accenture has partnered with them very closely but we have started very early on in the journey. I remember back in 2007, it was apparently when we did the first Salesforce project. Of course, I was not in the practice at that point in time, but I knew this that we apparently did the first project, which was a very small sales automation kind of a project. But somewhere we could spot that this is a very unique product and it's gonna transform the industry. So, we set out our relationship and partnership with them at that point. And then we've been with them through the journey. So essentially now, we are able to suggest to them how they can improvise their product portfolio and enhance some of their functionalities, and where we come in is also with our deep industry expertise as well as our domain experience, working across different industries, clients with various geographies and all of that. So we're able to suggest to them what works in one and how would it work in a different scenario. That's how they've been enhancing their product portfolio to a certain extent. So that partnership has been going very well. The other aspect is also about spotting exactly what are the areas where we need to be early partners with testing. So all their products, we are actually the beta partners. So before the product really comes on and there's a generally available product, we are the test-bed, we pilot with a few clients and then it goes into full-fledged releases.

Shiladitya: And, of course, you are able to, basically influencing their product road map in a lot of ways being the largest partner. What can you tell us about some interesting implementations which you've actually seen Accenture do, which are unique in the ways in which Salesforce as a product has evolved and the customers have used it?

Sailaja: So again, as part of our last 12-13 years journey, I think we have done some very large, complex, global implementations and many of them, in fact, are transformational in nature. And that's how Salesforce wants to partner with us.

They do not want to partner with us just for a core Salesforce implementation but when the client is looking for a large-scale transformation initiative, that's typically where they would suggest Accenture as the go-to partner. Few examples that I can think of are, one is this large electronic equipment manufacturer in the European region.

They embarked on the Salesforce journey actually at a very early stage. Again this was probably around the 2009-10 time frame. They rolled out a single integrated CRM platform globally. It was for about 26,000 users. More recent examples I can think of are something in the banking industry. So for some of our leading banks in North America, we are actually doing commercial lending transformation, so how their loan origination and all of the lending systems work, that's what we are transforming. Again with the combination of Salesforce and Ncino, which is one of their app exchange products.

Shiladitya: Okay, so in all of these, you add as a partner, you also add a lot, of course, you're the end delivery part for the customer, you are using the core product of Salesforce so many other components and packages out of them developed. What's the differentiated work which Accenture does as part of all of this and what's the innovation that you are bringing in this domain?

Sailaja: So firstly at Accenture, we work across 26 different industries and the Salesforce work we do extends to the majority of these industries. So there's pretty much a breadth of industry coverage and what we have done is based on this industry knowledge and our deep technical experience in Salesforce, we've been able to come up with what we call as full force industry solutions. Full force is just a term which Salesforce uses to certify a solution to be go-to market-ready. But essentially they are industry point solutions, like the intelligent patient platform I called out earlier was one of our full force certified solutions. So we have about 20 of those catering to different industry segments and they all specifically target a point functionality. And that's been a good very successful thing because most of our clients like it, as we've already brought in thought leadership and also some accelerator to their Salesforce implementation. The second aspect is, we are constantly trying to innovate on this product and recently, last year at Dreamforce, we launched one of our Salesforce innovation centres in the Salesforce tower in San Francisco. So it was a tower they launched at Dreamforce and then we had our Salesforce innovation centre there. In fact, I hear we're the only partner who has our innovation centre in their Salesforce tower. So some of the showcases we show out there are again on all the latest technologies, Einstein, AI, lightning, mobility and all of that, so constantly trying to innovate using some of the newer elements of the product. The other aspect is also around automation focus. So what our clients are looking for today is how they can get better efficiencies in their implementations and better speed to market and thereby also improving quality. You can't risk quality when you're going at a faster pace. So we have a set of automation tools which pretty much cover entire project delivery lifecycle, be it dev-ops, code reviews, testing, diagnostics, all of those. So we've got automation tools which can enable automation on the Salesforce platform for any development on the Salesforce platform.



Shiladitya: How does this impact the overall future of the Salesforce ecosystems, since you'll be at the edge of what's new and how it's being used in the new. How do you see the ecosystem overall evolving?

Sailaja: So the strategy I think now for Salesforce and also for us is to help transform organisation and experiences into becoming truly digital. That's really having multiple facets. If I take, for example, AI, which is one of the facets of that, we are looking at you know how we can predict customer behaviour based on historical data and also recommend the right actions based on these predictions. IOT is one of the other newer areas which Salesforce brought in a few years back but has been relatively less implemented so far. But I believe there's going to be a lot of usage in the future. So this is about creating a connected ecosystem where devices and everything else is connected. The other example is how they are going to create a connected devices ecosystem with their IOT solution and I remember this interesting use case we built for the largest beverages company in the world where we connected the IOT solution to their vending machines and when the quantity of the bottles went beyond the threshold it would automatically detect and place an order. So I believe these kinds of scenarios and usages of IOT will actually grow a lot more in the future. And lastly Mulesoft, which is their recent acquisition, I believe that's going to change the game big time because today our clients still have this problem that a lot of applications are siloed. They don't have a very integrated view. So Mulesoft is going to enable all of those applications to be integrated and it's not just about Salesforce apps to other apps, it's going to pretty much connect any app, be it on the cloud or on prime applications - it's going to enable everything to be integrated in a very seamless way. So, I believe these are all going to drive a lot of future growth for Salesforce and that's how the economy is actually going to evolve.

Shiladitya: So this brings me to, of course, I would say the crux of the conversation where we are trying to understand what are the kind of careers for folks in this ecosystem? For people who are already here, what are the new and innovative spaces where they can enhance their expertise like the interesting projects you told us about, and of course, for those who want to get into a career in the Salesforce domain, what are the opportunities out there?

Sailaja: Firstly, as I said, I think now the Salesforce ecosystem is probably a great career choice. It was not probably so evident when I came into this area, but now it's a very evident great career choice. In fact, IDC published research around early 2018 where they quote that they will be 3.3 million jobs created with the Salesforce economy. That's a tremendous staggering number.

Let's imagine that even if they do half of it that's still a very big number. So I believe also that there are various kinds of roles across the spectrum of career levels and experiences which the Salesforce ecosystem can offer. On the functional side, we have roles like Salesforce administrator, Salesforce consultant, marketer, and all of these roles and on the technical side, we have roles like app developer, app lead, integration developer and then finally the Salesforce architect. So all of these roles cater to whatever background people are coming from, be it a core technical background or any kind of a functional CRM domain experience. We have roles across any of these. And at Accenture the way we are expanding, we are actually hiring for all of these roles. At any given point we would have open demands for all of this. The good part about getting people inducted into the Salesforce ecosystem is that they offer this platform called as Trailhead, which is actually free of charge, where they roll out all trainings on the Salesforce platform and it covers basic and advanced trainings. So anybody who just wants to learn and understand more about Salesforce can just jump onto Trailhead and do that. At Accenture what we've done additionally is we've also created very targeted, structured learning programs which we recommend to people to take after the Trailhead learnings. Then we've also got some specific shadow programs so that they can get some hands-on experience before we deploy them on projects. And typically our approach has been, we've been taking a lot of technical, java, .net and any object-oriented programming knowledge and functional as I said, Siebel, other Oracle CRM, any kind of CRM functional consultants - we've been cross-training in all of them. And that's really how we've expanded the practice. That's been one of the core ways of how we have been able to expand the practice.

Shiladitya: In fact, thanks for this. It's incredible to see how this has become such a central piece of so many companies where, of course, Salesforce is implemented and the entire career paths which it has enabled. Thank you so much for sharing all of this with us, Sailaja. I think it was great to have so much detail in this conversation. And, of course, let's hope to have a lot of folks who want to take up this as a path.

Sailaja: Absolutely. Great career choice.

Shiladitya: Thank you so much Sailaja. It was great to hear about all the conversations we did around Salesforce, and of course, it continues to be one of the most interesting companies and platforms to talk about. And of course, we'll see how the platform evolves over time as well, as more and more professionals come into this domain. I hope everyone listening got a good idea about exactly the kind of things you can do becoming a Salesforce professional, and of course, the interesting opportunities you have.



To all of you who was listening in, if you are excited about what we discussed here today and if you are interested in exploring careers with Accenture check out the open positions at careers.accenture.com.

On the next episode, we are talking Artificial Intelligence, but until then I am your host Shiladitya on Tech Careers in the New, the podcast series presented by Accenture.

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