



# AI LEADERS - INTERSECTION OF DATA AND AI IN THE COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Andy Markus [00:00:00] If your AI went away today, what couldn't you realistically do tomorrow?

Manish Dasaur [00:00:12] All right. A big hello and a warm welcome to this podcast. This is going to be a great conversation about how data and AI are intersecting and driving impact in the communications industry. I'm personally excited about this one just because the communications industry is the industry that almost everyone on our planet interacts with and utilizes every day. And, as this industry evolves, it impacts everything that we do every day. So, I'm personally excited about this one, and it's terrific to have my friend and colleague Andy Markus, the Chief Data Officer of AT&T, joining me for this chat. Andy, welcome and thank you for joining us.

Andy Markus [00:00:52] Hey, thanks for having me. Really honored to be here.

Manish Dasaur [00:00:54] Fantastic. Andy want to give our audience a little bit of your journey and how you got here? That would be wonderful.

Andy Markus [00:01:00] Yeah, absolutely. So, I've been the Chief Data Officer at AT&T for two years. Came over from Warner Media where I worked in a similar fashion and have been in statistics, data science and the data space for almost 20 years now working with different media companies, and then finally

certainly here at AT&T. AT&T has been a great place to be, so many fantastic opportunities to use data and AI. So, it's just been a great journey so far.

Manish Dasaur [00:01:35] Terrific. Terrific. Well, I'm excited, and I think we've got a few great themes for us to explore together in our conversation Andy so maybe I'll position the first one. Let's talk a little bit about your lens, my lens on what makes data and AI critical to the communications business today. I would love to start with your thoughts on that.

Andy Markus [00:01:54] Well, I've almost never been involved with a company or an industry that has access to so much data, right? Operating a communications company like AT&T, it's so complex and it really so big. At the scale of AT&T, it includes everything from the network to subscriber management to supply chain to just generally how we operate the company. All of this throws off so much data, so much data is generated and being able to manage that data and really harness that data to drive actual insights and really make decisions that will help us become the best communications and the best connectivity company on the planet. You know, that's our goal and that's what makes this so exciting.

Manish Dasaur [00:02:38] Yeah, I love that. When I think about it, Andy, what's happening in the communications industry



more broadly, just in the industry itself, is I see a combination of opportunities and threats, right? I think we're starting to see the industry and the industry leaders really focus on three core things. One is driving revenue growth. I think that's become a huge focus of ours as CSPs are looking for new ways to do that. Second one I think about is network transformation. Building intelligent and flexible infrastructure, that has become paramount. And third one I think about is optimizing back-office operations to really kind of drive overhead cost reductions and improvements. And I think data is going to play a huge role in all three of those objectives, right? Revenue growth is going to happen through smarter lead generation, more cross sell/upsell, pushing more sales to the digital channels. If I think about intelligent network, 5G is expensive, right? So, getting really intelligent about where we make investments in that space to maximize the return on that investment. And if I think about optimizing operations, automation and cost takeout and key back-office functions like supply chain and billing and collections and customer care, I think it's super critical and data and AI plays such a huge role in that. I wonder if you want to explore that a little bit as well.

Andy Markus [00:03:56] You know, you're spot on. I mean, you're kind of hitting our journey right across AT&T. We recently had a chance to kind of present where AT&T is on the AI maturity scale - and Manish I know we talked about this - to an outside advisory board that consults with AT&T on our technology journey. We had a really good story to tell on where we are and, you know, we always like to paint a pretty picture of where we are, but it's always helpful to get that outside in perspective. And one of the advisors asked a really pertinent question, and the question was, if your AI went away today, what couldn't you realistically do tomorrow? And, you know, that kind of cuts to the chase, right? I mean, it's like, okay, we're doing a lot of cool things, but what's

foundational to operating our company? And I thought through it, and it cuts across all the things that you mentioned. I think about the fraud prevention and the monitoring that we do. We are experiencing our lowest fraud rates in years when the industry is seeing more pressure because we have a network of about three dozen models that help protect us and our subscribers from fraud, and you know how expensive fraud is in the telecom industry. Think about how we dispatch our technicians. The truck rolls that we have are super expensive and we optimize that so that we serve our customers best, and we optimize the cost from an AT&T standpoint. You mentioned about planning and administering the network. It's so complicated, but AI is a driver there with data to make sure that we have a network that serves our customers in the best way possible. Something that we're really proud of is we're finally making some great headway into robocalling. If we look at our at our customer surveys, we see - and we're consumers ourselves right - robo calling is one of the biggest nuisances that our subscribers have, and we've been able to block about six and a half billion calls using AI really cutting down that headache that a mobility subscriber has with robo calling. You know, everything from how we manage credit collections, how we manage our subscriber acquisitions and our churn and retention strategies for the subscribers, how we optimize our customer care, right, so that our customers get the best experience when they call in for customer service. And then you mentioned supply chain. I mean, everybody talks about supply chain these days. AI is really helping us make better decisions and more optimal decisions in supply chain. So, there's a lot, but those things are foundational today. I mean, to address the question that we were asked, we couldn't do those things tomorrow if AI went away today.

Manish Dasaur [00:07:08] Thank you for



sharing that. I love actually the way you phrased that question. Like, what couldn't you do tomorrow is a great way to think about it, and that really helps you think about where AI becomes a core part of the business, right? It becomes a required service and require capability, and that's a great way to think about it. Andy, I think your mind was already going to the second theme, which is a great one for us to explore now. Let's talk a little bit about what you and I are seeing as the most impactful applications of data, of analytics and AI in the space. Why don't we start with your thoughts on that?

Andy Markus [00:07:43] It ranges across that gamut that I just mentioned. I mean, robo calling is something we're super proud of because it is something that that we're all impacted by, and to make that experience with the mobility network that we offer optimal, you can't be bothered with the robo calls that we all are faced with. And AI has allowed us to break through that barrier. I mean, fraud. I think about how many billions of dollars of exposure we have as a company, and there's no way we could make the decisions that that we're able to make - let me clarify - the right decisions that we're able to make, right? Because we don't want to suppress or put any barriers or any space between us and the subscribers. We want to protect our subscribers. We want to protect us from the fraud that's out there, and we're smartly doing that with how this AI system works together to make the right decision and really target the fraud activity. So those are really big drivers. I mean, I think there's a lot out there. Managing the network in a smart way with AI is, I think, a game changer for us and for other telecoms, too, but to really enhance that experience of connectivity that you wouldn't have without it.

Manish Dasaur [00:09:13] I think all of those are fantastic examples. And when I think about it from my chair, looking across the industry at what a lot of the leading

communication providers in North America are doing, I think about a couple of examples that come to my mind. First one is about using AI to drive the network to your point Andy. I think about 5G network deployment, the data is intensive, right? It's just not humanly possible to monitor thousands of metrics every day and identify concerns that may derail the network built. An example of some of the things that we're starting to see is AI/ML interactive applications that are analyzing network build data every single day, sending target alerts to personnel, and companies that have deployed those kinds of things have seen a 50% acceleration in their ability to build out the network. And I think you'll agree there is a little bit of a race to a market here, right? Whoever can build out the most comprehensive but cost effective 5G network, that's a big differentiator for communications provider, right? So, we're seeing a lot of focus on using AI/ML to really accelerate and optimize network build. And I think that's a fantastic and very critical application of AI. Another one that I see quite a bit is using AI to drive revenue growth We're starting to see a combination of internal and external data combined with real time intent and sentiment analysis to really curate and improve sales leads and then tightly coupling those sales leads with the appropriate digital channels and the sales personnel that utilize that data and provide feedback on the data to drive a continuous improvement in the data set. And what we found by doing that is you're getting a much better conversion rate on your sales leads and eventually leading to up to a 10% growth in your sales revenue. So, kind of hitting that sales growth objective with data and the AI has been huge. I'll pause there just to see if you have any comments on a couple of those stories as well.

Andy Markus [00:11:13] Spot on. And I'll tell you, on the last one, we've seen more than 10% by leveraging ML & AI in that fashion. And I think, in the personalized space, it



plays a big role I think in customer experience as well. I mentioned that quickly, but you know, it's so important to be able to serve our customers in the right way, in the way that they want to be served, to meet them where they are, and I think AI gives us so many opportunities to do that, to make it a more optimized experience. To your point, if there's a sales opportunity to make sure that we find the right thing to sell, but not to burden the customer in that channel with things that they're not interested in, but to make sure that we serve them quickly and more effectively, and I think AI is opening doors there that we didn't have before.

Manish Dasaur [00:12:08] I love that point about the customer experience. I do think our customer's expectations of us are getting more sophisticated. They're expecting that we know what they want, they're expecting that we're improving the experience, they're expecting that we're coming to them with offers that are relevant and customized for them, right? So, I think that that expectation on personalization, that expectation on past experience is a great point to touch on, and I know AT&T has been quite focused on that as well. So, I'm glad you brought that up. That's great. The next thing Andy I'd love to get your thoughts on as well is how do you see the communications industry evolving with data and AI over the next, I'll say 3 to 5 years? Lay out the roadmap for it for our listeners here.

Andy Markus [00:12:57] I love that question. I mean, we talk about all the things that we're doing today, but there's still so much more to do. I mean, you and I have talked about this kind of offline, right? We're only scratching the surface on potential, and so, what we're doing is we're evangelizing, you know, to our business leaders, how to really integrate data into the core fabric of what we do and to think about how we reimagine the business with data and AI at the center. And the leaders are very receptive and know, I think, that's going to drive further opportunities to

really optimize the business, and even make our customer experience even better. I think you're going to see that trend to leverage data and AI to continue to grow with AT&T over the over the next five years. I'm sure across all telecoms. Other things that we're doing, and we've talked about this, too, is we're very committed to democratize data and AI throughout the company. We can't be great at data and AI if only we have one or two teams great at data and AI across AT&T. So, we really have to democratize that across the firm. I think AT&T has that potential to be that data and AI powerhouse, but we can't reach that potential unless we're great across the board, and we're doing that. We've created a data council and we're really using that council to evangelize that, and we have representation from all corners of AT&T. And I'm really seeing that momentum take place. On the same topic of democratization, we're really focusing on self-service too. Again, it can't just be one team. You know, I run a Chief Data office team. We're really good at data and AI but we all have to be good, right? So how do we democratize this across the business? How do we build that muscle up so that all parts of the firm have that muscle to do data and AI, and they're not over reliant on true data engineers or true data scientist? And so, we're creating these self-service processes so people can onboard data themselves, so that people can do it in a consistent manner leveraging target architecture, connected architecture, and focus on that single version of truth and the reuse of data wherever possible. You know, that's a vision. We have another vision. We talked about this, about mobilizing what we all call the citizen data scientist, smart people throughout the business who aren't data scientist, but they're smart and they're subject matter experts, and if you put data science capabilities in their hands that can really supercharge what we're able to do with data and AI. So, we're creating what we call AI as a service. Right now, it's a code-based process for the data scientist to use



so that we create AI in a standardized way across the company, but we're evolving that to a low code no code service so that those smart people that aren't data scientists in finance or marketing or supply chain or wherever can create AI for their purpose. So, I think those are some things that won't happen overnight, and maybe it's a three-year journey, maybe it's a five-year journey, but I think are really going to change the way AT&T operates.

Manish Dasaur [00:16:26] Yeah, I think some pearls of wisdom there for sure. And I think democratization is huge. I always say, Andy, data needs to be part of everybody's job description now. There is no such thing as like a core set of data leaders. Every executive needs to be thinking about how they're using data and AI in their shop. Every person in the organization needs to be thinking about, how can I use data and AI to better inform my decision, better automate my decisions? I think there's lots of power of all of us thinking about it in that way, and I think that's a fantastic point. Your other point about reimagining the business is something that I think is going to be very relevant for CSPs going forward, too. We have a term called the Connected Consumer Platform, right? So, if you think about the onset of digital services that the consumers are starting to see now, but a CSP is kind of unique, right? A CSP can think through and really get a sense of the daily activities that a consumer does every day because they're on their phone, they're on their devices, doing all those activities, and then they can help translate those activities into specific services that telco plus maybe ecosystem partners can provide enabled thru a platform which I think will generate new lines of revenue and new streams of revenue for our CSP providers. So, I think over the next 3 to 5 years, we'll start to see some evolution of kind of new revenue streams and new business models that emerge thru ecosystem partnerships, that emerge through the collection of IOT data, that

emerge through those kinds of things providing a richer data set and more avenues for us to explore. I think that's a pretty fascinating journey to kind of go on in the next five years. I also think about the SMB side of the house, and I think more and more SMBs are going to become reliant and dependent on CSPs as their primary growth partners, that they can tailor digital services. They can draw inspiration for both customer and large enterprise segments and start labeling partner services for those SMBs. I think it's going to be pretty critical for that growth, too. And lastly, I'll say really optimizing connectivity, right? And I think you talked about this already, and I know you guys are already moving down a path on this, but to address some of the rising costs, to address some of the growth challenges, I think we're going to continue to see communication providers move towards leader operations, leveraging new technology with cloud and data and AI, driving new ways of working, which to your point was about democratizing the workforce and really up leveling and upskilling their capabilities. I think we're starting to see that happen already, and that's going to be a continued feature and focus of the next 4 to 5 years. I want to get your reaction to some of those points Andy. What do you think?

Andy Markus [00:19:12] Again, I mean, spot on and it's right down the alley of what we're doing, and I couldn't agree more. All telecoms, AT&T included, have to become more efficient. We have to continue to drive cost out of the business. We have to continue to offer better services. Those things are not really possible without data and AI at the forefront, right? We talked at the beginning about AT&T and all the big telecoms being large and complex businesses. You can't, you know, do this manually any longer. You've got to really rely on automation, you've got to really rely on data, you've got to really rely on AI to set the course for the next 3 to 5 years.



Manish Dasaur [00:20:03] I love that. Maybe I'll throw one more at you Andy, a bit of an audible, but would love to get your sense of where data and AI is going and the impact that it can drive in communications. I think we all agree that it has huge ability to drive impact there, but it's not an easy thing to do either. I'd be curious to get your thoughts on what do you think is the biggest hurdle or challenge that we have to overcome in enabling that impact to happen?

Andy Markus [00:20:28] I think we have to have. So for AT&T, I think we had to get to a certain level of maturity, which I think we're at now and it becomes an effect, right? You know, at the very beginning, embedding AI into operations there's a lot of the wild, wild west. Right. We're way past that. We have that maturity. We have the foundation to go faster, to go at a lot more speed and really to get to and solve those harder problems. I think working with the business to think about the business strategy, to do that reimagining. We all are caught up into in our day to day demands, and it's hard to take a step back and to rethink how we should redo a process, how we should think about something differently with the new tools that we have at hand. I think that's one of the biggest challenges, is that the tools are there, the capabilities are there, the successes are proven, it's really reimagining the business to think about it differently and not turn that same crank that we've turned for five years, right? To really think about pivoting in that different direction. And it's hard, I mean, because the demands of the day never change. They only grow in complexity to accomplish. So, taking that step back and to really rethink what we're doing is so hard. I mean, love to hear your thoughts.

Manish Dasaur [00:22:02] Yeah. No, I think I think your point around having platform maturity is a good one, right? But I am seeing more and more clients getting there. I think more and more our clients are getting

closer and closer to it. I think the next thing that I think about is what you said, tying the business strategy to the data strategy, and I think those two things each have such a tight interlock. The data and analytics can no longer...it has to be on the CEO's agenda, and I think helping our business leaders understand the criticality of it, having our business leaders tie their business objectives and their strategy to the data strategy that the organization is going to go after. Curating that data and treating it like one of the most valuable assets the organization has, I think, is kind of the key hurdle that we've got to get everyone kind of aligned to that way of thinking so it can be relevant to the CEO, and everybody in the organization understands how is data and AI in my shop, in the world that I live in as a business leader going to drive those three things that we talk about. How is it going to drive revenue growth? How is it going to drive network transformation? How is it going to help me optimize? Right. And we've got to think about it from a business impact perspective more than anything else, I think is the next key critical step for us.

Andy Markus [00:23:19] Yeah. I mean, you hit a passion point for me in talking about data strategy and business strategy. And, you know, often times I hear people say, what is your data strategy? Well, truly, the data strategy is to make sure that you have the foundational capabilities in place to execute anything the business wants to do, right? And the business strategy really is thinking about what's most important for the business to accomplish and then making it foundational to tie that data capability to execute that goal. And so, they go together. To your point, they're not separate. You don't have a data strategy that stand alone. The data strategy is making sure the capabilities are there so that when the business needs to execute, you're bringing that directly into the equation. You're not building up that capability while you're trying to execute on this strategy.



Manish Dasaur [00:24:16] Love it. Love it. Well, certainly very exciting times ahead for the communications space and the way that data and AI is going to impact that space. Andy, I want to wrap by thanking you so much for joining us and a wonderful conversation here.

Andy Markus [00:24:31] My pleasure and always good to talk to you.

Manish Dasaur [00:24:34] All right. Thank you.

Copyright © 2022 Accenture  
All rights reserved.

Accenture and its logo  
are registered trademarks  
of Accenture.