



# A Walk in the Cloud

## Sustainability: Green Dreams to Black Screens

### **Ellen Bencard, Walk in the Cloud Host**

Ellen Bencard leads Accenture's marketing campaigns in the UK while also managing to nourish her journalistic roots as an established blogger on the arts, travel and fine dining. Her corporate work usually finds her behind the scenes, coaching her team to bring together big ideas, insightful commentators, exciting events and innovative channels in ways that inspire prospective clients. But this isn't the first time she's stepped into the limelight to show off her training as a reporter, writer and presenter. She's anchored a web-based YouTube series for BT called Top Tips for CIOs and was Northwestern University's on-site media spokesperson at the Royal Wedding of Prince Harry and fellow alumna Meghan Markle. Born and educated in the American Midwest, Ellen's lived in the UK since 1999 and is a proud dual citizen.

### **Jasmine Dhiman, Accenture, UKI Technology Sustainability Lead and UKI People and Diversity Exec Sponsor**

Jasmine has been with Accenture for over 23 years working across Financial Services, Health Public Service and Products industries. She has deep business-led digital transformation and delivery experience having spearheaded large programmes of work for Tier 1 retail and Investment Banks as well as government departments. She has been a global client account lead for Financial Services and also led Accenture's UKI Capital Markets Technology business.

Jasmine currently leads Accenture's UK Ireland UKI Technology Sustainability business which is ensuring sustainability is positioned at the heart of Accenture's client's technology strategies and supporting clients in their transformation journeys. She was recognised for her work in Technology Sustainability as a finalist for the Innovator Award in the Everywoman in Technology Awards 2023. She also has a qualification in Business Sustainability Management from Cambridge University.

Jasmine sat on Accenture's UKI Executive Board as the UKI People and Diversity Exec Sponsor reporting into the UKI CEO. She was responsible for leading on Accenture's UKI People and Diversity Strategy which included employee experience, inclusion diversity and talent strategy, looking at ways to innovate and improve how all employees work and live. Prior to the board role, Jasmine led the roll out of UK leadership development programmes and was the executive sponsor of a Global Inclusion and Diversity programme.

She is proud of her Indian Punjabi heritage and is a working parent to a 5 year old daughter and 3 year old son.

**Intro:** Walk in the Cloud

**Ellen:** Hello, this is Ellen Bencard. Welcome back for a Walk in the Cloud. If you're a regular listener you know that we couldn't go too long without returning to the topic of sustainability. How to make sure that your company sustains itself for the next hundred years or so is an evergreen topic, made all the more relevant as we worry about the planet too. Surviving, thriving, sustaining through the world's current challenges required change, for many that means radical reinvention – the kind of massive transformation we're talking about in this series.

**Ellen:** Today, I'm walking with Jasmine Dhiman. Jasmine is the lead for technology sustainability for Accenture in the UK. Welcome Jasmine.

**Jasmine:** Thank you Ellen, it's great being here.

**Ellen:** Jasmine I've got to start with a problematic question which is, technology and sustainability. Is it an oxymoron? The more technology we use – the more energy we burn. How do we reconcile that?

**Jasmine:** Yeah, I mean – that is the elephant in the room isn't it, Ellen? But I think what's helpful to do is potentially just take a step back and understand what we need to do in sustainability and then technology's role in it.

Which can be good or bad as you've just outlined. At Accenture, we believe there are 5 forces driving the next wave of growth, and these include things like total enterprise reinvention, talent and really the ongoing tech revolution. But we also believe that every business must be a sustainable business. And there's clear evidence that strong sustainability commitment is good for business. Some research that we've done has found that companies that have a consistently high ESG rating and score generate 2. x higher shareholder returns and . higher operating margins.

**Ellen:** And is that what commitment means, being serious about those ESG targets and how you measure yourself?

**Jasmine:** For sure, as a first step we know that actually to achieve any of those things digital technology - as in all business transformation will underpin that growth and those sustainability initiatives. Our research also shows that 00% of CIO's agree that technology is critical to sustainability. But we know that it creates its own environmental impact. We know at the moment, the ICT sector creates about 5% of global carbon emissions and that's due to potentially rise to 15% of global emissions by 2030.

**Ellen:** Wow.

**Jasmine:** So, we recognise that there is an issue there. If I just give you a little bit of like context of what that means today.

It represents in terms of energy - the annual primary energy used by the entire continent of Africa and if IT were a country today, it would be the 5th largest greenhouse emitter. So, there is no doubt that IT has a role to play in reducing carbon emissions but also to spearhead our sustainable transformation.

**Ellen:** So lets move on, to what do we do about that? That just sounds like a huge problem. It's not as simple as just measuring stuff and putting out ESG scores is it?

**Jasmine:** For sure. There are real actions that organisations can take, those that are very reliant on IT and if I take for example, financial services and other professional services organisations and government itself. These are organisations that don't actually manufacture real products. And actually they are focusing much more on their IT infrastructure carbon reduction than other industries than I'm seeing at the moment. And only if they baseline can they put actions in place. There are other things that are also being put in place that include, open foundations like the green software foundation that were set up by Microsoft, Accenture, thoughtworks and GitHub. And this is about an open foundation that everyone can join, join together our collective thinking on how to reduce the impact of IT and software to the environment.

**Ellen:** So Jasmine, would you say – awareness of sustainability and the need for sustainability is very high in the tech industry?

**Jasmine:** I think it is and I've seen over the last 2 months a spike in interest. I think it is gaining momentum. If I go back in our walk, maybe 6 months ago – it was all very new and it felt like somebody else needed to do things. You now have IT organisations and developers like young people wanting to understand what is their part to play and you would've seen that evidenced actually with the huge interest here, at Accenture in the huge digital clean up week. And real actions that individuals can take – we had teams participating in cleaning up emails, cleaning up their drives measuring the amount of gigabyte's they've saved and what that actually meant in terms of real-life carbon emission savings. There was also a panorama programme that many of our hopefully, listeners would have seen. Around, data centres and data just collecting, collecting, collecting forever almost like the carbon emissions in the atmosphere collecting, collecting, collecting forever and if we don't actively do something about it, it will just carry on growing and building.

**Ellen:** And I was going to save this question till the end, and it's a great topic. I mean – what can we as individuals do? Because corporations are after all just a collection of individuals. So, what's the best advice for all the listeners of this podcast on how we can use less energy, in our computing?

**Jasmine:** So, if I just go back to the advice that was put out on the clean digital week, there were four things that were really recommended. One was to clean up your smartphone, you know? Remove the applications you haven't used in a while. Be honest and be bold about it. Delete those forgotten apps. Step two was to clean your PC or your laptop. So, look at files, photos, duplicates, things that you've backed up. How many backups duplicates do you need of these things? The third bit of advice was clean up your mailbox. How many things do you subscribe to that you don't actually ever read. All of this is about data transfer and storage so get rid of that junk. And then, think about new arrangements about how you interact with people. Stop sending those emails that say 'ok' or 'Thank you'. Think about how many backups they said you need and just create less, less content that you don't think people are going to actually absorb. You know, we have a fascination or putting millions of TikTok videos and Instagram videos – be sparing in that, I mean do you really need to share?

And I'd say some of the things we can do in our work environment. For example, if you use a screen with a black background it uses less energy.

**Ellen:** Really?

**Jasmine:** I have my team doing PowerPoint decks in black now, rather than in white. Little things like that will make a difference.

**Ellen:** But all of those little things matter?

**Jasmine:** They count, exactly.

**Ellen:** If I could move to big corporations then, if we all as individuals are making those sorts of contributions what are you seeing and what kind of conversations are you having with big corporations about the kinds of projects they might embark on? Understanding that we obviously can't use any names – but in general.

**Jasmine:** In terms of some of the key projects that we see at the moment. They particularly around ESG reporting, very much thinking about the regulatory landscape. Now, it's not necessarily where we want to be. Ideally, we want to be doing the overall business transformation and making people's lives sustainable and human centred. So, what I mean by that is the sustainability transformation that businesses need to make should be around and will be around how our human lives will need to transition and change. That's not to say that we haven't got real leaders in the market who are actively looking at waste circulatory and supply chain issues.

**Ellen:** So Jasmine, how are we doing in the UK? Are we better than the world, worse, just keeping up? I know you are looking at multiple borders in this.

**Jasmine:** So recently, experts have said that the UK leads the world's efforts to extract carbon from the air compared to other countries.

If I just explain that's obviously technology but that's physical technology and in the world of sustainability theirs obviously three types of technologies that move things forward. Digital, physical, and biological.

**Ellen:** Presumably, we need all three?

**Jasmine:** We need all three to work. The UK government set a target to capture between 20 and 30 million tonnes of CO2 by a year, by 2030 and that could involve industrial processes as well as power generation and what we're seeing is the development of carbon capture power stations as part of the solution. Along with, and we do a lot of work in this space at Accenture – the use of nuclear energy and setting up new nuclear power stations, but they have a long period in terms of installation, these are heavily capital projects. There are also other rapidly evolving technologies that we're driving around hydrogen as well as a source of clean energy. Now, the UK has set really great targets including one to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

So, all of these things are contribute to actually execute on that. But the UK committee for climate change are also warning us that despite our efforts for carbon capture, unless we do more and better energy storage for times when for example, the wind doesn't blow, we're going to struggle to keep those commitments. So, that's the other side of the coin on this. We are making great progress but we're also slightly bound by technology advancements in energy storage to be able to actually capitalise on that.

**Ellen:** So there are clear reasons to hope in future, so let's end our walk by coming back to today and, if I'm a senior executive at a large British corporation, what do I do first – let's assume the ESG stuff is out of the way because I know you want to move beyond that.

**Jasmine:** We need to take some learnings from industries, that have used technology to advance their ways of working and I'll tell you an example. So, financial services have spent the last 20 to 30 years digitising and sharing data and standardised forms that are trustworthy and able to move forward. That industry in a way that we hadn't moved from paper to digitisation in a trusted way – with central counterparties and exchanges... and all these institutions that require the movement of secure trusted safe data. We are moving into a world where we need to replicate that at a global level at every industry and you see that happening in some industries already. In consumer goods for example, we spoke to a large consumer goods organisation and they are working with their competitors and their suppliers to understand how they would standardise the sharing of data. The reason that's important is that - we live within the boundaries of the same planet and there are only so many resources that we can use. So sharing data on what we're using and our supply chain can only be done collectively and we're all on the same supply chain and we need to trust the data that we're getting from each other to be able to put that into our plans of what we will consume from the planet and what we won't.

This is a massive challenge and also is one that Accenture would love to help shape but it does require a full ecosystem of businesses, finance, government coming together to solve and it's probably our greatest mission to date that we're going to have to face in this generation.

**Ellen:** Wow, so many key topics we can keep talking on and I can do other episodes on. For now Jasmine we have reached the end of our walk. Thank you for joining me.

**Jasmine:** Thank you Ellen, it was great.

**Ellen:** And thank you listeners for joining us for another walk in the cloud. I hope we've given you ideas on how you can help your company, help yourself and help the planet. If you like this podcast please spread the news. Like, share, do all that good stuff, see you next time.

**Outro:** Walk in the Cloud