BUILT FOR CHANGE EPISODE 15: DISCOVERING THE AUTOMATION ADVANTAGE

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

0:00

MUSIC

RAJ: So hospitality's such a unique industry, right?

ELISE: That's Raj Singh. He's the CMO at a company called Revinate.

RAJ: When guests are on a trip whether it's for business or for leisure, they're looking to be taken out of their natural normal environment. And they're out of their comfort zone.

JOSH: Raj has worked in the hospitality industry for more than a decade. And he's seen some pretty interesting guest requests in his time.

RAJ: A guest may request a helicopter ride. Or guests that wanted to book out the entire restaurant for a special occasion. Whatever it is that the guest desires.

MUSIC out

ELISE: Of course, not everyone who visits a hotel makes such elaborate requests. But the leisure industry is all about making those magical moments possible.

JOSH: And the one making all of this happen - orchestrating that helicopter ride, arranging for the front row tickets at a pop star's Vegas show, or even just suggesting a great restaurant within walking distance from the hotel? That's the concierge of course.

1:00

MUSIC

RAJ: Her name is Ivy. Ivy has arranged for over a thousand helicopter rides. Ivy has set up all kinds of tours, activities, VIP experiences.

ELISE: Ivy is a concierge– she fields requests for everything from the wifi password to booking out a 5-star sushi restaurant for the evening.

RAJ: Ivy checks in with every single guest personally. So when the guest gets up to their room, they put their bags down. They already have a message from Ivy waiting for them saying, Hey Elise. Welcome to our hotel. I'm Ivy, your personal concierge. Can I help you right now with anything like the wifi password, drinks by the poolside or a meal that I can have sent up to your room?

JOSH: Guests can talk to Ivy, make requests and ask questions throughout their entire stay.

So they get pretty comfortable with her…

RAJ: Sometimes this includes guests asking Ivy out on a date. Ivy has also been asked for her hand in marriage. Guests come up to the front desk all the time with a $20 bill in their hands, looking for Ivy.

ELISE: And if they do, they'll be in for a surprise.

2:00

JOSH: Because even though Ivy is every guest's personal assistant…

ELISE: Ivy is actually a virtual concierge, powered by intelligent automation.

MUSIC out

RAJ: She is intelligently and virtually yours.

JOSH: Intelligently and virtually yours. I V Y.

THEME

ELISE: Intelligent automation technology like Ivy has a ton of potential… to alter day-to-day experiences for employees, CEOs, and customers alike.

JOSH: … IF it doesn't feel automated. Because in a business as personalized as hospitality, a robotic response to a guest request would stick out like a sore thumb, and totally undermine the guest experience.

ELISE: So how does Ivy's design toe the line, to be so personalized as to inspire proposals of marriage while being sufficiently automated to make the lives of guests and hotel employees easier?

RAJ: I think that the most important thing and the highest leverage that we have to make something intelligent is in the design process and making sure that we are humanizing that design, making sure that we're understanding the context of the person who was going to end up using that automation.

ELISE: I'm Elise Hu.

JOSH: And I'm Josh Klein.

ELISE: And this is Built for Change, a podcast from Accenture.

JOSH: So I love the idea of automation in terms of making our day-to-day lives easier.
ELISE: Sure, like setting up alarms or calendar invites.

JOSH: But sometimes this goes terribly wrong. Like when we moved, we got a new robotic vacuum. Our new robotic vacuum, despite vacuuming really well…

ELISE: Yeah?

JOSH: …is horrible because it constantly gets stuck. And then it says in this really annoying voice return to dock, return to dock.

ELISE: [Laughs] Yeah. It sounds like it's one of those examples when your robot feels too robotic.

JOSH: Yes.

ELISE: Like when you call an airline because you have to change a flight…

JOSH: Ooh.

ELISE: …I'm always just like trying to rush to get to agent. So I'm constantly like "Agent. Agent."

[Laughter]

JOSH: Yeah. The point is that companies have to be intentional about how they fold automation into their business. You know, you have to make sure that the technology works well with people.

ELISE: So in this episode we'll be discussing Accenture's new book, The Automation Advantage. It's a practical guide for using AI to scale automation and embrace the future of productivity. And we'll talk to two companies who are using these strategies to embrace automation and grow their business.

THEME out

MUSIC

BHASKAR: What's happened in the last few years, this paradigm of automation has completely changed.

ELISE: That's Bhaskar Ghosh. He's Chief Strategy Officer at Accenture, responsible for the company's strategy and investments…

ELISE: In his role at Accenture, Bhaskar saw how businesses were approaching automation. They'd pilot a strategy, and it would be successful… but then their plans to apply automation would stall. So… he started asking a simple question.

BHASKAR: What is stopping you to use that across the organization and take that at enterprise level?

ELISE: That question led him to write a new book. It lays out a road map that shows businesses how to take that next big step to create an organization-wide automation strategy that sticks. It's called The Automation Advantage.

BHASKAR: I am a little busy. Still, I take a little time to write this book.

ELISE: Bhaskar says that he and his co-authors, Gayathri Pallail (GUY-uh-tree pah-lay-il) and Rajendra Prasad (rah-JEN-dra Prah-SOD), took a look at how the automation space has rapidly changed over the past few years.

BHASKAR: Some of the technology suddenly is becoming very mature and coming together like cloud data, artificial intelligence, machine learning, they all come together and create an impact. I think that is the challenge we wanted to address in this book, that how can you take this automation at the enterprise level to drive business value?

MUSIC out

ELISE: These are technologies that create new possibilities for how we can automate our world. Of course, they were already being put to use before the pandemic, but when COVID hit and everything moved into the digital space in a matter of months, businesses had to pull together all this tech to implement automation strategies faster than ever before.

BHASKAR: The new paradigm of automation is all about better decision-making, it is about growing the business. It is about creating the differentiated experience for your customer. So that is the new paradigm, and that is now possible with the power of the new technologies.

ELISE: The new paradigm creates new expectations to meet. Businesses need to step up - and find ways to use automation to grow their business. Like, creating tech solutions to help employees do rote tasks more efficiently. Accenture calls this intelligent automation.

MUSIC

Take, for example, the story of Il Secolo Decimonono.

BHASKAR: We have written that in the book is the Italian newspaper. The newspaper industry has undergone huge changes.

7:00

ELISE: Like many print outlets today, Il Secolo was struggling to keep up with the demands of a 24/7 newscycle in an ever-more digital industry. They needed to grow digital traffic, reader loyalty and company revenues, all while maintaining high journalistic standards and factual accuracy. So they looked to intelligent automation.

BHASKAR: The reporters, when they write report, the artificial intelligence agent continuously helps them to create the content.

ELISE: Here's how it works. When a reporter sits down to write, they have something like a high-powered version of spell-check popping up as they write their story. But this assistant doesn't JUST check for grammar and formatting.

BHASKAR: It is about the verification of the data, verification of the content.

ELISE: Basically, writers can use this intelligent assistant to cross-reference information really fast. Say I'm writing a story on an upcoming music festival. As I write, I might get a note from my intelligent assistant linking me to other articles about the bands that are playing. I can click and read those for background, adding more color and content to my story faster than if I had to go searching out those links myself. It's a way to flesh out a story, and even fact check for accuracy, more efficiently and easily. Which, as a journalist myself, sounds pretty awesome.

BHASKAR: The level of their productivity has significantly gone up because with help of this tool, they can write much faster. They can verify. They're more confident. It is more supported by the data and so on.

ELISE: The productivity is higher and the content is elevated.

MUSIC out

But of course, it's not as simple as throwing an intelligent assistant onto a journalist's computer with no training and expecting skyrocketing profits. When you're introducing automation into a business, you're changing the processes for all humans involved. You may be changing the way an employee executes a task, or maybe which tasks they do altogether. Ultimately, the success of a company's automation strategy depends on how well it works with people - both employees and customers.

MUSIC

BHASKAR: The strategy should be simple, seamless, scaled, and sustained.

ELISE: The 4 S's. Starting with Simple. So in the example of Il Secolo, the intelligent assistant was already pretty similar to the AI-empowered editing software like spell check they'd been using, so it was simple to implement into their everyday routine. Next, Bhaskar says, it should be seamless.

BHASKAR: It has to be these applications are linked with the business flow.

ELISE: So for example, those links that the intelligent assistant might suggest to help flesh out a story would open right in the reporter's web browser. Everything was integrated. Which connects nicely with our next S…

BHASKAR: It should be scaled. Because otherwise what will happen? One part of the business will try to use the artificial intelligence and data.

10:00

ELISE: But the other parts of the business that aren't using AI will lag behind. For Il Secolo, that meant every reporter needed to use the tool. Not just a select few. According to the newspaper, this changed the digital culture of the organization. The company-wide buy in made it more likely to stick. The last S? The approach needs to be sustainable.

BHASKAR: Sustainable means it is not a one-off effort that you create the solution. You create an AI based engine and you forget about it.

ELISE: Instead, Il Secolo made sure they had buy-in from their reporters, and trained them to use the software, making sure to continuously update them so that everyone could use the assistant properly and with confidence.

MUSIC out

ELISE: This means the tech team needs to understand the reporters' job, their processes, and the equipment they use.

BHASKAR: If I do not understand how reporters write the report and what type of data is actually needed by them. I cannot just create a software to help them. I need to understand that industrial equipment and bring the technology knowledge together to create the difference.

MUSIC

ELISE: If the technology is built with the buy-in from the people using it, then it can have its desired effect.

BHASKAR: I feel the human potential. That is

what is really a passion for me, the last 20 years. It is basically that, "How do we use the technology to improve the human productivity, human performance?" That is the one single goal I'm working on.

MUSIC out

JOSH: I think Bhaskar absolutely has it, especially with things needing to be simple and seamless.

ELISE: Yeah. And that doesn't happen very often, Right?

JOSH: No.

ELISE: And a lot of times that's because humans aren't part of the process. Like Bhaskar says, we need PEOPLE to be at the center of these approaches to automation. When a human perspective isn't considered, things can get pretty frustrating pretty quickly.

JOSH: Yeah.

ELISE: I've really noticed it in situations like online rental portals, like—

JOSH: Car rentals!

ELISE: Yeah. You're putting in a bunch of information… but then you don't have the right field filled out and the system and the system just bonks... It gets really frustrating and I just want to get to a human.

JOSH: Right. And then you get there and they ask you for all the same information all over again, to type in by hand, finger by finger.

ELISE: It's NOT simple. AND it's not scaled OR sustained, right? It's clunky and disconnected, which makes it even harder for customers to use the service. That's why it's so important to make sure automation works with people.

JOSH: Yeah.

ELISE: We talked about how Il Secolo's automation needed to work with its employees, but the other thing that's true is that automation

needs to work with customers. Next, we're going back to learn more about how automation concierge Ivy improves guest experiences.

RAJ: When we were initially developing Ivy, the general response was this is crazy. AI will never work in hospitality. You have no idea what you're doing, get out of here.

MUSIC

13:00

ELISE: That's Raj Singh again. He's talking about Ivy, the virtual concierge we "met" earlier in the episode.

RAJ: You know, up until 10, 15 years ago, the job that Ivy's currently helping with was exclusively done by humans. So the level of expectation is very high.

ELISE: And that's for a good reason. Travel logistics are complicated, and guests can have very specific needs and requests. A human concierge understands this complexity all too well, and so the overarching consensus was that a digital assistant couldn't possibly do their job. But Ivy was destined to help the people she'd work with.

MUSIC out

After the financial crisis in the late aughts, Raj saw hotels cut their staff by 30-40%.

RAJ: And the first place that got cut was the concierge department.

RAJ: So as a result the guest expectation continued to rise. But the ability for the hotel to meet that guest expectation actually was decreasing because they had fewer people.

ELISE: And that squeeze? That's why Ivy was born.

RAJ: It seemed like a perfect blend to bring hospitality and AI together because of course, hotels have so much to do. The person at the front desk, they are tasked with 50 different things that they have to do every single day.

ELISE: And the tasks that take up the most time? Turns out, they're often pretty… robotic. Like answering the question "What's the wifi password" over and OVER again.

RAJ: Anything that is informational related, Ivy can answer within seconds. Typically one second, actually. If you ask what's the wifi password, where's the best pizza restaurant nearby, et cetera. All of that comes back in the snap of a finger.

ELISE: Ivy was designed to do all of this through text message. A guest would opt in to messages from Ivy when they got to the hotel. And then she'd be right there on your phone for the whole trip.

RAJ: Ivy's messages show up right in your text message threads, where your friends and family are communicating with you all day.

ELISE: It's simple, and seamless. But if you've ever had a conversation with a chat-bot while trying to pay a bill, or check your bank balance, you could imagine how if a guest has a more complicated question—like, where can I land my helicopter—things could go wrong quickly.

RAJ: Chatbots were starting to get popular around the time that we brought Ivy to market. And we were very deliberate about not calling Ivy a chatbot.

MUSIC

RAJ: Most chatbots have this dead end scenario where you might end up in a loop or some kind of dead end of the kind of programming if you will. That's something that we wanted to make sure that never happens with Ivy.

ELISE: So Raj and his team made sure that the people at the concierge desk were still at the center of Ivy's design.

RAJ: If Ivy doesn't understand something, she actually has a human to fall back on, unlike chatbots. Which makes the whole process a lot easier for the guest and makes sure that we never end up in a frustrating scenario.

ELISE: So if a guest asks Ivy a question she doesn't know the answer to, she'll alert a concierge to take over the conversation.

RAJ: It's something that was very important for us building from the ground up, is to understand what is the edge of this knowledge,and then be able to actually hand off to a human being at the perfect time, where if it's a complaint, Ivy will not try to resolve it, knowing that's not the time to deploy automation.

MUSIC out

ELISE: Ivy is able to understand when she doesn't know the answer to a question through a technology called sentiment analysis. She doesn't just look for keywords like "wifi" that prompt her to respond with the wifi password.

RAJ: If you ask what the wifi password is, Ivy understands, okay. The intent here is that the person would like to get online. So let me actually send back the wifi password that seems to be what they're asking for. But if the guest says the wifi is slow or, hey, I have a meeting and I can't get on the wifi, Ivy understands that the sentiment of those two statements is much more negative than just asking for a password and understands that, okay well this is a complaint.

ELISE: If Ivy detects a negative sentiment, that signals her to hand off the conversation to a hotel employee.

MUSIC

RAJ: We had a person in Las Vegas staying at one of our partner properties. Her son was having an allergic reaction and she wrote into Ivy in a panic saying Ivy, where is the nearest CVS? I need to go buy some Benadryl for my son who was having an allergic reaction. And two minutes later there was a knock on her door with a front desk person holding Benadryl that they were able to provide. She then later wrote into Ivy saying, Ivy, you're a lifesaver. I don't know how you got somebody here that quickly. My son's feeling so much better. Thank you so much.

ELISE: Because Ivy was able to detect the intent

of the message, she could alert the staff to this dangerous scenario immediately, and they were able to quickly spring into action.

RAJ: We could not have anticipated that kind of use case and that's what humans are so good at doing. The service staff at that hotel really went above and beyond that person's expectations.

MUSIC out

ELISE: Raj says, a good online reputation is essential for hotel businesses. A bad review carries a ton of weight. Ivy knows this. She's checking in with every single guest in the middle of their stay automatically, flagging any guests that are not having a good experience for the front desk to follow up on.

RAJ: And by doing that, Ivy's actually allowing the front desk to do their job so much better because the front desk employees don't have time to call every single guest personally.

ELISE: The Hotel staff are able to focus their efforts on the guests that need them the most, because they're not bogged down by answering the same question about wifi over and over.

MUSIC

RAJ: Ivy is actually loved by the staff because the staff don't want to answer the same question a hundred times a day. Cornell University actually did a study on Ivy specifically and concluded that humans at the front desk are feeling less robotic with the presence of Ivy because Ivy is handling the rote transactional everyday questions that they're getting a hundred times. So it frees the humans up for higher value tasks instead of the repetitive mindless ones. These kinds of, you know, automation technologies are helping your best employees do so much more with their time and be able to have a much larger impact because automation is here to amplify all of their efforts.

ELISE: In the end, using Ivy helps the hotel make sure any need that a guest has is instantly met.

RAJ: We've actually had guests say to Ivy, hey,

thank you so much for checking up on me. It's nice to have somebody to talk to. That was the biggest thing that we understood was missing from the hotel experience. It's that emotional connection—that personalized feeling of, oh yeah, I am a guest that matters to this hotel. I'm being taken care of and somebody is out there looking out for my trip and making sure that it's a really great one.

MUSIC out

JOSH: I love the idea of chatbots that can actually work with human beings. Way back when I was first hacking around with tech, I fell in love with the Eliza bot, which is one of the first chat bots that was around. But that was just like oh, interesting. Tell me more. It wasn't really a conversation.

ELISE: Yes. I love how Ivy can read intent so that the bot knows exactly when a human needs to be called in. And you wouldn't traditionally think that automation could help create that personal of an experience.

20:00

JOSH: Or that they could hand it off to the right person at the right time.

ELISE: Exactly. So far, we've been talking a lot about how customer and employee experience can be improved with automation, but we shouldn't ignore that automation can also be a game changer for business efficiency. So next we'll learn about a company that embodies the 4S model that Bhaskar laid out. They're using that automation road-map to bring efficiency and creativity to the factory floor.

MUSIC

BLAKE: What we're doing, the things that manufacturing provides are fundamental human needs in many cases.

ELISE: That's Blake Moret. He's the Chairman and CEO of Rockwell Automation.

BLAKE: We see it in pharmaceuticals in terms of being able to measure out and package the

individual doses. We see it in food packaging.

ELISE: You might not realize it, but you probably have something that Rockwell had a hand in making in your kitchen or garage right now. They provide automation technology to factories that do everything from package the food you buy in the grocery store, to manufacturing vaccines. All of these products come to life inside a factory.

BLAKE: There's lots of different things going on, both automated and manual, on a factory floor, but Rockwell, with the services that we provide, we help these things all work together to a common goal.

ELISE: Imagine—big silver vats filled with bubbling liquid chocolate sliding through tubes to cover chunks of nougat; metal conveyor belts lined with big orange blocks of cheese waiting to be swaddled in a protective layer of plastic; gears turning as glistening glass bottles of soda fly down a factory line. And people, running everything. Pulling levers and pressing buttons, to make sure it's all working in synchronized harmony.

BLAKE: You can think of Rockwell as the conductor of the symphony that goes on on a plant floor.

ELISE: Rockwell gives people the tools to help everything in the factory run smoothly.

MUSIC out

And Rockwell's technology—the software and hardware they provide—allows plant workers to control what's happening in the factory without always being down there physically. That looks a lot different from when Blake first entered the manufacturing business almost 40 years ago.

BLAKE: If you were to walk into a facility, the things that you would be breathing in would not be benevolent or benign things that you were bringing into your body. There's certain jobs where people were being put in harm's way.

ELISE: Now, with these intelligent automations that Rockwell has brought to the manufacturing process, it's not necessary to break your back

carrying pallets across a smoggy plant floor. Now employees can do those things with the touch of a button. This more sustainable work environment frees them up to focus on more important—and often physically safer—tasks.

MUSIC

BLAKE: The business of automation has traditionally been overly complex. A particularly warm spot in my heart is simplification.

ELISE: For a long time, what workers were able to control on the factory floor was limited. Manufacturing systems were extremely specialized and not particularly "smart." They used something called a "logic algorithm"—basically old-school computer code—to control their systems. So, for example, if you were bottling soda and a whole bunch of bottles tipped over, you would have to manually shut down your whole line to solve the problem. It wasn't simple, and it certainly wasn't seamless. But Rockwell's approach to automation is different. It's intelligent.

BLAKE: When we talk about intelligent automation, it really is introducing more learning methods. So that predefined logic algorithm can now adapt to what it's actually seeing on a plant floor.

ELISE: So at the soda bottling plant, instead of having to shut down a manufacturing line completely because those bottles tipped over, the intelligent algorithm is able to understand that those bottles won't be counted in the final tally at the end of the day. It will compensate for that automatically. That saves time, and is seamlessly incorporated into the process.

MUSIC out

ELISE: Another cutting edge automation tool that makes everything from bottling soda to measuring vaccine doses more efficient? Rockwell's Independent Cart technology.

MUSIC

BLAKE: The core technology of linear motion control has been around for a while.

ELISE: Linear motion control is the process of, essentially, moving different parts of a machine back and forth and up and down. Like that conveyor belt filled with glass soda bottles, for example.

BLAKE: Being able to accelerate and decelerate, moving parts of a piece of machinery or a conveyor has been an important part of automation systems for as long as there's been automation. Independent cart technology allows you to build that motion control right into the machine.

ELISE: Instead of adjusting the speed of all those bottles whirring by on the conveyor belt, you can run different parts of the machine at different speeds.

BLAKE: So think about a line that can produce on the fly a three pack or a six pack and a nine pack or a 12 pack without having to change the mechanical orientation of the machine.

ELISE: All of this is built into an approachable software that someone working on the plant floor could access from an operator panel or their phone.

MUSIC out

So if an employee wanted to switch a line from producing a six pack of soda to a 12 pack, all they'd have to do is press a button.

BLAKE: It can be used to provide greater visibility to what's happening on the floor, or it can also be used as the front end to be able to schedule production runs and to be able to be notified of required maintenance when you have a line down situation and you need to get somebody engaged to get it back up and running.

ELISE: Rockwell also recently acquired a company that brings all of these capabilities into the cloud. So people can now, for example, clock into work from their phones, or access reports on which machines need maintenance, from anywhere at any time.

BLAKE: The companies that win across all these industries have people—real, live breathing, people, who are trained and comfortable interacting with the technology. It's really about people being freed up from the repetitive manual, physical labor, and people are a part of the operation for their decision-making skills, for their ability to assess things that haven't been automated. And to be able to add the creativity and the innovation that remains so important to successful enterprises.

MUSIC

ELISE: From packaging the bottles of soda pop in your fridge, to manufacturing the vaccines that keep us healthy. Industrialized automation is—maybe surprisingly—all about people.

BLAKE: The technology is great, but the technology comes from people. And when we create an environment where everybody can and wants to do their very best work, we know how much more we can contribute when we feel great about what we're doing.

ELISE: Rockwell's technology is simple to use, seamlessly incorporated into a factory's machinery, scaled so every worker can use it, and sustainable for people and the environment. That allows the creative people behind the machinery—the conductors of that great soda-bottle symphony—to shine.

JOSH: Yeah, it's really cool that there's so much advancement going on in manufacturing right now.

ELISE: Yeah. It makes you kind of fast forward to the future of what could be automated.

JOSH: Oh my gosh. There's a robot that flips burgers and every, every time I see that, I keep thinking. Fold my laundry, fold my laundry.

ELISE: Exactly. Yeah. I'd love to see care work be more automated so that the care work that really requires humans can really be reserved for human touch.

JOSH: Right. Yeah. The intelligent automation value is really about embracing the human element.

ELISE: Yeah. And not just that, but making sure that everything from automated manufacturing processes to digital assistants are designed with how people will use them in mind.

JOSH: Yes. It, it just goes to show if that's your north star, you can strengthen your core mission through automation.

28:00

ELISE: To learn more about the trends in today's episode, order a copy of The Automation Advantage at Accenture dot com slash Built For Change. It gives you a concrete road map for generating value for your business by embracing automation.

JOSH: Thanks to Accenture's Bhaskar Ghosh.

ELISE: And to Raj Singh and Blake Moret for talking with us.

JOSH: Built For Change is a podcast from Accenture.

ELISE: More episodes are coming soon. Follow, subscribe, and if you like what you hear, please leave us a review.