AI: MORE HUMAN, LESS MACHINE

WALK IN THE CLOUD

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Host:

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Speakers:

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Liz Barnsdale Bio:

Liz has over 20 years of experience as a trusted client partner on both global and local brands in both agency networks (latterly member of Havas Media Group UK Board) and for the past 5 years in Accenture. Liz previously worked in integrated creative agencies focused on data-led customer marketing strategies across all channels. Since joining Accenture she has focused on the creation of customer growth and experience strategy development overseeing specialist Data, Technical, Design, Change and Creative teams to define the vision and strategic roadmap and leading teams who then drive the transformation. Liz was named AdAge's Leading Women Europe 2021 for her impact on inclusion and diversity - leading our People and I&D agenda for Accenture Song Europe as well as for Accenture UKI as a member of our UKI Executive Team.

Intro: Walk in the Cloud.

Ellen: Can a computer copilot actually make your experience more human? That is the illogical idea we're talking about today. I'm Ellen Bencard, welcome to Walk in the Cloud! Accenture's Life Trends report for 2024 paints a picture of a world of frustrated consumers, who are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their customer experiences. It also talks of those people wanting to take back control, and like everyone this year it discusses the rise of AI. Today I'm walking with Liz Barnsdale, whose deep experience in both technology and marketing makes her a perfect person to ask. Liz, can the artificial actually bring us back to a more real place?

Liz: Hi Ellen. My answer straight off the bat is yes. I will take a big step back beforehand to express a huge deal of empathy with what we talked about in the Life Trends, and what you outlined in the opening to your question. The reason being is that at an emotional level I often feel I want to embrace being a Luddite myself. Going back to the age of no technology and trying to have more human interactions rather than less. Trying to step away from devices and screens because I feel too enslaved by them and wanting to run off to

a cabin in the woods and detox from anything digital. I think many of us feel like that. The nub of what you're describing and the real issue at the heart of this is the intent of too many businesses. Over time it has started, potentially, with using digital technologies to drive cost efficiency. If that's your starting point, then you generally find all your steps to design that experience come from a root cause that doesn't get you to the most human of outcomes. It's about cutting things out of the process. It's about accelerating self-service, beyond maybe human beings' ability to self-serve. We have all been there, and there's many more examples.

Ellen: We've all been there.

Liz: We could wax lyrical, I'm sure. What it ultimately comes down to is if we start with the intent. Embracing the forefront of the new technologies that we're looking at in Generative AI. Let's make our starting point, embracing them to design a better human outcome. If I start there, rather than in a cost efficiency and effectiveness space. Then what I see is a toolkit ahead of us that enables us to step in at scale, where there's an absence of a human being able to do the same thing. Instead of it being about self-serve, it's much more about a relationship, a conversation and the ability for the human being and the machine to come together and have a partnership. A true partnership. Let's make the intent right from the outset, and let's embrace it as a way to enhance a human experience, not embrace it as a way to drive cost, efficiency, and effectiveness. Because I don't think we'll get to the right outcome.

Ellen: Amen to that. I think the easiest way to get your head around this is to talk about examples. Can we dive into where you've been spending time right now, the automotive industry. Where you've told me there's some really exciting things going on. How is this going to become real for us, as drivers?

Liz: If you imagine that next to a house purchase, for many generations, the purchase of a vehicle is the next most emotional big-ticket thing they do. Globally over the years I've worked with auto clients and many of their customers. The overwhelming majority described a personal, human relationship with their vehicles that they drive. It's seen as an extension of their family. It's seen as something they personify. They give them names because you are physically spending a lot of time in this space. It becomes an extension of both you and your identity, and something that is felt to be trusted. Even if that's just in a work context. It gets me from A to B and I can hold my meetings there. Which is what many of us must do today when we're thinking about going out and seeing our clients. Or if it's much more emotional than that and it is somebody that you feel is a mate. The opportunity now exists, again with the advent of Generative AI. To move us from a point of view where previously our voice assistants in the car have been incredibly useful, but incredibly servile. They are there against our instruction to act on certain logic, to be able to help us pull up that map, to be able to help us find the next route.

Ellen: I need to learn the commands. There are still many things I need to pull over to touch my iPhone for.

Liz: Precisely, exactly. Whereas now we have the opportunity. If I think about a typical journey that I might make to see my clients who are in the Midlands. At times the journey could be an hour and a half. There are times it could be 3 hours, and during that time I need to have things to support me on that journey. Practical things, yes, but sometimes emotional things, such as somebody to talk to. I might be trying to phone my team or phone my partner. If they're not available then, I'm sitting in a traffic jam, not moving. Wouldn't it be wonderful to know that the voice assistance of the future doesn't have to be seen as just voice assistants? It could just be my car and I having a conversation. I could decide that I want to use the half hour to do a Duolingo course, and they can help and guide me through it. I could decide that I wanted to engage in a meeting that I wasn't intending to but without having to stop to enter my Teams ID to get into it. They can just help me do that. I could decide that I want to use this as an opportunity to get to know the car a bit better. Like with computers, there's still such low penetration of knowledge on these massive, great big technological kits that we drive nowadays. People are not accessing all the features and all the things that would help make them better drivers.

Ellen: I'm looking forward to being able to say 'Hello, Putt-Putt. What the heck does that light mean?'

Liz: Precisely. Oh my God, these little warning lights have gone on. Should I dial RAC now and put up the red emergency flag? Or am I safe to drive home for the next 50 miles? Or just, more simply, I'm just about to go through some flooded area.

Am I OK? Can I drive through that? As a woman navigating, often at the end of the day in darkness, also having the security and the safety of a voice just to talk me through certain things. If I'm feeling like I'm not in the safest space or like I'm able to use the car to the best of its ability. You can see so many different examples of where this moves to an ability to have a more expansive relationship with the vehicle that you drive. It's wonderful to imagine what that could be, and there's many, many, many auto companies that are doing that right now.

Ellen: I can't wait. OK, excellent. Not long before we all have the Droid in the back of our X-wing fighters.

Liz: Well, it's like Kitt from Knight Rider, isn't it? That's what I'm looking for. I need to get my Knight Rider on.

Ellen: Let's move on. Second example, healthcare. Now you mentioned cost-cutting assistance. I think we probably all have had those interactions where we're trying, but it's not the friendliest design. How can we get better at helping a healthcare programme that is under strain?

Liz: There's a huge amount of potential here. I think the acceleration of it is going to be key to how we think about the digital future of healthcare. One of the examples that you and I have talked about before is the frustration of 24 hours before an appointment with your GP. You can't find the route to go in because you've realised that you've got a family emergency, or you've got a meeting that has suddenly come up and you need to reschedule that appointment. It's out of surgery hours. You go into the site. I've had many of these instances. I work in digital experience design. I work in a digital space where we're doing this day-in and

day out. I have felt like giving up when I couldn't find the route through the site to help me on my GPs portal. How do I go about telling them I can't make that appointment tomorrow without having to make a phone call?

Ellen: Yes, God forbid, if you're my 85-year-old father.

Liz: Precisely because different ages and different vulnerabilities are at play here. That aptitude becomes lessened. Especially with illness and with healthcare, they can be quite acutely emotional points in time when you are looking for help. If all you're getting is a bit of a self-serve dead end, or a 'computer says no', you really at that point need to have something that's more akin to sympathetic, empathetic human interaction. And again, this isn't about replacing the existing human interactions we have, because we're saying we need more. The ability now is that it doesn't have to come from a flesh and bone human. It could and will come from Generative AI and the technologies that we can play with today. They could support a much more human reasoning-based approach to how we deal with empathy, with patients who simply want to reschedule an appointment. It's taking what would have been in a chat bot or a virtual assistant, but it's supercharging it. To make it a lot more instinctive, a lot quicker and easier, and hopefully getting people at really acute points to be able to get resolution. Now that's a very mundane and domestic scenario. What our amazing life sciences and health teams are doing are looking at multiple scenarios. Where it helps in the context of surgery, and in the context of diagnosis. It helps ensure that from a research perspective, companies are able to get to outcomes far quicker, because they

have the ability to synthesise research at a far greater volume, depth and legitimacy than they were before. You can see that it starts to open up the opportunity to be a lot more human, and a lot more instinctive, in how we deal with healthcare. And hopefully get us the healthcare system we want, which is entirely proactive instead of reactive. That would be the ideal use of it into the future, I would say.

Ellen: Absolutely. Those are two examples that seem overwhelmingly positive. Let me go to possibly a darker place. The creative industry. In 2003, we lost four months of creative production with writers and actors on strike. There's a huge amount of concern about Gen AI just starting to churn out copy and music and making all our artists and writers unemployed. Should they be scared or is there an upside here?

Liz: I'll start from the position of saying I genuinely believe there's going to be an upside. I will talk more to the commercial creative industry, because that's the one that I personally operate in, and I work with many teams that do. Based on the conversations that we're having there's a huge cognizant that there is an ability to produce output at a level, scale and speed that hasn't happened before. Ultimately, what our creative teams are looking at is the ability to use Generative AI and technologies like that to support their creative process. To help them get to richer, better, deeper ideas in a faster sense or just in a more exciting way. What would have been a lot of desk-based research and insight gathering, to support where their ideas might be going, where their brains might be sparking. Now they have a creative co-pilot using Generative AI to sift through inspiration and use that as the fuel to help them get to better ideas. What you can see

in multiple experiments and studies that have started to spin up globally. There is an absolute consensus that Generative AI is very good at sifting through the information that's already available. Because it's using quite homogeneous information, it can often get to quite homogeneous ideas. They're very safe. They're very sound. No one could overtly start rejecting it straight away. But does it have that spark of genius? Does it have that lateral interception? Does it have what true creatives bring to the table, when you think about that human endeavour? The answer is no, and it's not expected to get to that space in decades to come.

Ellen: But it can set up for me that average that I can bounce off or give me the information I need to generate that big idea.

Liz: Yeah, I think that that's very much how our creative teams are looking at it. As that creative co-pilot. The able partner who helps them to have the right playground to work within, but not necessarily the artist and the architect itself. I think that's where the human steps in.

Ellen: I like the playground idea.

Liz: I think what you're highlighting there is that everyone should have a very firm view on this. It's about the ethical and responsible frameworks that we as businesses put around how we treat the IP of the creative partners that we want to work with. Whether that's our own creatives and us respectfully looking after our own creativity. Because if we don't value it and we don't value it from others, then we are basically writing it off. We have to put more time into looking at, responsibly,

how can we create those frameworks, how can we align our processes around IP? There are people in Accenture that are far, far better versed than me, especially our wonderful responsible business team that have been looking at this and advising clients today. That for me is a starting point. Let's have the intent to do the right thing. Let's be responsible and let's all start from the starting point that true creativity is the work of genius, and that isn't something that we can easily replicate.

Ellen: You know, IP is probably an excellent episode just on its own.

Liz: You need to do that. You need to get the likes of Ray Eitel-Porter and his team on it and come and talk to you about it. They will be they will be chapter and verse on all the wonderful things that we are doing and how we look at helping businesses in that space. But yeah, hugely important.

Ellen: But for now, we are approaching the end of our walk. So let me ask you for a quick closing thought. One thing everybody should do to get better at diving into this world of an AI copilot, what's top of my to-do list?

Liz: You've asked for one. I'm going to give you 3 in rapid fire. First play with it. Don't dismiss it until you've played with it. Get in a safe sandbox and have a play and just enjoy it. Secondly, read about it and really prioritise educating yourself because we're all learning. Nobody is a marked genius in this. Everybody is still learning, and stuff is developing day-in and day-out. Educate yourself and prioritise that. Finally, like I said, when we concluded our last conversation,

get a perspective on where you sit on this. Have your own ethical view on it and work to understand your organisations view, because it's important that we are clear on where we stand on how it's applied and how it's used. Those would be my three top tips for really getting into it.

Ellen: Super. Thank you, Liz. That is it, from us, for now. Two humans on a walk, but there may be some AI friends helping us to get this into your ears. If you want to read more on these topics, search Accenture in conjunction with either Life Trends 2024 or AI for Everyone. There will be enough to keep you busy for hours, until next time!

Outro: Walk in the Cloud.