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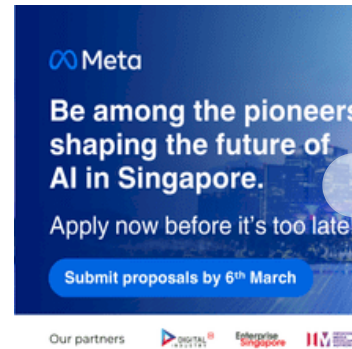


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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE RESOURCE SME

AI adoption is an area of maturity for SMEs, but they have advantage over big corporations: Aicadium's Robert Young

AI enables SMEs to scale efficiently and compete in the evolving tech landscape, a process that begins with quality and productivity



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25 Feb, 2025

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During his recent visit to Singapore, **e27** met with Robert Young, Vice President of Strategic Innovation at Aicadium, Temasek's global AI centre of excellence.

We discussed the role of AI in enabling SMEs to scale efficiently and compete in the evolving tech landscape, a process that begins with quality and productivity, according to Young.

"If you are going to assess how well it works, you need to have a structure, a framework. A lot of things look really nice in a brochure, but how do you measure before you start implementing a new thing, before you change your processes and behaviours around it? With that whole process, an SME can actually evaluate the performance of a technology, not just based on feelings," he says.

"It is an area of maturity for SMEs."

Young brings over 15 years of experience successfully delivering solutions to customers in various industries. He joined Aicadium after founding Lab Insights. At the company, he was the principal owner and principal consultant leading dozens of laboratory informatics projects over the last 15 years.

In this interview, Young explains how SMEs can maximise the advantages of AI in their operations. The following is an edited excerpt of the conversation.

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data and the technology that is also moving so fast. How can we differentiate between the science and the science fiction of these technologies?

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I will give you an example. We are at a restaurant. When they are making food here, as a person running the restaurant, they might think, "Sometimes I get hair in my food, but I do not want that to happen anymore."

[Understanding] how often this happens is the data literacy part. How often does it happen? How much does it cost to your reputation and bottom line? How can you assess the value of fixing that problem as compared to the cost?

Is there any advantage that SMEs have compared to big corporations when it comes to AI adoption?

They had the expertise of their data decorations, which I have experienced in my journey to technology.

Coming from an SME point of view allows you to approach problems differently. First of all, you are not thinking about these problems academically; you are approaching them practically. Because you understand the entire business process or the entire science behind what you do on a daily basis, you actually have more insight into the things that are important.

How can SMEs begin the process of adopting AI without affecting their existing process?

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the technology that can analyse and summarise all of your notes for the day while before, you have to write this down by hand. If I do not change what I am doing, I cannot make the most of its usability.

Another way to think about it is this: back then, we were using typewriters, and then all of a sudden, we had to move to printers and computers. If you just tried to replicate what you were doing with typewriters in the age of the computer, then there would be a lot of value that you were not able to grab.

In terms of people, you also have to bring them along with you. Yes, you can have a leader. You can have top-down thinking about where the most valuable pieces of AI use cases could be. But if you do not go down to understand the day-the-day of SMEs workflows, then you might be limiting their ability to do their best work.

They will have to change something, but you do not want to completely overturn everything they do.

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Now, while we are on the topic of the people ... there has been a lot of buzz about workforce upskilling. Do you have any ideas about how SMEs can do this?

It is important to first create a framework for the acceptable use of AI and provide tools and education for people who want to adopt it. As I said before, it starts with data literacy, being able to understand the right language to describe AI's performance and outcomes. I think that is really important.

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For example, many people nowadays are coming up with frameworks for the appropriate use of chatbots. What are the do's and do n'ts? What information am I, as a company, allowed to put in there? How do you create the right framework for exploration? How do you create a community inside organizations where lessons learned from one team can be shared with others so the knowledge grows exponentially?

Balancing automation and human expertise. So, how do these two work together?

I think there are ways that you can use AI to codify some of the human expertise, but there are things that you always have to think about intended use. So, any AI that you build, there is a certain amount of capability that it has.

You have to understand what it can and cannot do, and put in processes and controls around the AI so that it is doing what it is supposed to do. You are able to monitor what it is doing and make sure that the human is always in the driver's seat.

What are the upcoming trends in the next few years?

Predicting the next few years is tough. Five years ago, we did not think of Generative AI as this transformational technology that would revolutionise the world.

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In the current year of 2025, all the way to 2026, I see us starting to unlock things that are actually useful. People are familiar

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hype was real and which are going to be put aside. Agentic AI has the opportunity to be transformative in a lot of areas in ways that our smartphones have revolutionised how we live every day ... but there will also be things that we spend way too much investment on that did not work out. And that is just the nature of new technology adoption.

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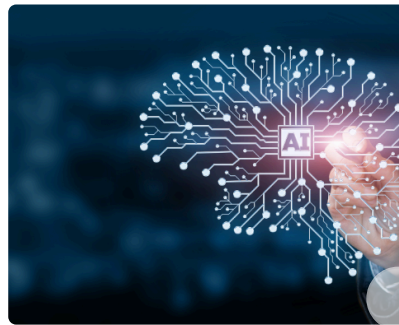


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Paviter Singh



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