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THE IMPACT OF AI
ON ICT

Business

On 11 March 2025, the Telenet Business Leadership Circle, organised and moderated by CIONET and Hendrik Deckers at the invitation of Telenet Business, took an in-depth look at the impact of AI on ICT.

The evolution of AI is comparable to that of IT, but it's happening much faster. As with IT in its early days, AI is becoming deeply embedded in almost every business function. Amara's Law also applies here: we tend to overestimate AI's short-term effects and underestimate its long-term impact. This makes it essential to embed AI across your company in a structured way.

AI is driving a level of acceleration unlike anything we've seen before. Nobody wants to miss the boat. The result is predictable — a flood of ideas for all kinds of potential AI applications. This turns out to be the first major challenge in the AI era: managing the deluge of proposals and identifying the most promising opportunities. Many companies have responded by setting up innovation boards to prioritise and evaluate use cases.

Others are building citizen networks — internal communities that shape and streamline ideas into viable concepts before they go to the innovation board and IT development. This approach allows you to maintain a certain level of control over the demand for AI and keep its use on IT's radar — avoiding the dreaded shadow IT.

But does AI really need to be under the remit of the IT department? Not necessarily, according to the participants in our roundtable discussion. Data needs to reside where it creates the most value. On the other hand, it's IT that knows exactly how to extract value from your data. After all, the value is only realised at the very end of the process.

Multi AI

It's predicted that all kinds of AI applications will be available off the shelf before long. But anyone who wants to stand out as an early adopter right now still needs to develop bespoke solutions. Modular development offers advantages in this respect. Modules can be replaced later when new and improved tools hit the market.

But early adoption isn't without its pitfalls. Anyone hoping to make rapid progress today must rely on the American AI hyperscalers to move quickly. This leads us to a familiar concern around data sovereignty, especially in sensitive sectors such as healthcare and government. It's notoriously difficult to untangle your services from such providers at a later date.

One solution is to opt for a multi-AI model, analogous to multicloud. Then you can develop an AI application in such a way that you can easily switch between providers. By testing on so-called test benches, you can evaluate the trade-off between cost and performance. What's more, you can compare the test results, which acts as an additional check on quality.

Safe experimentation

Of course, many companies haven't yet reached this stage. They might still be experimenting with an off-the-shelf application such as Copilot, ideally using a carefully selected group of internal ambassadors. This ensures proper training, more enthusiastic adoption, and maximum value, while avoiding the risk that an expensive tool woud be underused or misapplied.

Public AI applications such as ChatGPT still raise concerns, particularly around data privacy. A private version offers a safer alternative without sacrificing functionality. There are plenty of potential use cases, for example reverse engineering, documentation and testing of code, or quickly searching manuals, legal texts, etc. Even predictive analysis of fraud, using targeted checks, is possible.

Guardrails

The danger of uncontrolled proliferation came up again and again at our roundtable. There are often still too many POCs, which can sometimes lack accuracy. Guardrails are needed to counteract this. While there are certainly believers who want to move as quickly as possible without asking questions, there are also many non-believers who spend their time asking questions and blocking progress.

A clear framework is what's needed so that you can start with the low-hanging fruit, while also creating an environment that makes more possible — fast but safe. And you don't necessarily need a separate policy for AI. Often your existing IT policies will suffice. By involving the right employees — for example through a prompt-a-thon where they learn to use GenAI — you can more easily establish and maintain the guardrails.

PASCAL PAUWELS
CIO Colruyt Group

Colruyt Group: stay focused on the business

""AI is changing the world very quickly," says Pascal Pauwels, CIO at Colruyt Group. "And that has a major impact on all aspects of IT development and IT management."

AI is being used in diverse ways at Colruyt Group. Pascal identifies three broad categories. "Firstly, there's AI in the office, which is geared toward user efficiency," he says. "This includes employees who work with ChatGPT or Copilot, for example."

A second category takes in those in the IT department who use AI. "Here too, efficiency is the main goal, for example when writing code. Think of Jira, which has integrated AI support that allows you to check or complete code." But Pascal doesn't believe that GenAI will make writing code redundant. "It gets you started as a developer and yes, it speeds things up, but it can't read your mind. You still have to set the requirements yourself."

The third category includes what Pascal describes as the "true AI use cases" — applications that were unfeasible before AI but are now making completely new processes and innovations possible. "I'm thinking of smart recipes, for example," he says. "We have a large database of recipes that we want to apply AI to. For example, the user can input which ingredients they have at home, and then the app could suggest what to make for dinner tonight and give you step-by-step instructions."

This third bucket contains the potential applications that will most directly impact Colruyt Group's business. Colruyt is a price tracker. The company looks at the prices and promotions of its competitors and adjusts its prices accordingly. To do this, employees visit competitors' stores, scan brochures, and scrape websites. "We already adjust our prices several times a day. AI could allow us to include more information in that exercise and further refine our pricing, for example in combination with customer preference details."

The impact on the IT department

The business has many ideas for AI. "The first thing is to structure these questions properly. After all, an AI application requires infrastructure," says Pascal. "To handle this efficiently, you first need to have a good reference architecture: a framework within which you can develop your use case. But for AI, this is a really complex exercise because things are moving very quickly. We're essentially writing the book while we're reading it."

There is no shortage of challenges. For example, you don't want your employees to start working with confidential data in ChatGPT. "We develop our own guidelines," says Pascal, "often because there is no legal framework in place yet." And how do you know as a company which tools are the right ones for your needs? "Gartner doesn't yet have a magic quadrant for AI, so we work with POCs and we use the embedded AI functionality of existing tools. An AI function in ServiceNow, for example, easily makes ticket flows more efficient."

Choosing the right POCs

But precisely because AI is evolving so quickly, you also want to suppress the tendency to immediately react to every new development. You don't want to end up chasing your own tail. "That applies to all new technology," says Pascal. "But AI is very hot right now, and you have to remain calm and only focus on what really matters to your company." You can achieve this by choosing the right POCs. "And you keep the proliferation of ideas from the business under control by sticking to your reference architecture."
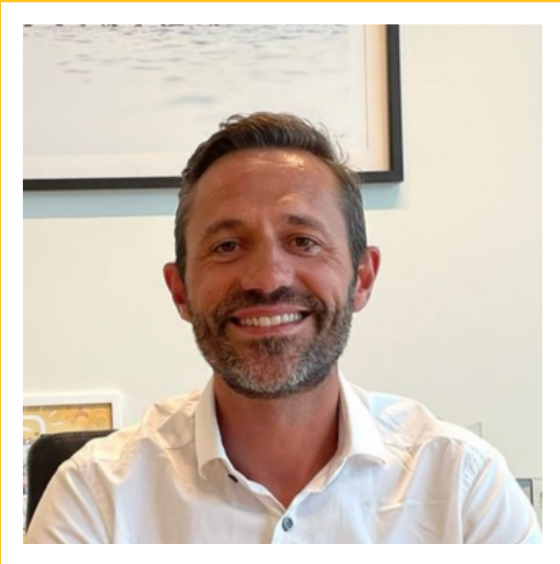
KIM SMETS
VP Data & AI Telenet

Telenet: stands or falls on integration

Telenet's strategy is focused on improving customer experience. And because the company's business is based on connectivity, it's actually about improving the connectivity experience. "Data and AI provide us with a compass that points us in the right direction on our customer experience journey, helping us to chart a course for meaningful improvements," says Kim Smets, VP Data and AI at Telenet.

A good example of this is the use of predictive AI to detect connectivity problems — instead of waiting for the customer to report a problem. AI searches for the root cause of the problem and estimates how dissatisfied the customer will be because of it. The application then proposes a solution, such as sending a technician to the location or having a new modem delivered.

Another example is the use of AI in Telenet's value-based network roll-out. "This allows us to prioritise investment where it's most needed," explains Kim. The same goes for the AI application that supports network service assurance. "The last mile of connectivity must always be top notch. The application helps to ensure that potential issues are resolved immediately."

However, the focus remains firmly on the customer. The applications rely on data from the network and from the customer's modem. "We correlate that information with the available customer data and then it flows on to the technician, the call centre, or the Telenet app." The app allows the customer to see whether everything is working as it should. They can also receive advice and support, for example about how to install a new modem.

"That feedback is key," says Kim. "As I mentioned earlier, it's all about improving the customer experience. To do that effectively, AI must be fully integrated with IT – otherwise it just wouldn't deliver real value. But integration alone isn't enough. To make it work, you also need a team that trusts the data coming from various sources, such as network data and customer data." Telenet is a great example of this in action. All the right conditions are in place, and as a result, the business is clearly benefiting from AI.

Conclusion

It's clear that AI is changing the world — and the role of IT along with it. It's amplifying the need for both integration and security. To deliver on AI's promise, we'll need more IT, not less, but organisations must create space for experimentation within a clear and safe framework that prevents uncontrolled growth.

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About CIONET

CIONET is the leading community of more than 10,000 digital leaders in 20+ countries across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Through this global presence CIONET orchestrates peer-to-peer interactions focused on the most important business and technology issues of the day. CIONET members join over a thousand international and regional live and virtual events annually, ranging from roundtables, programs for peer-to-peer exchange of expertise, community networking events, to large international gatherings. Its members testify that CIONET is an impartial and value adding platform that helps them use the wisdom of the (IT) crowd, to acquire expertise, advance their professional development, analyse and solve IT issues, and accelerate beneficial outcomes within their organisation.

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About Telenet Business

Telenet Business, part of the Telenet Group, is so much more than connectivity. As a managed service provider they help Belgian companies turn their digital challenges into business opportunities. They support and unburden, large and medium-sized enterprises as well as small entrepreneurs. You can count on them for high-quality managed services such as internet, telephony, solutions to collaborate and communicate digitally, cybersecurity and smart displays.

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