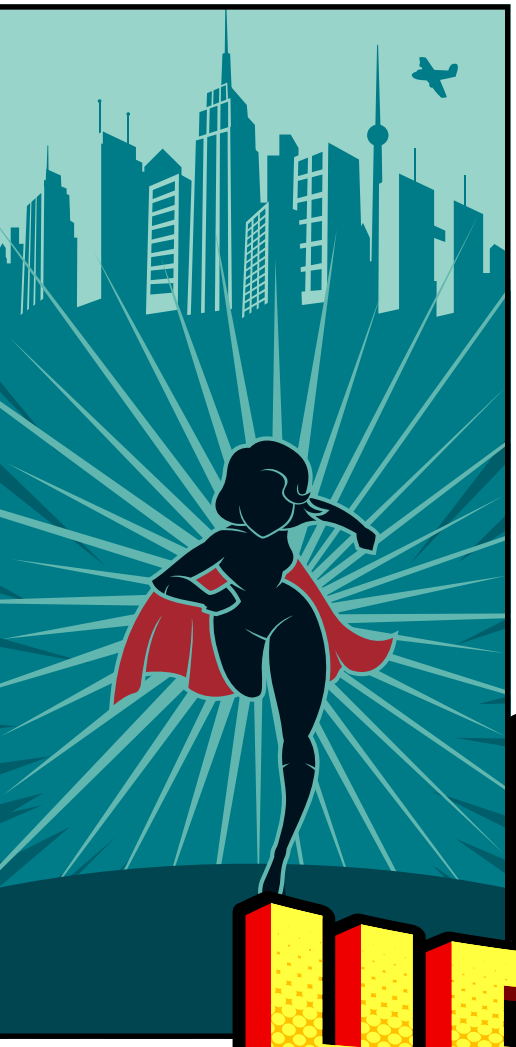
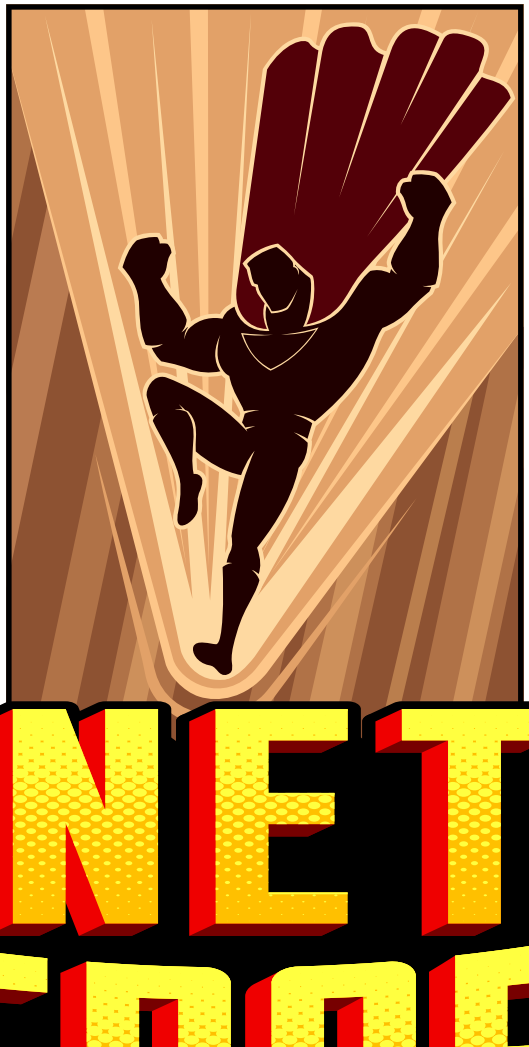




NET HEROES

Tech Channel Unites: Meet a new wave of sustainable superheroes driving real change across our industry...

Richard Kenny

Managing Director, Interact DC

Richard Kenny had no idea when he embarked on a research project into circularity with the University of East London and Innovate UK back in 2018 that it would lead him to start his firm, Interact DC, just a few years later.

The project attempted to prove or disprove that as electronic components continue their usage, they become less performant, and therefore better understand whether performance is a limiter for circular practice in IT. This led to Richard and his research partners benchmarking thousands of servers.

"That's how we ended up building Interact DC, which is a machine learning tool that allows us to input any server configuration and tell you how much work it does, what it's efficiency per watt is and to build simulations of what change looks like to help companies achieve carbon and environmental benefits," Richard says. It was while the firm was benchmarking servers that the team found themselves disproving Moore's Law.

"We realised that transformative generational improvements in CPUs just weren't there any longer, because no one had benchmarked to the level we were working at. So we published our findings in the IEEE Journal of Sustainable Computing in 2021, and we pinpointed exactly where Moore's Law stopped holding true."

All of that research feeds directly into the Interact DC tool, which helps organisations and governments significantly improve their carbon and energy efficiency. Richard has worked with over 500 data centres, including customers such as BT, the NHS, major financial institutions and the Dutch Government.

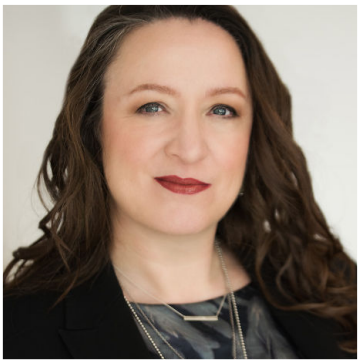
He says some of the most promising uses of AI in ESG are in the medtech space. He cited a recent study concerning Pneumonia where AI was able to detect cases faster and more accurately than doctors. "Several years ago, I met a company doing a similar project with AI, but they were training it on breast cancer data.

With all the data available in the NHS, the AI could not only detect breast cancer in a patient faster and more accurately than doctors, but it was also able to inform clinicians of which scans would be likely to turn into breast cancer in the future. Using AI in this scenario not only prevents unnecessary biopsies, but it can also be preventative and save lives," he says.

When it comes to how AI can help smaller channel businesses with their ESG strategy, Richard says it's easy to become overwhelmed with the number of tools out there. However, he recommends keeping it simple by using GenAI to help create a strategy.

"People are using ChatGPT to create bland content or write product descriptions, but there are better tools that can do so much more," he says. "Try Google Gemini and do deep research to help with sustainability reporting. The key is prompting it well – think about the outcomes you want to drive and use the tech to help you plan a way of achieving that."

> **One piece of advice:** Take a step back and think about whether AI is the right tool for the task. It's not about transforming your whole business overnight, but about using AI to improve outcomes in practical ways. GenAI can help you understand where you can make meaningful changes – whether that's tracking emissions, improving reporting or identifying opportunities for efficiency. Always start with the outcome you want, then use AI to map out how to get there.



Tiffany St James

Chief Commercial Officer, Vitalis Capital

Tiffany St James has spent her entire career exploring new technologies and helping others make sense of them. Through her consultancy, Transmute, she's worked across everything from social media and blockchain to NFTs and Web 3.0. Now, as Chief Commercial Officer at both Vitalis Capital and Sustainable Wellness Group, and UK Country Director for the Global AI Council, Tiffany is focused on how AI can help organisations achieve their goals, as well as be a force for good.

She sees AI not as a threat, but as an opportunity. "There are, of course, two sides to this coin: Training large AI models can be resource-intensive, particularly in terms of energy and water use. But AI is being used to support climate and sustainability efforts, helping us to use our creative intelligence better, and the tech industry is rapidly evolving toward more sustainable practices."

At Vitalis Capital, Tiffany is involved in using AI to track the markers that identify socio-economic development in Small Island Developing States and Developing Economies. "There are lots of social impact tools out there, but AI allows us to take more than just a snapshot in time. We can analyse how ongoing policy changes affect waste, water, schooling, infrastructure – everything needed to support a population with growth ambitions."

When changing environmental data, such as extreme weather, is layered with geopolitical changes, the result is a powerful tool for government planning and public resilience. The firm is now working with national leaders in Bhutan and other small developing nations to help them set socio-economic baselines and measure the growth of specific interventions effectively.

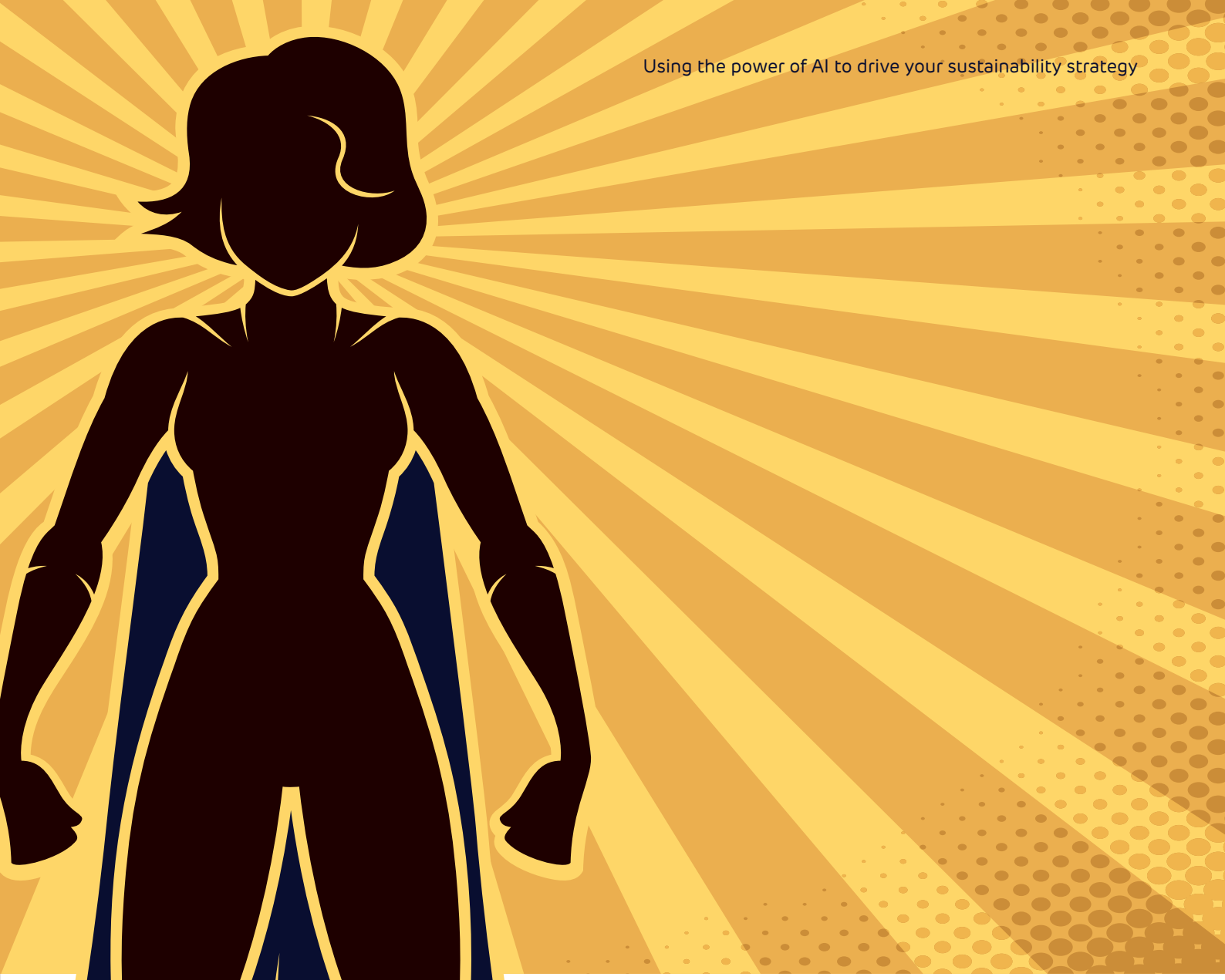
When it comes to ESG, however, Tiffany says it's important to distinguish between ESG and social impact. "ESG is a fiscal measurement that incorporates governance and reporting. Social impact is harder to measure because it's about quantifying the real-world outcomes of what you've done."

Most companies, she explains, might report on ESG metrics and even reflect on their social value – the softer benefits of their work. But few are quantifying social impact in financial terms aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. "That's where AI can help," she says. "We use proxy values from the UK Treasury's Green Book and feed those into our models, allowing organisations to calculate, in pounds and pence, the good they're doing."

Tiffany is optimistic about AI's future. "We're seeing high-speed democratisation of big tech and tools into any size company. By leaning into good online education, any organisation can help themselves to build, use, and make tools at scale that can help the business."

But she also recognises growing scepticism, particularly among younger voices. She's noticed that some Gen Z and Gen Alpha individuals, including her own daughter and her peers, are actively pushing back against AI. And not just on creative grounds like copyright or originality, but because of its environmental impact.

"Some of the people I speak to – not all, but a noticeable number – are strongly anti-AI. They see it as harmful to the planet and a threat to human creativity. That really surprised me. It made me



realise the conversation is shifting and we need to be listening and understanding key concerns and responding to them."

Even so, Tiffany believes AI has enormous potential, especially in freeing people from repetitive tasks so they can focus on more creative, meaningful work. She also acknowledges concerns around generic outputs from tools like ChatGPT but sees this not as a dead end, but rather as an opportunity for organisations to improve how they communicate, not lose their voice in the noise.

> **One piece of advice:** Organisations must be very clear about the problem they're trying to solve and not use AI for the sake of it. It's not about using AI because it's on trend; it's about using it because there is a business challenge that AI can help you solve. Then, once you're clear on the purpose, invest in building your people's skills and confidence with AI, so they can use it effectively and feel part of the journey.

Jon Steggles

Sustainability and Social Value Manager, CDW

With over 25 years in commercial roles across the public and private sectors, Jon Steggles brings a knowledgeable and pragmatic eye to his role as Sustainability and Social Value Manager at CDW.

His remit is wide and covers five core areas: setting the strategic direction for sustainability; overseeing tactical delivery, often through others; working directly with customers and partners to shape shared ESG journeys; influencing CDW's global strategy by representing UK needs; and participating in key industry panels and working groups.

Unsurprisingly, his approach is rooted in commercial awareness. "If I'm not recognising where the customer or partner is on their sustainability journey, and ensuring we meet them there, then I'm not going to enact real change," he explains. "I view everything I do at CDW through that lens."

Jon says that it will take a united technology industry to drive real change. "There is a big opportunity for radical collaboration across the industry. It doesn't matter how big our organisations are, in isolation, individual voices won't drive change, real impact requires a consolidated voice," he says.

Jon says the impact of AI is simultaneously helping and harming our sustainability goals. He's cautious about the environmental cost of large language models and GenAI, which demand vast amounts of energy and water. "Without a shadow of doubt, it is more intensive to run a ChatGPT search than it is to do a Google search. And I fear that people will use those kinds of tools for tasks that used to be done on a browser. I think that's problematic."

But he's also hopeful about where AI can make a positive impact, particularly when used to help address specific sustainability challenges and provide ideation. "You can analyse data faster, draw trends and build models that say, 'If I move this lever, what's the impact over here?' That combination of human and technology will produce some innovative, impactful solutions," he says.

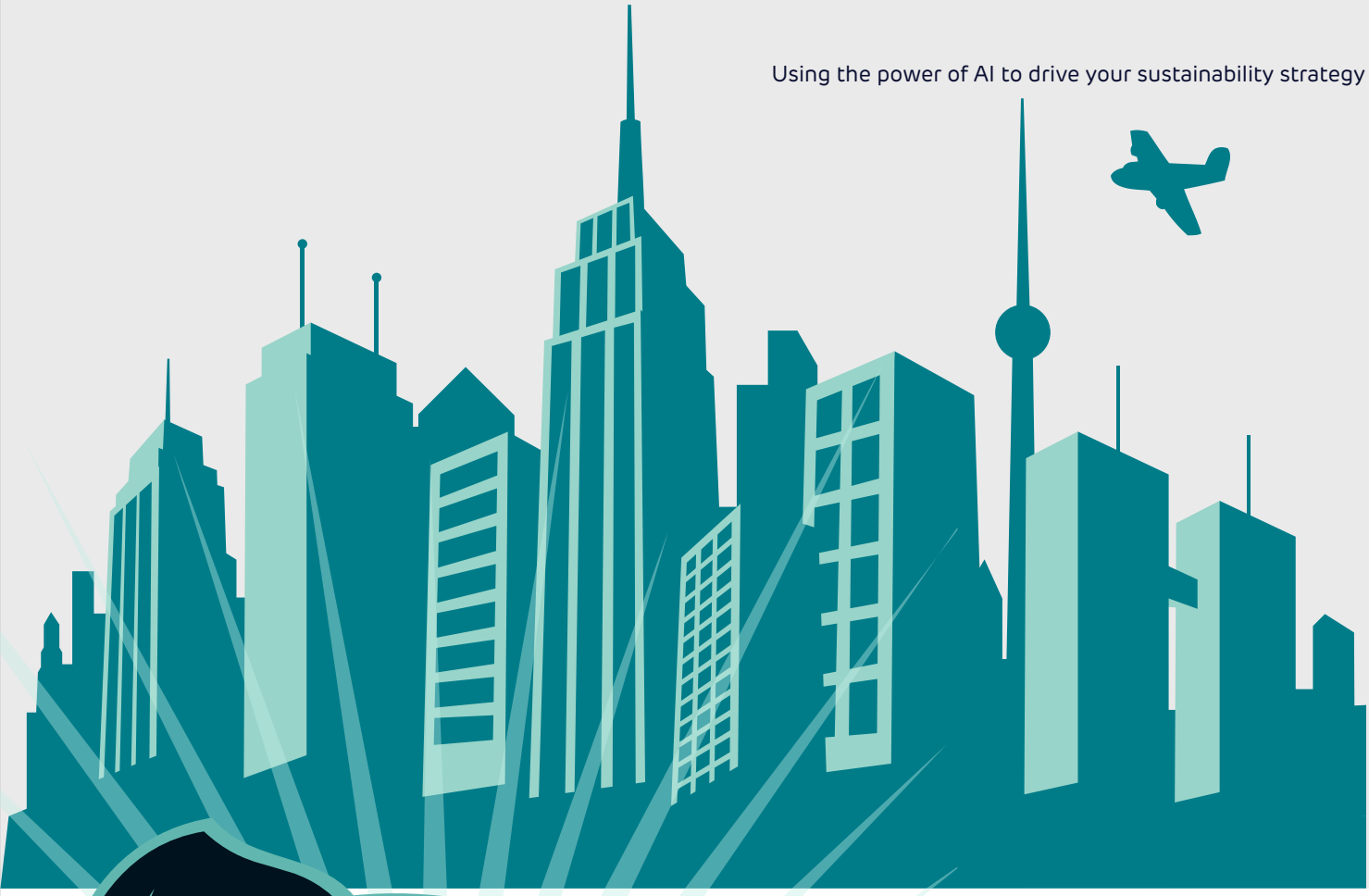
That potential, however, is still a way off. "There's this expectation that AI will be the saviour. It'll tell us how to improve the sustainability position of a business, a group or a country, but I don't think it's there yet," he says. "Most companies will achieve more by using AI to help guide their strategy than they will impact the planet. But of course, there will be a tipping point," he says. "And that's when we need to exercise more caution."

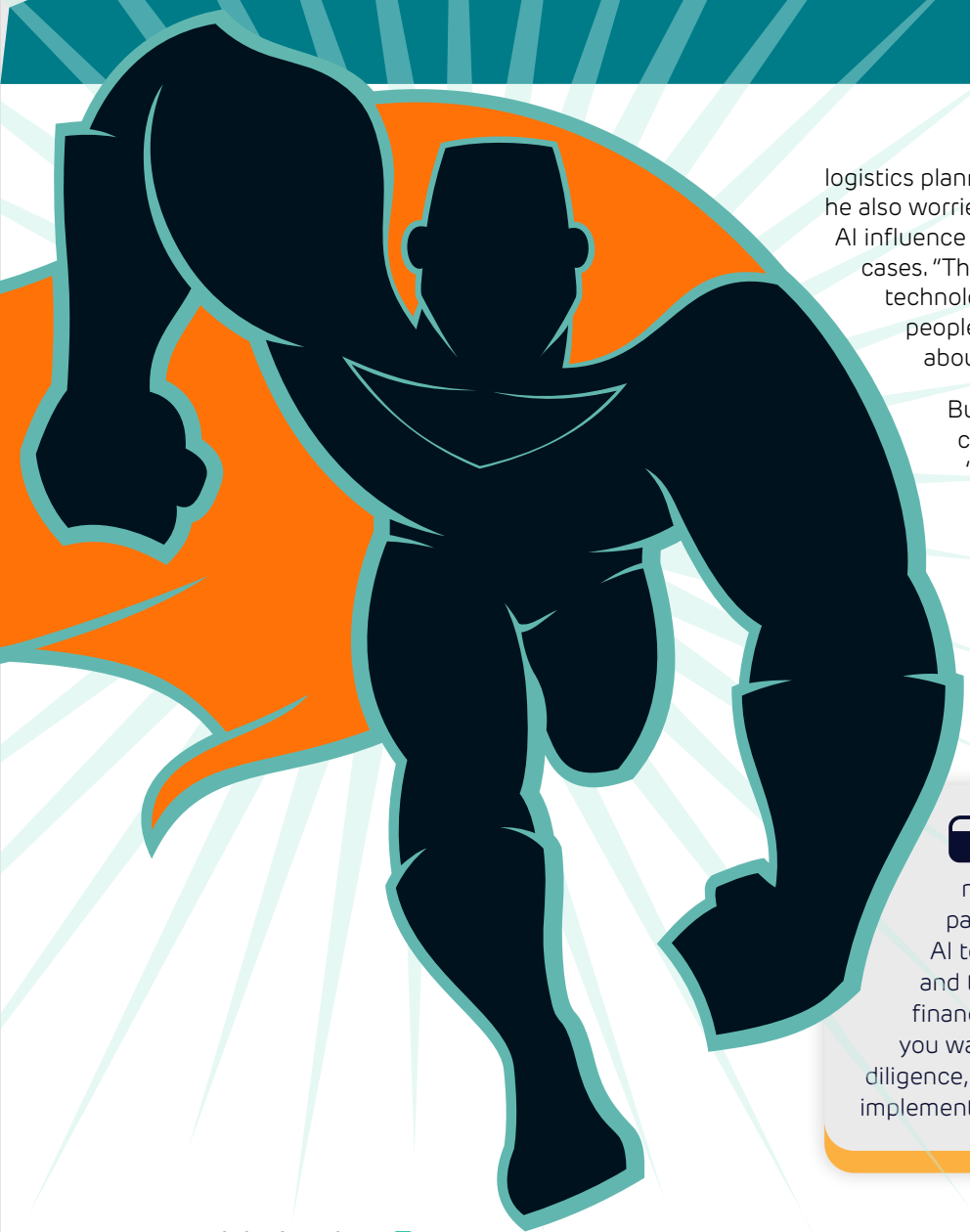
Currently, CDW is adopting this cautious approach to using AI within its own sustainability strategy. The carbon accounting platform the firm uses, Normative, is starting to introduce AI in its calculation engine, and Jon says CDW is beginning to explore the use of AI on the social side of ESG.

CDW is working alongside Intel and HP to support the AI for Citizen curriculum. The project provides Help for Heroes staff and veterans with AI-integrated devices and specialist AI training to build valuable skills and knowledge in AI. "We are focused on advancing digital equity as part of our social impact programme," Jon says. "This will help veterans transition to new career paths after their service."

The company's work experience programme also introduces young people to AI, including a session delivered by an avatar of CDW's Head of the Office of the CTO, backed up by the real person in the room.

Looking ahead, Jon is pragmatic. He sees potential in AI-led tools to green the grid, help people use electricity more efficiently at home, or improve

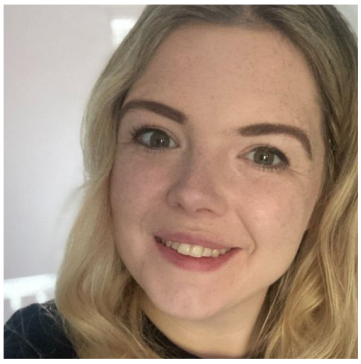




logistics planning with better emissions data. But he also worries about the unchecked growth of AI influence and low-value, high-emission use cases. "There is a cost to powering this kind of technology," he says. "And I don't think the people building it are necessarily thinking about the environmental impact."

But he's optimistic about the UK tech channel's ability to lead with purpose. "We've got some brilliant minds working in this space," he says. "If someone could build an AI platform that's specific to our industry, with a discrete, carefully considered set of applications and power it in the least environmentally impactful way, I think we'd all start selling it tomorrow."

> **One piece of advice:** The technology is embryonic right now. So, firms shouldn't move with pace just yet. I would test and trial AI to see if the business applications and the performance outcomes are financially viable and driving the results you want. Take your time, do your due diligence, and start small before you implement anything business critical.



Chelsea Chamberlin

CTO, Roc Technology

As CTO at Roc Technologies, Chelsea Chamberlin leads the technical strategy across the company's four core practices: networking and connectivity, cloud platforms, cybersecurity, and automation and AI. She also shapes Roc's industry approach and vendor partner ecosystem, with a particular focus on the public sector – an area where she brings expertise thanks to her aviation and defence background, including time at Lockheed Martin and NATS.

Roc employs around 270 people and is backed by private equity giant BGF, which conducts regular ESG audits. "BGF monitors all companies within its portfolio using automated tools," she says. "In the past 12 months, Roc has moved from scoring 'Excellent' to being recognised as 'Leaders' in all areas of ESG."

Still, Chelsea is keen for the company to go further. Roc is now working towards EcoVadis certification and exploring how AI could support its ESG ambitions. "At the moment, what we do is quite manual, but we want to get to a place where we can deliver more granular reporting with continuous monitoring and management," she says. "We're looking at some open source tools and also considering building something in-house, through our software business, Coria, where that makes sense."

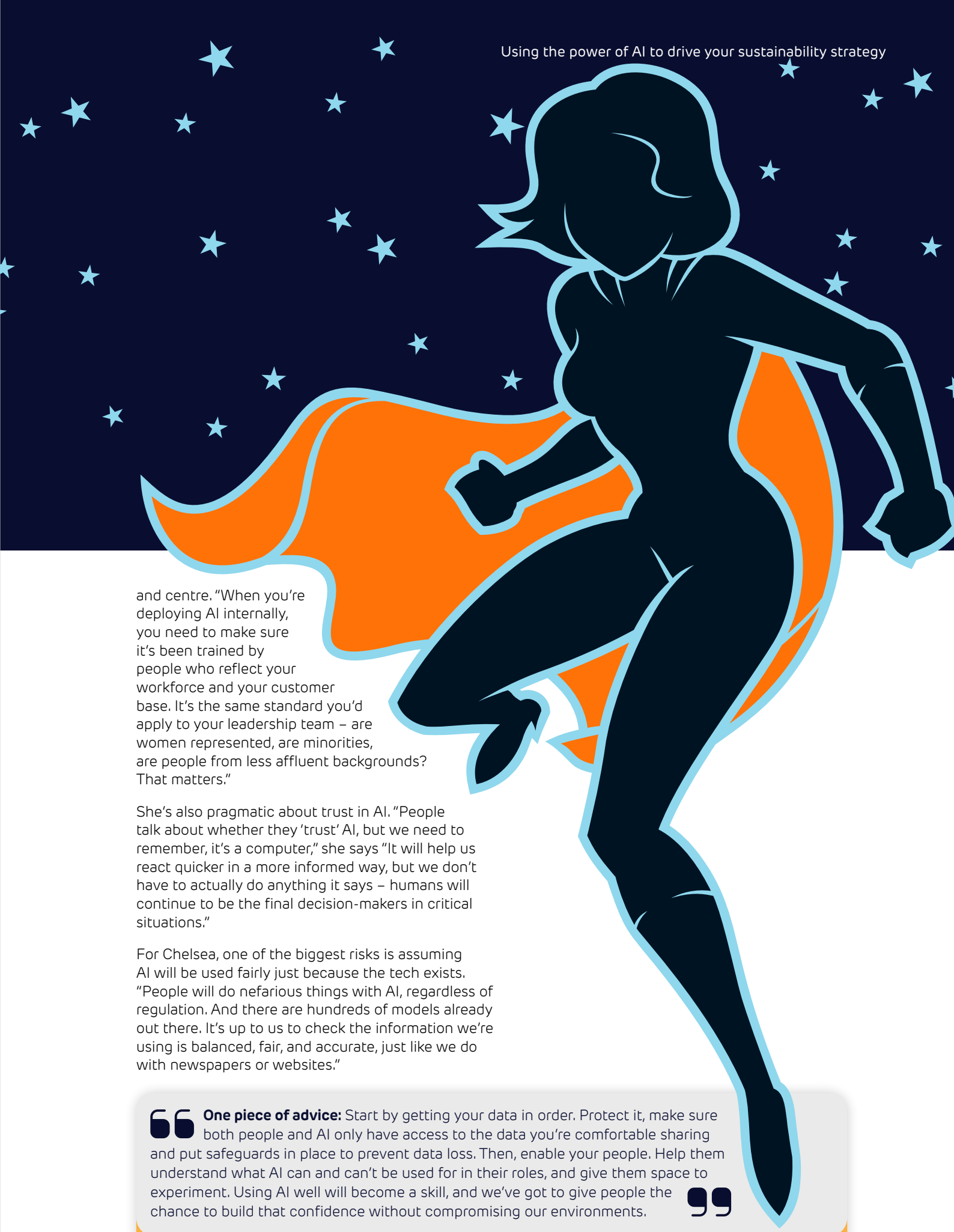
However, there are some limitations for Roc. "Because of the environments that we work in and customers we serve, we are highly secure and highly governed; we can't just adopt a new system and turn it on," she says. "But our data is in a great place. We know where everything is and who has access to it. That will stand us in good stead once we're ready to adopt AI more generally across our whole business."

Chelsea sees AI as a tool to unlock value in human terms. "We're focused on using AI for customers where it can deliver operational, environmental or social benefit to drive efficiency and value. By doing this, AI will help offset its own carbon impact," she says. "It's not about AI for the sake of it. If we can free people up from repetitive, mundane tasks, that helps morale, but also lets us redirect energy into areas for social good."

One example is a project Roc is supporting that uses AI to help prevent suicide. "We're the networking partner on a project to deploy high-definition CCTV, which can analyse images of people as they walk onto bridges," she explains. "Faces aren't identified, but the AI monitors expressions in real-time and can flag behaviours that might indicate someone is in distress. It means support services can intervene much more quickly."

She is optimistic about how AI can be used to help solve the environmental dilemma around ESG and AI. As a judge for the TechRound AITech35 Awards, Chelsea sees firsthand how many AI start-ups are prioritising ESG. "Over 60% of the companies we reviewed were using AI to solve environmental or social challenges in everything from agriculture to education to protecting vulnerable people. There are amazing ideas out there." See Chapter 2 for more.

But she's clear that inclusion must remain front

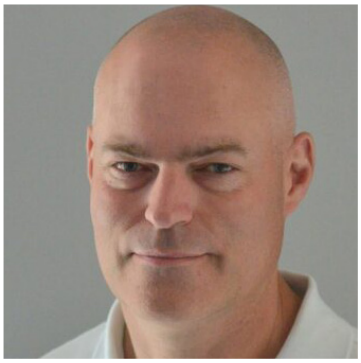


and centre. "When you're deploying AI internally, you need to make sure it's been trained by people who reflect your workforce and your customer base. It's the same standard you'd apply to your leadership team – are women represented, are minorities, are people from less affluent backgrounds? That matters."

She's also pragmatic about trust in AI. "People talk about whether they 'trust' AI, but we need to remember, it's a computer," she says "It will help us react quicker in a more informed way, but we don't have to actually do anything it says – humans will continue to be the final decision-makers in critical situations."

For Chelsea, one of the biggest risks is assuming AI will be used fairly just because the tech exists. "People will do nefarious things with AI, regardless of regulation. And there are hundreds of models already out there. It's up to us to check the information we're using is balanced, fair, and accurate, just like we do with newspapers or websites."

> **One piece of advice:** Start by getting your data in order. Protect it, make sure both people and AI only have access to the data you're comfortable sharing and put safeguards in place to prevent data loss. Then, enable your people. Help them understand what AI can and can't be used for in their roles, and give them space to experiment. Using AI well will become a skill, and we've got to give people the chance to build that confidence without compromising our environments.



Dr Steve Finnegan

Managing Director, PNZ Advisory

With a PhD in lifecycle assessment, and a career spanning the European Commission, Arup, KPMG and EY, Dr Steve Finnegan has always been driven by environmental impact. Alongside his role as Associate Professor of Sustainable Design at the University of Liverpool, he now leads PNZ Advisory, a company focused on helping organisations reduce emissions, improve sustainability, and meet net zero.

PNZ Advisory (acquired Arete Zero Carbon in January 2025) and that company started in 2021 by manually building Scope 1-3 carbon footprints, roadmaps and decarbonisation plans for clients including CDW, TD Synnex, Exertis, Westcoast, KFC and many others. As the software as a service (SaaS) market matured, the team recognised an opportunity to scale through AI. "There was a plethora of software platforms coming out using AI to do this," says Steve. "So, we did our due diligence and partnered with a platform named Greenly. Now, the software handles all the data and the calculations, and we act as the implementation partner."

For Steve, the real power of AI is in democratising sustainability and helping businesses of any size or scale to achieve their carbon, sustainability and ESG goals. "Even micro-SMEs should get involved because although their impact may be small, collectively, they have a large impact on global supply chains. Having tools that can automate carbon footprint calculations and help with reporting for a predictable cost, means ROI can be delivered, and smaller businesses can compete for new business where RFPs require ESG and sustainability credentials," he says.

One example Steve points to, where he's seen real progress with AI in sustainability is Rejoose, a Copenhagen-based company that uses AI to scrape and analyse emissions data weekly for electronics and IT hardware. "Over the past six years, they've built a database of more than 10 million SKUs. When you order a product, the software sits alongside your invoice and gives you a carbon footprint for the goods and services you've just bought."

For this to be effective, vendors must post Environmental Product Declarations (EPD) for all their products online. An EPD is a document that transparently reports the environmental impact of a product throughout its lifecycle. Organisations doing this are also subject to ISO Standard ISO14067. "All the larger vendors are already doing this, they've got tens of thousands of their products mapped throughout the lifecycle," Steve says.

The risk, Steve explains, is that companies start using this data to claim their products are carbon neutral, just as Apple has done recently. The firm is currently undergoing legal action for marketing three of its Apple Watches as carbon neutral. "We need to be careful," he says. "These carbon figures are based on assumptions around usage, geography, and lifespan. No vendor can truly know all of that."

One solution, he suggests, is to add a sensitivity range – a plus or minus percentage to acknowledge uncertainty, something he has done with multiple studies he's conducted. But over time, he believes AI can improve the accuracy of these models.

"With the right rules and parameters, AI could analyse those 10 million SKUs and refine the estimates based on real-world data. That's where I see AI making a huge impact on ESG – helping us be more accurate, more transparent, and ultimately more accountable."

> **One piece of advice:** Invest in research. Invest in knowing more about how it will affect you as a business. Look at your risk profile, where is your business at risk? Any firm doing business with big corporates or within the public sector is going to have to demonstrate sustainability and ESG credentials. You can use AI to get started or use a software platform that includes AI to help with your data, but you need to build a sustainability and carbon reduction plan.

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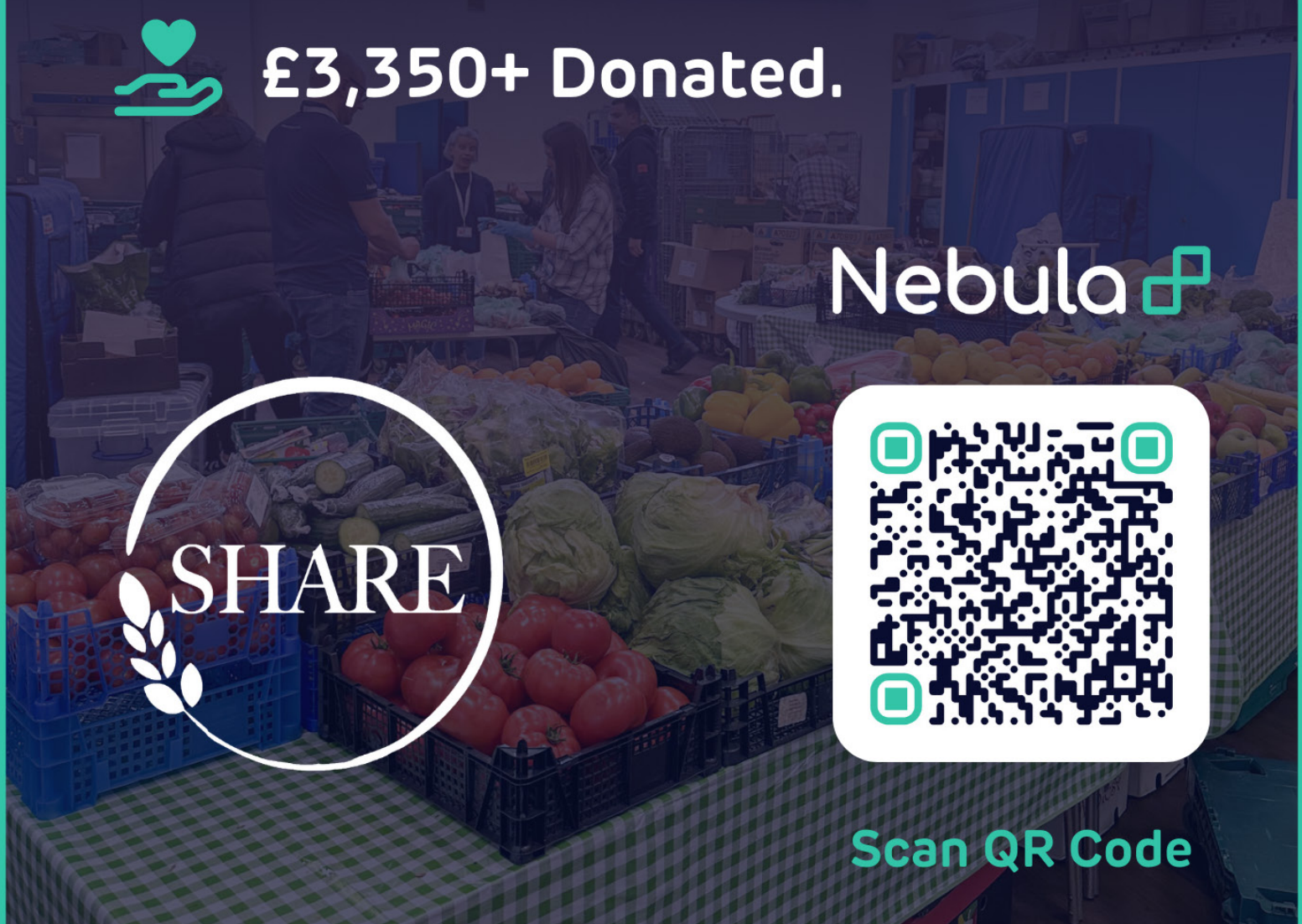

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Nancy Powell

Sustainability Manager, HP

As Sustainability Manager for Hewlett-Packard (HP) across the UK, Ireland, and now the wider EMEA region, Nancy Powell leads a team that bridges specialist sustainability experts and the business across different markets.

The team work closely with HP's customers and partners to understand their challenges and help align the company's sustainability priorities with theirs. That means thinking about everything from product lifecycle and supply chain impact to regulatory reporting and Scope 3 emissions.

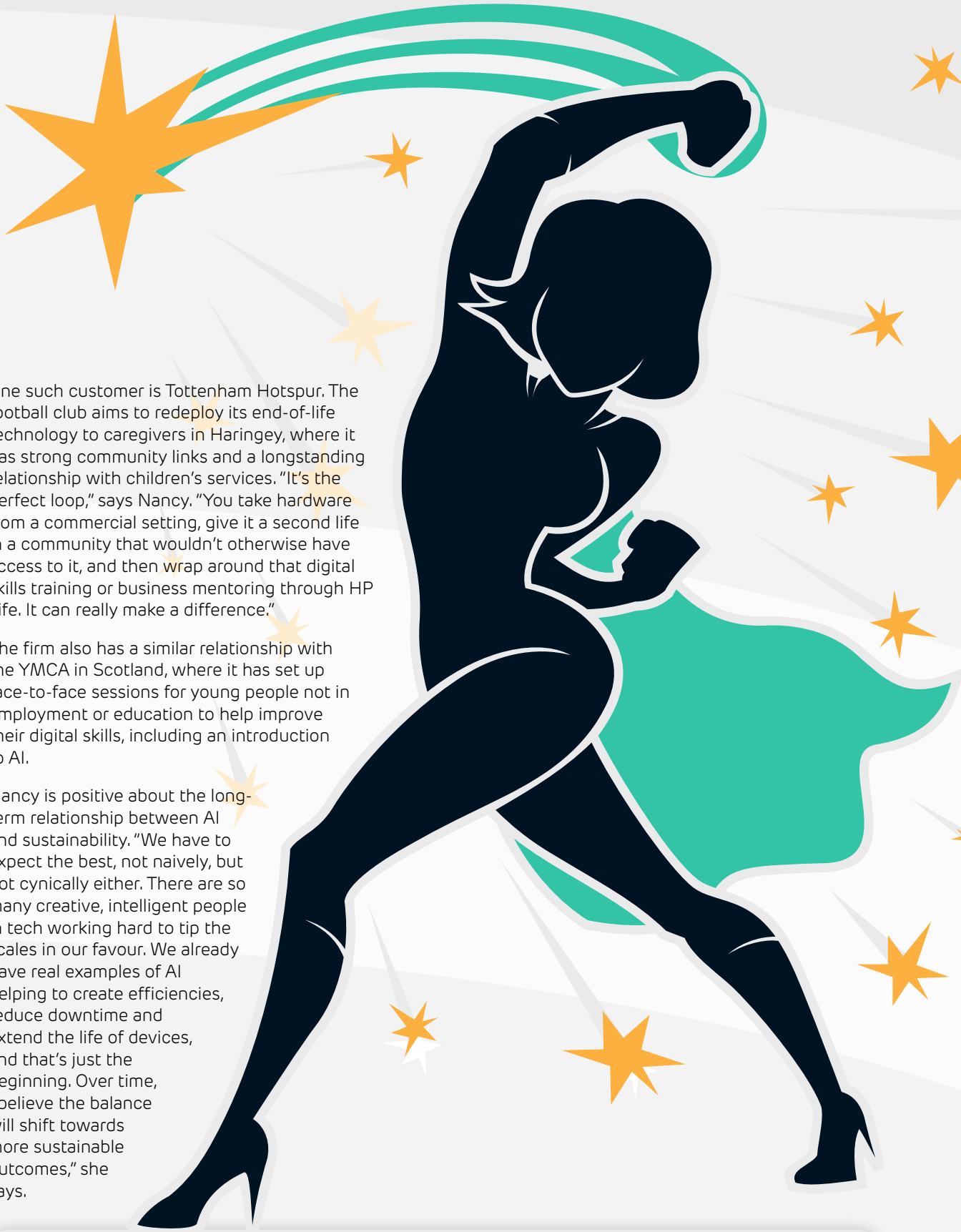
HP's sustainability strategy is evolving to become more transparent and customer-focused, says Nancy. "We're talking to partners and customers to understand the pressures they're facing, both from regulation and from their own customers. We know that for many of them, HP sits largely within their Scope 3 emissions, so we're looking at how we can support them more effectively with accessible data and tools, especially as new regulations come into play."

Sustainability is not a new focus for HP. "With our printer business and broad product mix, we've been recycling since the 1970s," she says. "So we've had a head start in understanding the value of refurbished and second-life hardware."

She says the company is already exploring where AI can be most useful in an ESG context (see Chapter 1). "We're using AI in manufacturing to improve quality, track metrics, reduce downtime and increase efficiency," she explains. "And when you look at logistics, everything a laptop goes through, from planes to ships to lorries, that feels like an obvious area where AI can help us do better."

One area where Nancy is already seeing AI make a difference is in sustainability reporting. Software platforms that collate carbon data, for instance, are helping to improve data quality, eliminate inconsistencies and give organisations a faster, more accurate view of their emissions, she says.

HP also runs numerous social impact programmes, including HP Life, which uses AI to help people around the world access education (see Chapter 2), and HP Renew, which promotes the use of refurbished products. While many of these initiatives don't yet use AI, Nancy believes it's only a matter of time. "For a customer's end-of-life hardware strategy, we recycle or refurbish the technology free of charge. The customer then has the option to have this technology redeployed by HP to a charity or a social enterprise that they or HP work with," she says.



One such customer is Tottenham Hotspur. The football club aims to redeploy its end-of-life technology to caregivers in Haringey, where it has strong community links and a longstanding relationship with children's services. "It's the perfect loop," says Nancy. "You take hardware from a commercial setting, give it a second life in a community that wouldn't otherwise have access to it, and then wrap around that digital skills training or business mentoring through HP Life. It can really make a difference."

The firm also has a similar relationship with the YMCA in Scotland, where it has set up face-to-face sessions for young people not in employment or education to help improve their digital skills, including an introduction to AI.

Nancy is positive about the long-term relationship between AI and sustainability. "We have to expect the best, not naively, but not cynically either. There are so many creative, intelligent people in tech working hard to tip the scales in our favour. We already have real examples of AI helping to create efficiencies, reduce downtime and extend the life of devices, and that's just the beginning. Over time, I believe the balance will shift towards more sustainable outcomes," she says.

> **One piece of advice:** Get people using AI. Encourage your teams to explore, upskill, and experiment. Maybe that starts with a few Copilot licences, but once people start using AI in their day-to-day work, you'll naturally uncover new use cases. AI is a huge opportunity, and we need to help people get comfortable with it. You can't afford to sit on the sidelines. If you're not engaging with it and encouraging your teams to do the same, you'll miss out on what it can offer.

John Gladstone

Sustainability Lead, Softcat

For John Gladstone, sustainability has been central to his career, from early roles in logistics, the circular economy, and lifecycle services to leading Softcat's growing environmental ESG strategy today.

But when he first moved into the sustainability role, John admits he wasn't entirely sure it was for him. "I cared about the planet, but I wouldn't say I was an environmentalist. But within a few weeks, I started to see the connection between technology, logistics, circularity and sustainability.

"We were already doing a huge amount at Softcat, but we just weren't publicising it." That's when John started focusing on building Softcat's sustainability strategy, setting science-based targets, and understanding what customers and partners want from the firm regarding sustainability and ESG.

When it comes to the environmental footprint of IT, John says the technology sector is headed in the wrong direction. "We're not like other industries where they may have peaked, where efficiency gains are already driving emissions down. With the developments of AI and the change in working styles since COVID the industry is on the ski lift going up – creating more data, using more power, retiring hardware faster than ever."

He cites a Boston Consulting Group report that states the ICT sector is now responsible for 3-4% of global CO2 emissions, about twice the level of

the aviation sector and could account for up to 14% by 2040 if data use continues to grow.

This, he says, is why Softcat isn't using AI as part of its environmental strategy – yet. "AI brings speed and agility, but it's resource-heavy. It uses water, it uses power and this shouldn't be ignored.

"AI is only as good as the data it's fed. Bad data in, bad data out. And if you're using AI to generate carbon plans, you need to be sure the outcomes are credible. That still takes human assurance," he adds.

That validation step is often missing, John says, which is why Softcat has recently launched a Trust Centre, where documents like ISO standards, reports, and company polices are all publicly available online to demonstrate independent verification. "We needed to show full assurance – that our emissions, data, and disclosures are all independently verified, not just submitted onto a platform."

Within the channel, he sees potential for agent-based tools that can help gather supplier data at speed or scrape carbon reduction plans published online. But he is also cautious. Using some of these tools and platforms can be a big investment. Companies need to focus on how they use that data in a way that's not going to damage the business, but that can still make it more sustainable. That's the magic question."

One practical area John sees AI working for VARs is to help them understand what's possible and what the impact would be of changing the status quo. For example, he says, firms could use AI to check the impact of changing their car fleet to electric vehicles, put a business case together and do a cost analysis. That, he adds, would help to drive real change.

John believes technology will be part of the answer to the AI-versus-sustainability challenge. "Whenever a problem arises, someone finds a solution. Look at new cooling methods for data centres – there are emerging cooling technologies that could reduce such high dependency of water. Legislation will play a big role in driving efficiency, and I think we'll start measuring things like computing power and data produced per employee as a measurable performance metric."

> **One piece of advice:** Be aware of how you're going to use AI and what you want from it. It's easy to go down a rabbit hole. Ask yourself: Will it genuinely help? Not many companies in the channel are using AI for sustainability yet, and for good reason. There just aren't enough proven use cases. Start simple, be strategic, and don't overcomplicate it if you don't need to.