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EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS

Artificial Intelligence

Three top experts share advice on how to implement AI tools into your business today

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Buddy Bockweg is the co-founder and CEO of Vsimple, an AI-powered operations platform designed to revolutionize how businesses manage end-to-end workflows. Leveraging nearly two decades of leadership in supply chain and operations, he launched Vsimple in late 2020 with a bold vision: to serve industries that make, move, build, and maintain the world's infrastructure industries often bogged down by legacy systems and inefficiencies.

Under his direction, Vsimple is being developed as an "AI Operating System" for the real economy: an intuitive, intelligent backbone that empowers organizations to operate more efficiently, sustainably, and humanely. More than a product, Bockweg emphasizes building a purpose-driven team that values people, service, and the belief that work should support individuals, not the other way around.

DR. JEFF GUAN

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Dr. Jeff Guan is a professor of computer information systems and associate dean for programs at the University of Louisville College of Business. He holds a Ph.D. in computer engineering and brings extensive expertise in artificial intelligence, technology management, and digital transformation.

Guan teaches courses on AI and technology management, equipping students with the skills to navigate and lead in technology-driven environments. His research focuses on the application of artificial intelligence and the adoption of emerging technologies within organizations. Recognized for his innovative ideas in business education, Guan also collaborates with businesses and institutions to integrate AI solutions into their operations and strategy.

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Tony Scribner, Bluewave's vice president of solution advisory started with the company in 2024. He has over 35 years of industry experience in infrastructure, managed IT services, software development, telecommunications, and cybersecurity. Tony also holds the ISC2 CISSP Certification.

Prior to joining Bluewave, he served as chief information security officer and Field CTO of Ntirety, a global managed services provider. Tony's executive leadership experience includes, CTO of a medical startup, senior solution architect at Apparatus and Comsys, and CTO at Kinetic Corporation. He has also held strategic technology positions at GE Aircraft Engines, Litton, Silicon Graphics, and Broadwing/Cincinnati Bell.

Tony is an alumnus of The University of Cincinnati, and he resides in Louisville with his wife and twin boys.

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MODERATOR: As the year has gone on, artificial intelligence tools have started to become more pervasive in our daily lives. What are the biggest misconceptions that businesses still have today about the use of artificial intelligence tools?

BUDDY BOCKWEG: If I had to boil down the environment that we service – mid-market industrial companies – there are two things that come to mind. One is they believe that there is a silver bullet. There is this sentiment that AI today is going to forever change the way that we do business. In the future, yes, but today, not yet. It's going to be a stepped process. The other thing that we see consistently is the thought that it is going to eliminate the need for people immediately. That is a misnomer in a lot of different ways. What AI is built to do today in this environment is to superpower, to supercharge, to ensure that your people have the ability to create something at a much faster pace and much more capacity than what they currently do today.

JEFF GUAN: The biggest misconception is that a lot of people think AI is plug and play and it works like magic. I think that's so far from reality. It's a tool that really, just like any other business tool, requires strategy. It requires quality data, which a lot of businesses probably have not realized. And it requires human collaboration. So, really, the value of AI depends on how much you bring to AI.

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> University of Louisville

TONY SCRIBNER: Some of the conversations I have routinely are about how smart AI is. A lot of people have the misconception that AI thinks like a human and is as smart as a human. We're not there yet. We are still working in an AI subset called Narrow AI, which really is dependent on the data that goes in. It requires a lot of human oversight and can't really handle tasks outside of its current training and specifically what you're asking it to do. So, we're not to the sci-fi world that we see in the movies yet. Maybe someday we get there, but we're still in a very narrow set of AI.

MODERATOR: What are the effective examples you see of how AI is being applied to business, in areas like marketing, finance, operations, that our audience can particularly relate to?

SCRIBNER: Certainly, AI can be used across the board and in all those functional areas within a company. A real-world example is a company that is a customer of ours literally spent 40 hours a month in each of its regions compiling data and providing some analysis of that data back up to the executive team. It was a very manual process and quite frankly, a pain point for each of the leaders that ran the regions across the country. They were able to install an AI project that allowed for the aggregation of data across all the offices within the region automatically and gain intelligence off of those operational metrics. It cut that time for report creation from 40 hours down to under an hour. So, operationally they saved themselves a week of someone's time every month.

GUAN: If I may use higher education as an example – we're very student-centered. One the major functions that we provide for our students is, of course, advising. And so as the number of students grows, which has been the case in the last few years, and the number of advisers really hasn't increased, it creates this bottleneck. This is a perfect situation where AI can come in and help. We already found out that it would take about a couple of hours to upload all of the catalog information for the entire university into a vector AI database. And then we can create a large language model that has guardrails and that has information to answer most of the questions that the students may have. So when the students come into the office they have already got the basic questions answered, and the advisers only have to deal with those situations or questions that are very difficult. This provides a better experience for the student and for the adviser at the lower cost. That's essentially, I think, the value of AI.

BOCKWEG: Jeff is onto something when he's talking allowing people to do valuable work. How do you apply something and derive tangible value? To me, it's in the operational space, and that leads to the customer success. The people that are knowledge workers are sitting in seats every day doing nothing but punching information into spreadsheets, replying to emails, looking in shared drives to try to find information. There's McKinsey stats that are out there that are just mind-boggling on the time wasted on these things. We're seeing organizations start to understand, "I get this report every day; I have to take this information off; I need to insert it into a place." Well, AI does that now for people. These things that used to take 10 to 20 hours a week now take 10 to 20 minutes. That leads to being able to aggregate that data, A lot of companies just don't do it because it takes time, and it provides a much better customer experience because you have real-time data at your fingertips that you can now apply to the customer's success. And as you train the artificial intelligence to understand what it is that you physically are providing, all of a sudden, now you have this unique way to be able to wow your clients without a tremendous amount of effort or a lift.

MODERATOR: It's clear that AI in the future is fundamentally going to change the way we do business, in everything from preparing students for the future workplace to navigating traditional business challenges. Can you each share a little more about AI as a disruptor?

GUAN: I think it's almost a perfect storm for higher education as an industry. We have other technologies, such as blockchain, such as robotics, energy storage. And AI is an enabler. It cuts across all these fields. Higher education leadership is responding to that. I was at Harvard Business School last month and they now have a chief AI officer. AI has become an integrated part of the curriculum. Let me give you an example. Venture finance is a class that we teach here at UofL, which is a critical

part of entrepreneurship, innovation program. At Harvard Business School the professor taught the use of AI agents in his Venture Finance, so by the time the students finish that class, they will have created several AI agents to help them perform the actual tasks that are involved in the finance process.

MODERATOR: Jeff mentioned AI agents. Buddy, could you explain to our audience who might not know what that is?

BOCKWEG: Earlier what Tony was describing is artificial intelligence making sure that it can read, understand and regurgitate. I'm asking it a question, and it's finding information. That's why the data that Jeff was talking about is so critically important. It's fundamentally the beginning of ensuring that you're building value with AI. The next step of that is then to take action. So, what you're seeing with agents is the ability for it to physically go in and out of platforms to execute work. For example, "Go find me the best flight based on the parameters I provide – cheap, fast, whatever it may be – and now book it for me. Then send me the information and continue to check to make sure that it's on time and notify me if you see any variant." Those are things that can be done today to a certain degree. The agent experience is where the future is going, which is why you hear everyone speaking about them. If you want a 10x value, it's not just regurgitation, it's actually execution.

MODERATOR: How else is AI changing the future of work?

SCRIBNER: I have a varied IT background, but I have a specialization in cybersecurity, which is another popular topic of the day. When I look at what companies have to do to protect themselves from an information security standpoint, that's a very difficult task. First of all, you're dealing with volumes of data that are sometimes difficult to really comprehend. Being able to traverse through that data and pick up anomalies is impossible for a human to do. We've had systems for a while that help do that but typically those were rules-based. As a threat actor, all I had to understand were the rules, and then I could modify my behavior to get around those rules. Today's AI helps security operations personnel parse through large volumes of data and look for those subtle anomalies that might mean that there's some type of breach or at least some type of action that needs to be looked into. That's really the first step in the chain. Once you get an alert, you have to understand what's happening. You have to triage that, and you have to prioritize that. You may have to take some sort of mitigating procedure against what you found. And that's the perfect run-in between AI helping you parse through the data, but also agentic AI taking some action based on what I've found.

> "AI is not valuable unless the data itself is valuable."
>
> **BUDDY BOCKWEG**
> Vsimple

Security operations is still largely a human-based operation with a lot of human oversight. As a security analyst is studying what's going on within the environment, AI co-pilots can sit side by side and always suggest, "Have you looked at this? Do you understand this? This could be X, Y, or Z." That can help speed up those investigations and minimize incident response. That's just one thin vertical where AI plays a huge part.

MODERATOR: How would you all suggest they evaluate whether tools really provide a strategic advantage for their company or if it's just the next shiny object coming down the line?

SCRIBNER: Like any project, I would try to start with strategic intent that's aligned with a business goal. I don't want to take a technology and force-fit it into my environment. If I don't have the right use case, I probably have a pretty high percentage of failure. But if I have strategic intent and why I'm looking at the tool, what I want to get out of it, and design some use cases then I probably have a much higher success rate. Do I need to optimize supply chain? Do I need to customize my customer experiences? Do I need to kind of free up my people from repetitive tasks? Again, if I have the right use case now, I'm not just adopting a shiny object, I'm adopting a technology that's actually going to help me solve problems. Strategic alignment is the very first step.

BOCKWEG: There is so much noise out there, and it's just starting. If you look at the landscape today, I don't know the exact statistics on the number of AI companies that have been created over the past 18 months, but it is mind-boggling. Here's our suggestion to every organization, every leader, every owner of a business that we come in contact with: What your company doesn't need is another tool. In the world that I live in. we've been really good at providing tool after tool after tool after tool and creating massive inefficiencies in organizations. Your people aren't going to get excited about another thing. Our suggestion always is find something that's really hard for the day-to-day operations of an organization and solve it with AI. It can just be one instance. It could be the parsing of a document and placing of data. It could be building out a dashboard so that there's a clear understanding of value created. It could be as simple as providing people the access to ChatGPT so that they can respond better and faster to emails and write better messaging and copy. Find that thing, though, that's really painful to the organization and solve it first. And don't try to bite it all off right now, because this is an evolving market. Our suggestion always, though, is get started now.

GUAN: That's great advice from Buddy, and it's not too late. You know, the ship hasn't passed us by. What should business owners and leaders think about? Just to get started, like he suggests. Your AI adoption has to be driven by business strategy, by the goals. Along that line of thinking, I think it requires senior management endorsement, so it really is critical. And this is probably the biggest change management project our species has taken on. It permeates just about every aspect, and every fabric in your organization will be affected. So it's change management, it's organizational change. And without senior management endorsement you run into resource issues. Most senior business leaders are very good at managing change, but this technology is so new that I would recommend that all the CEOs probably spend an hour a day playing with AI so that they at least get some gut feeling about it. There are all kinds of tools, depending on their need and fascination – ChatGPT and Gemini, for example. Perplexity turns out to be very popular with some of the friends I have in finance. They're using that to do financial analysis and the results are almost as good as homo sapiens analysts.

SCRIBNER: This is not the first time we've been through almost this exact motion with the development of technology. We went through similar motions with the number of startups and tools when cloud technologies came to the forefront. Same thing happened with cybersecurity when that became ultra-prevalent. The market is flooded, and the decision analysis becomes more difficult. And we're at the exact same point with AI. So, along the IT spectrum this is a motion that we've seen kind of repeat itself with different technologies. It's a little bit like Groundhog Day.

MODERATOR: What are some of the common mistakes that companies make when they start to implement AI for the first time?

BOCKWEG: We talked about the tool example, which is not having a use case and just thinking that you need to invest in AI. ChatGPT is a perfect example. It's a wonderful tool. But if you just give people access to this tool with no guidance and no clear understanding of value creation for the organization or the human, it's just a glorified tool, and it will die a pretty slow death after you realize that most people aren't utilizing the thing that you provided them. The other thing that we frequently see is the advancement before a clear ROI. "We've got to go because we see the motion, the movement." Everybody's moving in this direction, and they get going a little too fast, and then they realize, hold on a second, I'm creating a cumbersome space. This is not adding value to the day-to-day operations of my organization. I'm delivering something that hasn't been fully baked. Those are two issues that we see.

SCRIBNER: Let's assume we have a clear strategy developed for AI and how we want to use it. We have business alignment, and maybe a couple good

use cases. We've realized now we need to bring in some of our corporate data, right, connect it into maybe a private AI model, or in some compliant, secure way, to be able to use our corporate data. People very much underestimate the quality of their data, and that's a problem. There's the age-old adage, "Garbage in, garbage out." If my data's not high quality, consistent and available, that's going to be a very difficult project to get good ROI, as Buddy mentioned, out of the project. People underestimate the need for good quality data and good availability of that data once these projects kick off.

BOCKWEG: Tony hit something that is incredibly important to the future of organizations. And Jeff was talking about leadership buy-in and making sure that you manage this change, which is critically important, but leadership should also be focused on how do I aggregate my data and ensure quality? AI is not valuable unless the data itself is valuable. It sounds like an overwhelming task, and that's why we have a platform and software. Everyone needs a place to come to work every day, not just because it organizes the actual employee base, but it also centralizes all of the data so that there is structure now to be able to support the use of artificial intelligence to empower their people and their business. We see it all the time: We have a little bit in our ERP, and we've got a CRM over here, and then we've got this project management tool, and then we do a lot in spreadsheets, and we still have these emails, and we direct message all the time … Well, AI is not going to be any value to you in your organization, because it doesn't even know where to go to aggregate the information that's necessary for it to be valuable.

GUAN: I agree with Tony and Buddy in terms of the risks they have described, but I also want to bring people's attention to the user. Technology acceptance has been a problem. It's never been smooth, and in addition to the problems of data organizational structure, the user also is critical in that you don't know how they think. A lot of users have expressed concerns that "AI is going to take my job." That issue has to be addressed, and I think user training should be on the agenda. You can't assume that everybody else is going to be as excited as you are about AI or as willing as you are to learn new things. That is a critical element to success. I did a study for the U.S. Army, and the general was saying, "Jeff, I can just issue a command, and they'll adopt the technology." It turned out to be wrong.

> "You need to get started now understanding what the benefits to your company and your ROI are."
>
> **TONY SCRIBNER**
> Bluewave Technology Group

MODERATOR: Let's talk a little bit more about that, because I think something a lot of folks can relate to is that feeling of being skeptical, even being fearful of AI and what impact it has on job security. So how can business leaders encourage that buy-in from their teams?

BOCKWEG: We strongly encourage leaders to lead with outcomes. There's change that's necessary that makes everyone uncomfortable, some more than others. It has to be framed as, "You're going to be uncomfortable but it's worth it because of this outcome." Instead of, "Look at this shiny AI thing that we invested in, that we're putting in the organization and everybody's got to use." I think what Jeff was experiencing with the Army is just: "I command you do this." Well, hold on, where's the value for me? What's the outcome? What are we really trying to accomplish here? I think if leading with outcome is critically important to the organization and the success of AI. I think the other thing is, is, and we talked a little bit about it earlier, is find the one thing. If you want to manage change within an organization, you don't swallow the elephant whole. Let's start with this thing. Let's start with this group of people that are working together collectively on this task that we think we can automate seven of the 10 steps. You want to find that evangelist saying, "Oh my gosh, it used to take 40 hours a week, now it's an hour. What else can we do with this technology?"

SCRIBNER: I've seen it start with good, open communication. If we can understand and let people know the anticipated role of AI, that should help with buy-in. AI is not coming after my job; AI is here to help me do my job better so I can elevate myself and do better, different, more strategic things. The last thing I would add is, as you get into these projects make sure you include the affected teams in the decision-making. Have them help with use cases. Have them help with testing. Have them help with quality and quality feedback to continually improve the process. Have people that understand why AI is there and what it can do and what it can't do, which may be even more important. Now it's their project, and that's a very deep level of buy-in by that point.

MODERATOR: Let's take a look into the future a little bit. How do you see AI shaping the competitive landscape for businesses?

GUAN: I think there are three different ways in which a business can think about the impact of AI. First, it's the productivity gain. We have given examples of that, and that's pretty obvious. The second one is the redesign of existing work, and we also talked about that during this panel, how the current process can be changed. Then of course, another one is the design of new work, in other words, new industries and new businesses, new services, new products that could be introduced as a result of these technologies. The last time this happened with the platform economy, the results from the use of the internet. If you think about Airbnb, I mean, it's the largest hotel operator without owning any real estate, and Uber, which is the largest taxi operator, without owning any single vehicle. I don't know what AI's going to bring but I'm pretty sure there'll be new industries that are formed, that are created and existing industries that may face some challenges.

BOCKWEG: This is a point in history that we'll be able to look back on and clearly separate the adopters from the non-adopters. This is an extinction event. The ones that adopt are going to run faster; they're going to run leaner; they're going to create better experiences for their employees, better outcomes for their clients. More profitable businesses that create more value within their communities. When you look at the lack of adoption, and I'm talking about today, this isn't even into the future. if you don't adopt in the next 5 years I think there is real potential of extinction. You're going to fall so drastically behind and not be able to compete, that it'll be almost impossible to catch up This is that moment that every business leader and owner should be looking to because it solves one of the greatest problems that we all face Iin the world today, which is a declining population. Productivity is critical, not just for profitability but to ensure the success of your business, because every organization in the world is going to need to be able to get more work done with fewer humans. It is just a fact. This isn't a replacement of human jobs. This is ensuring that you are prepared for the future of what's to come which is a Baby Boomer retirements here in North America, and unfortunately a dwindling population. Technology has to be weaved through your organization to ensure not only do you survive, but you thrive into the future.

SCRIBNER: I agree 100%. I see the efficiency and operational agility that AI can drive as table stakes. If you're not figuring that out now, you are going to be left behind. You're not going to be as agile, you're not going to be as profitable, you're not going to be able to move at the same pace as your competitors, and that's going to be damaging to the business. The time is now, as Buddy mentioned. You need to get started now understanding what the benefits to your company and your ROI are for your company.

MODERATOR: What are the emerging capabilities of AI that you all are excited about?

BOCKWEG: The future is generative AI and the ability to perform human thinking at beyond human levels. It's going to take a long time before we get there, and I say a long time a long time in the AI software space. But when you look at the near-distant future, and we talked about it, it's the agentic approach and the ability for these things to make your life much better. If you're in Meta, or if you're in Google Gemini, or if you're in Grok, or Anthropic Cloud, everyone has this ability to start moving people down this path of everyone has an assistant. If Lisa can utilize ChatGPT to

book a hotel room and a flight, and have a wonderful weekend away without physically interacting or engaging but she comes to work every day, and she has to enter information into a spreadsheet so somebody can track her progress – look at that dichotomy there, right? The agent moving into the business operational space is going to be the real game changer.

GUAN: AI is going to evolve very, very fast, new tools are going to come out, and I couldn't pinpoint any specific technology or type of technology that would be popular, say, 18 to 20 months from today. But I think what's going to change is that a lot more businesses will have taken a look at AI. They will have a much better understanding of AI, and they will have implemented some AI strategy. Like Buddy was saying. If you don't act now you may actually face existential threat. And I'm thinking of higher education where so many problems in higher education could be addressed to varying degrees by the adoption of AI. But higher education is also an industry that doesn't move very fast so we have that dilemma.

SCRIBNER: In the near future, I would have to mirror what the NVIDIA CEO said in his CES keynote speech this year, it's agentic AI. People are starting to get used to, at least at the personal level, the use of AI, ChatGPT, you know, pick your model but to be able to have systems take in data and events and perform tasks for you automatically, 24-7 is very exciting for me, and Buddy, you kind of picked on travel. The amount of concern that a delayed flight can cause me from time to time is pretty amazing. But if I had a flight delay and I had a system that could automatically adjust my hotel reservation, move my meetings around, and change the scheduling for my pickup from the airport to that meeting then I would have no worries, right? I would know that I could still get my work done without having to stand in an hour-long line just to get onto the next flight. There are a lot of improvements in customer experience across the board that agentic AI is going to help us iron out.

GUAN: I want to add another example. The person teaching AI agent development for us at the College of Business, he's creating an AI agent for his brother, who's a small business proprietor. What the agent does is to eavesdrop on a conversation between his brother and the client and on his drive back to the office, the agent will summarize the conversation, connect it with the product database and come up with a proposal. By the time he arrived at his desktop a draft proposal is already there. He just needs to go and tweak it and make changes. Then, of course, it'll automatically send it to the client and gather the feedback. And it just totally changes his life and the way he does business.

MODERATOR: What are the biggest things that you think business leaders need to address proactively in conversations about the ethical use of AI with their teams?

GUAN: This is certainly one of the biggest issues that has been ignored. We, at the College of Business, when we design this AI program, we made AI ethics a requirement. We also use that class to teach students critical thinking skills. Many people don't realize that philosophy as a field really has addressed these issues extensively so we can use the frameworks from philosophy to help us think about the new phenomena in the field of AI, or in the adoption of AI. I've looked at the syllabus, and I couldn't teach that class myself, because I know nothing about philosophy but I think it could be easily adapted to a business environment and into training. I think from the top down this is an issue that needs to be addressed.

SCRIBNER: Data privacy remains key. There has to be governance and rules in place around how you use AI, what data can be exposed to AI, and what cannot be exposed to AI. That's critical at the very beginning stage as you work through adoption of AI and it is in more and more of the operations. We always have to maintain an environment where human safety is No. 1. Human insight is still there helping to maintain that human safety. I think in terms of medicine, I can't have AI giving incorrect answers that could lead to harm to humans. If that happens, you have accountability and responsibility concerns that you have to have defined up front. You can't just say, oh, well, that was the AI, right? The company has to have full accountability and responsibility.

BOCKWEG: What's interesting to me is, and it's something that's a warning for all of us, is the bias and bias out. Because you're training these things, these things are learning. So if there's bias in the training, there's going to be bias in the output. That can be incredibly damaging. It can also create perverse incentives. It creates lack of truth. As companies are starting to understand that what you're doing is really training this thing to understand more about you, and if you're leaning in a direction, one way or the other, it doesn't matter which direction it is, it's going to pick up on that, and it's going to continue to perpetuate it. It's important to be very cautious to make sure that not just the data is clean, but what you're physically feeding your AI is actually truth and not bias.

MODERATOR: Is there anything we didn't talk about today that you think is important to for our audience to understand about AI?

SCRIBNER: We touched on it a couple times, but I think it's worth mentioning again: If you haven't started, get started. If you don't know how to get started, find someone, like someone on this panel, that can help you get started. That's really the No. 1 thing. Figure it out now.

BOCKWEG: AI is not here today to replace your people. It's to supercharge them. It's to ensure that you are giving them something that can create enormous value for them in their lives. If invested in properly, it's amazing what we're seeing in not only the transformation of organizations, but the transformation of work. We had a woman tell us that she felt she could finally take a vacation, and it had been eight years, The quality of life within the environment should be drastically improved because of the investments that you're making in this technology. AI is here to help your people continue to grow and thrive.

GUAN: I'm the Associate Dean for Programs, and was the Interim Dean for the last 3 years, and I've been telling my people that AI makes you better at what you do. That's the bottom line. And in addition to that, I also want to say that people tend to overestimate the impact of technology in the short run. There is a lot of hype, and incorrectly placed, too. But they tend to underestimate the impact of technology in the long run. The impact of AI is only going to be bigger because of other technologies that are also occurring and transformative changes occurring in other areas. I'm really jealous of my students, because they're young, they're launching themselves into life when so much change is occurring.