Deloitte TECHTalks | SPECIAL EPISODE | Tech Trends 2026 at CES ®
With Bill Briggs, Principal, Chief Technology Officer, Deloitte Consulting LLP

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Raquel Buscaino: Hi there and welcome to Tech Talks. I'm your host Raquel Buscaino and I lead Deloitte's Novel and Exponential Technologies team, or our NExT team where we sense and make sense of emerging tech. I am so, so excited to be with you today for this special edition episode of TECHTalks, because we are recording from the Consumer Electronics Show CES in Las Vegas.

It is a packed house here, 4100 exhibitors, I mean tons of people. It is such a lively environment and so we are excited to be recording this special episode from Deloitte Skybox. I'm also very excited because this episode will mark a bittersweet moment in TECHTalks. This will actually be our last podcast episode for TECHTalks, but the exciting thing is we will be transitioning to a new podcast called *Forward Technology*, who is hosted by a dear friend, mentor, colleague, someone I respect very deeply, which is also going to be our guest for today. Bill Briggs, our Consulting Services Chief Technology Officer. So welcome to the podcast. I couldn't be more excited for this episode.

Bill Briggs: And what a hell of a run with TECHTalks! And we're going to try to do it justice as we continue on the new, which you're going to be part of, which is to going to be amazing. And here we are at CES!

Raquel Buscaino: Look around! I mean, we've got a beautiful show floor behind us. Life is good!

Bill Briggs: The energy is high. Yeah. So, 4000 exhibitors, I think 2.5M square feet of emerging tech, which I love because people feel like, “oh, the world's changing so fast, there's so much happening!” And this is almost like that, embodied in physical form, but the real question becomes, what does it mean, and what should we do? And we'll get to dig into that a little bit. That's a big piece of where our tech trends research every year plays into. But how's it how's it been so far for you?

Raquel Buscaino: It's been great. I mean, I think my feet are a little bit tired from walking the show floor, which is a rite of passage.

Bill Briggs: Yep.

Raquel Buscaino: If you're not, then you're not doing it right.

Bill Briggs: That's right. Yeah.

Raquel Buscaino: And you haven't seen more technologies than you can count on your hands. You're doing it wrong. So, we are off to a good start, but maybe we'll start with CES 202. As you've walked around the show floor, what have you seen? What's excited you?

Bill Briggs: I think every year we say there's so much happening, this feels like the most chaotic and ambitious in that, in that, you know, the fact that we say it every year, I think it's because it's building on each other year to year. So that's not just hyperbole, I think that's real. You know, the things that get the

headlines or some of the novel, quirky, the smart lollipop that plays music as you lick it with vibrations in your skull. And my wife, she saw the news of a laundry folding robot and her quote to me in text was literally “give me that”. She wants that to come home! So those are fun and a lot of them are concepts that might never see actual.

But the overarching theme, I think, is that AI is literally everywhere, which, funny enough, the Tech Trends theme this year was about AI everywhere, and I think we're in this moment of “how do we move away from the hype cycle and then shift out to where we are we actually seeing AI applied to ways that drive real impact, utility value,” and not just be the billboard fodder to get people excited.

I think we even said this last year, 100 years ago, people were saying “now we have electricity”. You know, we don't see that on a lot of billboards, walking through, and I think soon it's going to be like that with AI, that it’s assumed, it’s going to be a part of the fabric of every bit of technology, and the real question is going to be, for what purpose? And, you know, the “why” versus the “what.” We're still kind of in the “what phase” right now.

Raquel Buscaino: Yeah. I would have said two years ago, everyone put AI on their billboards in their booths like everyone had it, no one was doing it really. Last year: experimentation. This year's theme, I think, fits really well with Tech Trends 2026, which is, we're moving to production. What's the actual value for it?

Bill Briggs: Embodied as an actual product. Yeah. And I think the other thing is CES, and consumers see in CES, we're seeing so much, you know, our clients across industries including government, public sector here, because the tech impact we're seeing, you know, there's a big of industrial here, but the underlying technology is so part of all of our clients, it's not just the narrow segments of media and telco. And so you know, of course, there's big TVs with new pixels and micro RGB (Red, Green, Blue), whatever, that things will come, but there's more and more of CES embodying what technology means to back office, front office. Which is exciting!

Raquel Buscaino: Yeah, it is, it is! Well, so why don't we dive into our trends for this year. So tech trends launched in December of last year. So it's been about a month I think…

Bill Briggs: 17th year! Yeah. And the mission hasn't changed. Just looking 18 or 24 months out. It's just trying to be that like provocative but pragmatic, that mix. And what I love is every chapter says, what's the “now”, the things you can do literally right now, but what's the “new” and what's the “next”. And your team helps look out in the horizons because depending on the individual client we're dealing with, they're all starting at different places and the tech is moving so fast, it's really hard to put a pin on just exactly a small piece of it. So we kind of provide a continuum, and there's no judgment on where you are in that continuum. But the overall message is a little bit one of urgency. Like the fastest way to get started is to start. And hopefully it helps be a little bit of a treasure map of how to sift through all the noise and get to the things that really matter.

Raquel Buscaino: Especially, I think AI is such a profound tech transformation. It's not a game you necessarily want to find yourself late to.

Bill Briggs: Yeah, and AI is its own category. It's so amorphous and ambiguous, like the trend has that as an overarching theme, but then it breaks down. So you think about models and agents. We think about the infrastructure you need behind it. We think about it becoming physical. What does it mean to the tech organizations?

So it's almost like, okay, let's move away from this hand-waving headline into what's the bill of materials and the things you actually should be thinking about because they all matter. Right? And there's advances happening in all of them.

Raquel Buscaino: Let's make it real okay. So let's go through each trend. There's five of them.

Bill Briggs: Speed date through, okay.

Raquel Buscaino: Speed date!. The first one is AI goes physical: Navigating the convergence of AI and robotics. So what does it mean to have intelligence that moves beyond screens in today's day and age?

Bill Briggs: Yeah. A part of it is physical AI is, AI is getting better and better about understanding the real world. So sensors that can know exactly what your product and what your facilities look like, physics models, real-world models that can understand how it's going to actually move and react. And then the end game is going to be more and more of the robotic form factor.

So the fact that AI is going to move from passive agents in the background or embedded in systems and software into on-the-factory floor, into the hospital floor, into the how we think about security and navigation maintenance, but there are different things. So we try to break down, of course, the infatuation, especially at CES, is going to be on the robots themselves, from the large excavators that the construction companies have that are now increasingly autonomous, you know, down to the household humanoid, that can do chores. So that's advancing and the cost is coming down. The utility is going up. And the idea is they can actually sense, perceive, react to ambiguous situations, which is amazing.

The other piece, which we're more excited about, is the stack you need to actually train, to simulate the environments, and to deploy them, to make them. So there's a whole lot of utility in that side of it too, and they are both required.

So the point of this is we should be thinking about reinventing business process and increasingly tech is going to have an active tense play in that, especially as is made physical in the real world, but there's things we've got to solve, and safety is a big one. You know, you've got a very large, potentially, humanoid robot that, we can't just say we're going to carve out and say, no, no one's going to be around it. And if anyone gets near it, it's going to shut down for safety purposes if it's on a supply chain line or if it's in a hospital floor.

So much to come, but a ton of progress be made and you can see a lot of the headlines put it in the center of where we think the next trillion of investment is going to come. For good reason.

Raquel Buscaino: Yeah, I think last year physical AI as a term really came into the forefront. At CES in the last year asking a lot of investment, a lot of activity, a lot of maturation, AI, declining costs across the board, so.

Bill Briggs: Yeah, yeah.

Raquel Buscaino: All right. Our second trend. So first one AI goes physical. Second one is The agentic reality check: Preparing for a silicon-based workforce. I'd love to hear your thoughts here. Where are we at with agentic because that's, I think, been the buzzword of the last year?

Bill Briggs: Yeah. I think, the reality check was the things that had to be true to take advantage. One, we have to know where it's going to be creative to have agents in play. And we went through a path of "everything should be "agentized", well, not quite. You know, there's going to be places with more value. So we're seeing a lot more focus, which is a part of the answer.

And so we see it specifically in finance, or sourcing, procurement, where suddenly you can have an agent doing really complex tasks, that don't take away from the humans, they're still in the loop, but it takes the mundanity of the things they had to do and makes it so it's being done for them and they can have elevated [roles]. That's important.

But what does it take to make it real? Well, you got to invest in core systems and data. Turns out. This isn't a shortcut. The agents are exposed to your transactions or APIs, and if they're not ready, your agent can't do much and then this, "dot, dot, dot", I think is the most important piece is what is the implication of humans and machines, if it's agents, or if it's back to the physical robots, increasingly being coworkers or collaborators, right? Very different than when we deploy a piece of software and we train people to use it. This is now more of an active, and the agent's capabilities can evolve. And so there's two sides to it.

How do we think about culture, community, learning development. And we found a stat, my favorite stat, it's high, in the report, 93% of AI investment goes to the tech. 7% goes to everything else, including the people elements. So that's part one.

Then part two is a little bit more provocative: we need to challenge how do we think about agents and bots. Is it just like a piece of code that we deploy, or is it more like the employee life cycle?

Raquel Buscaino: Hum, interesting.

Bill Briggs: And what would be the HR process for an agent and a bot? And there's real debate about is that a healthy like… I think it's the right backdrop to say: "where would it make sense to think about things like performance management and how does it apply to, you know, if an agent makes a mistake, is it a trouble ticket we give to the IT staff, or is it a disciplinary action that we have to do mandatory learning, like it would be with an employee, right?

And, you know, we don't have all the answers yet, but we're helping invest in the frameworks to think about it. I think it's going to be the next frontier.

Raquel Buscaino: Yeah. I think, for both physical AI with robots as we think about our physical companions and then agentic AI. There's this defining moment we're in, which is what is the relationship between both and how do you work together? Because I firmly do believe that humans enabled by technology, enabled by machines and by AI, is going to be the best path forward. But what does that look like in practice? I think it's what we are going to figure that out over the next couple of years, hopefully.

Bill Briggs: And you got the underlying headline of the importance of the human, and we think about work redesign because in reality any agent, any robot is only going to take on a subset of tasks. They're not going to replace entire roles. But, but the roles of the individuals have to evolve.

Raquel Buscaino: So, keep precaution. Let's continue the speed date. The AI infrastructure reckoning is the third trend. I love this trend. Optimizing compute strategy in the age of inference economics. What's been the sentiment the past year and the emphasis on compute, on infrastructure?

Bill Briggs: Yeah. Part of it is, it's elevated to a much more strategic conversation. For a long time, infrastructure, and compute was a commodity, and cloud made us think of it as something we just rent and forget about. And it's certainly a continued part of the equation, especially for immediacy. But then you look at the costs at scale, and there's going to be an increasing investment in high-performance compute that you own. And then, there's the edge element, because it plays back into physical robotics and even more traditional workloads. A lot of times it has to be done as close to business: so on-fleet, if it's about autonomous cars, or in the actual warehouse, or on the hospital floor.

So that piece, it's, there's not one answer, and it doesn't mean the new hardware replaces what came before necessarily but this mix of what's the right investment we should be making, there's a lot of nuance to it. But you know, this is the place where if you don't get it right, especially if it's agents and agents scaling, the meter's going to run quickly if you make the wrong decision.

And so how do you have that cost lens, on top of the utility lens, on top of the functional impact lens? And all of that feeds into an infrastructure that's really a CEO-level dialog, and CIOs/CTOs used to be the ones that took care of that but gets a higher discussion now.

Raquel Buscaino: All right. Keeping the party going. Trend number four: The great rebuild: Architecting an AI native organization.

Bill Briggs: This is the easiest headline. And it's basically the tech org has shifted from a back-office affair. 65% of organizations expect their technology function to be revenue-generating. And 64% of CTO/CIOs report into the CEO now, where a few years ago it was basically reporting to the CFO, reporting to COO. It was a cost discussion. How do we squeeze for efficiency?

But at the same time, the way we need to deliver technology has fundamentally changed. So AI needs to be embedded in the software development lifecycle as an example. It's not just a procurement exercise to squeeze, you know, the lowest license costs down. Like, we need commitment. We need visibility into the roadmap, architecting for flexibility because we know the roles are going to change.

All of that kind of plays into how most IT shops have been built over the years, really need an overhaul. And the CEOs and the boards aren't patient about it. So it's as much about "what IT capabilities do you need, how much skills do you need as it's about the background of the CTO, CIO, your tech executive, because they need to be able to articulate the vision to the market, to your people, to your partners, and also have the confidence to get there, in a world that looks very different than, you know, I'm 30 years into my career, it looks a lot different than when I started. And it's only going to continue. You know, it's exciting.

Raquel Buscaino: Definitely. But the pace of change is just accelerating at, I would say an unprecedented rate, but it just keeps picking up.

Bill Briggs: Yeah.

Raquel Buscaino: You need a team,

Bill Briggs: Totally.

Raquel Buscaino: To help you navigate all the change that's happening.

Bill Briggs: And recognize that the team is going to evolve. And the worst trap you can fall into is wait until we get the perfect. Wait until we get 100% confidence, and you know, wait for the next model to get released. Wait. Because the competition's not waiting. And this might be trite, but the fastest way to get started is to get started.

Raquel Buscaino: Definitely.

Bill Briggs: But do it in focused ways with an eye toward: we need to be flexible because the world is going to change. Like, we went from "fault-tolerant" to "fault-expected". It is architecture. Like we're going from change management as a "one-time" to like how do we embed that into our tech, into our licensing, into our strategy, which is a huge shift.

Raquel Buscaino: Big shifts. Big shifts. All right. Our fifth and final trend. Yeah for 2026. The AI dilemma: Securing and leveraging AI for cyber defense. So I feel like, the first four items we just chat about were all about how AI is impacting work, our systems. This is a little bit more on the cyber side.

Bill Briggs: Yeah, this isn't fifth and "now we have to eat our vegetables before we can enjoy our dessert." It's almost like the foundational cyber and trust. Think about security and privacy and regulatory compliance, which is huge, especially as we talk about new work shifting in different ways, and then even

ethics and morality of what all of this means, that all needs to be embedded in how we deliver technology.

So a bit of this is good news. Hero's journey. We can use AI to do cyber better, so we can actually use AI as a proper cyber response. And we can embed it in our engineering lifecycle. So it's not up to engineers and architects hopefully doing the right thing. Right. It's just embedded in how they work. Which is amazing.

Like I don't wake up every morning and curse gravity because I can't slam dunk a basketball. Right? I've just gotten used to I live under it, and so we want that to be the same for security privacy. The flip side is new attack vectors, new entrance, easier access for bad guys to do things that are going to disrupt operations because of AI.

And so we have to balance those two, especially as we talk about more and more AI embedded into critical business process, or physical robots that are onsite in a power plant, so it couldn't be more important. The good news is we're seeing as much advance on the response as we're seeing the evolution of the threat.

And, and, a bit of this is a callback to last year's trend too, with quantum finally seeing adoption curves, we know that encryption is one of the things quantum will be very well suited to solve. And so, we have to get ready for that, now. And we can't wait. So there is a piece of the story too that's still really, really important.

Raquel Buscaino: And I think this, this trend will probably be a tale as old as time, “good” versus “bad”. It is just that the tools that are used are a little bit different, and they're supercharged these days with AI.

Bill Briggs: And we can't, again, if you make it like a hygiene issue or you make it like a compliance issue, like, oh, “we can't release into production to we checked a couple of boxes,” you're probably missing most of the game because it needs to be embedded in the strategy of what we're doing into how we design and architect and build solutions organically.

Raquel Buscaino: Well, so, Bill, those are our trends for this year. We're actually asked you want to share a bit more about the podcast that will be coming soon. And yeah, that's what it's all about now.

Bill Briggs: It's going to be amazing. So it's going to be co-hosted by myself, Deloitte Consulting’s Chief Technology Officer Brett Davis, our US Chief Innovation Officer, and Simona Spelman, who's our Deloitte Consulting Services’ Human Capital People leader, driving all of our human in AI and bringing the three points of view together with a guest from industry, from clients every episode to basically get back on the headlines and really dig into what we're seeing, the things that we don't want most of our listeners to have to stumble upon, that we've already stumbled upon, hopefully inspire a bit about what's happening in the world of tech.

So it's going to be phenomenal, and we're going to stand on the shoulders of giants from TECHTalks. And I know you're going to be a part of the new podcast too, which will be amazing. So coming soon, we're actually going to record the first episode here from CES. So we'll have a bit of a through line here.

Raquel Buscaino: Love it. Yeah love it. I'm so excited for it.

Bill Briggs: And thanks to you and you for all the great work over the years. And this is phenomenal.

Raquel Buscaino: Thank you, thank you. Well, it's been wonderful having you on our final closing episode of TECHTalks, which is sweet because I think even way back when, TECHTalks was a name that you crowned.

Bill Briggs: Yeah. I was the first host. So, history doesn't always repeat, but sometimes it rhymes. So here we are. That. Yeah.

Raquel Buscaino: Well, thanks for that. To all our tech savvy listeners out there, thank you so much for tuning in. If you'd like to learn more about our tech trends for 2026, you can download the report. The link will be an episode description if you'd like to follow Bill or myself to stay tuned. You can always do that. I might also just like to send out a very, very special thanks to those on the Tech Savvy team who have made this episode, this episode today and the entire podcast possible for the past three years. So Janelle Hughes, Marie Gaudaire, the entire Tech Savvy team, thank you so much. It has been an absolute privilege serving as your host to the thousands and thousands of people who have tuned and supported, connected on LinkedIn, sent well-wishes and just contributed to our community.

Raquel Buscaino: Thank you. It's been a great honor and I'm so excited as I'll join Bill on this next adventure for the podcast. So until then, I hope that you stay savvy. We'll see you soon.

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