

# Accelerating Innovation in the U.S.

An Interview with Kathleen O'Reilly,  
Senior Managing Director – U.S. Northeast, Accenture

**EDITORS' NOTE** A 20-year Accenture veteran, Kathleen O'Reilly is a senior managing director at Accenture responsible for leading the company's business in its U.S. Northeast region. A member of Accenture's North America Leadership Team and Global Leadership Council, O'Reilly has served as the company's senior managing director for CMT (Communications, Media, Technology) within Accenture Strategy, as well as the group strategy and operations officer for Accenture North America. Before joining Accenture, O'Reilly worked for A.T. Kearney and began her career in the telecommunications industry with Verizon Communications. She holds a B.A. from Princeton University.



Kathleen O'Reilly

**COMPANY BRIEF** Accenture ([accenture.com](http://accenture.com)) is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology, and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions – underpinned by the world's largest delivery network – Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With more than 411,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives.

**What is the key to Accenture's consistent strength and leadership in the industry?**

It's a combination of things. The rotation to new high-growth areas, like digital, cloud and security, account for 50 percent of our total revenues. The differentiation of our capabilities in the market and the diversity of our business have enabled us to continue to gain significant market share.

We're also accelerating our investment in innovation and creating destinations where our people and our clients come together to work with digital and emerging technologies – artificial intelligence, blockchain, robotics, drones with computer vision, and virtual reality. By 2020 in the U.S., we'll build 10 new Innovation Hubs in key cities, invest \$1.4 billion in training to ensure our people have leading-edge capabilities, and create 15,000 highly skilled new jobs. In New York City, we're building a new Innovation Hub in the Hudson Yards district as a place to co-create and rapidly prototype solutions with our clients.

**Would you share an example of innovating with a client?**

Our work with Visa is a great example. Together, we developed a proof of concept that embeds payment credentials and information directly into a connected car – essentially turning your car into a credit card. Payment credentials are loaded into the car and are made available for secure, frictionless payments to other devices. While driving, consumers will be able to place grocery orders, pay for them via the car dashboard, and pick up their items at the curb. With a single touch, gas

can be purchased, parking can be paid, or fast food can be ordered.

Employing liquid design and development concepts, we moved swiftly from a general idea to pre-concept, design, implementation, and roll out of a proof-of-concept in just 12 weeks.

**Would you provide an overview of Accenture's operations in the Northeast region?**

The vibrant region I lead is home to roughly 10,000 Accenture people across 11 states – Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia – and we're doing some really groundbreaking work with our clients. For example, we teamed with Biogen to develop a first-of-its-kind quantum-enabled molecular comparison application. Molecular comparison is a crucial part of early-phase drug design which could help predict the positive effects of a therapy or drug while reducing negative side effects. This has the potential to significantly speed up drug discovery and bring medicines to people faster.

Another facet of my role is to oversee strategic acquisitions in the region. I'm thrilled to say that we recently acquired Boston-based mobile design and development firm Intrepid, which helps organizations create engaging mobile experiences for customers at speed and at scale.

**Accenture is known for working with large, global brands. Is this the primary focus for Accenture and how critical are your relationships with smaller companies?**

Large organizations today are partnering differently than they have in the past. We're creating innovation ecosystems for our clients who are looking for opportunities to co-develop and connect to smaller, more innovative players in the market. A great example of this is the FinTech Innovation Lab in New York City, which we established with the Partnership Fund for New York City. The Lab

connects the best and brightest entrepreneurial companies with top-level financial executives so their organizations can stay in front of tech innovations in their field.

**Accenture places a major emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Would you highlight these efforts and, more specifically, the opportunities for women in the industry?**

The need for greater innovation to grow, compete, and transform in the digital economy has never been greater. We believe that to truly deliver innovation, we need people who bring their unique perspectives and skills to the table. At Accenture, we embrace diversity as a source of creativity and competitive advantage.

Our focus on attracting, inspiring, and advancing women is critical to our future success. We recently set a new goal to achieve a gender-balanced workforce, with 50 percent women and 50 percent men, by 2025. This is another milestone in our journey to being the most inclusive and diverse company in the world.

**How critical is corporate responsibility and community engagement for Accenture?**

Our people love to give back. They are passionate about improving the way the world works and the lives of our clients, our communities, and our families. Last year, our people spent approximately 240,000 hours volunteering through our global corporate citizenship initiative, Skills to Succeed, which equips people with the skills to get a job or start a business. Here in the New York area, we partner with a number of organizations, including Girls Who Code, CS4All, Back on My Feet, Covenant House, and Upwardly Global. Across our Northeast region, we recently hosted a "Day of Service" where hundreds of our people spent the day volunteering with our community partners, making a difference for causes they believe in.

We do exciting work that truly impacts issues facing the world today. Together with Microsoft, we're helping the United Nations provide digital legal identification for refugees who have no official documents through a digital ID network that runs on blockchain technology and connects existing public and commercial records so people can access their personal details from any location.

**What advice would you give to young people interested in a career in the industry?**

I would recommend three things: they should be comfortable operating in ambiguity – the pace of change is so rapid and the ability to be agile and flexible is critical; they should be a team player – collaboration is paramount; and they should always be inquisitive and never stop learning. ●