

Innovation at the Center

An Interview with Jimmy Etheredge,
Senior Managing Director-U.S. Southeast, Accenture

EDITORS' NOTE Accenture recently appointed Jimmy Etheredge – a 31-year veteran and member of its North America Leadership Team – to lead the company's U.S. Southeast region (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia), as well as the District of Columbia). Etheredge also leads the company's Atlanta office. A graduate of the Georgia Institute of Technology with a degree in industrial engineering, Etheredge is an ardent supporter of his alma mater and a member of the Georgia Tech Foundation, Georgia Tech Lacrosse Advisory Board, Alexander Thorpe Board of Directors, and the Hill Society. An active member of the Boy Scouts of America, Etheredge sits on the Atlanta Area Council Board of Directors.



Jimmy Etheredge

COMPANY BRIEF Accenture (accenture.com) is a leading professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology, and operations. With more than 50,000 people and operations in 42 cities in the United States, Accenture serves 93 of the Fortune 100 and more than 70 percent of the Fortune 500. In the United States, Accenture has innovation hubs that bring together key elements of the Accenture Innovation Architecture – including labs, studios and innovation centers – to help clients develop and deliver disruptive innovations to drive growth and increase competitiveness.

What has made Accenture a place you have wanted to stay for your career?

A consulting career offers the opportunity to be exposed to different challenges, industries, countries, and people. That's really what I wanted, and what I still want. I've always been fascinated by how technology can transform business, so it's been a wonderful part of my three-decade career at Accenture to work across these different dimensions. There's always another interesting challenge around the corner.

How do you define your role today? Is it challenging to find time to spend with clients?

I'm accustomed to managing business while constantly deepening relationships with our clients, who are always at the center of what we do. In my new role leading our Southeast business, much of my focus is around driving and delivering innovation, ensuring I'm bringing the best of

Accenture to the work we're doing in this region which, after more than 30 years with the company, I'm in an excellent place to do. I have a very strong network to tap composed of experts in the latest technologies who understand how to leverage them in ways that make a difference.

Another key focus of my role will be to attract top talent to the region. To drive innovation, and then deliver it, we need people who are creative change makers – adaptable in a landscape of constant disruption. Luckily for them,

our Southeast region is home to major Accenture hubs of innovation, including the Accenture Labs in Washington, D.C., which focus on cybersecurity R&D. Our Atlanta office sits at the heart of Tech Square – alongside many of our clients' innovation centers – which allows for easy collaboration.

Will you talk about the value of innovation for the work at Accenture?

Innovation is at the center of what we're doing. Every CEO I spend time with understands that they can't communicate with a customer, a shareholder, an employee, a supplier, or a regulatory agency without technology and digital expertise. They're looking for that innovative edge to leverage technology to create a competitive advantage. We call it leading in the New.

We recently announced that by 2020, we'll open 10 new innovation hubs in key cities across the U.S., and I'm proud to say that this includes Atlanta. It's going to be incredibly beneficial for us to have a space where our clients can experience innovation firsthand. Our hubs will help us lead with the out-of-the-box thinking they look for.

How do innovation and disruption relate to each other?

Disruption tends to be an output – a consequence of innovation. Innovation disrupts the status quo. Amazon, for example, is disrupting everything from publishing to big box retailer segments like consumer electronics. The personal transportation industry, from automotive companies to dealers to taxis, is facing major change via Uber and Tesla.

Our clients recognize their future depends on being able to innovate with both their customers and in their operating models (talent, processes, etc.). The best way to predict the future is to invent it, so a focus on innovation is a critical part of our leadership agenda.

How close is coordination region to region and globally for Accenture?

We try to execute on the model "think global, act local." We want to take the best innovation, research, and insights that Accenture can offer and ensure it's being brought to bear in our local markets, like our regions across the U.S. Despite our global scale, we want to ensure that our relationships with our clients are intimate and that we can bring ideas to them based on our clear understanding of their culture.

A part of acting local also means making a measurable impact on the communities in which we work and live. Our people are focused, and energized by applying the wonderful core values – like Stewardship – outside our own walls. I like to say, our people want to do well, but they also want to do good. In Atlanta, we have a strong portfolio of nonprofit partners we team with through our Skills to Succeed initiative. We issued grants to 13 organizations, including Boys and Girls Club of Atlanta, City of Refuge, Junior Achievement, and United Way, which resulted in securing employment for over 250 disadvantaged job seekers in the Atlanta area.

Will you talk about the emphasis Accenture puts on investing in its people?

We are a people business, so our capability is very dependent on having the best talent on the planet. First, we must be excellent at attracting the best, so we've worked to build relationships with key institutions and universities we hire from, getting to know students and professors and fostering meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships.

Second, accelerating our innovation investment in the U.S. also means investing \$1.4 billion in training for our people, ensuring they have the leading-edge capabilities in areas like cloud, mobility, security, and analytics.

Third, we invest in providing an environment where our people can be successful both at work and at home. Our people must feel they belong, and that they can be themselves. They crave an experience that provides more opportunities to do interesting work that's aligned with their strengths and passions.

How important is it to represent the diversity of your client base within your workforce?

It's incredibly important. Our clients look for diversity of people and diversity of thought. At Accenture, we have a very strong, long-standing commitment to inclusion and diversity. Our people represent a tremendous variety of cultures, ethnicities, beliefs, backgrounds, and languages, and we strongly believe this makes us more innovative. It helps us drive the disruptive change that our clients look for. ●