

# The Intersection of Business and Technology

An Interview with Jack Azagury, Market Unit Lead, U.S. Northeast, Accenture

**EDITORS' CHOICE** Jack Azagury joined Accenture in 1996 in London and became a managing director in 2003. In addition to his current role, he is also a member of Accenture's Global Management Committee and North America Leadership Team. Prior to his current role, he led Accenture's resources and utilities businesses in North America and served as global lead for its Smart Grid Services business. Azagury is a frequent speaker at conferences and has published numerous articles on energy and utilities. Prior to Accenture, he worked in the software industry in the United Kingdom, United States and Japan. Azagury holds a master of software engineering degree from Imperial College London and an MBA from INSEAD.



Jack Azagury

**COMPANY BRIEF** Accenture ([accenture.com](https://www.accenture.com)) is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services in strategy and consulting, interactive, technology and operations, with digital capabilities across all of these services. It combines unmatched experience and specialized capabilities across more than 40 industries – powered by the world's largest network of Advanced Technology and Intelligent Operations centers. With 513,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture brings continuous innovation to help clients improve their performance and create lasting value across their enterprises.

## Will you provide an overview of Accenture's U.S. Northeast business?

Our Northeast business includes more than 10,000 people in the Northeastern region of the U.S., with offices in New York Metro, Boston, Hartford, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. We are home to more than 130 of the Fortune 500 companies and many leading public and medical institutions.

## You assumed your current role in March during a global pandemic. How has the pandemic impacted the first few months in your role?

In January we announced changes to our operating model which took effect on March 1. I gathered my brand new team in person on March 2 in New York, getting to know one another and developing our 100-day plan.

The following week Accenture's U.S. offices shut down. Like working people across much of the world, we were suddenly trying to maintain work/life balance while working from the homes we were confined to. Many of us were dealing with friends and family who were affected by the pandemic which hit early and hard in the Northeastern U.S. At the same time, our clients were looking to us to help them navigate these uncharted waters.

It has been one of the most challenging and uncertain periods in my career. Through it all, my team has executed flawlessly, delivering for our clients without any interruptions in service.

In many ways, the pandemic has made us closer as a team by enabling us to connect on a more human level. I have met many of my colleagues' children and pets on video calls, and we talk from our living rooms. In March, our managing directors checked in one-on-one with all 10,000 people in the Northeast to offer support, and to just say hello. I have been humbled by the way our Northeast family has come together.

## How can leaders reinvent their businesses so that they have the agility to change course and innovate depending on how the pandemic evolves?

There are three important traits that will define companies that emerge stronger from this crisis. The first is agility. Companies have executed projects in days and weeks that once took months and years. Retaining this capability will be critical as companies adapt their operating model, culture, ways of working, and leadership empowerment to a much faster world.

The second is a zero-based cost structure. With technologies such as machine learning and intelligent automation, companies can fundamentally shift cost curves and realign resources to invest in critical growth.

The third is a digital-first mindset enabled by the cloud. This crisis has accelerated digital adoption by half a decade. The cloud allows a variable cost structure and provides a platform for digital solutions such as machine learning and artificial intelligence.

## Accenture has a long history of corporate responsibility and community engagement. Do you see this as a responsibility of leading companies today?

Businesses have a responsibility to be a force for good. Our understanding of technology provides us with a unique vantage point to address social issues such as the future of work.

To that end, Accenture launched a national apprentice program for underserved people in 2016, and we've hired most of its graduates – nearly 700 apprentices – into full-time roles in cybersecurity, application development and software engineering.

## How critical is it for companies to build diverse and inclusive workforces?

Building a diverse workforce while creating an inclusive workplace has long been a strategic priority at Accenture because it makes us a stronger innovation partner for the world's leading companies. I am saddened by the recent tragic events in the U.S. and stand as an ally of our Black and African American communities, and communities of color. I'm proud that Accenture has made several commitments, including to increase our percentage of African American/Black and Hispanic American/Latinx people overall, and in leadership, by 2025.

## You joined Accenture almost 25 years ago. What has made Accenture a place where you have wanted to spend so much of your career?

I joined Accenture in 1996 for two reasons. I related to the culture, and the company aligned with my background at the intersection of business and technology. My plan was to learn for two or three years, and then go back into industry or become an entrepreneur. Twenty-four years later, I am still here. Why?

First, I still feel very connected to our culture. We have a collaborative, down to earth, hardworking, and caring culture which is very aligned with my values.

Second, my learning curve has remained as steep as it was on day one. I am constantly presented with new client challenges that keep me on my toes.

Finally, throughout my Accenture career I have had opportunities to practice the advice I provide to clients. I have identified and closed acquisitions, turned around struggling businesses, built practices from the ground up, formed a joint venture, and mentored colleagues. I couldn't ask for a better opportunity to learn and grow. ●