Enterprise AI

An Interview with Pat House, Vice Chairman, C3.ai

EDITORS' NOTE *Pat House co-founded C3.ai and is its Vice Chairman. Previously, she co-founded and served as Vice Chairman and Executive Vice President of Siebel Systems. House is Chairman of the Mary Mae Foundation and is a member of the board of directors of the Hewlett Foundation and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. She is a frequent guest lecturer at Stanford University.*

Pat House

COMPANY BRIEF *C3.ai is a leading enterprise AI software provider for accelerating digital transformation. C3.ai delivers a comprehensive and proven set of capabilities for rapidly developing, deploying and operating large scale AI, predictive analytics, and IoT applications for any enterprise value chain in any industry. The C3 AI Suite and C3 applications are proven and tested at petabyte scale, solving previously unsolvable challenges. At the core of the C3 AI Suite is a revolutionary and powerful model-driven AI architecture that dramatically enhances the productivity of data scientists and application developers while future-proofing applications against underlying IT evolution. The C3 AI Suite is 10 to 100 times faster and more reliable than other solutions or DIY approaches, enabling robust delivery of production applications with 100 times less code and cost. The C3 AI Suite seamlessly works with existing data storage, sources, tools, and infrastructure investment, while flexibly operating in a private, hybrid cloud, or multi-cloud environment. The C3 AI Suite supports configurable, pre-built, high-value AI applications for predictive maintenance, fraud detection, sensor network health, supply chain optimization, energy management, anti-money laundering and customer engagement.*

Will you discuss the vision in founding C3.ai and the opportunity that you saw for the business?

It became apparent in the early years of this century that a new set of technologies was emerging that would profoundly impact how businesses operate. As Tom Siebel describes in his bestselling book, *Digital Transformation: Survive and Thrive in an Era of Mass Extinction*, these technologies include elastic cloud computing, big data, the internet of things, and artificial intelligence. The ability to harness these technologies is essential for organizations to remain competitive in the 21st century. We saw an opportunity to bring these technologies together in a new generation of enterprise software with the potential to deliver substantial economic and social benefits at global scale. When we founded Siebel Systems in the 1990s, we took then-nascent technologies and created an entirely new software category, CRM (customer relationship management) and a company which we grew to $2 billion in revenue. Similarly with C3.ai, we saw an opportunity to create a new category, Enterprise AI, to enable organizations to digitally transform and survive in the 21st century economy. We believe we have an opportunity to create one of the world's great software companies.

How do you define the C3.ai culture?

C3.ai is a results-focused, high-performance culture based on four core values: Innovation, Curiosity, Integrity, and Collective Intelligence. It is a culture of self-learning. The company attracts individuals who are driven to continuously learn new things, acquire new skills, and solve new problems for our customers. They are people who like to work in teams with other knowledge-seeking problem-solvers. The C3.ai culture is also characterized by a high degree of professionalism, consistent with the mission-critical nature of the problems our applications address and the trust our customers place in us.

How challenging is it to differentiate in the industry and what do see as the C3.ai advantage?

The market is awash with countless products that position themselves as "AI platforms," yet in reality are narrow point solutions, each of which addresses only a limited part of the overall Enterprise AI requirements. In fact, C3.ai does not face significant competition from other products, because no other company or product delivers what C3.ai provides. The primary competition comes from the decision by CIOs at companies to try to internally build their own AI solutions, typically by writing lengthy code to stitch together numerous point products, open source components, and microservices from cloud providers. This approach is costly, complex, and highly prone to failure. Most customers have made such attempts before and turn to C3.ai, whose software – based on C3.ai's unique, patented "model-driven architecture" – reduces the amount of code that needs to be written by 99 percent and accelerates the time to develop and deploy Enterprise AI applications by a factor of 26. C3.ai has invested nearly $800 million over the last decade to develop this patented technology. For many customers, the annual economic benefit of C3.ai software is measured in hundreds of millions to several billions of dollars. The C3.ai advantage is speed, simplicity, and the proven ability to deliver substantial economic value – all enabled by this model-driven architecture.

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C3.ai was built with an entrepreneurial spirit. How critical is it to maintain that entrepreneurial spirit even as C3.ai grows in size and scale?

An entrepreneurial spirit means having the will and the ability to continue innovating even as the company is growing, succeeding, and serving an increasing number of customers. C3.ai has a veteran, highly disciplined management team, led by serially successful entrepreneur Tom Siebel, who knows how to maintain that entrepreneurial spirit while driving growth. It's in Tom's DNA, it's the management team's DNA, and it permeates the company's DNA. The culture that C3.ai has carefully and deliberately nurtured is designed to attract individuals who have the combination of traits that create the entrepreneurial mindset: curiosity, problem solving, and a focus on results.

Will you highlight C3.ai's commitment to building a diverse and inclusive workforce?

C3.ai is proud to be an equal opportunity and affirmative action employer that hires the most qualified people to join the company in meaningful work. With staff representing more than 25 nationalities and alumni from over 275 different academic institutions, C3.ai has a diverse and inclusive workforce committed to serving our customers. The company's talent acquisition team proactively engages constituency groups to recruit qualified underrepresented minorities, women, and military veterans to job opportunities. For example, C3.ai hosts tech talks and workshops at top universities across the nation with the Women in Computer Science Associations, the Society of Women in Engineering, the Society of Latinx Engineers, and the Society of Black Engineers. I have personally hosted company events to introduce young women to C3.ai and to the tech industry. In 2019, C3.ai joined in partnership with BreakLine, through which C3.ai has substantially increased engagement and hiring of military veterans. C3.ai also advertises job opportunities with local nonprofits who serve individuals with disabilities. The company celebrates the breadth of diversity brought by our employees and encourages all organizations to build a talented and diverse workforce.

How critical is it for C3.ai to be a purpose driven company and to be a leader in corporate responsibility and community engagement?

As C3.ai establishes a global market leadership position in Enterprise AI, it's essential to maintain the highest standards as a company committed to applying this technology only in ways that are consistent with democratic values and social good. That is a fundamental principle for C3.ai. All of the stakeholders with which we are engaged – including our customers, partners, employees, investors, and regulators – can expect that C3.ai will be a good member of the communities in which we operate and will strive to be a responsible corporate leader. We take that obligation very seriously.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to lead in the industry?

The challenges for women regarding opportunities to lead in business, including in the tech industry, are well known and documented. Nonetheless, there are many examples of women in leadership roles throughout the industry, demonstrating that opportunities clearly exist. Increasingly, leading technology companies are focused on diversity and meritocracy in their hiring and promoting activity, and there appears to be a growing trend to address gender-bias and create cultures that are inclusive. These are all positive developments, but a lot of progress remains to be made.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers during these challenging and uncertain times?

Now more than ever, the tried and tested wisdom of taking ownership of your career, establishing goals, and continuously working toward those goals holds true. Opportunity favors the well prepared – those who have invested the time, effort, and hard work of educating themselves, learning how to communicate and present themselves professionally, and comporting themselves with the highest standards of integrity and work ethic. The current environment, with virtually everything now conducted via video calls, accentuates the importance of being able to communicate clearly and effectively.

You have worked closely with Tom Siebel for many years. What has made this relationship work so well and what do you feel has made Tom such an effective leader?

Our success in working together is rooted in the values that we share and the approach that we take to business. We do the hard work of studying the market, identifying the opportunity, defining the objectives, and committing ourselves to achieve those objectives. We set high goals and strive to achieve them. Tom possesses a number of qualities and characteristics that make him an unusually effective leader, but it boils down to the combination of having vision – the ability to envision things as they could be – and then the focus and discipline to work tirelessly to make the vision a reality. That combination of vision and ability to execute attracts highly talented and motivated individuals who want to work toward a set of ambitious goals, and to achieve collectively what none of us could have achieved individually. ●

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