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TRANSFORMATIONAL GROWTH LEADERSHIP

A CEO Perspective

From Content Storage to Strategic Data Services: How OpenDrives Is Building for the Next Generation of Distributed Enterprise Workflows

An Exclusive Conversation Featuring



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As artificial intelligence (AI), distributed workflows, and content-intensive operations reshape enterprise priorities, data infrastructure is becoming increasingly central to business performance and desirable business outcomes. Organizations must move beyond simply storing growing volumes of information to ensuring that data is accessible, secure, and available wherever applications, people, and AI agents need it. This shift is creating new demands for integrated storage, compute, and data management capabilities that can support operational efficiency, collaboration, and evolving business requirements.

Within this evolving landscape, **OpenDrives is expanding its focus beyond high-performance media and entertainment storage toward a broader data services approach.** Through its suite of storage services, including the Atlas data storage and management platform, OpenDrives Edge hybrid cloud-edge performance accelerator, and the Astraeus cloud-native data services platform, the company is addressing the growing complexity of enterprise data environments while pursuing opportunities across new industries. In this Transformational Growth Leadership conversation, Lynda Stadtmueller, **Associate Partner,** Frost & Sullivan, **speaks with** Trevor Morgan, **CEO, and** Alex Dunfey, **CTO,** OpenDrives, about the company's evolution, its approach to innovation and strategic partnerships, and how it is positioning itself to support the next generation of AI-enabled, distributed enterprise workflows.

> "The real question is how production houses are incorporating AI tools into their workflows to accelerate time to market. When AI becomes part of the core business and starts driving revenue, that is when you see meaningful adoption." — John Abou, CEO, TTEC Engage

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Powering Enterprise Agility Through Connected Data Ecosystems

Lynda Stadtmueller: *Trevor, storage has evolved significantly over the course of your career. How has it transformed from a static content repository into a strategic business enabler, and how is OpenDrives addressing this shift?*

Trevor Morgan: I go back to a time when most content was worked on in a very localized fashion, using a localized application by an individual. Once the work was complete, the content was put onto a local drive or, over time, a shared source, where it would sit until it was needed again. Content and data rarely moved outside these localized environments.

What really changed that static content repository model, in my opinion, was the **increased emphasis on collaboration**. This has accelerated over the past 10 years, particularly at the beginning of this decade, when people were confined to certain locations for a period of time. That reinforced the need for people to collaborate using shared sources of content, whether they were in the same building, city, state, country, or different parts of the world. And when you add the question of where the applications using that data are residing, you now have an environment that I call a **content ecosystem.**

If you think of the static content repository as a park bench, data rarely sits down and takes a rest anymore. Previously, it could remain there for a long time until someone needed it again. It was, quite literally, data at rest.

Frost & Sullivan's **Transformational Growth Leadership Program** aims to honor visionary business leaders who possess the foresight and leadership acumen to drive positive change within their organizations. The leaders we celebrate hail from diverse sectors and company sizes, yet they all share an unwavering commitment to innovation and excellence.

Today, **data is constantly in motion**, and that has changed everything, from how storage functions to how networks deliver and protect data as it moves between environments. **Storage now acts almost as a staging area,** preparing content for use elsewhere and enabling collaboration across applications and people.

To support this, storage has had to become more **performant and distributed,** capable of handling the increasing demands of content in motion. Lastly, the nature of the content itself is constantly changing. We used to marvel at 4K video. Today, 4K video is nothing. I can go out and shoot 8K video with my new GoPro.

From an enterprise perspective, storage has had to become capable of scaling out to accommodate these growing demands. And that is what we have continued to do at OpenDrives. We have continued to lead the charge with a storage solution and platform that can accommodate all of this.

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Accelerating Innovation Through Proactive Problem-Solving

Lynda Stadtmueller: *That raises an interesting question. How much of what OpenDrives builds is responding to what customers are asking for, and how much comes from anticipating problems they may not even know they have yet?*

Alex Dunfey: It is a mix of what customers ask for and what we anticipate they will need. Sometimes customers come to us with a specific solution in mind, while others simply have a problem to solve. And sometimes, we identify challenges they have not even considered addressing.

Building on what Trevor was saying, there are some common themes that we plan around.

One of the first things I noticed at OpenDrives was **how many customers were struggling with data management.** Their workflows were changing because of the **push to the cloud, distributed teams, evolving content consumption,** and new ways of engaging with customers. More recently, AI has added another layer.

Rather than making things easier, these changes have introduced new challenges. Customers increasingly want providers to **address a broader range of needs instead of delivering individual solutions one problem at a time.** And that became an opportunity for us.

Even if someone came to us asking for high-performance storage, we wanted to understand what other problems we could help solve.

Atlas is a good example. It started as a solution that did one thing very well: **providing high-performance data storage for content creation.** And it still does that extremely well.

But as customer workflows changed, we expanded its functionality. We added greater connectivity to data storage through **mount management,** along with **backup and disaster recovery capabilities** using snapshots and remote snapshots.

More recently, we expanded those capabilities significantly with the release of **OpenDrives Edge**, which provides **automated, policy-based data movement** and **transparent caching** across cloud and other on-premises storage environments.

These capabilities can be deployed separately, but they also integrate seamlessly with Atlas.

About two and a half years ago, we started having serious discussions about focusing our development more on **data services,** rather than just high-performance network-attached storage (NAS).

That direction led to Edge and, about a year ago, the first version of our **Astraeus cloud-native data services platform**, which combines **compute and storage infrastructure into a single cluster** that is easy to deploy and manage.

Astraeus also provides the foundation for future data services that will deliver to customers, including analytics, tagging, metadata, search, and other capabilities.

The last thing I would emphasize is **ease of use.** As customer data and operating environments become more complex, our solutions need to make them easier to navigate, whether it is people, AI agents, or other systems interacting with that environment.

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Bridging the Gap Between AI Adoption and Business Outcomes

Lynda Stadtmueller: *As customers look to simplify their operations, they are also facing a tsunami of AI-generated data. Is this becoming the defining factor pushing them to move beyond traditional storage toward data services and data management? How are your customers responding to this growing volume of AI data?*

Alex Dunfey: I am not sure all customers know what to do with this yet. Some are ready and have plans and strategies in place, but **many are still figuring out how to approach these advancements in AI.**

From a data storage solutions perspective, it reminds me of the push to the cloud that started about a decade ago, or even earlier in some cases. Everybody needed a cloud strategy to streamline operations and save money.

But during that transition, many teams struggled because **they did not fully understand how to use the technology.** Their day-to-day applications either did not work with the cloud or did not integrate well with it, and **some did not know how to move their data from point A to point B.**

I see **a lot of similarities with AI.** It has tremendous promise. We use AI internally for software development, and it can certainly help us work faster, become more efficient, produce more, and get more done. But you still need to manage the output.

In content creation, for example, it is fantastic that AI can help generate content more easily and quickly. But that does not do you much good if you cannot manage the data and content you are producing. **Without that ability, you cannot effectively use it to drive value for your business.**

And that is **both a challenge and an opportunity for us as a provider of data and content management services.** It's a question of: How do we continue to help customers handle that complexity more easily while ensuring our solutions integrate with the AI-enabled applications they want to use?

Trevor, what else would you add to that?

Trevor Morgan: I agree with Alex. It is very reminiscent of the early push to the cloud, when **organizations started adopting the technology, but did not always see its full value. They just stuck their toes in the water, so to speak.**

With our customers, particularly in media and entertainment, you often hear individuals say they are using Claude or other AI tools. But that is not necessarily what we mean when we talk about AI accelerating business operations.

The real question is **how production houses are incorporating these tools into their workflows to accelerate time to market.** When AI becomes part of the core business and starts driving revenue, that is when you see meaningful adoption.

We are beginning to see organizations use AI in some fascinating ways, but we are not quite there yet. My hope is that our software facilitates further their desire to adopt these new technologies



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Unlocking Cross-industry Growth Through Specialized Expertise

Lynda Stadtmueller: *Trevor, OpenDrives has built a strong position in media and entertainment and is now moving into other industries. What did you learn from that original customer base that gives you the confidence to compete in the broader ecosystem?*

Trevor Morgan: OpenDrives was founded to **solve technical challenges that existing storage solutions** could not address. Our founders were technologists in media and entertainment who wanted to help directors, producers, and production houses carry out their work without being limited by technology.

The first Atlas NAS system came from that need. When customers could not complete projects or pursue innovative ideas with what was available off the shelf, our founders took the approach that **if they could not buy the solution, they would architect it themselves.**

That has always been part of the OpenDrives story. We started with a system specifically **designed to handle demanding video content, and those demands have only continued to grow.**

Back then, it was 4K. Today, even as a consumer, I can capture 8K 360-degree video with my latest GoPro. Resolution and bit depth continue to increase, bringing new technical demands. Video content will always continue to be challenging as it evolves.

The real change is that media and entertainment is no longer the only industry where video creation is a core part of the business. We are seeing healthcare, manufacturing, financial services, and other industries increasingly using video to achieve business goals, whether for marketing or other activities that support their operations.

One of our most recent customers is an RV manufacturer. You might wonder why an RV manufacturer would need complex video workflows, similar to those of a post-production shop.

They want **control over their content.** They capture extensive video and assemble it in different ways, whether for individual projects, future use, or multiple shows across the country. The video becomes an aspect of their core business.

They have essentially **built an in-house video production unit rather than outsourcing that work,** which can be cost-prohibitive. They also work under tight timelines, with multiple people accessing the same content from different locations.

That is why we are ideally positioned to expand beyond media and entertainment. **These businesses are using video as a business asset and are facing many of the same challenges as traditional production companies.**

Creating Competitive Advantage Through Unified Data Ecosystems

Lynda Stadtmueller: *Alex, let's talk about how enterprise data infrastructure is evolving and how it needs to adapt to the distributed environments businesses operate in today.*

Alex Dunfey: One of the most important challenges for enterprise data infrastructure today is **ensuring that data is where it needs to be,** so applications and AI agents can access and consume it in a timely and efficient manner.

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AI creates opportunities for automated workflows that were not possible before, but it also **introduces greater complexity in data and content management,** particularly when AI agents need access to the same data that people are working on.

For example, if AI-enabled applications are running in the cloud, **how can they process and update data coming from a video editor or camera crew working in an office or on a movie site?**

If those applications are running on-premises, they may rely on expensive centralized compute that needs to connect to users in different locations. Or, processing might happen at the edge, on a powerful workstation, away from the systems where data needs to be backed up, shared, or distributed.

Either way, you have an **increasingly complex web of compute and storage** that needs to work together.

How can we set up **systems and pools of resources that work together seamlessly?** Compute and storage resources must work together without manual intervention whenever data moves or resources shift to support users and applications. The infrastructure needs to draw on these resources, wherever they are, and use them effectively for whatever task needs to be completed.

There are solutions available today that attempt to address these challenges, but **they often solve only one part of the problem, are prohibitively expensive, result in vendor lock-in, or some combination of these.** That brings us back to the **data services strategy** we started building with Astraeus and OpenDrives Edge.

Our vision is **for these data services to integrate seamlessly with unified storage and compute pools, ideally through a single management infrastructure that handles everything and connects directly with the applications customers bring into their environments.**

That is how we see the future of enterprise compute and storage infrastructure evolving, and it is what we are working toward delivering to our customers.

Building an Innovation-First Culture to Drive Business Transformation

Lynda Stadtmueller: *Trevor, as you talk about the capabilities you are building for customers, I also want to understand how you run the company. How do you encourage a culture of innovation and give your teams the freedom and incentive to anticipate what comes next, while still executing on what needs to be done today?*

Trevor Morgan: I cannot claim that I am the sole driver of that. Alex and I together drive the operations of the company, so I will start from a cultural perspective and let Alex explain how that translates into effective, agile processes, particularly in development and support.

From the very early days, when our founders created the first solution, they placed a **high value on openness.** They embraced open-source technologies, open standards, and open protocols to avoid vendor lock-in. We never wanted customers choosing OpenDrives to find themselves restricted to a narrow range of technologies.

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At the core of our solutions are open-source components supported by communities that collaborate and continue to advance those technologies. Our founders were committed to participating in that development, and the same philosophy guides us today. We are always looking for ways to **work with more technologies, not fewer.** Our ability to mount different technologies, as Alex mentioned earlier, is one example.

That philosophy also shapes **how we collaborate and innovate internally.**

We do not work in silos or expect someone to solve a problem entirely on their own. **As a largely remote workforce, we have adopted tools and processes that allow us to collaborate and address challenges in real time.** We cannot expect someone who needs an answer today to wait until next Thursday. That is **simply not the speed of business anymore.**

The last thing I would emphasize is that nearly everyone in our organization has a genuine interest in technology. We talked about AI earlier. Alex encouraged his team very early on to understand and implement AI, whether to find efficiencies, access information more quickly, or automate certain tasks.

We then extended that opportunity across the company, encouraging people to use their preferred AI tools. Teams in accounting, HR, marketing, and other functions began exploring how AI could augment their work and improve efficiency.

AI is just one example. We are a group of people who are fascinated by technology and actively use it, including our own solutions. **When people enjoy working with technology, they naturally encounter problems and look for innovative ways to solve them.**

That is the culture we have built. Alex, would you agree?

Alex Dunfey: Yes, 100%. **Innovation goes beyond technology and product development.** Every part of the business has opportunities to improve how things are done and address customer challenges.

We have had to rethink how we sell and package our products, ensuring customers get the software and hardware they need within their budgets. Those solutions also need to be easy to demonstrate, distribute, install, and support.

These may not be flashy innovations, but they are important to both our business and our customers.

Sometimes that requires new features or functionality. Other times, it is about **using existing products or processes in ways nobody had considered before.**

For example, someone from sales or customer support might assume we need to develop new software to address a customer requirement. But perhaps there is a way to achieve the same result using what we already have, especially when development would take time and the customer needs an immediate solution.

There is a saying that **constraints lead to innovation**, and we see that frequently. Whether we are working under time or resource constraints, we have to find different approaches, sometimes within the product and sometimes around it.

Building on what Trevor said about agility, we have also spent considerable time improving our ability **to deliver updates faster and with higher quality.**

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That has required us to rethink our internal infrastructure, processes, and distribution mechanisms. While these changes are not necessarily product innovations, they improve the customer experience and allow us to introduce new features more quickly.

In terms of how we work together, we maintain an **open-door policy across departments, encouraging people to bring their challenges forward so we can solve them collaboratively.**

When I first joined, we were a little more siloed. Trevor has done an excellent job of improving communication between teams, and we now hold regular cross-functional meetings to understand what our customers and internal teams need.

That helps us **identify where different departments can contribute, whether it is engineering, product, customer support, or marketing.** Equally important is our **ability to iterate quickly.** The faster we can iterate, the more opportunities we have to adjust our plans and make changes that better serve our customers and the business.

Positioning Customer Value at the Heart of Competitive Leadership

Lynda Stadtmueller: *Let's talk about the segments you operate in. OpenDrives participates in both hybrid storage and data services, two areas that are increasingly converging, along with the companies competing in them. Trevor, what have you learned from your competitors, and how do you ensure OpenDrives stays a step or two ahead?*

Trevor Morgan: One thing I have learned about our competitors is that they are never going to stop competing. Every time we find a way to add more value or do something differently, they are going to respond.

For example, a few years ago, we started promoting a model where **we did not charge customers additional software fees when they expanded their storage capacity.** Many of our competitors generated additional revenue that way. If a customer wanted to add another 500 terabytes, they would have to pay more to use the same software.

We put a stop to that, and at the time, we had not seen the same approach elsewhere. Eventually, though, we started seeing some competitors adopt a similar model. That is to be expected, and I think it deserves respect. It shows that they are keeping an eye on us and are nimble enough to respond.

But it is also a reminder that **no matter how far ahead we think we are, our competitors will be close behind.** If we take our eye off the ball, they are going to grab it.

I have worked for much larger companies that believed customers would willingly pay 40% more for a solution simply because of the brand. That approach might work for a while, but it is not sustainable in the long term.

Ultimately, **the customer benefits from that competition** because **it drives innovation and encourages companies to deliver greater value.** Of course, we want those customers to be ours. But **we recognize that they can be taken away if we are not consistently delivering value.**

That is something I remain mindful of every single day when I think about our customers and the industry.

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Balancing Strategic Vision with Customer-centric Execution

Lynda Stadtmueller: *Alex, when you look at OpenDrives and the broader competitive landscape, what are the biggest challenges you and your competitors face, and what will it take to overcome them?*

Alex Dunfey: From a product delivery perspective, **resources are always going to be limited.** That is true of any company, whether it is our size or much larger. We have a big vision for our customers, and achieving that requires resources.

But the bigger challenge is **prioritizing within those constraints** to deliver the most value to as many customers as possible.

We have several paths we believe are valuable, supported by feedback from our customers and partners. But if we can only deliver one thing in the next three months, what should that be? And what comes after that?

We need to ensure each step moves us toward our broader vision while responding to what customers need today.

The other consideration is **awareness and visibility.** Some customers still think of OpenDrives as the company it was five years ago. They know us for Atlas and high-performance NAS for video editing. That is great, but they may not realize how much more we offer today.

We have developed a broader range of solutions, but **are customers and partners thinking of OpenDrives for those capabilities, or do they still associate us primarily with high-performance NAS?** Changing that perception is important as we continue to evolve.

Trevor Morgan: We still hear from people who remember what OpenDrives was doing four or five years ago and appreciated those solutions. And that is something we value.

But today, **we are solving different problems for different types of customers**, because those customers have brought new challenges to us. And that is what we do.

Navigating the Commoditization of Artificial Intelligence

Lynda Stadtmueller: *Alex, as we wrap up, what do you think will be the next major development transforming your industry over the next five years, and what should enterprises be doing today to prepare for it?*

Alex Dunfey: That is an interesting question. I know we have already talked about AI, but I am going to make a bold prediction: **AI is going to become a utility.**

We hear a lot about how advanced AI is becoming, particularly with models from Anthropic and OpenAI. But frontier AI is advancing beyond what many applications actually need.

So, the question becomes, what level of AI is good enough for a company's business needs? **Not every company needs the most advanced model.** We are already seeing other competitors, including Chinese companies, developing models that are good enough for many applications.

I think that over the next five years, we will see some **commoditization of AI.** Companies will have more choices, whether they access models directly from providers, through platforms like Amazon Bedrock, or from newer cloud providers. **Local AI will also become good enough for companies to build their own clusters at a reasonable cost.**

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What does that mean for enterprises? They will need **infrastructure and applications that give them the flexibility to switch between providers,** depending on who offers the best price, quality of service, and reliability.

We are already seeing something similar with cloud. Cloud providers are less differentiated than they used to be, and companies increasingly want the freedom to move between them based on who offers the best deal.

Lynda Stadtmueller: ***So, it really comes down to flexibility, making sure companies can choose AI capabilities that are fit for purpose without going beyond what they need.***

Alex Dunfey: Exactly. And there is another aspect to this.

Today, unless you are a massive institution, **cloud is really the only place to access truly effective AI.** But once local AI becomes good enough, I think more companies will start thinking seriously about where their data resides and how secure it is.

They may prefer to run AI applications on-premises rather than rely as heavily on the cloud, or work with specialized providers that can offer greater security for their data.

Defining the Next Chapter of OpenDrives' Growth

Lynda Stadtmueller: ***Trevor, let's look five years ahead. If we sit down for a similar conversation then, what would a successful OpenDrives look like?***

Trevor Morgan: I am going to give you the standard reply you might expect from a startup or a company that is growing rapidly. In five years, if we have been successful, I will tell you I only have five minutes because Alex and I are about to race our private jets across the United States on a $1 bet.

I am being facetious, of course. I have worked in a lot of startups and small companies, and that is often how people define success: making a ton of money and never having to work again. I do not see it that way, although I will come back to the financial side because it is important.

For me, success five years from now comes down to a few things.

First, I would like to see us **achieve much broader adoption in the areas where we already operate, particularly among customers who are a natural fit for what we offer.**

> "One of the most important challenges for enterprise data infrastructure today is ensuring that data is where it needs to be, so applications and AI agents can access and consume it in a timely and efficient manner." — Alex Dunfey, CTO, OpenDrives

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Second, I want us to **expand further beyond media and entertainment.** We already have customers outside that space, but I would like to see meaningful penetration into three or four other industries.

More industries are relying on video content and video workflows for their core business operations. **I do not want OpenDrives to be known only as an M&E company.** I want us to be recognized for providing content storage and data services that support organizations across multiple industries.

Third, I would like to see us **strengthen our partnerships** to the point where much larger organizations depend on us just as much as we depend on them. We already have some great partnerships, but there is room to grow.

We do not want to provide only content storage. We want to be a data services company. And a data service is essentially something that does something to data, whether that is securing it, archiving it, reporting on it, or performing analytics.

Finally, I want **all of this to translate into significant revenue growth.** That brings me back to the financial side. We are not a nonprofit. To continue innovating, we need **revenue that allows us to reinvest in the organization.**

Five years from now, I want to look back and see how far we have grown, because there will be another five-year plan ahead of us. **And to achieve that, we will need the resources, people, and money to make it happen.**

Closing Reflection: When Data Infrastructure Becomes a Business Growth Enabler

As enterprise workflows become more distributed and AI introduces new demands on data management, the role of storage is changing. The challenge is no longer simply accommodating growing volumes of content, but ensuring that data can move efficiently, remain accessible across environments, and support the applications and workflows that businesses depend on. Data is useless when it can't be used. Data must drive business value at all times.

For OpenDrives, this shift is driving an evolution beyond high-performance storage toward integrated data services, with opportunities extending well beyond its media and entertainment roots. Trevor Morgan and Alex Dunfey point to a future where business outcomes, not human preferences, trends, or available technology, determine where data is stored, shared, managed, and monetized.

For enterprise leaders, the strategic consideration they should make today is how well their infrastructure can adapt as business requirements and AI capabilities evolve. Today's ever-evolving data challenges cannot be properly solved with legacy, static technology. OpenDrives' transition from data storage to data services is intended to solve dynamic business challenges, while expanding its industry reach, strengthening partnerships, and building the resources needed to sustain innovation and growth.

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Trevor Morgan | CEO, OpenDrives

Trevor's career trajectory at OpenDrives is as compelling as it is impressive. Since joining the company in 2018, Trevor has progressed from consultant to COO and then CEO, with responsibilities spanning content and product marketing, product oversight, and operations. With nearly 30 years of experience in enterprise software and a background in sales engineering, solutions architecture, and product management and marketing, Trevor has held senior positions at startups and large organizations, including Cisco, Capital One, and Ciena. Passionate about full-cycle innovation and agile development, he has been instrumental in improving internal processes and encouraging his team to reach new heights. His steady guidance has kept OpenDrives grounded, focused, and results oriented. When not ideating about operational improvements and new products, Trevor enjoys road cycling or watching Hallmark movies with his wife.



Alex Dunfey | CTO, OpenDrives

Alex has shaped OpenDrives' technology vision and works hand in hand with the product team to drive the company into new markets adjacent to media and entertainment. He began his career as a software engineer and technology lead at Dell EMC and VMware before joining the fast-paced startup SimpliVity during a period of rapid growth. Following a stint at Amazon Web Services, where he deepened his knowledge of building scalable, customer-focused solutions, Alex was drawn to OpenDrives' open and collaborative culture and its commitment to solving complex data challenges. Outside of work, Alex stays busy with his two kids and dog and enjoys staying active through tennis, running, hiking, biking, and skiing.



Lynda Stadtmueller | Associate Partner, Frost & Sullivan

Lynda is the **Associate Partner and Program Leader**, **Cloud at Frost & Sullivan**. She has been with the company since 2008, covering enterprise network services, digital transformation, hybrid & multi-cloud, and edge-to-cloud network configurations. She is a frequent speaker and contributor to technology publications, with over 40 years of experience in the communications industry. Prior to joining Frost & Sullivan, she served in several leadership positions with AT&T and other technology firms.

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Appendix: Transforming Enterprise Data Infrastructure for AI-Driven Growth

As enterprise environments become increasingly distributed and AI reshapes how organizations create, access, and manage information, leaders are being challenged to move beyond traditional storage toward **integrated, flexible, and scalable data services.** This transformation requires aligning **storage, compute, AI, data management, and distributed workflows** to improve operational efficiency, reduce complexity, and unlock new growth opportunities.

To support leaders navigating this evolution, Frost & Sullivan provides strategic insights across the following areas:

- Frost Radar™: Hybrid Cloud Storage Software Platforms, 2026
- Top 10 Growth Opportunities in Cloud Infrastructure for 2026
- Top 10 Growth Opportunities in Content Creation, Management, and Orchestration for 2026

These insights complement the leadership themes explored throughout this discussion, helping organizations **modernize their data infrastructure, align technology investments with business priorities, improve operational agility, and identify where integrated data services can create measurable business value.**

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