

Vodafone and Microsoft sign decade-long digital partnership in Europe and Africa

Vodafone and Microsoft unveiled a strategic alliance that promises to reshape the digital landscape for millions of businesses and consumers throughout Europe and Africa on Tuesday. The 10-year partnership is set to harness the companies' combined prowess in digital technology, impacting over 300 million entities.



The collaboration will see a transformation in Vodafone's customer experience, using Microsoft's cutting-edge generative AI. It aims to supercharge Vodafone's managed IoT connectivity platform and spawn innovative digital and financial services, with a keen focus on supporting SMEs across the two continents.

This partnership will catalyse a comprehensive revamp of Vodafone's global data centre cloud strategy.



Autopilot's new AI integrates into Microsoft Teams and Copilot

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Vodafone's commitment to this joint venture coincides with a planned \$1.5bn investment in AI and cloud services tailored for customers, developed in concert with Microsoft. In turn, Microsoft will bolster its operations using Vodafone's extensive fixed and mobile connectivity solutions.

A pivotal development is Microsoft's planned investment in Vodafone's managed IoT connectivity platform, which is poised to become an independent entity by April 2024. This strategic move is expected to magnetise new partners and customers, fuelling a surge in applications and broadening the platform's reach to encompass an even greater array of devices, vehicles, and machinery.

Powered by generative AI

The digital offerings birthed from this partnership will be powered by the latest generative AI technology, delivering a highly personalised and distinct customer experience across various channels. These services will be grounded in principles of unbiased and ethical privacy and security, aligning with Vodafone's robust framework for responsible AI use.

“Today, Vodafone has made a bold commitment to the digital future of Europe and Africa. This unique strategic partnership with Microsoft will accelerate the digital transformation of our business customers, particularly small and medium-sized companies, and step up the quality of customer experience for consumers,” Margherita Della Valle, Vodafone Group chief executive.



Microsoft CEO, Satya Nadella (right), with Vodafone CEO, Margherita Della Valle.

“This new generation of AI will unlock massive new opportunities for every organisation and every industry around the world,” said Satya Nadella, chairman and CEO, Microsoft.

“We are delighted that together with Vodafone we will apply the latest cloud and AI technology to enhance the customer experience of hundreds of millions of people and businesses across Africa and Europe, build new products and services, and accelerate the company’s transition to the cloud.”

Five key areas of collaboration

Generative AI To increase customer satisfaction, the companies will apply the power of Microsoft Azure OpenAI to deliver frictionless, real-time, proactive, and hyper-personalised experiences across all Vodafone customer touchpoints, including its digital assistant TOBi (available in 13 countries).

Vodafone employees will also be able to leverage the AI capabilities of Microsoft Copilot to transform working practices, boost productivity and improve digital efficiency.

Scaling IoT Microsoft intends to invest in Vodafone's new, standalone global Internet of Things (IoT)-managed connectivity platform, which connects 175 million devices and platforms worldwide. Vodafone also plans to become part of the Azure ecosystem making the IoT platform available to a vast developer and third-party community using open APIs.

Africa digital acceleration Microsoft intends to help further scale M-Pesa, already the largest financial technology platform in Africa, by housing it on Azure and enabling the launch of new cloud-native applications. The companies are also launching a purpose-led program that seeks to enrich the lives of 100 million consumers and 1 million SMEs across the African continent.

The goal is to enhance digital literacy, skilling and youth outreach programs, as well as offer digital services to the underserved SME market. The partnership aims to boost financial services innovation, building a community of certified developers.

Enterprise growth Vodafone will extend its commitment to distributing Microsoft services, including Microsoft Azure, security solutions and modern work offerings such as Microsoft Teams Phone Mobile, as part of its strategy to become Europe's leading platform for business.

This enables business customers to deploy Microsoft's cloud-based services at pace with low adoption and running costs, as well as support the estimated 24 million SMEs across Europe through the provision of a managed platform that grows with their business.

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