

"WE CAN BECOME THE WORLD'S LIVE DEMONSTRATION OF HOW TO BUILD AND SCALE AI SAFELY, INCLUSIVELY, AND EFFICIENTLY."

## Brian de Francesca

FOUNDER AND CEO,  
**VAI**

"THE REAL BREAKTHROUGH ISN'T JUST AI CHATBOTS OR IMAGE TOOLS: IT'S IN REDESIGNING HOW BUSINESSES FUNCTION ENTIRELY."

**A**s the founder and CEO of VAI (formerly known as VER2), Brian de Francesca began laying the groundwork for AI in 2014—well before the compute power, models, and regulatory environment were ready to support his vision. He focused on building the foundational infrastructure in anticipation of the day when AI would become commercially viable. It wasn't until 2022 that things truly took off, and today, his company is helping small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across domains safely integrate AI into their operations. "The core challenge we address is the complexity, cost, and risk associated with AI adoption for small and medium-sized businesses in the GCC," de Francesca says. "Many organizations lack the internal expertise to evaluate, integrate, and manage AI solutions—often choosing to opt out, or abandoning implementation altogether. VAI solves this through a structured, platform-enabled ecosystem that simplifies the AI journey: assessing solutions, integrating them securely, and supporting long-term adoption."

According to de Francesca, it was

VAI's early traction in the healthcare sector that enabled the company to be in a position to quickly leverage the boom in AI adoption that came with the launch of OpenAI's ChatGPT in 2022. "With VAI, small- and medium-sized businesses now have frictionless access to everything they need to do AI right—from intelligent solution assessment to secure integration, adoption support, and continuous performance monitoring. This end-to-end AI enablement model is now being extended beyond healthcare into hotels, education, manufacturing, logistics and more." As de Francesca says, "VAI is all you need."

Given that de Francesca has been operating in the UAE for the past 15 years, he firmly believes that the GCC can leapfrog ahead of other regions with its rapid adoption of AI systems. "The MENA region, especially the GCC, has an opportunity to leap ahead," he says. "Unburdened by legacy systems and outdated infrastructure, the MENA region has the rare opportunity to design AI-native systems from the ground up—systems built for the future. With visionary leadership, substantial investment, a tech-savvy youth population, and urgent national-level commitment, MENA is positioned not just to adopt global AI standards, but to shape them."

And as of the first to integrate AI, the region becomes the responsible deployer and model for the rest of the world. "We'd love the entire world to learn how to build and scale AI safely, inclusively, and efficiently here," says de Francesca. "That's why we chose to establish VAI here in 2014—because we believed the MENA region would become a proving ground for responsible and inclusive formats for AI adoption—and this is now being realized."

de Francesca reflects on the early days when he spent years advocating to skeptical governments, driven by a clear vision of the future of AI long before it entered the mainstream. "I've been early, consistent, and committed," he says. "I founded VER2 in 2014 to lay the foundation for what was coming. The infrastructure needed to be in place. I wasn't looking for recognition—just the opportunity to be ready when the world was."

Now, with VAI, he turns that vision across industries and geographies. "Looking ahead, de Francesca believes that the next decade will see significant transformations in the employment landscape, in addition to potential risks related to the rapid pace—and breadth—of AI adoption. With that in mind, de Francesca is founding "Ree," a non-governmental organization dedicated to reskilling professionals for the age of AI. "Given our role in enabling and supporting the deployment and adoption of these technologies at scale, we feel a moral responsibility to help mitigate the societal impacts they may cause," he says. "That is why we are founding Ree—a non-governmental organization focused on supporting displaced workers through re-skilling programs, transition support services, and advocating for a society built around the benefits society could have, rather than exacerbating inequality."

Looking ahead, de Francesca believes the future of AI is not centered on generative tools, as many assume, but on a more profound shift: the emergence of synthetic labor. "AI, automation, and robotics that augment or replace repetitive knowledge work are being underestimated," he says. "This transformation will fundamentally reshape how organizations operate."

He emphasizes that AI will not only improve what small and medium-sized businesses already do—it will reimagine and amplify what they can possibly do, leveling the playing field with far larger organizations. He refers to this shift as a "Phase Shift": a complete redefinition of the possibilities available to SMBs in the AI era.

"The real breakthrough isn't just AI chatbots or image tools: it's in redesigning how businesses function entirely. AI is no longer just an add-on to chatbots or workflow tools—it will now change how we build hospitals, run logistics, scale-up production, and deliver education and so much more. This is not about replacing humans, but humans and machines working together in reimagined business models that will build a better future for all."

vai.world