CEO CFO

CEOCFO Magazine

Tony Urban, CEO and Founder of DeckRobot discussed how their Automated Enterprise Software Tool using Artificial Intelligence is helping Businesses Create PowerPoint Presentations in a Few Clicks

Tony Urban
Chief Executive Officer and Founder

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Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Mr. Urban, what is the concept behind DeckRobot?*
Mr. Urban: DeckRobot is basically an enterprise software tool that helps in creating PowerPoint presentations in a matter of a few clicks. We automate it using Artificial Intelligence. The only thing you need is to put a draft onto the slide and the system will make it ready for external publishing or a board meeting.

CEOCFO: *PowerPoint has been around for quite awhile. Why has it taken so long to improve in this area?*
Mr. Urban: There are a combination of factors. First of all, this particular market niche looks to be small and not that significant for people outside of this market, such as for machine learning developers. When they think about artificial intelligence they think about how do we cure cancer or how do we make robots. They do not really think about helping with a PowerPoint presentation. Therefore, the first problem in there are no enough software developers looking to apply AI to PowerPoint. The second reason is that among the business people no one really has the skill to create the product. However, I was working for a management consultant firms including McKinsey for seven years and my technical Co-Founder, Ivan Novikov was doing research in Artificial Intelligence since 2009, so we had the right skill and problem identification to do this. Most people who see the problem don't have the skills or knowledge on how to do it.

CEOCFO: *What was the key to create DeckRobot? What did you need to do on the technology side?*
Mr. Urban: First the machine learning and computer vision are such great technologies that can do a great many things, with many use cases. Therefore, the first thing was understanding what we need, because Artificial Intelligence has to be guided, as it cannot solve problems just by itself. This meant we had to figure out how to guide this powerful tool. We figured out that the first thing we had to do was to understand out each design code and this was a very difficult thing to do. In data analytics the most important question is about what you are designing for.

vCEOCFO: *Is the product available today or are you still in development?*
Mr. Urban: Our product is available today. We have a very high entrance point, so we do not work with companies with less than 1,000 users for our products. We hope to release a version for smaller firms next year. In addition, we are hoping to release a version for B2C end-users.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach out? How have people become aware of DeckRobot?*
Mr. Urban: Because we are solving such a strong need for the market, we have benefited from word of mouth through the professional network.

CEOCFO: *What is your global reach today?*
Mr. Urban: Our key markets are London and New York, because our buyers have their headquarters there. We also have clients in Chicago, San Francisco, Paris, Frankfort, Munich, Copenhagen and some in Eastern Europe as well.

CEOCFO: *How do you work with your clients in getting started and understanding what to do?*
Mr. Urban: We conduct free workshops and webinars, and the more you use the tool the more you realize its potential and its limitations. Because we have an easy user interface, it is not a big problem. There is literally one button that you

need to click, and then the only thing you have to know is when it will not work, such as if you put a sticky note in your laptop, that will not work. What is complicated is the initial setup when you are first starting up everything. When you work with the IT department, when you work with the security department you want to make sure that everything is done according to corporate procedures and the way that the corporation wants it.

CEOCFO: *Your site indicates DeckRobot has no access to a company's data. Is that a concern for you clients?*
Mr. Urban: That is why we do mostly on premise solutions. We can also do cloud based, but 99% of our clients prefer to have data stores on their servers. Most of them have very sensitive data and cannot afford for a mistake to happen. That is why we do everything on premise, on their servers; just to make sure they do not have any concerns.

> **"There will be less focus on the mechanical work because our clients want to focus on analysis and client relationship building, rather than moving around small boxes on the slide. AI will affect the way we work."- Tony Urban**

CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach as more and more people have been using DeckRobot?*
Mr. Urban: That is great question. Customer feedback is very valuable to us because people know what they need. In the beginning when we started thinking about the product our initial hypothesis was to make a tool that allows you complete control of slides on the Whiteboard. You could take a picture with your iPhone and instantly have a slide, and we thought that was a cool idea. We then met with a few clients, who thought that was a cool idea, but wanted to know if we could make something inside the PowerPoint itself. That is how we initially got started. As we get new clients, we also get new customization requests. We will get new feedback from customers, such as if something is not working, and sometimes someone will try to use our product in a way that it was not designed to, which means we may have to add another feature.

CEOCFO: *How is business?*
Mr. Urban: So far, so good. However, this creates more issues. We now have to hire more people and open more offices, but those are kind of good problems to have.

CEOCFO: *You mentioned possibly creating a version for smaller companies. What else is coming in the future for DeckRobot?*
Mr. Urban: Our company vision is to help the professional services industry, specifically management consulting and audit, automate all the routine data-to-day tasks they are doing.

We will try to push to the market new products based on our current slide formatting tool. The next product in our pipeline will be a corporate knowledge management system, which will help you to instantly share insights from the work you presented. Nowadays, the biggest issue is the data confidentiality, so a consultant or an auditor has to manually remove all the client data and client context from every presentation to be shared outside of the client engagement team. They cannot share presentations "as-is" with anyone else other than the clients or team members.
This means when they go the another client with pretty much the same project (let's say the cost cutting), they can reuse it because they have it in their laptops or they have memories of what they have done, but another colleague would not be able to do anything.

We have in mind a technology that will enable to automatically read the whole presentation and extract the approach you use without extracting the client data, and immediately publish it through the internal corporate knowledge base.

CEOCFO: *Put it together for our readers. With so many new ideas to look at, why pay attention to DeckRobot?*
Mr. Urban: DeckRobot is one of many new vendors to come in the market in the last few years. We are applying a very powerful set of tools labeled Artificial Intelligence, which addresses issues many large corporation and small firms are facing. The way we work will be changed in just a few years. There are so many industries from finance to manufacturing that will be changed in a few years, and not just because of robotics and self driving cars, but also because we are going to have more tools to perform our day-to-day duties. There will be less focus on the mechanical work because our clients want to focus on analysis and client relationship building, rather than moving around small boxes on the slide. AI will affect the way we work.