

Episode 147 | ANTA: TelecomTV's AI-Native Telco Accelerator (Guy Daniels)
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Guy Daniels: [00:00] There is way more AI activity than most people think, and it's going on in all regions.

Danielle Rios: [00:08] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [00:08] I read a statistic recently that 70% of telcos have yet to deploy AI in the network. Well, I think you'll want to rethink that. Our evidence says that is not the case.

Announcer: [00:25] This is "Telco in 20", a podcast that helps telco execs achieve a competitive advantage with AI and the public cloud. It is hosted by Danielle Rios, also known as DR. Today, we're talking to Guy Daniels, chief strategy officer and content director at TelecomTV.

Danielle Rios: [00:44] Hi, guys. I'm DR. Who can keep up with the pace of AI? In just the last few months, the Frontier Lab shipped three things telcos can use today like AI that writes production-grade code with benchmarks going from single digits to more than 90%, agents that work unsupervised for hours, even days, and come back with the work done. Even AI that solves problems humans couldn't crack for decades. That's the pace now.

[01:13] Blink, and the ground has already moved. The world's best telcos are keeping up. Deutsche Telekom has customer-facing AI publishing real results. Orange now briefs investors on its AI deployments and says that 80% of employees are using it. And 54 out of 56 telco operator groups tracked by TelecomTV are running AI in three or more parts of their business. But for every operator talking, others are quietly doing amazing work. And an industry that can't see its wins can't learn from them.

[01:45] We need a group that shares telco's trials, tribulations, and results so the whole industry stays ahead. That group now exists. And it's TelecomTV's ANTA, the new AI-Native Telco Accelerator. Today, I'm joined by Guy Daniels, chief strategy officer and content director at TelecomTV. We cover what ANTA is and why the industry needs it. Guy's readout on the AI-Native Telco Index, an evidence-based report on how telcos are actually using AI. And what's up with TelecomTV's AI-Native Telco Forum happening in Düsseldorf this September. So let's take 20.

[02:25] Guy Daniels is chief strategy officer and content director at TelecomTV. Hi, Guy. Welcome to "Telco in 20".

Guy Daniels: [02:31] Hi, DR. Good to see you again.

Danielle Rios: [02:33] Yeah, I'm super excited. We're all geared up and getting ready to head out to Düsseldorf. We're going to talk about all the exciting things about that event and the new AI Telecom Accelerator or ANTA. And so last year was the first in-person AI-Native Telco Forum, and it was a raging success. Tons of people attended. People were waiting to get in. It was amazing. And so how will this year's event be different?

Guy Daniels: [02:59] Yeah. Well, thanks, DR. First of all, this year, we've had more time to plan. We only had a few months to put together last year's event. So with more time, we're able to up the quality.

Danielle Rios: [03:09] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [03:09] We do like to keep our events below the 200-delegate mark because we think it's really important everyone in the room can get involved in the networking, the meetings, the casual chats. Very, very important.

Danielle Rios: [03:22] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [03:23] We know AI is accelerating and we are there to really facilitate the conversations. So this year, we've got more telco CSP delegates and speakers than before. Really pleased about that because we all want to hear from the telcos and learn what they're doing with AI. We've got more sessions, we've got more time, we've got more demo areas.

Danielle Rios: [03:44] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [03:44] We've also got the ANTA Telco Steering Board, which I'll talk about later, that helps us to shape the agenda and make sure we're covering the right areas. They're joining us in Düsseldorf and participating. We're streaming live, but really, you got to be there in the room because there's so much value to actually being there in person.

Danielle Rios: [04:02] Yeah. I mean, I love this event we attended last year and the focus on telco and AI is really something that's needed. I

think it's one of the only events in the industry that's so focused on this. I think TelecomTV is building a real community around this, and I think that's really exciting. And so, as you mentioned, you guys have launched a new program called ANTA, the AI-Native Telco Accelerator. Totogi, my company, is a founding member, and we're alongside great operators like Deutsche Telekom, Orange, NTT Docomo, Rakuten Mobile, and Axiata.

[04:37] So tell me about ANTA and what are the goals? What are you guys trying to get out of this program?

Guy Daniels:

[04:41] Well, as you said, DR, it's about building a community. We want to really facilitate and share best practices. We want to find out what's working, what's not working. We want to highlight successes, but equally, we want to highlight shortcomings and any evidence gaps out there, but do it in a really positive, constructive way.

Danielle Rios:

[05:03] Yeah.

Guy Daniels:

[05:04] So to do this, we've got three elements to ANTA. There's the event, the website, and the report. So the event, of course, we're in Düsseldorf in September. We've spoken about that earlier, but we'll have a second in-person event. We can't announce details just yet, but that's coming for next year. The website is the community engagement area. So that's where we've got our news and analysis from Ray and the TelecomTV team.

[05:32] We've also got AI content from our ANTA members themselves. They're putting up demo videos, POCs, white papers, reports, you name it.

Danielle Rios:

[05:40] Yeah.

Guy Daniels:

[05:40] And then we've got the report, the AI-Native Telco Index, and I'm really excited about this. I believe it's the first 100% evidence-based report on the state of telco adoption of AI. And I'm tracking 56 operator groups, and compiling, and evaluating all their published news and information on their AI activities. So this isn't an analyst report. This is a media view of what AI-Native telco is becoming. And we're publishing it in September at Düsseldorf for ANTA members only. And I'm really excited to share it.

Danielle Rios: [06:19] Yeah. One of the reasons Totogi joined was we really wanted to be a part of the community that's really applying AI, not just talking about what you can do with it or what you should do with it, but on the ground experience deploying this at scale within a telco. What are the battle scars that everyone's going to have to go through to get this implemented? And so we're really super excited about that.

[06:44] But let's talk about the list of operators that are part of the group. These are the innovators of our industry, the companies that are really leading AI transformation in telco. And so what are these operators doing that puts them at the front of the pack?

Guy Daniels: [06:56] Well, you said it there because they're doing, they're not just talking, they're getting the battle scars and they're sharing their experiences. Orange, Deutsche Telekom, NTT Docomo, Rakuten Mobile, and Axiata, as you mentioned, they all joined us as our telco steering board. And they make sure what we're doing continues to be relevant and helpful to all telcos.

[07:19] And since then, we've added Vodafone Group, we've got MetTel, Fastweb. And it's interesting when you say, "How are they leading? Who's leading?" In a way, this is one of the reasons we produce this index is to challenge many of the perceptions that have already developed around AI-Native telco, including this notion that it's only a handful of large telcos that are doing all the hard work because it's not. Some of the most amazing work that I've discovered and found so far has been done by the smaller Tier 2s.

Danielle Rios: [07:51] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [07:51] But many of these large Tier 1, they've got the necessary scale and they've also got the desire to keep up with the transformation velocity. They've got to keep pushing.

Danielle Rios: [08:01] Yeah. I would love to hear some examples of how these guys are leading that you guys are finding out there.

Guy Daniels: [08:07] Yeah, there's huge detail in the report. Deutsche Telekom, they started with RAN Guardian, they moved on to MINDR. They've also got an impressive customer-facing AI that's

actually delivering published results. It's incredible. And I think DT is moving faster than any other European operator out there.

Danielle Rios: [08:25] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [08:25] Orange, incredibly strong board-level support.

Danielle Rios: [08:28] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [08:28] And that actually gets presented to investors and the financial community. They're talking detailed AI deployments in their investor calls, which very few of the telcos do. And it's company-wide. They're claiming over 80% of their employees are already using AI. And then, of course, there's the trust element that Orange is really going all in on. And those are just two. I mean, we've got 56 of these.

Danielle Rios: [08:54] That's amazing. And I think that's going to be very helpful for the industry. Just all these different applications and experiences. Maybe you have a colleague, a friend that's in one of those companies, and you say, "Hey, how did you guys get this off the ground?" One of the biggest struggles of AI is just starting to get those reps in, building that muscle internally and building the confidence that this is going to work.

Guy Daniels: [09:17] Yeah, you're right. And maybe this is why there is so much AI work that these telcos are not disclosing publicly. They're keeping to themselves. I think they are slightly concerned at what they're doing. Are they doing the right thing? Will they be seen doing the wrong thing? So we've got to give telcos more confidence, I think.

Danielle Rios: [09:32] Yeah, for sure. And so what's also interesting is you also have some industry bodies that have joined ANTA, GSMA, TM Forum, and then certainly, you have the technology vendors like my company, Totogi. And so what role do the industry bodies and the technology partners play in ANTA?

Guy Daniels: [09:47] Oh, a huge role. ANTA's there for the whole ecosystem.

Danielle Rios: [09:50] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [09:51] So if I start with the association, we've been blown away by the support we've had from associations. As you say, GSMA

and TM Forum are ANTA partners. We've also got NGMN, we've got ETSI, and we've got the Linux Foundation.

Danielle Rios:

[10:04] Yeah.

Guy Daniels:

[10:05] And they're all doing fantastic work in this area in AI and telco AI. We're not looking to replace them. We're not looking to compete with them. We are absolutely not another association or alliance. So that enables them to work with us to promote their activities to a much wider audience, the TelecomTV audience, as well as hopefully encouraging collaboration between all these different bodies.

[10:30] And as for our technology partners, such as Totogi, their support is absolutely crucial. They get the report, they attend the event, they participate on the website. Above all, it's about getting closely involved with the AI-Native telco leaders and sharing what they can offer and listening to what the telcos need from them. I keep saying it, this needs the whole community, all the different stakeholders. We all need to understand what everyone's doing. What is going to get us to the AI-Native goal without any delays or any missteps?

Danielle Rios:

[11:01] Well, I think what's interesting about the industry bodies is, a lot of times, these are think tanks. These are people who are thinking how this will be or could be implemented. And bringing them into the ANTA, they're now going to get the stories and the experiences that real telcos are going through that informs them on their standards and on their advice that they give to other telcos. And I think on the flip side, being a vendor, I think what we bring to ANTA is we see the actual activity across multiple telcos and even across continents.

[11:32] And so my company sees organizations that are really advanced and what they're doing with training their people and experimenting with AI. And we can talk to the human resources element of getting your organization aligned to AI, and then certainly real-world experience of multiple deployments across a variety of sizes of operators, prepaid, postpaid, who's focused more on network, who's focused more on customer. And so that perspective from vendors that are seeing a lot of reps out there across telcos, I think, is an interesting voice to bring into the ANTA, and it's really good to share like that.

Guy Daniels:

[12:07] Yep.

Danielle Rios: [12:07] So as you mentioned, one of your big deliverables of the group is the AI-Native Telco Index, the first ever report tracking the world's leading telco operator groups on their AI-Native activity. The way I think of it, if you want one place to catch up on what's going on with AI and telco, this is the report to read. And so you just finished the first draft. What are some surprising insights you found?

Guy Daniels: [12:29] Great. Well, thanks for saying that, DR. We do appreciate it. And I do believe also this is the report to read.

Danielle Rios: [12:34] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [12:34] What did I find? I'm still crunching the data, but we've completed first drafts of all the dossiers and all the associated research articles. So if I take a step back, how I started this is I thought, "Well, what are the assumptions that we have today?" So I took a set of industry-wide assumptions about AI-Native and then compared them with the evidence-based findings that we discovered from all these telcos. So, for example, what does AI-Native actually mean?

Danielle Rios: [13:02] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [13:02] There's a big debate over what AI-Native means. Is efficiency still the main driver for telco AI? What about revenue growth? Is cloud native a precondition for AI-Native like most people think it is? Are there regional variations in AI-Native progress and more besides? So I've been analyzing these perceptions against the evidenced reality, and I've also been compiling these extensive dossiers on all 56 operators.

[13:30] And by doing that and looking at their published evidence that's out there, we can have a look at their progress on the foundational readiness, if you like, especially with data, strategic intent, are the boards behind them? Execution evidence, what are they doing?

Danielle Rios: [13:44] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [13:44] So my biggest takeaway at the moment, there is way more AI activity than most people think, and it's going on in all regions. And I read a statistic recently that 70% of telcos have yet to deploy AI in the network. Well, I think you'll want to rethink that. Our evidence says that is not the case.

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Danielle Rios: [14:07] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [14:07] Also, interesting at this early stage is that we've identified 15 distinct operational domains where AI is out there now in commercial use in evidence. And of these 56 operators we've been looking at, 54 of them have AI operational in at least three domains. It's across their companies. It's really extensive.

Danielle Rios: [14:29] Yeah, yeah.

Guy Daniels: [14:30] The long-term trajectory of AI in telcos is very clear. It's only going to increase.

Danielle Rios: [14:36] Yeah. Well, I have one question for you.

Guy Daniels: [14:38] Yeah.

Danielle Rios: [14:38] And that is, are you using AI to put your report together?

Guy Daniels: [14:42] You betcha. Yes, I am.

Danielle Rios: [14:45] You have to.

Guy Daniels: [14:46] Yeah. And unlike the recent conversations, I'm not afraid to say I'm using AI.

Danielle Rios: [14:49] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [14:50] I think you have to.

Danielle Rios: [14:50] You have to.

Guy Daniels: [14:51] You've got so much information. How do you make sense of all this without using AI?

Danielle Rios: [14:54] No, absolutely.

Guy Daniels: [14:55] It's like network data, isn't it? I mean, come on.

Danielle Rios: [14:57] Absolutely. And so this is great learning all about ANTA. For everyone listening, the AI-Native Telco Forum is September 8th and 9th in Düsseldorf. Like you said at the beginning, it's bigger this year, and I hear it's close to selling out. Give us the

pitch. Why does everyone doing AI in telco need to be in this room?

Guy Daniels: [15:14] Because it's the place to be if you're serious about AI-Native in telecoms. And I really, really believe that. We've got the leading telcos, leading vendors, leading associations. We've got a mix of everything you need, presentations, panels, demos, lots and lots of networking. We've got DR, of course. We've got TelecomTV magic sprinkled on top of it all. So we've got the full experience, but we are getting close to capacity. So do book your ticket now or book your demo pod and don't miss out.

Danielle Rios: [15:40] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [15:40] We'll reveal the index as well. There's so much information going to get shared and discussed in Düsseldorf. And as we said with AI, you got to run with it to keep up. You snooze, you lose.

Danielle Rios: [15:49] Yeah.

Guy Daniels: [15:50] So I'd just say to everyone, come and join us, you, me, the rest of the team in Düsseldorf. Everyone's welcome.

Danielle Rios: [15:55] Yeah, it's going to be super exciting. I'm doing another one of my crazy talks. We have a demo pod where people can see the Totogi Ontology in action. We're hosting a party that night, and I always throw great parties. And so I think it's going to be another amazing event put on by TelecomTV.

[16:11] And so, Guy, I really appreciate you coming onto the podcast and telling us all about the AI-Native Telco Forum and ANTA. So thanks so much.

Guy Daniels: [16:20] DR, thank you very much. Honored to be on.

Danielle Rios: [16:22] Awesome.

[16:27] Stick around. We end each podcast with a "Telco in 20" takeaway. I've got two minutes to tell you something you need to know.

[16:38] Guy said something that stuck with me. Telcos are doing amazing AI work and keeping it to themselves. My theory? They think sharing gives away their edge. Here's my message to every

operator hiding their wins. You're protecting the wrong asset. With everyone having access to the same models, the use case isn't the differentiation. What nobody can copy is the learning loop you create by deploying successfully. The creation of your operation context, the documentation of your decision making, and the arduous work of connecting your data.

[17:11] That's the moat. And it only gets wider when you're putting in the work. So share what you're doing with AI. It's the how that's a secret sauce. Want to know who's already sharing? It's in the AI-Native Telco Index, a readout on 56 operator groups tracked on evidence, not perception. ANTA members get access, and it drops at TelecomTV's AI-Native Telco Forum running September 8th and 9th in Düsseldorf.

[17:37] I'll be there giving a keynote and throwing another fabulous party. If you're not signed up yet, hurry. With less than a month to go, it's close to selling out. And while you're in Germany, come see the Totogi Ontology in action. Find the Totogi demo pod at the AI-Native Telco Forum or DM me on LinkedIn or X @TelcoDR, and we'll set up a time to meet. Until then, tune to more "Telco in 20" episodes. Like and follow and leave us a five-star review.

[18:05] Don't forget to sign up for my killer email newsletter on TelcoDR.com and check out our awesome YouTube channel and hit that subscribe button. Bis bald in Deutschland. Later, nerds.