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Global Artificial Intelligence

AI's Evolution: Perplexity - Day 2 Takeaways from Citi's Global TMT Conference

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CITI'S TAKE

We hosted Dmitry Shevelenko, the Chief Business Officer of Perplexity, for a fireside chat on September 9, 2026, at our Global TMT Conference in NYC. The discussion focused on Perplexity's model-agnostic product strategy, the role of AI in enabling new business formation and agentic commerce, and the potential for post-training and local or hybrid compute to create compounding data advantages while reducing inference-cost and privacy constraints.

Perplexity's product direction centers on accuracy, objective-based computing, and model neutrality. Shevelenko described Perplexity Computer as an orchestration layer that abstracts away instructions, uses available user context, and routes each task or subtask to the best-suited model. Because Perplexity captures the same value regardless of model choice, Shevelenko believes its "Switzerland of AI" positioning builds trust. While Perplexity is exploring its Router API with a few pilot customers, Shevelenko believes most enterprises derive greater value from Computer's fully packaged approach, which delivers end-to-end outcomes and supports local or hybrid deployment without requiring customers to rebuild the application stack in-house.

Agentic growth is being led by small businesses and accelerating new business formation, while e-commerce remains primarily a research use case. Shevelenko pointed to rapid adoption among solopreneurs and sub-five-person businesses, including users spending seven figures annually on compute to deploy digital coworkers across sales, marketing, operations, and client acquisition. Shevelenko believes AI is enabling more companies to form and operate with fewer employees, including e-commerce businesses and independent professional practices that might otherwise require larger teams. Despite increasing competition, Perplexity's revenue has more than tripled this year, while Shevelenko expects shopping agents to create the most value by filtering options and informing decisions rather than completing purchases autonomously.

Portable and hybrid compute could create compounding advantages while enabling always-on AI at lower incremental cost. Perplexity's Portable Computer runs Computer on local Nvidia GPUs, keeps organizational data on-premises, and post-trains open models using proprietary data from verified, completed Computer tasks, which Shevelenko said materially improves model performance and creates a reinforcing data advantage. Shevelenko detailed how "context maxing" matters more to most enterprises than marginal differences in model intelligence, while

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shifting AI spending from per-token inference costs to primarily electricity could remove usage constraints, support continuous agent activity, and hedge against rising inference costs and cloud-capacity limitations. Shevelenko views local compute as a hedge against potential data-center scarcity, allowing enterprises to securely use their full organizational context without being constrained by incremental token costs or the availability of additional cloud capacity.

