

IT Matters - Ep18

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

ai, denver, understand, data, people, columbia, perspective, great, cloud, technology, roi, organization, keith, copilot, training, tools, solution, starting, implement, interesting

SPEAKERS

Narrator, Keith Hawkey, Aaron Bock, Denver Hunter

- N** Narrator 00:07
Welcome to the IT Matters Podcast where we explore why IT matters and matters pertaining to IT.
- K** Keith Hawkey 00:16
Welcome everyone to the IT Matters podcast. Aaron, how you doing?
- A** Aaron Bock 00:21
I'm good, Keith, how are you doing today?
- K** Keith Hawkey 00:24
I'm fantastic. What's been going on in your life? I know you returned from the wonderful world of rain forest and leche stores. What have you been up to?
- A** Aaron Bock 00:33
Yeah, just loving this fall upon us right now. Where we don't have to walk outside and immediately change shirts. It cooled off a little bit. And yes, I just got back from Costa Rica. Highly recommend anyone check that country out. I was near Tamarindo and it is a very cool place. Wonderful people, I felt very safe, and I had a good time. So lots been going on with me. How about you, Keith?
- K** Keith Hawkey 00:58

Well, I haven't returned from Costa Rica. So it's, I'll take a notch down from that but very busy. Fall's coming around. Just aerated my yard and I'm trying some new grass seeds. So I'm excited to see what the results are. Trying to get that in before the leaves fall so they don't suffocate. That's my non work preoccupation this week, at least. But we have an exciting guest on the podcast today, Denver Hunter. Denver Hunter is the director of IT at PenServ, which is a full service third party administrator based out of Columbia, South Carolina, as well as the CTO of Small Town, which is a graphic design firm. He's also an official member of the Forbes Technology Council. Early in life, Denver decided that the best was for him. So he decided to brush up against the best and brightest, graduating from the University of South Carolina. Welcome to the IT Matters podcast Denver.

D Denver Hunter 01:57

Thank you, Keith. Thank you, Aaron. Thank you both for having me and I look forward to the discussion.

A Aaron Bock 02:00

Denver's definitely our best dressed podcast guest to date. So if you're watching this on video, you get to see our most, our superlative for best dressed so far.

D Denver Hunter 02:12

Thank you. I appreciate that honor.

K Keith Hawkey 02:14

So tell me, Denver, before we begin, what drove you to seek excellence and become a Gamecock.

D Denver Hunter 02:20

Man, just years of sitting through all those football games, right. No, um, I love my school, love my town, love Columbia. I'm from a little ways up north of there. But just a great campus, a great environment, and it was just a good time to go spend there and get my degree. I spent those four years there. I ran on the four year plan. And from there, it's just natural dive into tech. It's always interested me since I was a little kid. And since I've taught myself how to build websites, basically back in middle school.

K Keith Hawkey 02:45

How long have you been in Columbia? Did you grow up there?

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Denver Hunter 02:47

So I grew up a little town kind of northeast of there called Camden. Really our claim to fame are two major things. We have two Revolutionary War battlefields and we have the Carolina Cup now. Used to have Colonial back in the day but, so we have are the steeplechase capital of the world actually, very few people know that. But it's a great time. A lot of fun times, especially back when they had College Park. But so I grew up there and Columbia was just kind of a natural progression. Spent a lot of time there, still spending a lot of time there these days with my kids.

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Keith Hawkey 03:13

What does the tech industry look like in Columbia nowadays? I know it's become a little more trendy. I actually grew up not too far from Columbia as well, in a probably the more well known city next to Camden called Lugoff. But no, that was that was an inside joke Denver would understand. But yeah, what's what's the tech scene in Columbia look like today?

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Denver Hunter 03:32

So the tech scene here has been, it's been growing, I call it a well kept secret, if you will, because we don't have some of the prominence off some of the major areas and the hubs you think about. But there's really a lot going on here from a company side, from a company perspective. We had a gentleman by the name of Todd Lewis, who put on, used to put on some great open source conferences here that actually has kind of emerged and moved, moved up to Raleigh, where it's even grown even more, but there's still a connection here with that, as well as a few other groups that get together. And there's still some businesses that are doing some pretty amazing things in this talk, and then coming up in Bull Street, you know, that's going to be an exciting area that's brought in some tech names already. So I look forward to more growth with that in the continuing. And it seems like the government's done a good job in the area with kind of fostering that quietly.

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Keith Hawkey 04:13

Hopefully, they get louder here in the future, and you guys can continue to grow. Some of the things that I really found interesting with your background is you have familiarity around banking, and some of their concerns when it comes to artificial intelligence. There's a lot to talk about, particularly around personal information, credit card data, bias training. Can you share with our audience a little bit about your background and some of what you know, when it comes to these concerns?

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Denver Hunter 04:45

So it came around from the bank that was just shy of a billion dollars here in the state, where state bank, we were State Bank. The biggest thing, AI was already here in a lot of ways, particularly in the card market and things like that, but you know, obviously with the hype cycle kind of hitting what it is, and hitting that sort of all time, and you're hearing AI, this AI that, you

know, companies making money off of it. The FDIC, who's our regulating body, became very concerned about it, and a lot of the discussion, and we even had a series of table talks, and a lot of those discussions were based around what to think about with AI because AI is your traditional tech issue, right. You've got this new technology, you've got this new thing, nobody really understands it. It's unfolding right now as we speak. And so all this is going on. Well, AI factors into a lot of things in banking. And I mean, most prominently would be fraud, right? Because at the end of the day, all these big card companies are conducting fraud analysis and trying to predict, capture, quickly fix, had all the instances of fraud that we have going on. And I mean, that's something that anybody in the industry deals with, I mean, people people want money, either through legitimate purposes, or nefarious purposes. And so, AI has been spilling over a lot into that. But part of that concern is that is AI, you know, kind of moves on from that and comes into other roles, like making credit decisions is, is AI going to be fair, because there may be systemic biases that get put into AI, that we're not even thinking about, but that the decisions, the criteria going into the decision, the algorithm, if you will, of making these decisions, is causing an unfair advantage to a certain party or group of people with a certain, so you know, we're back in that territory of potentially looking at Red Line. And it's kind of back again, but in a different way, right. So a lot of a lot of thought is going into that right now. And a lot of thought is going to how can we check? How can we make sure? How can we, you know, verify the data and not make these unfair decisions that, you know, nobody's intending to be unfair, but the result, the outcome may be unfavorable.

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Aaron Bock 06:47

It's interesting, because we talk a lot about AI on this podcast, and I think we'll kind of get into it a little bit more today. Random question for you with where you're at right now, as an IT leader at a financial firm, taking a step back holistically, how is the raising interest rates and kind of the economy where we're at today, affecting the way you all run IT at a financial organization? Like, is it changing it? If so, what what is it changing? What do you kind of predict for the next year or two?

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Denver Hunter 07:18

Right, no that's good question. So like everybody else, I mean, I always joke, IT is the expensive baby in the room, right? It's the huge budget, it's the core software, it's all everybody's computers and peripherals. So we are going to be if not the most expensive, one of the most expensive line items in the budget. And so I mean, with the interest rates, and with decisions like that, you have to start looking at AI from a perspective of helping you maybe not, you know, we've all we've all lived through this crunch in personnel, so you're looking at AI as potentially replacing some of that. And not in a sense of, oh, we're going to fire the whole department and our coders and programmers are just going to be AI models, but in the sense of how can I leverage AI for my employees more efficiently to maybe get more done with fewer people? Or how can I leverage AI from a customer perspective to improve the customer experience, improve customer retention, and access to data? So it's, we're looking at all full spectrums, because I'm really, my mindset is that AI is gonna, you know, this hype is gonna cool a little bit, there's still going to be some amazing things to come out of it. I think we've already seen that. I mean, just what's being inserted into the average home with Bard and Chat GPT is already amazing enough, right? And it's already starting to change things enough. My

heart goes out to college professors, because how the heck are you going to grade an exam, especially a written one right now, or take home? How are you going to do that, because you don't know who's writing it anymore? But from a,

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Aaron Bock 08:41

They should be using AI too.

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Denver Hunter 08:43

There you go, there you go. But from a business perspective, you know, if I can improve people's efficiency in writing emails or I can improve people's efficiencies in making a decision, or whatever the case may be, then I can concentrate more resources on other things, and work on improving those areas. So that's kind of where the drivers going for me in that I think AI is going to be a help to most people, rather than replacing most people.

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Aaron Bock 09:10

You're saying basically, that you think using your resources smarter, to be able to do more work with less, try to keep costs down because of the rising interest rates, etc. If that's a goal for you, for AI specifically, and like how you implement this, you know, at a financial institution, there's usually more controls more regulation around it. How do you safely encourage people to test and use some of the tools that are out there? Because one of the knocks on AI is you have to be careful, don't put sensitive data, it can create hallucinations, etc. How do you encourage people to use it, but also use it safely?

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Denver Hunter 09:50

So that's another good question. But, at the end of the day, you've got to understand what you're potentially implementing, because with a lot of these models, where's the data gonna reside? How is the data going to be used? I mean, the conversations even in the media right now are all about them. Because there's kind of this pendulum swing of, where's our data really at? What's AI really storing? I mean, I think Elon Musk was in the news, because he was mentioning how many, you know, internet websites AI is using, and pulling content from, scraping content from ultimately to learn, and may spit this information out. And so that becomes a, you know, some ethical questions there. But from a financial perspective, especially, that becomes a very big concern about where the data is being stored. So I think number one, you got to seek to understand that and as an IT leader, or anybody involved in IT really, you need to start understanding how that works. Because we've got Copilot coming out, you know, we've got Bard out there. We've got all these tools, and you've got to understand that employees may use those tools, even though you may not be in a focus group right now, or you may not be politing those things. So, anybody can get on Bard right now, and anybody can go get on Chat GPT right now and start spitting out data. So I think from a perspective, as you've got to realize what's coming, and what's gonna, what your users probably are already doing, and get out in front of that. And so that, you know, it's just like, I view it a lot like phishing training, because you've got to do it. And you know that people are gonna click those

emails, and you've got to constantly hit over the head, you're gonna have to do the same thing with AI from an organizational perspective. And then as you adopt it yourself, it's going to be putting it through rigorous testing, I mean, again, you go back to, is the outcome of this decision that we're letting AI make going to be the correct outcome. So you're gonna have to do some very rigorous testing, some very rigorous understanding of the parameters, you know, down to prompts. I mean, learning prompts, is going to be its whole art form. It already is, you know, there's already some jobs out there that are paying quite handsomely for that. So that that all factors into a very rigorous program, a very robust program of implementation of AI. This is not just something you can kind of turn on and say, Hey, let's see what happens. You've got to have a plan.

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Aaron Bock 11:56

For the listeners out there, by the way, you know, Denver mentioned Bard, Chat GPT already, I think everyone is pretty familiar with those. For those that are not familiar with Copilot, Copilot is Microsoft's internal, well, not internal, but it's their tools that they're starting to roll out within the Microsoft ecosystem for AI. Denver, I was gonna say Opkalla, we were in part of the beta, which was kind of cool, we were able to see some of the features already and it's crazy. And I was talking about this yesterday with someone I sit on a nonprofit board and nonprofits for years have dealt with, you know, note taking and bylaws and all this stuff. And I was trying to tell them, I'm like, I don't think we need to follow much of this anymore, because I can turn on copilot and it will do most of this for me and it'll save all the time. And once again, you have to think about the data you're storing, what you say, it's all going to be recorded, but some of it should drastically improve your productivity. So a little plug for Opkalla, we're starting to see some of it. We've got a lot of folks in the Microsoft ecosystem and if anyone listening out there, out there is interested in learning a little more about Copilot, find us on LinkedIn and happy to share some of the things we've betaed. One other question for you Denver on just AI in general, like you've talked about finding ways, high level, and you mentioned a few specific examples about like writing emails, what is the most creative use case that you've seen for AI so far, and it can be at work and in the business, or it could be your side business, it could be in your personal life, like what's the most creative use case for AI you've seen so far.

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Denver Hunter 13:38

I think the one that's impressed me, and it's probably some of your listeners are probably going to groan, but I think it's interesting watching the application of AI in coding and programming. Because, you know, again, it's not going to replace the person. But I've seen folks use it. I've used it for some of my own problems with mixed, mixed results, I'll add. But you can go out and you can get an answer to something and oftentimes, you're seeing that second, third level of follow through that may not be on a website or in Google, you know, Google search, or whatever else to get the information. So you know, you're looking at a tool that not only can do that, but then could write some of your functions for it. So you're speeding up, you're making that person doubly as productive in being able to pull some of those functions in. So really, to me, that's been the most and it's not amazingly crazy sexy, but it really from a leadership perspective, from an IT person perspective, that's really driving some efficiencies. And again, to help improve what goes on in that world.



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Keith Hawkey 14:30

Denver have you had any exposure with Microsoft Copilot? Or are you familiar with what that is?

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Denver Hunter 14:37

I'm very familiar with it. Unfortunately, it was not in on the beta so a lot of my information has been secondhand at this time, but I've been reading up on it a bit and working through it. And, you know, understanding the implications of it and what it can do. I mean, you know, the notetaking feature being a great example of the kinds of things that I think you can deploy from the start.

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Keith Hawkey 14:58

What kind of impact, like imagine your entire organization, leveraging all and when I say all the features, no one ever leverages all the features, most of the time you install a tool and 10% to 15% are leveraged, but that's also because many of those features have to be manual. If they built in mechanisms with the solution that leveraged the features on their own behalf and are self-starting, such as simply recording a meeting, all we have to do is set the meeting to record and it automatically takes the notes. It will automatically put it into a bullet point format, and then we can command it to transfer the data from the meeting to an Excel file. What does that mean for an organization if everyone is using it? What do you think this leads to?

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Denver Hunter 15:42

Well, I mean, I think truthfully, and this is something I've preached even before AI came along, but in looking at what tasks you can automate, what tasks you can move along, and looking at process management, those repetitive tasks that nobody really wants to do, but you have to. Taking notes in a meeting, you know, those tasks that you, that just take time out of your day, you know, left brain versus right brain, okay, got to shift gears to do this, I think the efficiency gains, the productivity gains from that will be monumental. And I think it's really again, it's not that sexy when you when you kind of look at it at first, but when you really start adding up how much you know, someone says in meetings all day, Zoom meetings, in their teams meetings, whatever, just taking the notes from that is already going to give you time back. And that might be one or two more meetings a day, across 10, 20, 30, 100 employees, that starts to add up, right? And now you start getting those efficiency gains in multiple areas. I think, you know, I kind of laugh, we used to all have the, and I can't even think of his name but the old Microsoft paperclip that used to be in Word years and years ago, that tool is actually going to now be able to suggest fixes and kind of intelligently learn what you might not be good at. I mean, my example is always the person maybe, maybe sending emails is not really their thing. They're a great talker, but they're not the best emailer, and sometimes they tend to leave things out or be a little too, a little too vague. Well, then you've got an AI tool that can kind of come in and say, Hey, here's the better way to write this so you don't sound angry. Hey, here, did you forget to do this, that and the other? You know, in that kind of application I think, I don't know that you can measure that right now. But I do know that that is, you know, common to all of us. And there's all those little tasks that we can help do. I mean, from an IT perspective, can you imagine a lot of the log reviews and a lot of the analysis and analytics, you're now going to be

able to automate even further with AI that are going to give you results that are as intelligent as if you devoted an employee to looking for that. So I think a lot of that is going to kind of just compound on itself as we deploy these tools. And you know, something like copilot where it makes it kind of easy to plug in as a product offering is, you know, fairly clear. It's still a little vague, but I think they've done a decent job of okay, this is what it's going to do, this is how it's going to work, then, you know, organizations can implement that. And like you said, those features are already on. It's not going to be a case of I'm not going to touch it, it's going to be right there. And you're going to get some of those wins of hey, here's a way that I can help you, AI speaking, you know, do x, y, z, so that that's going to be kind of more in your face, and more something that you're more aware of than just launching a software product that's going to sit there and you got to click the button and interact with it to get it and do anything.

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Aaron Bock 18:12

Denver, so like it's interesting, Keith asked about how and you talked about like log reviews, if you had to give advice to others about how you coach like non IT people how to use some of these tools. Because I think that's going to be a big challenge of like IT people are usually willing to try and test and fail and try again, because that's just the nature of a lot of the stereotypical IT person. I think other departments are not so willing to do those things. So how do you, or how do others in your role, make sure that people are trying these things? And like what do you do as a director in an organization to try to push initiatives like that like cross functionally.

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Denver Hunter 18:54

So I think you've got to go where the wind is, so to speak. So you've got to look for those employees who are kind of early adopters. That's a big thing for me, I've done that, you know, we're in banking so we're very distributed. I needed to have a designee at each branch who kind of, I knew I could talk to. So you look for those type people. Now work in a much more, we've got two locations, it's much more centralized. But it's still the same thing, right? I've got those folks in my teams who I know I can go to and say, Hey, we got this new thing you really ought to try it out, it really will help save you some time. So you got to concentrate on those folks, I think on one front. But then the other two areas, and this is something, I'm an English major left that part out to start with, but that gives me a little bit of a unique perspective in IT because I actually liked to write. But with one of the two simple problems I see in IT are one communication. And it's because right we're always communicating. Everybody thinks we're using acronyms and lingo and everything else that they can't understand. And then two is just the training and a lot of times it's IT guys that are like hey, we deploy the software solution it's really easy to use, so easy a caveman can do it. Why can't everybody use it? So I think you've got to focus on that and really work with your teams, you know, work internally with HR, work with your training teams, work with your other departments and make sure that there's training regimens built for this. And there's classes that say, Hey, this is like, we'll start out with 101 level, but we're going to show you 102, 103, and so on to where you can really save some time and have a lot less to do during the day. You've got to sell it the right way and offer the training. So if you go out and get those stakeholders, get them on board, and then go out and do the training and do the clear communications, then I think you can put together a formula where people actually begin to use these things, especially when you can show those use cases.

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Keith Hawkey 20:31

I could see a lot of times what happens is you onboard a new technology, you implement it, and you're performing training. And that might be all well and good when you perform the training. But six months down the road, three months down the road, if certain employees aren't using this technology, very much, the training is lost and then they're contacting you the IT leader or they have to reach out to support with the vendors support desk. I could see AI playing a strategic role in the follow up of implementation. So an employee four months down the road, when a solution is implemented and running. How do I do that? I remember that training, there's a certain thing, instead of having to bother the IT department and have them retrain or called to who knows where for a support desk ticket, they can engage in AI platforms. Say hey, what how do I do this in this platform. I could see all kinds of providers implementing a large language model AI, like we find in Bard, like we find in Chat GPT, to provide that ongoing support as an easy win. I mean, it's the language is compelling, all it has to do is understand what the technology is about and how to train, I can see that as an easy win for a lot of organizations.

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Aaron Bock 21:48

Denver, I mean, I'll plug you really quick. So you mentioned in the beginning, you introduced yourself, you're on the Forbes Technology Council. And if you haven't checked out Denver on LinkedIn, go find him. He writes articles and you have a really good article on this topic. It's called "Four Things to Consider When You Start that New IT Project with Non IT Business Leaders". And so I think we're kind of talking about this, like how do you train, find advocates, understand like your stakeholders, like Keith said, how do you use some of the technology? So for our listeners out there, we'll link it in the show notes. But check out Denver's article on starting IT projects when you're dealing with the business.

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Denver Hunter 22:27

Most definitely. I mean, it's a huge application. I know in the army, they call it shot in the arm training. So it's a huge application for that, you know, as well as the scheduling the follow up. I mean, those are those are great points, because as an IT person, I don't know about others, but I find you know, the follow up is hoists. That would be a part that I wish we could do better. And we're constantly working on it, right? But now if you can follow up, or you can say, hey, here's, you know how to do this now so look at this, then you can get some more of those wins definitely.

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Keith Hawkey 22:55

Yes, speaking of wins, how have you won with hyper converged technology? There's a lot of discussion around hyperconvergence and there's a lot of mystery around it as well, and misconceptions. What would you tell an IT leader that is interested in this new technology? And how to think about it, how to separate it from a public cloud solution looks like hyper converged solution hybrid? How do you differentiate around all that?

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Denver Hunter 23:22

So that was a fun one, you see me kind of perk up a little bit. That's been a fun one already. So like most organizations, we were ready to go into the cloud. And we're already there to some extent, but you know, ready to fully embrace the cloud, then we saw the price tag. And so that caused us to kind of look around and go, Okay, what else is out here, I mean, we can do more of the same, we can look at VSANs, we can do this, that and the other. Then this solution called hyperconverged comes into mind. And it's essentially I just like to describe it as literally a data center in a box. It is an integrated, tightly integrated, nodular system, where you can scale up, scale down, you scale up to whatever you need, and run a form of your own type of private cloud. In our case, we ended up on VxRail as our provider. Great Dell solution, I'll plug them a little bit here. But we ended up with a solution, we essentially shrank several racks down to one rack with this hyper converged solution. And it just offered over the period of time over that 5, 6, 7, 8 year period of time, it offered us better, much better call savings than throwing everything in the cloud. And we were we were going to exceed the cost of the hyperconvergence solution by year three of the cloud. So for us, it made sense. And I'm one of those people, I like my hybrid world, I like ambiguity, so you know, being hybrid cloud doesn't really scare me. It makes a lot of sense that your emails and Microsoft's cloud they do a pretty good job of it. You know, I'll give a less report but Google kind of the same story, right? We do that with our small town code business. Those two providers are great at email, but it might not be worth it depending on what your applications are and what your needs are to put everything in their cloud, the cost may be too high the data transfer rates, whatever is involved. So for us, it was, it just made economic sense to look in the realm of hyperconverge. And then really getting that integration, we were able to kind of push the performance as well and create an improvement there. So it's very easy to manage speaking about, you know, reducing some hours, we were able to reduce some of our system admins hours just on using the software layer. And it really was a pleasant surprise, how much of the migration process how easy that was. And so it's given us a replicated solution, it's giving us everything that we need to better serve our customers, better protect our customers, and build into the future.

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Aaron Bock 25:43

We were on mainframes, a long time ago. We went to three tier, then there was two tier, I'm talking about infrastructure and architecture, two tier meaning that hyperconverged. You also have the public cloud, which some would argue is similar to the mainframe. So curious, your thoughts as an IT leader. Do you think we eventually come back on prem with data centers? Like how do you think the public clouds get disrupted in 10 years? With technologies? Like, do you see hyperconvergence continuing to be strong, and then eventually getting more popular? How do you see this interacting over the next 10 years?

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Denver Hunter 26:20

Well, I think this is a conversation that's going to be driven a lot by the CISO side of the house. The questions are starting to emerge of who really owns our data, you know. Everybody, a few years back, you know, more than a few now, dating myself. But you know, as Kindle and Nook, came out, right? Everybody, you can get your books, you know, my wife was happy then because I didn't have the stack of books by my bed, I had one little device. But then came the questions of well, who really owns that book that you just bought? Because really you don't.

Because if that device stops working, and Amazon goes under, where is it? It's gone? Right? So I think those same questions are now coming up in organizations. I mean, we saw just in the news the other day, you know about Microsoft's issues at this time. And I'm a huge Microsoft fan, but there's some issues. And you can see that from a privacy security perspective, the cloud can engender some questions, particularly in more sensitive industries, where you're dealing with compliance questions. So I think that there will continue to be a small swing back to the premise, I don't know that we'll all get back to having our own data centers with HCI in them. But I do think that you will see continue to see kind of one foot in each. And I think you'll see a lot of okay, these operations are affordable, feasible, it makes sense in the cloud, these operations over here, I would really rather have these on premise where we can continue to kind of work on our own products, have access to our data, and, you know, not necessarily be held hostage by a call solution.

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Aaron Bock 27:51

Interesting.

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Keith Hawkey 27:51

I'll be willing to make my estimation. It's a small form factor quantum computing back to that's when the trend reverses or gets back to its original point because the hardware has to be reinvented before the software comes along. And we've been making incremental instrumental changes and upgrades to hardware, particularly on the the chip side of things and whenever these quantum computers can become small enough and more manageable, with that level of hardware, I could see that being an impetus for potentially bringing some of this back on shore, some of this back in the data center. You know, I don't know how much energy these require but especially if it doesn't take up too much energy.

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Denver Hunter 28:33

Yeah, I definitely think I mean, the other side of that, right, is that we're dealing with more data than we've ever had. We're all dealing with that seminal problem. And I think personally, I feel that quantum computing is more poised to be the next printing press than AI even is. And I think for that exact reason, you know, you may see a change. I mean, quantum computing could conceivably bring about a scenario where cloud computing is not dead, but obsolete. And I think you could kind of see that, depending on power consumption, depending on other ramifications, where something like that could really, really disrupt what's going on in the cloud right now.

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Aaron Bock 29:11

Yeah, it'll be interesting to see because I think the public clouds have such a grasp right now. I mean, I assumed they would use some type of quantum computing as well. And so it'd be interesting how they create an ROI on it and how they sell it. But it's interesting, it remains to be seen. Speaking of ROI Denver, you know, you talked about like evaluating using HCI. And you said, you're using Dell VX rail, great example of kind of like evaluating technology and

putting in something that's going to save time, effort. I assume that you did some type of ROI analysis on it or you continue to do an ROI analysis. How do you measure ROI on all your projects? And what advice would you give to those who are trying to put an ROI on different IT projects? We talked about AI, we talked about data center hyperconvergence, we've talked about a number of different topics, but but how do you measure ROI in your role?

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Denver Hunter 30:05

One of the things, I'm a big fan of reading, I mentioned that already. One of my favorites is St. Thomas Aquinas, he was a philosopher. And beyond that, his main point was is he went through these sorts of dialogues that he had, where he was thinking through his thought was to start with the objections. And so for me, I'm looking at expense. I mean, I've had a lot of my life has been shaped around bean counters, I know a lot of a lot of IT VPs and up can kind of share that, you know, you're often still under the CFO, especially in a smaller organization. So you know, you're starting with that from an ROI perspective. But you've really just got to understand what you have. And so you've got to systematically take what you're using, get the analytics from that and take those and compare. There's a lot of great tools out there, I mean, Microsoft has its own, there's other tools out there. I'm sure Opkalla probably has something where you can look at your current consumption, get all those analytics, see what you're using, see what your baseline is, and then calculate out what that's going to be. So you know, HCI, that's probably a little easier, but some of these other projects, I mean, AI is going to be a little tougher. But if you can start projecting the number of hours, you can save the number of tasks that you can remove, then you can start making some educated guesses, decisions on what you're going to get back with that and you can know what you're talking about. Because the price I think, I think for a lot of organizations that start out at what? 30 a month per user? You know, if you've got a bunch of users, that goes up quick, but \$30 a month, in the grand scheme of things, if you can save hours, if you've got somebody doing 10 hours of meeting notes or something like that, then you can pretty quickly begin to justify that amount, and then kind of work from there. So I think you got to get into the weeds without getting too caught in the weeds of I'm going to find and squeeze every cost savings that can possibly find. You just need to find enough to justify the project. And then you can move on from there. And then a little bit later afterwards, you come back and you can take your victory lap and say, well, actually, it was more savings than we even realized. So I think that's going to be key to sort of winning that battle, especially with something like AI where it might not be as easily projectable as before. You got to figure out a way to justify those figures you come up with.

K

Keith Hawkey 32:10

That's very true. There's certainly an art form when it comes to portraying the vision to any kind of leadership team, some are more keen on technology, and some are promoters and some are inhibitors in a lot of ways. Depending on the type of organization that you're running, typically, the finance industry is a little more forward thinking. And they are more willing to take a measured risk when investing in various technologies. And we're starting to kind of draw the end of our podcast here. And one thing that we like to do, Denver is ask, let's say, I'm going to paint a scenario for you. And I would like to see your response here. So let's say that you somehow are able to project yourself in everyone's dream tonight. So they have a dream. And suddenly the big portrait of Denver Hunter appears and you are able to convey a message to

everyone in the world. Could be about IT, could be about life, could be about a lesson or principle that has delivered value in your professional or personal career. What message would you disseminate to the world, if you could do that?

D Denver Hunter 33:22

Well, first of all, with this mug it would probably a nightmare. So we'll start with that. But moving on from there, the biggest message I really would like to give from an IT perspective is yes, the grass is greener on the other side, but the water bill is higher. And I think one of the things I would put out in front of everybody is no matter your technology and I mean, I see this with websites that we do, I see this with larger term projects, hardware, software, there is always an acquisition of a maintenance cycle. Nothing is just kind of spun off into perpetuity just left there to spin and work all the time and not have any problems. That's kind of one of my messages that I harp on probably too much. Those around me might tell you that. But we just got to understand that when we're implementing these things that there's maintenance, there's details, there's things that keep on going. There's work from the IT departments managing, maintaining, supporting these things that has to be taken into account.

K Keith Hawkey 34:13

Where can our audience find you Denver, if they want to reach out?

D Denver Hunter 34:18

Okay so big things, I encourage everybody please hook up with me on LinkedIn. I mean if you have any questions or want to share anything or just talk or vent on there, we've got a lot of folks I do that with. I got some folks I've only met on LinkedIn or we've met at conferences later. The other thing is we are starting a blog at Small Town Co, smalltownco.com is our company website, but we have a blog there pertaining to a lot of things you'll see from the website, social media, things like that. And then my Forbes articles that you guys have already mentioned, those are out there. I encourage you to go out and read those. You know I encourage feedback on those again if you want hit me up on LinkedIn or somewhere else, you can reach me kind of those three ways. Those are the three big ones.

A Aaron Bock 34:55

Awesome. Yeah, Denver this was a pleasure to have you and we'll link a lot of this in the show notes. I really enjoyed the conversation today and I think you do have a perspective that a lot of people like to hear and it's one of those things where you talk about it in a simple way that I think a lot of people can relate to.

D Denver Hunter 35:12

I appreciate that. I appreciate you guys having me on, number one. Thank you both Keith and Aaron. And, you know, my goal is to try to communicate things better. I'm a problem solver by nature, but sometimes it's trying to communicate what's done to solve those problems and how

nature, but sometimes it's trying to communicate what's done to solve those problems and how to help others and kind of bring the team along with me, so.

A

Aaron Bock 35:27

Keith, it was another fun episode. Denver, thanks for jumping on and I hope our listeners out there have a wonderful rest of the day. Keep crushing it and subscribe to the IT Matters podcast again on your favorite podcast listening venue, Spotify, iTunes, Apple, etc., whatever's out there and leave us a rating if you will. Have an awesome day. We'll talk to you soon.

D

Denver Hunter 35:50

Great stuff guys. Thank you.

N

Narrator 35:53

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