

A Note From Cathy, Strongbow's CEO

Welcome to our first Strongbow Newsletter! Going forward we will be sending out this compilation of industry trends, market insights and interesting highlights from client engagements at the end of each quarter. We look forward to hearing your feedback and are committed to ensuring this publication remains a worth-while read – something more and more challenging in these days of information overload!

"It's about building a culture... that everyone finds purpose in"

As we round the corner towards the end of 2021, Barry Platzman takes a look at his 2020 predictions to see which came true, and which did not. He then doubles down by taking a look forward to 2022, predicting what changes the new year may bring.

One of things that certainly surprised me this year was what many are now calling the 'war for talent'. Simply put, there aren't enough qualified candidates to fill the jobs required to fuel the business growth and expansion that has (thankfully) returned this year. Finding and recruiting talent has become a challenge for Strongbow, and for our largest global clients as well, and I suspect this challenge will be with us for some time.

At Strongbow, we're continuing to evolve and enhance our Employee Value Prop, which demands much more than competitive compensation and benefits... it's about building a culture that employees want to be a part of, that they can relate to, and that everyone finds purpose in (more purpose than simply collecting a paycheck). Believe me, this is no small task, even for a smaller firm with less than 100 employees, let alone for those executives who lead organizations with many thousands of people.

That said, I find myself feeling ever more and more grateful for the wonderful team we've built here at Strongbow over the years. Not only does our team work tirelessly to support our client projects (which continue to grow as our clients rely on Strongbow to help overcome their own resource constraints), but our team is also pushing beyond BAU to drive more and more creative solutions for our clients, both commercially and technically.

In each issue of this Newsletter, we will highlight one of our team members – please take a moment to learn more about Alex Petrov as you click through this edition.

As we close the year and begin to celebrate the holidays, I want to thank all of our clients who trust us to help drive real business results for their firms, and extend an even greater thanks to our team here at Strongbow for always finding a way to 'make it so'. It's been a tough year in many respects, but as time passes on, I continue to find more and more to be grateful for.

Sending you all best wishes for a healthy and successful 2022!



Cathy Horst Forsyth

Team Spotlight - Alex Petrov

While there are many amazing things to say about Alex Petrov, one of Strongbow's Directors of Engagement Delivery, one standout quality is his passion for continuous learning, even after 20 years in industry. Having already earned a PhD in Electrical Engineering and an MBA, Alex is now completing a Postgraduate Program in Cloud Computing from the University of Texas, while actively applying new insights to help Strongbow's clients optimize hybrid, multi-cloud solutions. Alex has worked for some of the largest and most admired companies in the U.S., including Fedex, Whirlpool and Stryker. He has also worked for telecom startups and led his own consulting company. Having lived in Pennsylvania, California, Tennessee, Toronto, and Michigan, he now resides in Northern New Jersey (a stone's throw from Strongbow HQ). Outside of the office Alex enjoys cooking with his son Victor and taking his daughter Veronica to her gymnastics classes.



A Glance Back at 2021 - Barry Platzman

For those who have tuned into the latest Strongbow podcasts, I have been asking our guests for their 2022 predictions, something I love to do at this time of the year. As I sit and contemplate what may be in store for 2022, I realize I didn't ask any of the recent podcast guests what surprised them in 2021, and I think it's important to examine the past before predicting what might be coming next.

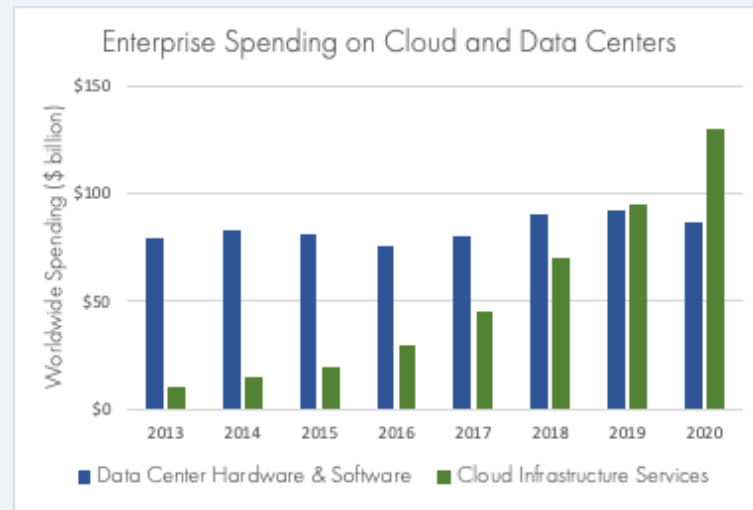
Here's my take on how last year's predictions panned out:

Prediction 1: Competition for wireless connectivity soars (into low orbit) –

5G seemed to have less dominance in the news cycle this year. Deployments are continuing and advertisements continue to target the consumer market. Enterprises have not yet fully committed to 5G deployments, despite the hype at the end of 2021. Lurking in the background are Low Earth Orbit Satellites which are quietly being launched and tested by some of the same billionaires that are now traveling into space (Musk's Starlink, Branson's Virgin Orbit and Bezos' Kuiper). While I wait for my Starlink kit (now expected in Q3 2022) I recognize that I too may have bought into the hype of 2021. Given additional delays driven by the FAA's concern regarding 5G signal interference, wide adoption of 5G and other wireless connectivity alternatives is probably still 2-4 years away.

Prediction 2: Enterprise Cloud Spend will increase by 50%, but transition from the On-Premises model will stall –

I think we got this one mostly right. Amazon, Microsoft, Google and others have seen revenues and profits soar from cloud services, and we have seen our customers drive unprecedented growth in the public cloud space. So much so, that some customers are rethinking their cloud strategy. This shift reinforced one of the key trends in 2021: the solidification of Hybrid Multi Cloud as the dominant computing foundation for most enterprises. More and more customers are now committing to some on-prem infrastructure for the foreseeable future. This in turn is creating a real economic issue fueled by increasing, bubble costs and stranded investment, as well as overall operating complexity. That's just one of the drivers forcing IT budgets up at



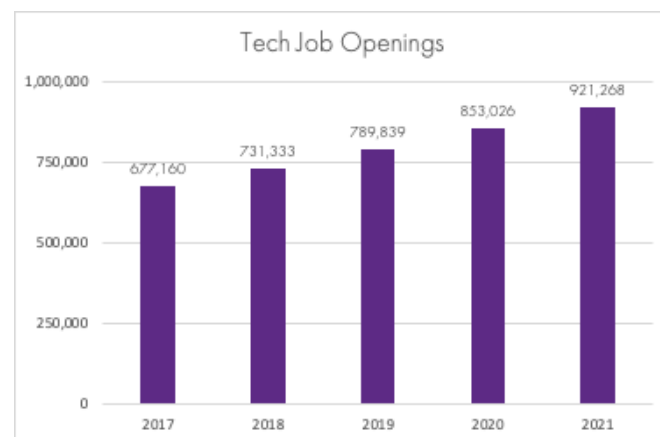
the highest rate in a decade (IT budgets are forecasted to increase 3% to 6% in 2022).

Prediction 3: Real competition will increase for Microsoft office

365 – Admittedly, this prediction may have been a bit aggressive, as the Slack acquisition was just completed in Q3 of 2021. Nonetheless, I am not ready to concede just yet. I believe that Salesforce and longer-term, AWS, are major challengers to Microsoft. Salesforce's CEO Mark Benioff (who invests in space travel but has not gone to space yet) stated "We're going to rebuild all of our technology to become Slack-first" – this is bad news for Microsoft. As standalone CRMs and collaboration tools combine into a single platform, customers will rethink the need for Office 365 and Teams. Salesforce's transformation may take a while, and customers who have big Microsoft agreements (likely getting bigger with Azure) should start to think about how new market dynamics can be leveraged in upcoming renewal cycles. Salesforce's transformation may take a while, and customers who have big Microsoft agreements (probably growing with Azure) should start thinking about how new market leverage can help in their upcoming renewal cycle.

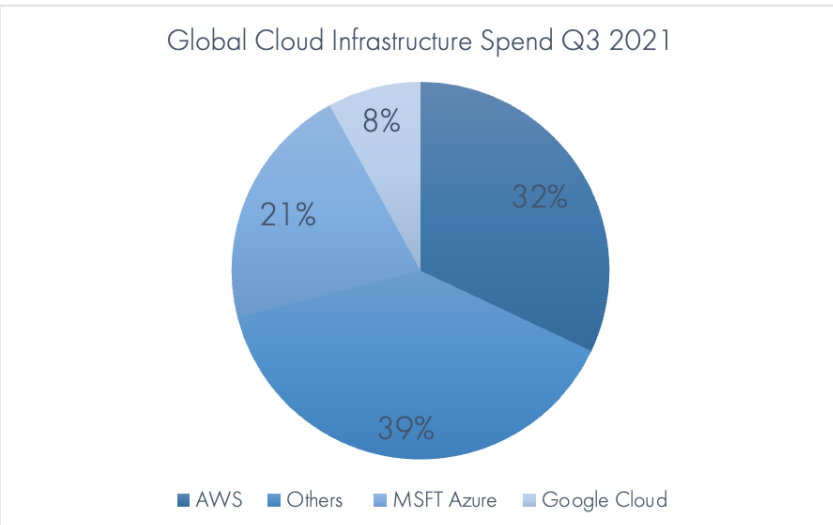
Looking Ahead to 2022...

Prediction 1: Labor, labor everywhere, but no one to hire – The labor shortage is upon us and enterprises are grappling with how to staff projects and find qualified hires. Given the constraints, I predict enterprise customers will look to MSP's to meet their hiring needs. This aligns with another trend we saw emerge, with an unusual number of customers evaluating changes to staffing and support models. In some way this makes sense: technology is changing and automation affords the enterprise new and different choices. Conversely, it has proven difficult to hire and retain specialized technical resources, and that was true even before the labor market tightened. Despite these competing forces, I predict that MSP's will be considered as viable ways to fill headcount, despite ongoing challenges of client dissatisfaction, more complex deployments and new technical solutions. Alternatively, this could prove to be an opportunity for third parties to help enterprises transform their operations (i.e., enable automation) instead of just providing an outsourcing and/or out tasked staffing model.



Prediction 2: Salesforce and Slack acquire Zoom and take on Microsoft head on – Yes, I am doubling down on this prediction for 2022. With Slack's ability to replace email and collaboration services, Microsoft becomes less relevant. The integration with Salesforce is an obvious goal of the acquisition. But there is a larger play here, making customer interactions even more cohesive as Salesforce plans to integrate Tableau, DocuSign and other related applications into the ecosystem. This competition will change the landscape for Enterprise buyers and will not be won or lost in a single year. I bet we see at least one large customer announce the intention to move to a Slack/SFDC environment by end of 2022.

Prediction 3: Cloud Wars heat up with Kyndryl vs. IBM and OCI joining the Big 4 – From the moment IBM announced they would spin off their managed infrastructure business, customers wondered what it would mean for them. Many of those questions have been answered for existing business customers, but most enterprises are still contemplating their options for new services. I believe battle Kyndryl vs. IBM will only grow in the coming years. This has already started to take shape; only one day after the Kyndryl spin-off was complete, Kyndryl and Microsoft announced an Azure-centric partnership which will directly compete with IBM's cloud offering. We don't expect Kyndryl to be acquired in 2022, but as customers contemplate support models for Hybrid Cloud, it will be interesting to see how the new competitive landscape takes shape, even as IBM retains 19.9 percent of Kyndryl's common stock (for now). At the same time, Oracle has been steadily building up its base, as it continues to play catch up with Google Cloud and the rest of key players (AWS, Azure, Alibaba), so look for OCI to build momentum into 2022 and beyond.



As we wrap up the second year living through the COVID-19 pandemic, it's amazing to see how enterprises have adapted to new challenges and how technology change continues to shape our new "normal". As we head into 2022, there will surely be new challenges from the ongoing pandemic and from other external events we can't yet conceive. But I am encouraged and optimistic that we will meet these challenges and innovate along the way.

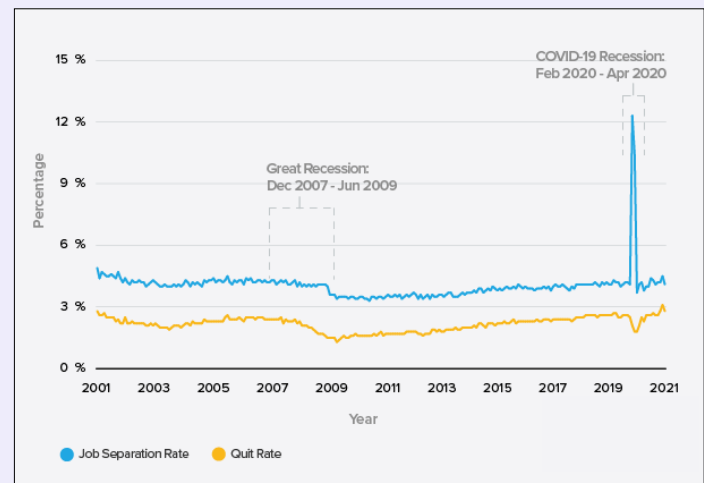
Thoughts on People & Culture - Patty Durkin

Many news outlets have recently highlighted a dramatic increase in people leaving the workforce, in particular those older than 55 - who in the Network and IT industry possess a lot of institutional knowledge and experience. This drop has been accompanied by record numbers of younger workers voluntarily changing roles in search of more fulfilling work, both financially and personally. As I think about what our employees truly appreciate here at Strongbow, it typically is not something quantifiable like money or days off. Rather, one of Strongbow's core leadership principles comes to mind - transparency.

Through both formal and informal feedback received from our team, transparency stands out as a primary driver of job-satisfaction and overall happiness. Some key examples of transparency our employees most value:

- Openly sharing the state of the business, in good and challenging times
- Giving honest and candid feedback across all levels of the organization
- Creating a safe space where employees can ask for support (professionally or personally) without judgement

There are many benefits from fostering a culture of transparency, but most of all, this approach has helped us build a team who truly respect each other, 'have each other's backs' and care about each other on both a professional and a personal level. When I'm asked what my favorite thing about Strongbow is (this happens all the time when I interview potential candidates), hands down, it's the people here and the strong foundation of trust and support we've built among us.



About Strongbow

Leveraging our deep technical and commercial expertise from the Data Center to the Desktop, Strongbow helps Fortune 500 companies plan, build and implement infrastructure modernization plans for improved resiliency and speed to market in today's fast paced digital economy. Our experienced bench of consultants understand next-generation technologies and legacy technologies, including bespoke configurations and outdated systems. Bridging the gap between old and new is critically important when delivering successful change programs with strong, positive financial returns.

In Our Next Newsletter

Strongbow was founded with the mission of advocating for large enterprises to ensure their interests are met fairly by suppliers in the technology marketplace. In our next newsletter, we'll share some recent engagement highlights where we are helping clients build thoughtful, cost-effective exit strategies for legacy services, as well as how we're helping to negotiate creative commercial agreements in the hybrid cloud space, as clients continue to straddle both on-premises and public cloud operating environments at the same time.