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2022 SMB Task Force Report

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Passion, Profit and Challenges

We often hear that small and medium-sized businesses are the engine of growth in the Canadian economy. We might not hear enough of the individual, in-depth, first-person stories that illustrate the individuals and companies' innovation, passion, and notable accomplishments that drive this growth.

How do these companies survive and thrive in these challenging times?

This task force report hopes to provide some insight into the success of Canadian SMBs. To do that, we've enlisted the help of four exceptional leaders in companies from various industries and ranging from iconic brands to start-ups. They come from different backgrounds, but they share common challenges.

We can all learn a great deal from these leaders. We can appreciate what they have accomplished and the challenges they have faced. And we can share their perspective on how they have succeeded.

These lessons can help us all meet the challenges

that our businesses face, from the pandemic crisis to the innovation and transformation needed to compete in the fast-emerging digital economy.

As you read this report, what will strike you is how these companies have not just met the challenges they face. They have turned obstacles into opportunities.

They are all experienced leaders, but none are afraid to move out of their comfort zone to try new approaches. The secret of their success may be how they look at something we all take for granted and reimagine it to drive new value.

They have embraced the new world of virtual meetings. They've struggled with the loss of personal, face-to-face contact, but they've also worked hard to master new ways of having effective virtual meetings and contacts.

They have found resources and made a case for investment, sometimes very creatively. They have, for example, taken funds from travel budgets and invested these into innovation programs.

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In the face of the "Great Resignation," they've changed not just the way they recruit and manage. They have evolved new ideas of whom they recruit and retain. They have learned new ideas of the characteristics and skills they are looking for in their increasingly virtual workforce.

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They have found innovative ways of engaging their customers, suppliers, and employees. They've learned how to collaborate and build exceptional customer experiences in the digital economy.

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Contrary to some popular wisdom, these companies are all prepared to invest in technology. Most were ahead of the curve. They had already embraced cloud technology to their benefit. In the face of the pandemic, they could pivot to virtual work quickly.

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They have an extremely mature approach to technology, recognizing that additional – albeit practical – investments are required to remain competitive and agile.

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Again, in contrast to some common wisdom, these companies are eminently aware of the need to adopt stringent and disciplined security and protect their customer data privacy. Once again,

they take creative approaches. Once they might have kept work in-house, now many are partnering with larger cloud and service providers who have the money and the expertise to invest in the new cybersecurity "arms race."

They see technology as an investment and are enthusiastic adopters. But they treat it as an investment – one that is made with a firm insistence that it delivers measurable benefits, not just in cost reduction. Technology is not just to reduce cost. It can and must drive real transformation, increase agility and ultimately deliver competitive advantage.

They are open to embracing new technologies. Artificial Intelligence (AI), smart devices and automation are definitely on their radar. They see these new technologies as coping with oncoming challenges such as labour shortages and delivering exceptional customer experience to fuel growth.

Fortunately, our task force proved not only accomplished, but they are also generous with their time. They already share their wisdom and insights with others in their community and industry and with us all through this unique task force report.

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Our Task Force

IT World Canada assembled a task force of four executives who were working to leverage technology to transform their organizations. This report is based on these discussions.

In this report, you will hear these individuals speak in their own words about everything from the impact of the pandemic and challenges of the new work reality to the ways they leverage technology to transform their companies.

The task force consisted of:



**Jeff Libis, VP Sales,
LED Roadway Lighting**

LED Roadway Lighting started 14 years ago, manufacturing and selling new LED technology to light cities and highways around the globe. The company's energy-saving systems quickly impacted significant cities in North America, and LED Roadway Lighting began looking for ways to leverage their expertise in public streetlights and their location. The result was a new brand – Liveable Cities.

Nova Scotia-based Liveable Cities has been using streetlight technology to gather data for municipali-

ties and major utilities in 65 countries worldwide. "We deploy different types of sensors that can do things in the context of a smart city," said Libis. "Because we're doing that – because we have the electronic platform and now we're collecting data with sensors – it became much more important to have a scalable, powerful, user-friendly software platform to bring it all together."

And it didn't stop there.

"As we began collecting the data and organizing and visualizing the software, our customers started saying, 'That's great, but I'm not interested in learning a new software platform.'

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What I'm more interested in is the outcomes from that. We spend a lot of our time today understanding the solution in its entirety and the outcomes and impacts that are coming from the solution – how those line up with our customers."



**Ted Maulucci, CEO,
SmartONE Solutions**

Ted Maulucci was the CIO of a prominent real estate developer, where he had worked for almost 30 years.

He rose through the ranks in IT and, in his words, "wrote tons of software around different elements of software around multifamily developments." He was recognized as CIO of the Year in 2016 in ITWC's annual award program co-sponsored by the CIO Association of Canada.

Over the last 15 years, Maulucci's passion for smart and connected buildings became a vision of a network in the centre of the building, changing not just the technology but "what it's like to live there." Smart buildings became one of his missions in life. "I got to do my first smart

building, which was almost five years ago. I created SmartONE Solutions after someone suggested I become an entrepreneur." SmartONE Solutions is dedicated to transforming buildings into "smart communities."



**Jim Estill, CEO,
Danby Appliances**

Jim Estill built his first company to almost \$2B in sales. At that point, he sold that business and retired. He later returned to Guelph, Ontario to sit on the board of Danby appliances.

Danby Appliances, which has been in business since 1947, makes and sells about two million appliances a year – mainly in North America, Mexico and the UK. The company has found a niche in small appliances, is a leader in second appliances, and has a high market share in bar fridges and microwaves.

Estill was initially CEO of Danby, but when the board asked him to take a role in selling the company, he purchased it.

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Estill, a self-described "growth maniac," said he "built his first company with a couple billion in sales. We're maybe a little bit over 400 million. The goal is to take this to a billion dollars."



**Keith Bradley, CIO,
Nature Fresh Farms**

Family-owned Nature Fresh Farms started in 1999 with a greenhouse construction project led by mechanical engineer Peter Quiring. Quiring "found his calling" and fell in love with farming, looking to build a state-of-the-art technical operation.

Today the company is one of the largest independent greenhouse growers in Canada, operating just under 200 acres of greenhouses in Leamington, Ontario and Delta, Ohio. They grow bell peppers, tomatoes and cucumbers year-round.

Nature Fresh Farms is two companies in one – a "farm company" which operates the greenhouses and a production "sales company" which operates distribution centers in Ontario, Ohio, and Texas. But according to CIO Keith Bradley, Nature Fresh Farms is also a technology company, leveraging technology at every opportunity to fulfil their mission of "grow different to make a difference."

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What has been the impact of the pandemic on your business?

Although the pandemic affected each company, our task force leaders found opportunities and not just challenges.

"The pandemic caused much concern for us," said Jeff Libis. "We didn't know what to expect. We assumed we would be running into many risks and unknown variables. It forced us to look at our company in a new way."

The pandemic forced Liveable Cities to find opportunities they might not otherwise have found. "The learning, the experience, the changes and updates – everything we did to harden the company in preparation for unknown COVID-related risks has had a positive impact on us from both an operational and a profitability perspective. I'm not sure that would have happened if not for COVID."

The result? "We had our most profitable year ever in 2020 – and 2021 will probably be even better. We're set to emerge from COVID a stronger,

"The pandemic forced us to take a unique look at our operation. Every department – no stone was left unturned, from sales and marketing to supply chains to overall operations."

JEFF LIBIS

VP Sales, LED Roadway Lighting

more profitable, and innovative company. The pandemic forced us to take a unique look at our operation. Every department – no stone was left unturned, from sales and marketing to supply chains to overall operations."

Jim Estill had a similar experience. The pandemic created challenges and opportunities. As people stayed home, there was a growing need for second appliances – a niche in which his company leads the market.

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"Before the pandemic, only 35 percent of households had a standalone freezer," he said. "Now it's 50 percent. Many people buy a second fridge for their garage or basement because they want to go to the grocery stores less often or because they don't have wine coolers. There's more entertaining at home now than before COVID. It used to be 'Let's go out for a drink;' now it's 'Come over to my house, and we'll have a few drinks on my deck.' Naturally, this has helped increase sales."

How are you changing your management of remote workers?

Jeff Libis noted some positive changes. "Liveable Cities always operated as fairly traditional businesspeople in office from nine to five. But in the early days of the pandemic, we sent people home to work remotely. It's been a great experience. We've been able to grow our company even with our people working from a home office."

"Our office before COVID was quite large. We've since moved to an office about a quarter of the size and a flex-work schedule. We ask our employees to come into the office at least once a week to



connect in person at least a little bit. But for the most part, our people can work from home."

Keith Bradley talks of leveraging technology strategically. "We use Automate and Intel vPro to do all our remote work. We switched over last year to an SD-WAN solution that handles all our farm connections."

Danby office staff started working from home when the pandemic appeared, including 100 percent of sales. "Before the pandemic," Estill said, "if I said I want to do a video call with you, people would say, 'Oh, I'd better call my IT person.' Now they say, 'Okay, sure, is it, Teams? Zoom?' There's been a definite evolution here."

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Now we're getting back to a hybrid office – half in the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and in-office optionals Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays."

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Unlike Libis, Estill doesn't foresee savings from downsized office space. "We thought at one point that we could cut back to half the office space. But we can't because I want everyone in the office simultaneously. I want everybody in on Tuesdays and Thursdays."

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But Estill noted that the pandemic had changed his approach to work from home.

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"I was not a work-from-home advocate before COVID. However, we've had great productivity – excellent results overall. Remote work had the result of expanding our hiring funnel. Employees working at home have to be good as someone who lives anywhere can be their replacement."

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Ted Maulucci, however, said he feels "that the whole work-from-home thing has been exaggerated. I have always been fine with it – it's no big deal." Even so, Maulucci said he sees an opportunity to get rid of what he terms "the old-

style view of the world where people think that if they're not in front of you, they're not working."

What are the biggest challenges associated with hybrid work?

The chief challenges and opportunities associated with hybrid work are around company culture – innovation in both employee and customer interactions.

Employee Interaction and Management Style

Jim Estill noted that remote work had a real impact on his management style.

"I don't consider myself to be a super-outgoing social guy in the workplace," he said. "But I am a walk-around-the-office, talk-to-people kind of guy."

Today, Estill's primary contact is at relatively formal meetings in which participants get quickly down to business.

"Pre-COVID, I was big on things like barbecues and pizza lunches. It's the time that you're in line waiting to get your hamburger that you chat. I may have computer-generated reports,

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but there's no substitute for walking through a warehouse. Is there dust on the inventory? What does that tell you? These returned boxes are damaged? What happened here? That's the stuff you can only learn in person, talking to people."

"I worry that you lose that rapport – and you certainly do lose it with a new hire. I have people that work for me that I've never met in person. I have people that don't have a social relationship with their peers"

TED MAULUCCI
CEO, SmartONE Solutions

What also breaks down real interaction is what Estill terms an intimidation factor. "I'm a CEO," he said. "If I call someone, they'll say, 'Oh no, Jim is calling me.' I almost have to have an excuse to call and talk to someone. Such reactions change your management style."

Thankfully, the residual of their in-office culture is still a saving grace. "The reason we can work

together as a team is that we worked together as a team before COVID."

But Estill worries about how long that will last. He is also concerned about how new employees will be affected and how to design a new onboarding process. "I worry that you lose that rapport – and you certainly do lose it with a new hire," he said. "I have people that work for me that I've never met in person. I have people that don't have a social relationship with their peers."

Jeff Libis shared the concern but also feels his company has been able to manage this effectively. "We have employees in the organization now that I have only met virtually, and they have turned out to be solid contributors."

Ted Maulucci also struggles with onboarding. "I can think of multiple examples where you need to be together, like when you onboard a new employee. If they're not here, you know they're not learning. It can be tough to learn remotely."

Maulucci echoes bestselling author Colin D. Ellis' belief that "culture is built by working together in person." In the case of a start-up, where culture

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is so essential, Maulucci said he feels that a team that is never together at all will struggle to build culture. Retention then becomes an issue because if someone doesn't have any connection to the company culture, they won't be likely to stay long-term with the company."

"You want people to be invested emotionally in what you're doing and connecting with you," said Maulucci. "It's tough when you can't bring people together. It takes away some of the pieces that you need to create culture. You can't build a culture on Zoom."

Customer Relationships

Employee engagement was not the only issue created by virtual meetings. How companies relate to customers was another key challenge.

Jeff Libis noted that Liveable Cities was "forced to look at different ways of engaging our partners and customers - virtual meetings, investing in and working with social media channels, et cetera. We had to get more creative and innovative when generating new opportunities. And we knew we needed to work on providing a better level of service and customer experience to our existing customer base."



Ted Maulucci expressed frustration with the idea of building customer and partner relationships during a pandemic and said he was relieved to see some travel and meeting restrictions reduced.

Echoing what the other task force members said, Maulucci noted that things like problem-solving, relationship-building and collaboration are much more difficult remotely. He said he sees this as being down to the artificial nature of remote meetings. "They're not nearly as efficient as in-person meetings," he said. "Nor is there as much energy. People may not want to acknowledge that, but it's true."

For Maulucci, the problem extends to building new relationships, which can make or break smaller companies in particular. "I miss conferences.

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I miss the cocktail party at the end, where I could make connections. That's what's missing right now. These connections aren't happening. Unfortunately, these critical connections are what drive behaviour and drive change and drive inspiration and creativity."

How much of your innovation budget has been tapped to support remote work?

No one in the task force felt they had to rob from their innovation budget to support remote work. Much is attributed to prior investments

"When COVID struck, there was a sizable budget available because we were no longer paying for airfares, hotel bills, and trade show fees. A lot of that got reallocated to our innovation budget which was around enabling a new way of doing business in the COVID era."

JEFF LIBIS
VP Sales, LED Roadway Lighting

in their technology in ways that already helped remote work.

"We have to do everything in the cloud," said Jim Estill. "We were fortunate in that we had freshly converted to NetSuite, which is a cloud-based ERP system." Likewise, the company has made a quick adjustment to virtual meetings. "I don't just call people – video is better than just a straight call."

Money reallocated to Liveable Cities' innovation budget came in part from the savings attributed to the pandemic. "When COVID struck, there was a sizable budget available because we were no longer paying for airfares, hotel bills, and trade show fees. Much got reallocated to our innovation budget, around enabling a new way of doing business in the COVID era."

Are you seeing/do you expect to see a churn in workers?

"Some companies are struggling to attract in-demand talent," said Ted Maulucci. "There's so much demand right now for software developers, for example, who right now can go anywhere

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they want. That makes it more difficult for some organizations to retain some of their highly skilled employees."

While many have emphasized that forcing employees to return to offices might resign, Maulucci said many employees are eager - some even desperate - to return to the office. He said that some people are not equipped to work remotely and have experienced stress and mental health issues. "One of our team members, who lives in a basement apartment, said he felt he was losing his mind."

The pandemic has affected employee retention rates. "By now, we've all heard about the so-called Great Resignation," noted Estill. "Like everyone else, we've had some turnover. And I think when we return to work to the office, we're going to have more because some people are going to end up re-evaluating their lives and careers."

Estill raises another issue. "The demographics in North America are bad. There are not enough people to do the work. Canada has traditionally met its labour needs by immigration, but there's been no immigration for a year or two with this pandemic."



Keith Bradley has had a more positive experience. "In the last year or two, especially on our sales side, we've seen a lot less turnover. We've seen improvement."

Have pandemic-inspired changes forced you to look for a worker with different skills?

There are new essential skills and characteristics for the workers of these companies.

"When the pandemic started, only half our people worked better at home," Estill noted. "What we found is some people who were superstars in the office were kind of mediocre at home, while

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others who were mediocre in the office became superstars at home. And I've been since trying to identify why that is."

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"I think part of it is having an appropriate workspace," said Estill. "So sometimes I'm talking to someone, and they're working at their kitchen table, and kids are running around and dogs and whatnot. But I think part of it has to do with personality. Some people can put their head down, and, as long as nobody is interrupting them, they'll get ten times the amount of work done."

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"We look for the desire to learn, and a personality that fits within our company. Many skills can be learned as long as you have the desire."

KEITH BRADLEY
CIO, Nature Fresh Farms

"We've also seen much time-shifting," he said. "I have staff who log off at four and then are back on at 7:30 at night. As an employer, I don't care if

you do your work from eight till nine at night and work a short day during the day."

"With creative jobs, this time shifting can work greatly in your favour. But you do need some discipline. Unfortunately, some people don't have much discipline – without structure, they'll spend their time doing laundry and playing video games."

While discipline and time shift are essential in Estill's model, Keith Bradley of Nature Fresh Farms adds another dimension – curiosity and desire. "We look for the desire to learn and a personality that fits within our company," he said. "Many skills can be learned as long as you have the desire."

Ted Maulucci said that while he thinks remote work will continue, he believes that "the world will eventually go back to where it was." He puts it quite colourfully: "We're pack animals. We're not meant to work in isolation. It's just how we as humans are wired."

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Information Technology

All four panel members acknowledged the role IT played and continues to play in the transformation of their companies and in their readiness to emerge from the global pandemic. They regard technology investments and resultant innovation as essential to their competitiveness.



Do you see IT budgets increasing?

For Ted Maulucci, it was essential. "We're in a different state where we are a fast-growing start-up, so we're *required* to invest," he said.

Jim Estill noted that the return to a hybrid office would increase technology investment. He pointed out that Danby Appliances will have to "restart" their existing infrastructure that has been largely unused for over a year and replace any equipment that has moved to people's home offices.

But the hybrid work force will also require additional expenditures, says Estill.

"When we go back to the office, there will be a spike in the stuff that people need for the office.

For example, I brought my monitors home with me. When I return to the office, I'm probably not going to bring those monitors back in; I'll probably purchase new ones."



Is legacy infrastructure holding you back?

Maulucci welcomed the opportunity to start fresh. "When I was a CIO, we used to say, 'What would we do if we could start over?' But to start fresh is fun. It's fun to be nimble. Unfortunately, many companies that have been around for 30 years are carrying many legacies. It can be a huge challenge to move past that."

Keith Bradley said major upgrades prepared Nature Fresh Farms for the pandemic. That they

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already had remote access made the switchover to work-from-home relatively painless. However, as Bradley noted, there is always more to do.

"We're mostly on-prem," he said. "For our farm company, sales have a little bit of a cloud presence but not a lot. We're in the process of looking at going to a private cloud."

Bradley knows that yesterday's leading-edge is tomorrow's legacy despite best efforts as a technology professional. And there's not always an easy solution. "A lot of farming program technology is older, and we've always had to find a way to bridge whatever gaps appear."

The challenge of managing legacy systems is a quandary that faces many IT professionals, including Bradley.

"A lot of farming program technology is older, and we've always had to find a way to bridge whatever gaps appear."

KEITH BRADLEY
CIO, Nature Fresh Farms

"I want and need to know how the life cycle changes at five years," he said. "It's always easy to say, 'Adopt this new technology, it's going to be great.' But at the end of five years, say you want to replace it with something new. How does that happen? That's what I want to know. I want that changeover to be smooth and seamless – not something I have to worry about. I want just to keep moving on and take that off the back-end workload for the IT department."

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Liveable Cities Headquarters - Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

The Innovation Agenda

Our task force members were all pursuing what we've termed "an innovation agenda." The common thread is a belief that they must leverage technology to drive transformation.

Jim Estill expressed his desire to "apply tech company speed to a smokestack industry. When I came in here, it was, like, 'Here are the products we're bringing out in 2024.' I'd say, 'What do you mean 2024? What are we bringing out next quarter?'"

Jeff Libis noted that Liveable Cities has consistently pursued innovation, leading to considerable growth. "We've had about 35 different products developed over the course of 14 years. We're actively involved in at least 65 countries."

Their secret is how they look at something we all take for granted and reimagine it to drive new value. The focus, Libis noted, is on enabling streetlights to become more than streetlights – "more than just a lighting endpoint – it's

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transitioned into being a smart city device or a network appliance."

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Libis' company also uses acquisitions and partnerships to drive innovation.

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"Nine years ago, we acquired another technology company – a BC-based wireless technology company called Streetlight Intelligence – that enabled our communications practice. We kept the Streetlight office in Victoria, BC, acquiring some of their employees. They were the first in the global market to provide wireless communications for public streetlights. We've used that IP and that knowledge to build on that part of the business."

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Ted Maulucci realizes his dream of not just a smart home but a connected community, which has required a new vision and business model.

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"Trying to convince my previous employer to become an ISP had pushback from those with interest in the status quo." According to Maulucci, the large carriers said, "If you start doing your own Internet, we're not going to service your building."

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When he couldn't convince his employer, Maulucci



Jim Estill, CEO, Danby Appliances



Ted Maulucci, CEO SmartONE Solutions

struck out on his own. Today he has 115 buildings and 32,000 homes that operate individually as smart homes but are also connected to a common network and sharing a community-based experience.

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Nature Fresh Farms greenhouse

What level of support do you have from the executive team to push an innovation agenda?

In all four organizations represented by our task force, there are high levels of support for innovation at the most senior levels.

Keith Bradley noted that Nature Fresh Farms owner Peter Quiring has always supported technology and innovation. That enthusiasm runs through the entire management team. "I can go to our Vice President, John Keller, and say, 'Here's a new technology, I think it's going to be great.' Our entire executive team is more than willing to look at it and will often end up investing."

Ted Maulucci brought a couple of people from his former company whom he described as "key people I needed to reach a goal." But he said he looks for support for new ideas from "a collective of the whole SmartONE team. There are no formal meetings, but instead, we have these little swirls of energy. You might have five people looking at a piece of technology, and this might spin off into another group and then another."

Jim Estill has an efficient approach. "I look at innovation from a competitive advantage point of view," he said. "If we try to innovate, we have to ask ourselves, 'Is what we're doing adding competitive advantage?' We evaluate return on technology investments as we would any other return on investment."

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Emerging Issues and Developments

While the organizations represented by the task force are all open to new developments and ideas in technology, they share a relentless focus on practical business benefits.



Are emerging technologies like AI or blockchain on your radar?

Jim Estill commented on the Internet of Things (IoT) – a popular topic regarding smart appliances. "Refrigerators are inherently a dumb appliance. We can add IoT; we can make it to keep your recipes or grocery list on your refrigerator. But is it adding value? Are you better off just using an independent app? Sometimes, we will add technology that doesn't add any real value."

Jeff Libis had an extensive but equally practical view of the IoT. He said the secret is using technology to reimagine every aspect of the existing infrastructure.

"We are implementing some AI in customer service – chatbots and stuff like that. AI is just a tool to do things a little smarter and faster. AI is going to be huge, but like with all technology, let's not over-apply it."

JIM ESTILL
CEO, Danby Appliances

"Every streetlight has something called an EMO receptacle, originally designed to host a photocell – an ambient light monitor that turns the light on and off based on ambient light levels," said Libis. "We repurposed that to be able to deploy communications and then piggyback different types of sensor applications. That's one of many examples of the flexible platforms we create to reduce customer risk."

Jim Estill of Danby also noted his interest in AI with his practical, no-hype approach.

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Estill is equally concerned with robotics, particularly to overcome the labour shortage in North America. "Companies like us will invest in almost anything to save labour," said Estill, who says his company is interested in robotics. However, he said it's worth noting that robots can't do everything."

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Keith Bradley noted that Nature Fresh Farms has been looking into using AI for produce picking. "We've also been looking at a machine that uses AI to collect data within our greenhouses. We're open to working with anybody who's starting to be innovative."

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Ted Maulucci is constantly researching new technologies but might be the most skeptical task force member. For example, while he sees applications for blockchain in real estate – "where it can be used for lease exchange, mortgage origination and secure exchange of information, without having to use an institution" – he is also skeptical.

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"I think 'blockchain' is a sensationalized term. Most people don't know how to use it yet, and I think it's being misapplied in many places. Some people will throw it into the mix just because it sounds cool - 'By the way, I'm going to give you video analytics with blockchain,' – without knowing exactly what it is."



How are you addressing security challenges?

"The bad guys are out there, and we have to be doubly and triply careful on our systems and processes," said Jim

Estill, who is acutely aware of the security issues that face his company. "The problem is it's cat-and-mouse. You learn and adopt new ways to stop them from getting in. But no matter how good you are, someone's always going to get through. You don't want to be the first one that clicked."

Keith Bradley said Nature Fresh Farms had implemented multi-factor authentication. "We have many things in place to protect our data and systems," he said. "From a security standpoint, on the non-tech side, we do a lot of biosecurity to protect our plants. Biosecurity is the single most important thing for a company like ours to protect."

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Ted Maulucci said he sees IT security essential to his company's success and his clients' demand.

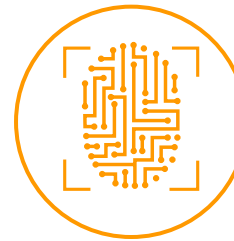
"We deal with some massive institutions, so they're putting the boots to us – in a positive way," he said. "We're dealing with some stringent security policies."

According to Maulucci, "there are two ways to look at (these demands for increased security). One is you can say you're going to hold your breath and turn blue until it all goes away, which isn't the right answer. The right answer is that you embrace it. It may be painful, but it's the right thing to do."

"As a start-up company, you typically don't have strong policies, and a lot of the things that you need are not in place. So that part has been tough, because we have to build the things we know we need. We do it because a single security incident could kill us."

TED MAULUCCI
CEO, SmartONE Solutions

Maulucci conceded that this is not easy, especially for small companies. "As a start-up company," he said, "you typically don't have strong policies, and a lot of the things that you need are not in place. So that part has been tough because we have to build the things we know we need. We do it because a single security incident could kill us."



Have you introduced new training or multi-factor authentication?

For Jim Estill of Danby Appliances, multi-factor

authentication is just another necessary evil. But that doesn't mean he has to like it. However, his frustration does not diminish his commitment to stringent security, even when directly affecting him.

"We're doing multi-factor authentication, absolutely. We have strong password rules. So, you can't put in 'password1' as your password and get away with it. We insist on a different password for every single site that we log into."

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Have you looked at zero trust architecture for greater security and to make device management easier?

Ted Maulucci felt it was a requirement.

"We have to look at Zero Trust," he said, "because it's what the industry is moving towards."

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Do data sovereignty, governance or privacy issues present notable challenges?

Maulucci said he considers privacy an essential issue for his company.

"I put privacy and data sovereignty side by side in terms of importance." He is a big advocate of "privacy by design" – "store what you need, destroy what you don't" – which was created by former Ontario Data Privacy Commissioner Ann Cavoukian.

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Jim Estill also sees privacy as essential to his business. Regulation is a key point for him, particularly the European privacy rules. "Most of us with European data know all about the GPRS rules. You could you get fined not \$100,000 like in Canada but \$10 million or more." But Estill sees

problems in other jurisdictions as well. "If someone hacks into our system and releases a bunch of stuff in the States, we have a massive liability. So, we have to have a process around what do we do if we have a data breach."

Estill's idea of what to do echoes the 'privacy by design' idea mentioned by Maulucci.

"We have to look at Zero Trust," because it's what the industry is moving towards."

TED MAULUCCI
CEO, SmartONE Solutions

"Part of our strategy is to deliberately not have a lot of some information. We won't even touch credit cards. So even if someone can break into our system, no one's going to steal your credit card info. We have a third party handling all that. We don't even do our payroll, which means hackers couldn't access bank account numbers and social insurance numbers even if they somehow did manage to get into our system."

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Last words

Starting or running a small or medium-sized business is not for the faint of heart. It has always been full of enormous challenges. Add in a pandemic and the need to transform your company to fit the new digital economy, and these challenges increase exponentially.

Those who tackle these challenges successfully offer us all the ability to learn and the examples that show it can be done with passion, a spirit of innovation and a strong and practical drive for results.

We hope that you've been able to find inspiration, vision, and practical advice to help you in your business. We thank our task force members for being willing to share their experiences with us all.

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About AWS

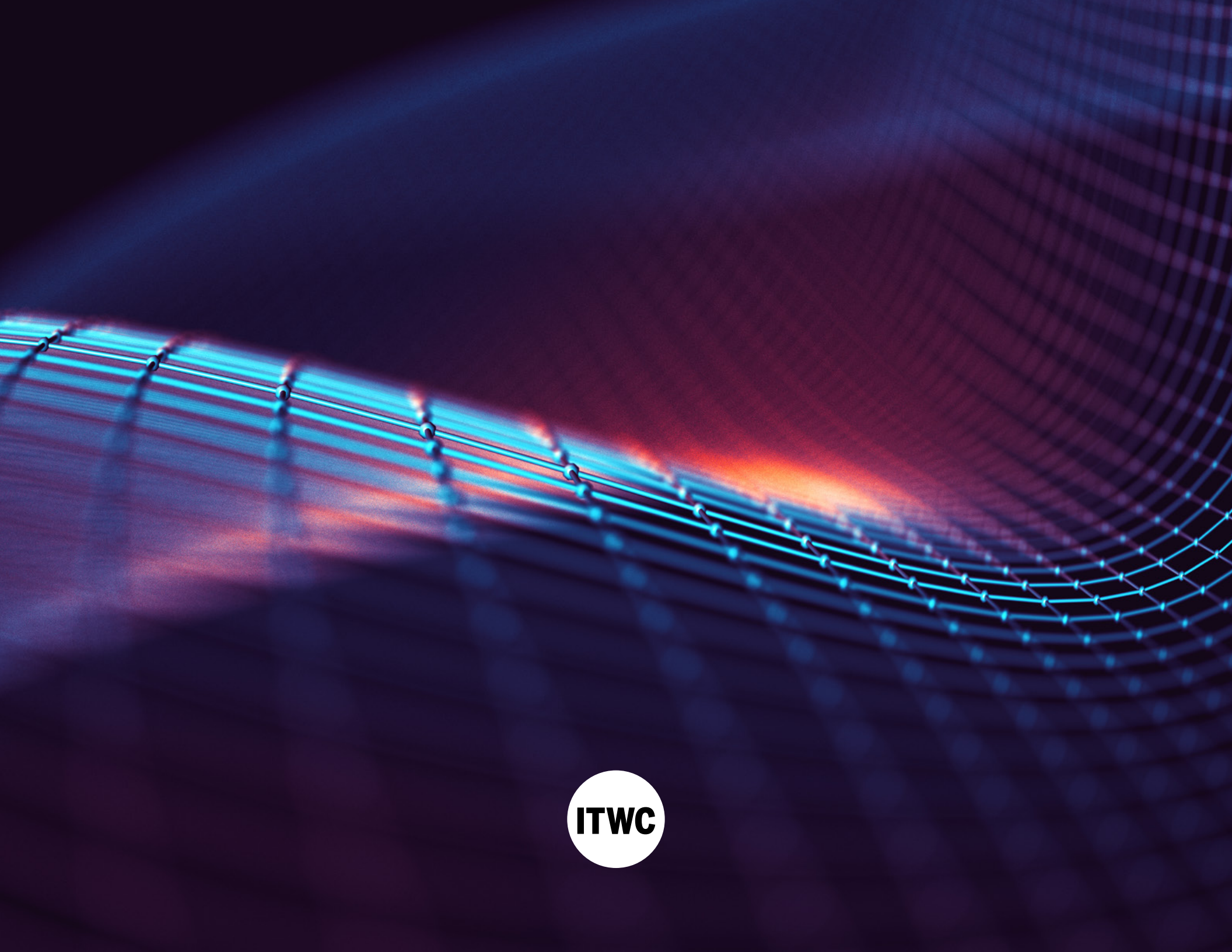
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AWS has been continually expanding its services to support virtually any cloud workload spanning numerous availability zones across several regions.

Millions of customers – including the fastest-growing startups, largest enterprises, and leading government agencies – trust AWS to power their infrastructure, become more agile, and lower costs.

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