



## The North American CIO

14 stories from 14 real life technology leaders  
in 14 cities in North America.

One emerging picture of what today's CIO is prioritizing.

**softchoice**

## LETTER FROM THE IEF CHAIR

What happens when you get a group of business leaders together in a room to talk about innovation?

### **They tell stories.**

They don't share statistics. They don't list off technology features. And they most certainly don't bore. They talk about what is real, what matters most, in their professional lives and personal experience. Their challenges. Their hopes. That big new trend... and how it might disrupt their entire industry (unless they do it first.)

### **We should know.**

In 2018, the Innovation Executive Forum met with hundreds of high-level innovation and IT executives across North America. We held 14 exclusive events, where dozens of local leaders, partners and customers were asked to come and share a meal – and their stories.

As has been the case in the years since launching this unique program, what emerged is a vibrant, living picture of the priorities and potential of CIO's everywhere. In the specifics of their tales, we found more insight, imagination and useful information than any trendy, top-ten list could ever deliver.

What follows is just a sampling of the conversations we've had. From everyone at the IEF team, we hope you find these stories just as inspiring as we did, when we heard them the first time.

Signed,



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke.

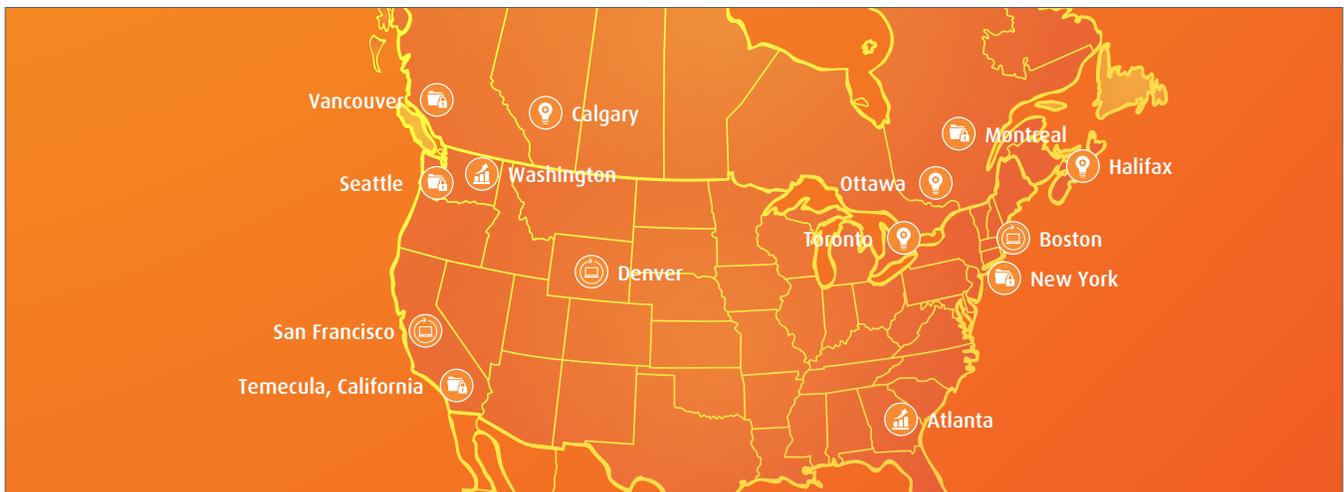
**Erika Van Noort**  
Innovation Executive Forum Chair

## ABOUT THE IEF:

### Bringing Massive Transformative Purpose to IT Leaders across North America

Softchoice's Innovation Executive Forum (IEF) is an exclusive, members-only program consisting of over 400 Senior IT Leaders across North America. The aim is to drive peer collaboration and mindshare while focusing on constant challenges facing the modern IT leader, inclusive of disruptive innovation and organizational transformation.

To learn more about the program and find out how you can apply to become a member, visit our [IEF home page](#).



## WHAT MATTERS MOST TO THE NORTH AMERICAN CIO?

While every event of the IEF is one-of-a-kind, the stories tend to overlap. It's as if they are strung together by a series of threads, master themes, the big ideas driving innovation most potently for our members.

Taken together, these threads are useful in understanding the bigger picture. What is important to CIO's today and in the near future? According to the IEF participants in 2018:



**Unleashing data:** today's CIO is tired of collecting data, only to watch it pile up. They are most concerned about using it wisely to drive business value.



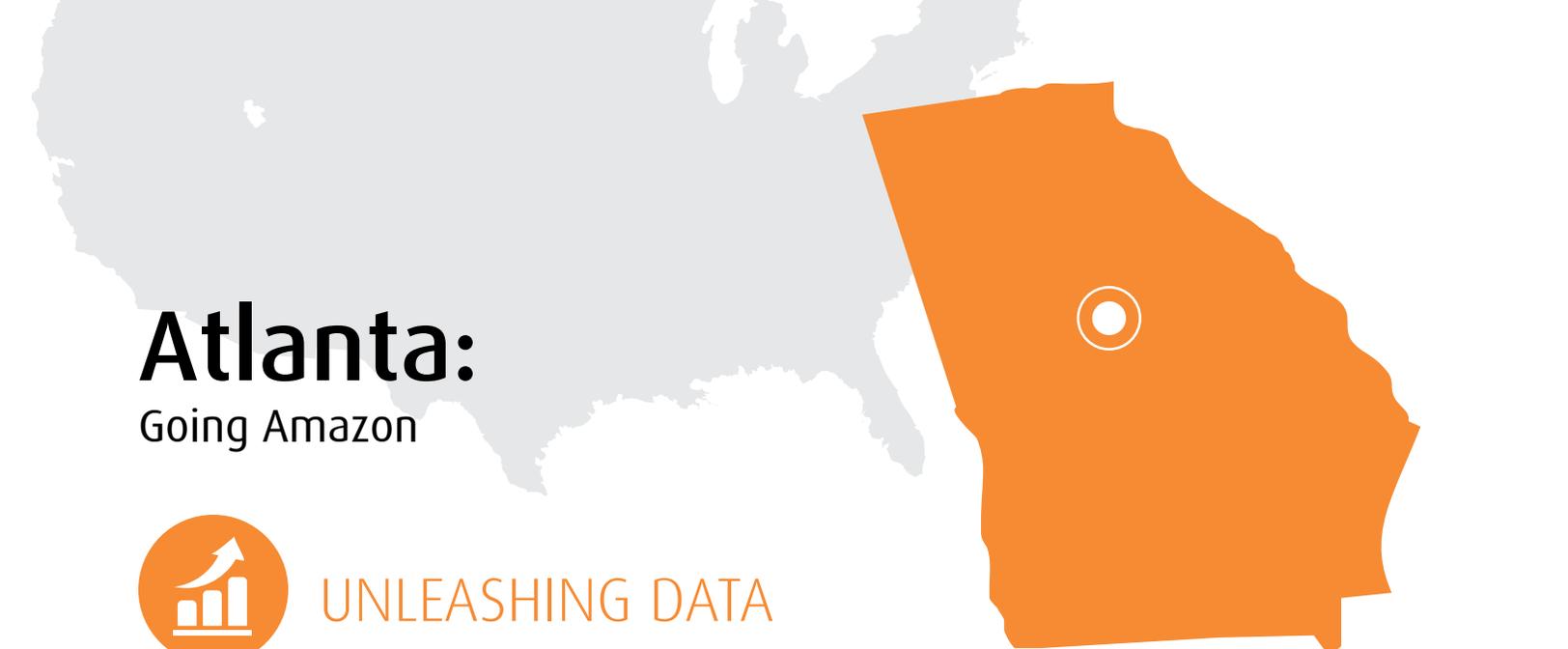
**Business innovation:** today's CIO is putting strategies into action to unleash innovation and drive the business into new domains. Their job depends on it.



**Modernizing the workplace:** today's CIO doesn't distinguish between innovation and great employee experiences. They are one and the same thing.



**Security, evolved:** today's CIO is making sure nothing is overlooked on the rocket-paced journey to digital transformation.



# Atlanta:

Going Amazon



UNLEASHING DATA

“...  
*How can you give your customers  
an Amazon-like service?*  
...”

**While in Atlanta**, an attendee in the food and wine business kicked things off by explaining the crucial role data plays in digital transformation. As one IEF member said, innovation begins by understanding what is most important to the business and your customers. The best way to achieve that understanding? You guessed it: Data.

“What is the business trying to achieve?” the member asked. “What do we have aside from our products that’s valuable? It’s our data. And how do we take that data and monetize it? How do you realign a sales force so it’s a monitored business? How can you give your customers an Amazon-like service so restaurant managers aren’t being asked to make orders while on shift? It’s a data transformation, an e-commerce transformation. It’s everything.”

Amazon has built its e-commerce empire on a powerful idea. Every click, every order, every search is tracked, compiled and transformed into something useful. For the restaurant owner, how can you anticipate what your next customer will order – and how will you leverage those insights to re-imagine the entire customer experience? The same line of questioning is applicable to every industry.

**Dig deeper:** How big brands are copying Amazon, to beat Amazon – via [Business Insider](#)



READ OUR ATLANTA REPORT



# Boston:

Cultural evolution



## MODERNIZING THE WORKPLACE

“...  
*Right now, we’re transitioning from folks who’ve been there for 40 years.*  
...”

**Our attendees in Boston** are well aware that the workplace is never going to be the same. New technologies, new approaches, and new generations are creating a more flexible, productive employee experience. But, the evolution is forcing CIO leaders to ask some tough questions. How do you implement change for the new, without throwing out the things that got you here? How do you build up, in other words, without breaking down your existing foundation? One member put it this way:

“Right now, we’re transitioning from folks who’ve been there for 40 years,” he explained. “So how do we carry that culture, something that has made us a very successful organization, and hand that off to a different generation with a different philosophy of technology? There’s a gap we need to bridge.”

The answer to this question is being addressed across boardrooms nationwide. Savvy IT leaders are adopting strategies to facilitate a cultural change in the workplace, without losing sight of the ultimate goal: business growth. The attendees in Boston made it clear that to achieve this double-sided goal, balance is needed. Users might expect 24/7 support, for example, but IT has a duty to push back if those demands are unrealistic. You need to deliver new technological experiences. But you also have to keep your eyes on the prize.

**Dig deeper:** How culture helps employees make better decisions - via [Gartner](#)



READ OUR BOSTON REPORT

# Calgary:

The Uber myth



## INNOVATING THE BUSINESS

“...  
*Uber didn't really disrupt the taxi industry.  
It disrupted the taxi dispatch.*  
...”

**IT leaders in Calgary** know staying still in the age of disruption is fatal. Whether you're in the energy sector or healthcare, you can no longer sit back and hope for the best, while the marketplace changes around you. This is especially true considering the sheer speed and scale of disruption in the digital, cloud era. Startups no longer need massive capital and assets to compete with established business models. They just need a new approach, a new technological innovation, to tear the whole thing down overnight. Consider Uber, said one of our members:

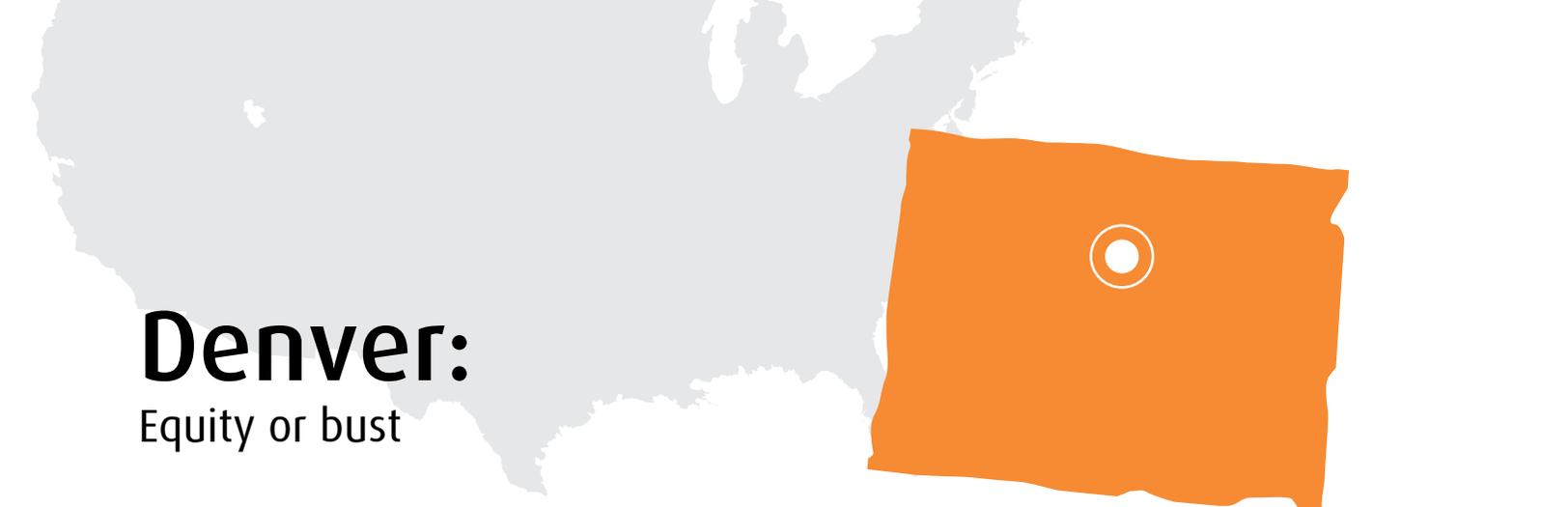
“Uber didn't really disrupt the taxi industry. It disrupted the taxi dispatch. The business didn't change. People in cars are still picking people up and driving them somewhere and dropping them off. Digital didn't change that.”

None of this is to say your business should rush to be first out of the gate with a flashy new gimmick or business model. Our members in Calgary argued traditional industries, such as the energy sector, should be more concerned about optimizing existing approaches, rather than total creative innovation. But the core idea remains important to all CIO's. Disruption is happening everywhere, and it can happen in a flash, from unexpected places. If you aren't actively seeking out ways to innovate your business, you are sure to be caught off guard by a more clever competitor.

**Dig deeper:** Disrupt or be disrupted – via [The Huffington Post](#)



READ OUR CALGARY REPORT



# Denver:

Equity or bust



## MODERNIZING THE WORKPLACE

“... ”

*I'd say, 'my owner doesn't want to give out equity,' and they'd say, 'see-ya!'*

... ”

**Our foray into Denver** proved the battle for high-tech talent isn't slowing down anytime soon. IEF members agree that for digital transformation to succeed, you need the right people in place. But attracting – and keeping – strong technical talent is no easy feat. Sometimes it comes down to dollars. If you can't out-bid your competition, tough luck. But other times, employees are looking for something a little different, explained one IT leader, who shared his experiences recruiting for a software company:

“It's like a shark tank. It's forever changing and it's very hard to get good people to stay,” he said. “They're also looking for that bigger, better deal. I'd say, 'my owner doesn't want to give out equity,' and they'd say, 'see-ya!’”

What promise are you making to your candidates? Perks and huge salaries might do the trick. But it is just as likely to fall short, as new generations of workers strive to make a big difference in the world. Sharing equity is powerful because it signals the person joining your team isn't just a cog in the system – they are responsible, they own the outcomes, their impact matters. Today's CIO can win the talent wars with this simple concept. It's time to freshen up your value prop by giving your employees a true purpose – no one can compete with that.

**Dig deeper:** Winning the war for talent has a new dimension – via [Forbes](#)



READ OUR DENVER REPORT



# Halifax:

Blockchain boon



INNOVATING THE BUSINESS

“...  
*“Smart contracts could be a huge benefit to us”*  
...”

**Over in Halifax**, IT leaders aren't sleeping on blockchain. For a few years, the buzz around this emerging technology has been muddled with Bitcoin hysteria and dire warnings of crypto-currency bubbles. But in technology circles, the discussion about blockchain is much more down to earth – and proving to actually be something, dare we say it, revolutionary. To CIO's, blockchain offers an entirely new way to operate, secure and supply services, information and products, around the globe. One of the most promising blockchain applications, so far, are “smart contracts,” according to an IEF member in the airline industry:

“Smart contracts could be a huge benefit to us,” he said. “For example, to lease an airplane, smart contracts would be phenomenal. If we could find an entry point for smart contracts using a blockchain algorithm, we could change the game in the business around aircraft leasing.”

The Haligonians didn't stop there. From leasing companies, to managing education credentials, to providing safety in the seafood industry, the decentralized, “trustless” nature of blockchain is proving to be a ground-breaking innovation. IEF members stressed that while the applications are endless, businesses should start by asking how blockchain can have an immediate impact on the products, services and experiences they deliver to customers, today.

**Dig deeper:** 5 blockchain use cases to follow closely – via [Forbes](#)



READ OUR HALIFAX REPORT

# Montreal:

Loving security



## EVOLVING SECURITY

“... ”

*We're trying to implement security and a lot of people are doing things on their own.*

... ”

IT leaders in Montreal are feeling left out of the loop. While IT is trying to leave behind its stark reputation as the department of “control and govern,” finding a secure way to strike up fresh, productive partnerships across the business is tough. For one IEF member, users are getting restless, and will go behind IT’s back to implement new technologies – often putting the business in harm’s way.

“We’re trying to implement security and a lot of people are doing things on their own,” the member said. “They think, ‘Oh I can’t wait on IT,’ and now we’re not stakeholders. We’re trying to pick up the pieces after.”

The take away is clear: IT needs to continue to build alliances across all departments, as the barriers to adopting new technologies (and security risks) are lower than ever. While the old narrative of strict control is no longer feasible, or recommended, IT must determine how to re-brand itself as an enabler of the new, not the strict, gatekeeper of it. Focussing on the speed of your service and lowering delivery times is a good start. Working with users to truly understand their needs and educate them on how to work securely is even better.

**Dig deeper:** 4 steps to launching a security training program – via [CSO Online](#)



READ OUR MONTREAL REPORT



# New York:

Less is more



## EVOLVING SECURITY

“ ...

*It's all about integration...*

... ”

While in New York, our members reflected on the need to keep things simple, especially when it comes to cybersecurity. Unfortunately, most enterprises don't seem to be following this advice, with the average organization using up to [80 different security vendors](#). Not only are businesses wasting cash on redundant, overlapping security services, they are failing to deliver a unified, holistic and effective security approach. As one New York IEF member said, buying technology is simple; implementing it correctly is another story:

“Technology is the easy part. It's not like 20 years ago where you had one or two choices. Take cybersecurity, you more or less trip over solutions now. It's all about integration.”

Complexity has dangerous consequences. It takes 191 days on average for an organization to [identify a breach after intrusion](#). If organizations don't begin to simplify and optimize their own technology footprint, they have no hope of countering the ever-evolving threat landscape. As such, the first step for CISO's is to radically simplify and reduce the number of solutions in their environment. From there, they must move forward in a way that supports operational speed, responsiveness and effectiveness, in a holistic way.

**Dig deeper:** Are there too many cybersecurity companies? – via [Help Net Security](#)



READ OUR NEW YORK REPORT

# Ottawa:

Idea machines



INNOVATING THE BUSINESS

*We try to encourage ideas to flow up.*

**Our excursion to Ottawa** revealed that creativity and innovation are a grassroots phenomenon. CIO's appreciate that a great idea can mean the difference between "disruptor" and "disrupted." But where do those ideas come from – and how do you make sure you have the wisdom to act on them? An IT leader in the military said you need to listen to your people – and make sure you do it in a positive way:

"We try to encourage ideas to flow up, but if you don't react to them or only react to some of them, it becomes kind of a negative motivator," he explained. "That's the last thing you're looking for."

The discussion underlined an often-overlooked reality: Not all ideas will disrupt your business. But if you don't let your people freely share their thoughts, you might stifle them from getting to the breakthrough. The point here is that today's CIO appreciates the need for a culture of innovation – and they must work hard to make sure that culture is flourishing, positive and open to making mistakes along the way. Your job here is to facilitate with workshops, contests and regular requests for feedback, whatever it takes to let the good ideas bubble up to the surface.

**Dig deeper:** 5 ways to get your team's creative juices flowing – via [Fast Company](#)



READ OUR OTTAWA REPORT



# San Francisco:

White glove IT



## MODERNIZING THE WORKPLACE

“ ...

*They're salespeople, they're not here to use technology, they're here to sell to customers.*

... ”

During a visit to San Francisco, members discussed the growing challenge of onboarding users in a modern workplace. You know the story: A smart new hire shows up to work on day one, and can't contribute because the technology – phones, laptops, apps – aren't up and running. Not only does this impact the employee experience, it drains the business. One IT leader in the sales industry had a bold suggestion: Treat new employees like first-class customers.

“They're salespeople, they're not here to use technology, they're here to sell to customers. The white glove service ensures that's what they're able to do, starting on day one.”

He outlined his organization's “white glove” IT service, specifically designed to get new hires working as quickly and effectively as possible. This “360 degree onboarding process” is note worthy – and should be kept in mind when rolling out new technologies designed to drive the business forward. Digital transformation is powered on new technologies – but your users need to be actually using those innovations for business results to follow.

**Dig deeper:** How to improve onboarding – via [Forbes](#)



READ OUR SAN FRANCISCO REPORT



# Seattle:

Gone phishing



## EVOLVING SECURITY

“...  
*For 99.92% of my population, that’s  
a completely genuine email.*  
...”

After settling down in Seattle, our IEF shared an unsettling view into the world of cybersecurity. Social engineering scams, such as phishing attacks, are becoming more difficult than ever to prevent. And while user education can certainly help, IT leaders face a predicament: Users hate training. Which is unfortunate, because with just a little guidance, everyday employees would have no trouble spotting the scams:

“I think they’re still easy to ferret out,” said one IEF member, speaking of phishing attacks. “But for 99.92 percent of my population, that’s a completely genuine email, so that represents a new threat to us.”

Researchers suggest phishing and other social engineering hacks, such as spear phishing, are increasing in frequency by double-digits [every year](#). Credential-based attacks accounted for 81 percent of all cyberattacks in [2018](#). The problem is obvious. But overcoming the end-user education gap might not be so simple. Today’s CIO understands they must figure out a way to make security easier, and simpler for end users. Our IEF members advise that creating incentives for completing training, as well keeping on the pressure with regular mock-phishing experiments can help.

**Dig deeper:** Education and awareness are key in the fight against phishing – via [CSO Online](#)



READ OUR SEATTLE REPORT



# Temecula, California:

Goodbye office



MODERN WORKPLACE

“...  
*I don't pay you for your time in an office,  
I pay you for your output.*  
...”

In the Southern California city of Temecula, IT leaders are re-imagining the workplace. Located a few hundred miles from Silicon Valley, perhaps no other initiative is as essential or as crucial to their success as attracting the right talent. While several IEF members discussed how they are working to bring in that trademark start-up vibe to the physical office place – beer fridges, catered lunches, gaming tables – one member's comments stood out. Why worry about the office? It's the outcomes that matter most:

“If an organization manages by objectives, what's the difference? I don't pay you for your time in an office, I pay you for your output.”

For many of today's CIO's, paying people to be physically present at work is an obsolete idea. Technology is making remote work possible to such an extent that it has enabled what one member termed the “workforce-as-a-service.” It's a compelling idea – one that can help strengthen your chances with would-be employees. Perks are fine. Everyone loves a fridge full of beer and a free lunch. But flexibility, independence, and being valued for your direct impact to the business, not for just filling a seat, might be even better.

**Dig deeper:** How remote work has evolved – and what the future holds – via [Business News Daily](#)



READ OUR TEMECULA REPORT

# Toronto:

Humble pioneers



## INNOVATING THE BUSINESS

“ ...

*No one is going to parade you down the street.*

... ”

In Toronto, IEF members shared a refreshing view of what true IT leadership looks like. IT leaders are not in this line of work for the praise, or a pat on the back. They are in it to innovate and deliver a true impact to the business. While this might be a humble philosophy, for IT leaders in particular it is mandatory. As one member explained, IT must always find evangelists outside of the IT department when pushing forward innovation:

“I co-sponsor absolutely every initiative with an executive peer, because if it comes from us, it’s a non-belief, right? ... No one is going to parade you down the street on their shoulder, but they will parade your executive peer – which is okay.”

By default, IT is at the forefront of innovation. But that doesn’t mean it needs to be center-stage or in the lime light. In fact, as the IEF member argued, it’s often better to work behind-the-scenes when developing new solutions. When you do that, IT becomes a trusted advisor when it comes to rolling out new business solutions. While this won’t win you any trophies, it will certainly build up your “private equity” and unleash the real power of IT to drive results.

**Dig deeper:** Meet The Modern CIO: Partner, Not Pedagogue – via [Forbes](#)



READ OUR TORONTO REPORT

# Vancouver:

Hack yourself



## EVOLVING SECURITY

“... ”

*Within ten minutes, me and two of my guys hacked it.*

...”

**Our Vancouver encounter** elicited a bold imperative for IT leaders: Go hack yourself!

Sometimes, all the user training in the world won't stop rogue departments from adopting cloud applications behind IT's back. When this happens, you might feel inclined to slap someone on the wrist and cite their infractions at length. Nevertheless, human nature is hard to change, and scolding a user will only further alienate them. For one IT leader, he found a much better way to persuade users against Shadow IT, after the HR Department adopted a free survey tool without consent:

“I said, ‘okay, give me access.’ Within ten minutes, me and two of my guys hacked it. We were able to access all the surveys this company had for all their customers.”

The lesson? Security is an ever-evolving challenge, one that is inextricably linked to human nature and our propensity to do things the easy way. While CIO's are working hard to educate end users, and enact user-friendly policies, sometimes they need to find unique ways to make their point. Hacking yourself, for example, is memorable, hard to ignore proof that IT just might know what it's talking about when it warns you about the cloud.

**Dig deeper:** 3 reasons why IT should hack itself – via [Open Data Security](#)



READ OUR VANCOUVER REPORT



# Washington:

## Data hygiene



## UNLEASHING DATA

“ ...

*The problem we have, is we have so much data.*

... ”

**While in Washington**, the IEF discussed an evolving approach to big data. It's undeniable the amount of raw data pouring into the enterprise is greater than ever, especially as we scale into the cloud and push our computing to the edge with the Internet of Things. But, so what? If you aren't turning these data points into business value, you aren't just wasting your time. You're burning resources and exposing your organization to security threats. As one attendee noted:

“The problem we have, is we have so much data, and we're digging into it a lot. But we're struggling with how to monetize that data. We're still learning what the value of our data is.”

The solution, said another member, is to start getting methodical with your data collection and analysis practices. If you're not labeling data up front, he argued, you will forget why you ever collected it – and never use it again. Clean, hygienic data practices are also important for security reasons. When you know what is collected, and why, you can start to decide which data to keep, and how to protect it. Putting this off for later will only increase your exposure, and make the process that much harder when it comes time to actually find a use for it all.

**Dig deeper:** 3 data strategy trends for 2019 – via [Dataversity](#)



READ OUR WASHINGTON REPORT

## WHAT IS NEXT FOR THE NORTH AMERICAN CIO?

From coast to coast, sea to sea, North American CIO's are pushing forward on the promises of digital transformation in four key ways.

They are unleashing data, by focussing on good hygiene and monetization. They are modernizing the workplace, creating engaging, meaningful experiences for employees. They are proving IT can innovate the business, whether it's with blockchain or fostering creativity. And they are evolving security to meet a changing threat landscape and ever-lasting human shortfalls.

In 2018, these were just a few of the great stories shared with us from the members of the IEF. We hope they provide some insight as you continue your own path forward in 2019 and beyond.

## TELL YOUR STORY



We are now accepting applications for new members of the Innovation Executive Forum. To find out how you can get involved, please visit our website to [learn more](#).

*"Our vision for this forum is to bring together a group of forward-thinking senior IT leaders from across North America to learn from each other and challenge their ideas through active, meaningful discussion focused on driving innovation back into our businesses collectively."*

— Erika Van Noort, Innovation Executive Forum Chair