

Jeff Garrett Audio

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AI strategy, decision fatigue, economic outcomes, cybersecurity, MDR evolution, IT architecture, business alignment, technology trends, 2025 review, 2026 predictions, IT solutions, vendor neutral, technology advisors, business leaders, IT challenges.

SPEAKERS

Aaron Bock, Jeff Garrett

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Aaron Bock 00:00

Welcome to the IT Matters podcast hosted by Opkalla. We're an IT advisory firm that makes technology easy for your business. Our vendor neutral technology advisors work directly with your team to assess technology needs and procure the best IT solutions for your organization. On this podcast, expect high level expertise from our hosts, plus experience driven perspective from the leading experts on topics like AI, cyber security industry focused IT solutions, strategy and more. Now let's get into today's discussion on what matters in IT.

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Aaron Bock 00:35

Welcome all to the IT Matters podcast. Again, I'm your host, Aaron Bock and we've got an exciting episode early in 2026 thank you guys for listening, and we've got an exciting year ahead. Today. We're joined by the Vice President of architecture for Opkalla, Jeff Garrett, and we are excited to have him. We will be talking today about what we saw as a company in 2025 and some of our thoughts, maybe some hot takes for 2026 between myself and Jeff, and so we are excited to do this. We get to, we have the pleasure of talking to a lot of people in the IT space, business leaders, and we feel that we should share this with you. So welcome to the show, Jeff. How you doing?

J

Jeff Garrett 01:19

Doing great. Excited to be on my first time on the IT Matters podcast, so I'm excited to kick off 2026 by doing this.

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Aaron Bock 01:27

We are excited to have you. It would not be the beginning of the year if I didn't ask you, how was your holidays? With you and your family,

J

Jeff Garrett 01:36

holidays were good. I think I had a solid we'll call it eight days of being able to unplug, which is unique. So I enjoyed that, and then right back into it this week. So it's been a hot start to 2026 already.

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Aaron Bock 01:53

It has been and I agree, and that's good. I hope for the listeners out there that you all had a great holiday season, like Jeff said, I this is the first time I can remember in a while where we actually didn't go back until Monday, like the fifth and so this first week back has been a long week, and usually it's a half week, or it's a cut week, or whatever. So it's definitely been busy coming back. But I'm glad you and your family had a good holiday. So Jeff, you know, I know you, especially you and your team, you guys get to, you talk to a lot of our customers. I know we did over 12 150 evaluations last year, maybe more than that. And so, you know, today, I think you know what we want to cover, and want to hear your perspective, your team's perspective, and anything else that you know you want to share, we're going to talk about 2025 so, you know, what are some of the trends we saw? What are some of the interesting, you know, observations that you know, you and your team made? What are some of the things we feel people are struggling with? What are some of the exciting things? And then we'll kind of talk about 2026 so, you know, I guess, from, let's start with you, you know, from, from a 2025 perspective, if you look back January 120, 25 you are. You're running our solutions architecture team, which is really advising customers on how to do technology. What's the best way to do it? What are, you know, gotchas, etc. What do you feel like changed the most for it, from an IT perspective, in 2025 for either the IT department or a business leader,

J Jeff Garrett 03:27

yeah, I mean, I think, I think something that was interesting across or a couple of things are interesting across 2025 I think this is something we've said a lot Over the last, I would say maybe five years or so, but I think we're really starting to see it take hold this year, for a couple of different reasons. Was the the IT leaders themselves are being asked to be more responsible for economic outcomes, not just the technical outcomes within their departments. And again, we've said that for a while, but I think we really saw it come to fruition this year in 2025 a lot of that was just comments I think we heard consistently across our calls was, you know, asking about the ROI of things, the you know, how it could economically impact the organization as a whole, how they're impacting the business with what they're doing in it. And I just heard that more a lot this year than, I think, in years past. So that was certainly something in 2025, and then another, another thing that seemed to be really big this year. And again, I think proving, you know, going back to the founding of Opkalla, and what we want to try to be for customers, and saw this come up a lot was decision fatigue. I think we saw a lot of decision fatigue. A lot of a lot of that coming from overlapping technologies and cyber security, driving a lot of that. And you see a lot of tool set. Because of consolidations having overlapping features. And so we got into a lot of evaluations of, do, do I use the tools I already have? Do I look at new tools? Do I completely replace tools to go with bigger tools that have everything? And it's just, it seemed like IT departments, IT leaders, businesses as a whole, were getting themselves into a lot of decision fatigue. Instead of, you know, solving core problems, it was more about which decision do I make related to this problem. So those are a couple, I think, big things that stood out to me for how teams and leaders were having to think different in 2025

A Aaron Bock 05:38

Yeah, and I agree, and I kind of speak for my role is the CEO of Opkalla Talking to fellow business leaders. I think you mentioned decision fatigue and just, you know, the just, it feels like when the start of the internet, or kind of before the.com bubble, everyone needed to have a strategy for their internet strategy. You know, we're going to get into the hot technology topics for 25 and six like it's be we'd be remiss in we're not really even an IT podcast if we don't talk about AI within the first five minutes. So, you know, obviously AI is a topic that everyone is talking about, and rightfully so. It's moving fast. It's creating this future of, you know, where, where is my industry, where's my job? Do I need to have an AI strategy? So it feels very similar to before .com from my perspective, you know, I think it's AI is moving from, hey, it's a nice, you know, kind of concept, to like, we're actually implementing it. And I think, you know, 26 we'll get to that, but I think you're going to going to see more actual metrics put around, like, okay, we're saying we're putting in AI, in AI, or, how are we doing it? And then I think people, decision fatigue wise, from a business perspective, are tired because there's just so many new solutions out there, AI and genetic AI and Gen AI and this and that. And I know your team hears it all the time, so like, before we get dive in on, like, technology categories and stuff, like, what's your take on AI at this point where we're at?

J

Jeff Garrett 07:13

I mean, it is, it's, it's, it's the wild wild west a little bit right now. I mean, it's, you know, how, I think three years ago, and how we joked about cybersecurity, and there was a new cybersecurity or five new cybersecurity vendors every day that were spinning up. Everything is AI. Everyone's got an AI platform. Everyone's developing AI. You know, it's, it's five guys in a basement at college have developed an AI tool, and everybody's jumping on board for it. And I think we'll see it go through the same, some of those same, you know, peaks and valleys that we've seen other technologies go through, where there's going to be a lot of spread, and then there's going to be consolidation, and then there's going to be a lot of spread into that. You saw that with generative, generative AI. You're going to see it with agentic AI. There's going to be a lot of things that come into the market quoting agentic AI. And I think where most people are going to end up consuming those in the long run is going to be once they have been consolidated into mainstream product sets. But it is a little feels a little bit like the wild, wild west of you know, you can't turn around without hearing AI enabled or AI driven something nowadays?

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Aaron Bock 08:21

Yeah, I would agree with that. So, so on that topic, and maybe it is something with AI. But for 2025, you know, across our customers and just general conversations you're hearing from peers and in the space what? What technology category, you know, surprised you the most this year, either an adoption or demand. And maybe not surprise you, but what technology category you feel like in 2025, was popular that excites you, either one.

J

Jeff Garrett 08:51

I mean, I think the, I mean, it is crazy as it is, right? And you said it like we can't talk about it now without talking about AI. I think that is exciting. So from the standpoint of what's going on, it's, it's, that's, that's the exciting portion of it, that in what's going on our market, is how that is fundamentally changing things. I think what's there's obviously scary pieces of that too. But I think the exciting piece of that is the potential it has to make to create better productivity for businesses, for people in businesses. I think once people get over and you see this, we see this a lot when we talk to our customers, and one of the things we asked them when we talk about AI is, you know, how is the business? How is it going in the business for accepting AI and your people accepting it? And I think there's a lot of fear from people right now that AI is there to replace them. And I think what's going to happen in a lot of organizations is there'll be some optimization in but I think what. Go more toward expanding in the future intelligently for their business, but also it's going to be a lot about making people more productive, right? I mean, one of those areas that I think was, I think was kind of a, it was a surprise, but not, not really a surprise, but a surprise in a different way, was like the Microsoft conversations and how many people were really diving into copilot, and what copilot is had to offer as an easy on ramp, and that all of that was around employee productivity and trying to make employees more productive in their day to day, not necessarily trying to get rid of employees and downsize.

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Aaron Bock 10:36

Yeah, and I think again, we could talk about AI for a whole podcast. So I'm going to spare the listeners and just spare ourselves, since we talked about this so much. But you know, before I talk to you about challenges you saw in 25 I mean, for me, one of the things I see across Opkalla, and I hear this from other folks that we don't work with, or other peers in the industry, I think one of the biggest challenges right now is that, you know, like a cloud strategy maybe seven years ago, or the internet strategy I mentioned. I think people are going to conferences, business leaders, C suite, board members, and they're coming back and they're saying, we need to have AI in organization. And so, you know, some people obviously are more advanced than others. And so we have customers all across the board. Some have very specific use cases, and they know what they could put AI on. But we have some people who, and I can recall one specifically where I know we've talked about it before, but this person came to us and said, Hey, we need an AI strategy. And it's like, okay, great. Like, you want me to give you, you know, one, two or three SKUs of AI like, and I think people sort of, we're seeing this challenge of, like, we need AI now. But I think the challenge is, is that it's, it's requiring, you mentioned it like, it's requiring the business in it to be more aligned. And so if you ask me, What's a trend in 25 I think that AI is kind of forcing an IT Department of Business to actually get aligned and figure out, like, what are we trying to do? Because you can't really go have an AI strategy if you don't know what business case you're solving and how you're going to do it. And so, you know, I think it's an opportunity, because you can get more aligned, and you can be on the same page, and people understand each other more, but I also think it's a key challenge. And so I would ask you the same thing, like, but, you know, maybe you agree with that, and that's the biggest challenge. But what are some of the other challenges that you saw in 25 that customers are asking Opkalla about, or just in general, that you hear whether they're asking or not?

J

Jeff Garrett 12:39

Yeah, I mean, I think that, I think that is a challenge. I think that's a challenge that maybe organizations don't realize they have yet, but I think it's why a lot of what we're doing at Opkalla, and specifically on the Opkalla architecture team around talk tracks, we're developing strategy workshops. We're developing, you know, we have larger technology strategy workshops, not just particular to AI, but to the whole conversation, because that there's the idea of you need to bring in the business. I mean, not in a lot of cases, it's you need to make sure you're getting through silos of the IT department first, and then getting through the silos outside of the IT department, because there's still, you know, we still run into a lot of silos in the IT department. There's still some of the old battles of, you know, the security guys versus the infrastructure guys versus the developers. And, you know, while dev ops and Dev SEC ops and all these, you know, buzz words have been around, not everybody has implemented those, and not everybody has coordination across departments, so there's still a lot of, I think, breaking down of walls between different groups within it and across the business to have those conversations. I mean, I mean, I think, you know some of this too, that is, was a challenge. Maybe felt a little bit different in 2025 was when we got into these conversations. I think there was a lot more of the from organizations coming to us, not saying, hey, help me with this particular project. I think there was a lot of, what do we do right? And some of that was driven by AI, some of that was driven by probably another topic we can't talk about it without mentioning now is the name Broad com and what they've done. So, you know, those are, those are two big things, but I think there was some things going on in the industry that were causing shifts customers weren't expecting for and so all of a sudden, the plans they had laid out, you know, kind of, kind of got thrown, you know, thrown overboard, and now you have to come in. And we had a lot of those type of conversations of, we're not sure what to do. And that was an interesting thing to see in 2025 and I think an interesting challenge that a lot of businesses faced is getting that thrown at them in the like, you know, in the middle of their year, in the middle of their plan. Plans when they thought they had it all, you know, mapped out correctly. Something an external factor like a broad com changing completely how we do a core offering like VMware just completely flipped these businesses upside down with what they had to, had to plan for and adapt to,

A Aaron Bock 15:17

yeah, and for the listeners, if you're not familiar with what Jeff's talking about with broad com VMware. VMware was acquired by Broad com in a couple years ago, but last year, they made a drastic change where they reduced the number of total customers that they really want to deal with, and they reduce the number of partners. And by doing that, which you know, increased stock and made them look good on the financials they have. If you are mid market or small enterprise, and even some of the enterprises, you're facing massive increases on your renewal. We've heard 567, 10x on a renewal. And so it's forcing customers to, you know, you know, decide, are we really going to use VMware in the future for our infrastructure, are we going to refactor and repurpose and and go to a new solution, or go to the cloud, etc? So, you know, I do think that that's a challenge, non specific to IT. I think in 2026 you know, you could see other providers look at that and say, is that a strategy we want to take on before we go on to 26 you know, I know we talk a lot about cybersecurity, and I feel like cybersecurity was like this hot topic from maybe 2021 to 24 and then it kind of got second bested, and second childhood to AI by a long shot. What about cybersecurity? Like? What are the you know, what are people asking about now with cybersecurity compared to what they did before, and challenges or opportunities, etc?

J Jeff Garrett 16:49

Yeah, I think, you know, in cybersecurity, something we saw in 2025, something that came to us a lot was, it was a very repeated conversation. Was kind of that next evolution of MDR, we saw a lot of conversations where I think customers are probably on their second, maybe even third, purchase of a managed detection and response platform. And that market has changed a lot. There's been there's been a lot of consolidation. There's been a lot of your kind of your core players in the market, have expanded their offerings. So from where we came, let's say maybe the first boom of that with, you know, 2016 2017 timeframe when that really started catching on to where we are now, organizations have matured and their understanding of MDR and where it fits. And so I think we we saw a lot of those conversations come up repeatedly through 2025 and I think we'll continue to see some things around MDR in 2026 and how that changes, continuing, continues to change. But that was something we saw on cyber was, was that that kind of new, mature talking part of managed security, managed detection and response. How do I handle this within my environment, knowing a little bit more about the topic now, with these platforms that are maturing,

Aaron Bock 18:11

yeah, yeah, I think you know, managed detection response is certainly still an important solution and service that many companies it makes financial sense to do I think, you know, the observation I would make is that a couple years ago, it felt like you just buy the next best thing that's coming up. I'm hearing more CFOs and CIOs pushing towards maybe more of a platform approach. Or can we get, you know, the best of vendors and solutions in certain situations that can cover multiple things. I think that's what we're seeing a little bit in the MDR space as well. Like we want someone that is not just the next best thing. We want someone that's here to stay, that's consistent, that will allow us to follow a process. You're shaking your head, so I'm curious your thoughts,

Jeff Garrett 18:57

yeah, yeah. I mean exactly right. I mean I think you could be wrong, but I think gone are the days in cybersecurity now, of like the pop up vendors that become that jump into these organizations and get bought. You know, people are looking for that stability. I think we see that it kind of goes to, this is not all cyber, but something else, another conversation we saw a lot in 2025 with our customers is Microsoft, and there was a lot of conversation, and we did a lot of work with customers around optimization of Microsoft in their licensing stack. But most of the time those conversations came down to the cyber platforms within Microsoft and the other tooling within Microsoft, like, like, in tune, like teams and, you know, communication platform, you know, using as a communication platform, using the cyber security tools. And that's back to your point. I think Aaron of the organization's looking for a consolidated platform that that they feel like is stable, rather than one off. Off one off products to come in and serve one particular niche need.

Aaron Bock 20:05

Yeah, yeah, I agree with that. Last, the last thing I would mention on on technology trends that I think I'm curious what you and your team are hearing. But, you know, I feel like, because of, we go back a little bit in our conversation, AI, because it is such a hot topic. You know, I think, yes, there are people on all different spectrums and levels of like, where their AI strategy is, and if, if they can really implement it, I do think it's forcing businesses to really address, like, do we have quality data? Do we have a plan for our data? And so, you know, even within, you know, Opkalla, we're 50 employees plus at this point, so we're still fairly small. But like, even with our reporting and our data, when we look at our information, it's becoming more and more important for us to have a single source, or a source of data that we know, we trust and we know is legitimate. Because if we're going to use AI in the future, we're going to, you know, make decisions off those data sets. We need to make sure they're accurate. So just curious like, what are the conversations that that people are having with us? And what are you hearing around the data conversation? 25

J Jeff Garrett 21:14

Yeah. I mean, I probably heard the term fabric more in the last six months than in the last year and a half, for sure. You know the that the data lake. The new thing is the data lake house. You know, these, where do, where do we put our data? Where is our data? Is our data ready? And some organizations, I think, have thought about that. I think something, you know, maybe getting a little a little bit ahead when we think about 2026, is probably thinking more about that. Ai strategy is that even if you're doing productized offerings, you still need to think about where, ultimately this data, right, my data's data, has never been further stretched out from the center of our organization than it is now. We have SaaS based applications everywhere we have, you know, applications are AWS and Azure, these public hyperscalers, we still have stuff on prem data. Data is everywhere. And I, you know, I think that's going to be one of those hurdles that a lot of organizations find unintentionally, is when they try to do AI and they haven't really thought about data centralization a data lake house, how we pull this in and structure it correctly to be used by AI that you might get a lot of incorrect information out of your first AI initiative and in house is you're trying to get the data right and massage your data to actually give you what you need. Yeah.

A Aaron Bock 22:41

Yeah. I agree. And I think, but I do think that one of the, you know, in and again, I keep referencing, we're going to go to 26 I promise, folks, we will go to 26 but I do think it's important to talk about, you know, where we're at in 25 I think one of the interesting things with which is happening right now, maybe it's forced by the AI conversation, or maybe it's just we've been maturing in it, and having it and the business kind of align more and more data is a is a perfect example where you have to have alignment between the two departments. And I think, you know, a successful IT department, they support the business, they understand the business, they work with the business, and they're producing data. I think something that that's going to happen, and is happening now in 25 you know, if we talk about how our IT people, and how are IT departments doing and being measured, I think that this is one of the first times where you can truly say, Look at look at the automation. Look at how much data we're being at we're pulling in the shorter amount of time, and look at the time savings we're creating for the business. I think that it's a cool opportunity in it right now to produce true business ROI, and so, you know, I at least see more leaders talking about, you know, praising their IT teams and their technology teams, because they're improving the speed at which they can go to market, they're improving this decision making speed, you know, you were in the it before you talk to a lot of IT departments like, what do you think that? You know, the bit, how does, how's the business looking at it? Leaders now in 2025 and going into 26 like, how are they measuring them? What's, you know, what's changing? Like, where do you feel? Like, if you're talking to an IT director, like, how do you feel they're being measured these days.

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Jeff Garrett 24:27

Yeah, I mean, I probably told the story too many times now, but it, it's going back to when I started in it, and it was, you know, it was the knob Turners, the button pushers. Like, that was the go, you know, rack the servers. Manage the data center. You know, look at the eyes on glass. Watch, all the watch, all the performance. Make sure that product is shipping those type of things. And, you know, it was, it was viewed mainly as a call center. And how can we run as lean? As possible and still get this out and kind of a necessary evil. You know, some of us have been told that at times in our IT career by, you know, people we report up through that that's what it was. And that's, you know, hasn't com that. I'm sure that hasn't changed for everybody. And there's probably some people listening would say that, yeah, that's, that's still the case, but I think for the most part, right? It's, it's, it's it sitting at the decision table of the organization. Now it is that strategic initiative. It is trying to find more efficient ways to do things so that they can take the people that we used to say, Where are the button pushers and knob Turners? Because they need to be looking strategically at what's going on within the environment and helping drive innovation forward in these business because it is to kind of use a, you know, maybe a little bit of a cliche saying and a buzzword. We are in a digital age and everything is being driven and talk about the generations that are coming along that are driven by, you know, smartphones and apps on the smartphones and everything's at the touch of a finger because of that it and the value they bring and the data they bring has never been more important. And to your point, I think we probably hear the phrase, well, what the data is saying more so now than we ever have before.

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Aaron Bock 26:21

Yeah, and I think that's a good thing, because I think it's helping people, you know, again, I think it's forcing people to question, do we have good data work together instead of working silos? And so, yes, there's still silos, and not everyone's perfect, but I think it is getting better. So all right, well, let's, let's move on, kind of, to 2026 now, you know, we're, we've started with a very busy first week, and I busier than I expected, at least. And so, you know, I think let's kind of, you're a CIO, you're sitting across from you in the Opkalla solution architecture team, and you're planning your 2026 roadmap. What are you all talking to? CIOs, directors, CISOs, etc. What are you talking to them about? What should they prioritize? Prioritize? What do you think they need to care about going into 2026

J Jeff Garrett 27:15

Yeah. I mean, I think the one and again, we'll harp on it a little bit longer and we can, and then we'll talk about some other things but AI strategy, and really looking at AI strategy. And we've already had, I had three conversations this week alone, just on through our AI talk track, you know, starting off the year of 2026, of looking at that strategy. And, you know, we've kind of come into this, and we talk about it the phases, and try to help our customers figure out where they are in the phase. What's, what's missing from that? And it covers a lot of areas. It goes back to what you're talking about with, you know, do we have a centralized data location, a centralized data lake house determine, do we have the appropriate even going back to, like, the pre kind of, the pre work of do we have guardrails in place? Do we have proper governance in place? Do we have the right security tolling in place? I think a lot of people are trying to get into the operationalization of things and find those, those, those good product wins. You know, that's where copilot comes in. That's where a lot of the customer experience. Cx side of things comes in as these productized offerings, they can put in quickly, but maybe missing some of the pre steps. So that's, I think, going to be important thing that I think shop should look at for 2026 is, let's get that AI strategy in place, so now we're plugging into it, rather than trying to go back and change something foundationally after we're already, already halfway down, halfway down the path. So I think that i ai strategy is a big one.

A Aaron Bock 28:51

Yeah, I agree with you, and I think a prediction I have. And sure, maybe this is a hot take, but I think that if you fast forward to the end of 2026, so 1231, 2026, and we're six, and we're having this same conversation about, you know, what happens in 2026 I think you're going to see, you're going to see a lot of AI implementations and strategies being executed. I also think you're going to see a lot of failures, I think especially some of these agentic AI solutions that are being purchased and implemented. I think you're going to see a lot of them. Fail unless there's true data maturity and people actually have a plan and a strategy. To your point, because I think a lot of organizations are are pie in the sky, but haven't really thought through the use cases super well. And so I wouldn't be surprised if that's sort of like a slowdown in AI. So it's slow down to speed speed up. You're going to have people taking a step back and saying, Hey, what are we spending money on? This agentic things, not saving the amount of money and time that we thought? So I think you're going to see that, and I agree with you that you got to have a strategy. But I think you're going to see some of the strategies fall apart that haven't been you. Don't have, like, a backbone to them on the data side,

J Jeff Garrett 30:03

yeah, yeah, it's, it's strategies that are built a little bit on sand, right, rather than a firm foundation. And some of that goes back to, I think that because organizations are pressed to get things done, because, similar to the cloud conversation, somebody went somewhere heard AI, everybody's talking about AI, and that they think they have to get it done and they have to get it done now, yeah, I mean, a couple other things that I think people should be looking at is, they may seem like old conversations, but I think in the new light, they need to be considered this. I think connectivity, advancements, and this is, you know, more so than just what's become the Sase conversation, and kind of the buzzword of sassy that we talked about, but it goes out into it touches a lot of things, like SAS security posture management and AI security posture management. And it's, it's really this new frontier of how expansive our networks really are, when you sit down and think about it. Of you know, my average employee in my organization, what all are they connecting to? Where are they working from? How far outside of our four walls are they and so I think that's something that needs to be looked at in 2026 is because, you know, with a continued push towards SaaS based, SaaS based tooling, cloud usage, and just the hybrid way we're going to continue to approach it and in business going forward, organizations need to think about, are we managing our networks how we used to? Are we managing our networks in this new way based on how everyone's working, and kind of in that same vein is identity security. I think there's going to be a big push around, how are we managing identities now? And it's because it's not saying like we're, you know, since 2020, we've been more hybrid. That's driving forward, but with automation becoming huge in environments, more so than it's ever been, with AI becoming big with these tool sets out there, with different SaaS tools out there that are outside our four walls, there's all these non human identities that are out there. So I think you know the idea of putting better scoping around identity, life cycle management around identity, understanding, you know, are you who you say you are within my environment? The you know, true, true idea of least privilege that we've been talking about for a while, I think, really starts to take hold in 2026

A Aaron Bock 32:39

so, so let me ask you a question around. So I already asked you about like, if you're sitting in front of CIO, what are you telling them to prioritize? You just brought up a topic that I think you know. Again, Opkalla, at our core, we advise customers, help them build roadmaps. You mentioned a talk track. So for folks that are not familiar, we have these talk tracks for value added meetings we run where we'll sit down and try to understand our customers environments and help them plan and strategize and consolidate or or digitally transform, or whatever the case is. You meant, we we've been talking about AI and data. We've been talking about security, connectivity, etc. SAS, there's all this stuff in it, right? So, like, you know, say that, let's go a level up. CFO, CEO is asking the IT team, hey, what's our priority? What's our strategy going to be like, what's your advice to these teams on, on how to prioritize and, and what's, what's maybe, our methodology that we're sharing with customers around, like, prioritizing these different projects, because it's hard to do them all at once, but you do have to figure out which one goes first,

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Jeff Garrett 33:48

yeah. I mean, so I think one of the things we we start with in in all of these conversations, right? And you mentioned, like, you know, our talk strikes, our workshops, these things that we're trying to do with customers, where, yeah, I think we're trying to be a little bit different and and come in, and not have a product conversation is have the strategy conversations. And pretty much every single one of those strategy conversations with the IT team or or the large organization starts with, what's the business alignment, right? What's, what's the business case? What? How are we aligning with each other here in the business, what goals are we trying to solve? And I think that's one of those important steps, because once you understand what the business is trying to solve, and what's more, what's the most impactful things to what the business is trying to do, then you can start looking at your projects and saying, Here's a priority we can set. Because if I accomplish this, it's going to have the most impact to the business. And I think it's something, I mean, we we talk about that even internally to Opkalla, right? Is, what are the things that you know? Am I working on something that's going to be impactful, or were we spinning our wheels on something? Yes, that's important, but does it carry impactfulness? Is it something that can can take a lower priority? And if we, if we did that in the silo of our teams across any organization, then then we may say, Well, I believe this is to be, this is the most important thing. But going back to I think some of that, what we talked about earlier is we're breaking down silos. We're talking more as a business. We're strategizing more as a business, understanding what's my business what's my business use case, what's the why behind this for the business? Then I can start setting more appropriate, you know, in those projects, setting more appropriate timelines and what's going to have impact. And so that's one of those things I think, is core to start with in the conversation, is start with the true why to the business, not just to the siloed organization of, you know, wherever you may be working within it,

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Aaron Bock 35:49

yeah, and you've, and we've, we've said this a million times, and I don't want to use a cliche phrase, but like, know, your crown jewels. Know what's really important to the business? To your point, I think if you can put \$1 amount on things. You know, how important is this to the business, either from an opportunity perspective, a risk perspective, a process time savings and cost savings perspective. I think if you can do that, you can make better decisions. And I know it depends. Every organization is different, so we can't give like a standard answer here, but I do agree, like it has to start with the business. And again, it's, it's, we're an IT company. We work with IT departments, mostly, but it's hard to do if you don't have a business strategy. I would advise all listeners you know, whether you work with Opkalla or not. I you one of the things Jeff mentioned earlier in this podcast, I think is really relevant, is we're seeing a lot of companies pop up. It's five, five people in a garage, and they've got this AI SaaS company that looks like it's been around for 20 years. It's branded Well, it's got great content. It's got great copyright. It has theoretically a cool product. I would advise anyone who's making decisions for an organization of size, of some maturity, if it's not Opkalla, talk to someone in the space about who they're working with, and validate that the providers are who they say they are. I think a 26 I think a trend that we're going to see is you're going to see heavy consolidation, because there was a lot of providers that were started last year. There's a lot of money in the private equity space that needs to be deployed. And so you're going to see a lot of acquisitions. And so I think for mid size enterprises, businesses, organizations of size, and recommendation and advice I would give that I would be prioritizing is make sure that you have someone you trust, that you can talk to about who you're working with, third party risk. You know, do they, do they have, have they been around longer than a year? Do they have any kind of security report that you can see? Is there any validity to what they're saying? Do they have references, just basic things that we've talked about for years and years in it? It's just more relevant now. So, you know, I guess that would be advice I would give Jeff. I know, one of my favorite things that you share with our team and our customers is, you know, know, where the company, the solution started, you know, I'd love for maybe you to share that and re emphasize that, because I think it's even more relevant going into 26 like, what is the concept of that that you advise people on when it comes to solution providers,

J Jeff Garrett 38:25

right? So there's, there's so much again, expansion, consolidation companies, you know, offer, you know, having new offers, day in and day out. A lot of what I've always said is, I try to look at what was the foundation of the company. Where did they start? And you can go from there, and how did they try to expand? Because if you know the foundation of an organization was in, you know, data center storage, and now they're trying to do MDR, you might say, Well, wait a minute, how did they get here? Right now, you start asking questions. How did they get here? Did they something? Did they try to develop this on their own? Did they expand by acquisition, you know? How did they get here into this new age? And I, I think it helps just it helps begin that inquisitiveness to to really seek the truth of what you know. What is this organization? How well do they do it? How do they execute on it? It seems that more often than not, you know, those organizations that have a deep foundation in in technology that they're they're not trying to represent now, they've tried to shift maybe too much. You know you're gonna you're gonna see that play out and then the same in the same vein. You're gonna see organizations who have come along and developed in the right way, maybe into those stacks recently, or organizations who have expanded the right way into some of their core offerings and their core beliefs and their core. Tenants as an organization are, you know, are going to show better, and you're going to see that show better, and you're going to see that align better, you know? And I think it's, I mean, it's true. I mean, it's even true to us, right? Is that's the hope for Opkalla, that people see us is a different way to interact, as an advisor today, right? Then, then the traditional reseller they've dealt with in the past, and I think some of those traditional resellers are trying to make that change, but if you look at the foundation of of what they were built in how they operate, you know, vendors are tied to those type of things, it makes it hard to shift. And you know, that's why I think we've been successful in this. And that same, same thing that applies to us, applies to almost every organization out there, when you look at the foundations.

A Aaron Bock 40:46

Yeah, I agree. As we wrap, we got a couple minutes left here. I want to kind of get into your predictions for 2026 so, you know, we talked about AI and what happened in 2025 so kind of, you know, for 2026 How do you expect AI to kind of show up with infrastructure security, etc. And then, you know, what are some of your predictions for it? And business leaders going into 26 that that you were talking about, that you think are relevant.

J Jeff Garrett 41:13

So, I mean, I think some of the things for AI, right, good, good in the bad. I think we have to keep a close watch, and organizations need to be aware of how AI is impacting infrastructure cost. I mean, there's a lot of talk right now about, you know, Ram sorted shortages and the pricing of RAM because it's needed in these AI. So the kind of the same thing we saw in graphics cards is now it's impacting RAM. Graphics cards may have not had, you know, a shortage of graphics card may have not hit everybody, but a shortage of RAM and pricing on RAM is going to impact a lot more organizations, a lot more data centers. It's going to impact about how we think about infrastructure going forward. You know, the combination of infrastructure costs potentially going up the actual physical infrastructure, plus changes like, you know, VMware pricing, that's going to that's going to make cloud workloads look a lot closer in pricing than they have in the past. So I think that's going to change. I think AI is going to have an impact there. I think it's going to have an impact on how we think about security. We've thought a lot about, you know, our data over the last couple years, and where's data going. I think it's we're going to think about AI or security around our AI. How are we securing our prompts? How are we securing our actual llms? You know, it used to be, you know, we worried about SQL injections and somebody attacking our SQL database, we're going to have to worry about the same things with with our AI models. And do we have prompt injection? And are people trying to attack our our language models and get sensitive information out of our business that way? And then the other thing I think is going to be a little bit more innovative for organizations, is thinking about how they privatize. AI, I think that's been something that's been there for the higher end, but I think it's becoming more commercial, becoming more productized for mid enterprise businesses, where they can take the work that other large organizations have done, like Google, with Gemini, like chat GPT and privatize those models more, more effectively, more easily than they have in the been able to in the past, where that's kind of been limited to select enterprise organizations who are starting to see that productized offering in the AI space, so that that's kind of specific to AI.

A Aaron Bock 43:42

And then, before you go into the other thing, I want to just say one thing on AI you mentioned, like the infrastructure getting more expensive. I think something that I would advise, that I think is going to be something that is a decision that people are having to consciously make, is the buy verse, build concept. You know, organizations, everyone thinks we all think we're unique. Every company thinks we're so unique that no one's like us. Well, yes, we are, and hopefully we are very differentiated. But the when you look at the data side and the architecture, a lot of it's similar. And so, you know, I think something you're going to see is there's been so much money spent on building AI companies in 2024 and five, and I would advise any CFO CEO, you know CIO as well, but like anyone who's looking at the money side, well, we should just build this. It's way cheaper. I would, I would question that, and I would look really hard to see if there's a solution already built, because people have spent millions and billions of dollars getting the hosting, getting the hardware, getting the infrastructure, building the AI models out, if you can use one that's built as a model versus trying to build it yourself. I think that's, you know, there's going to be cases where it does make sense to build it in house, but I also think there's many cases where people should be looking to buy the model in a. Going to be less expensive?

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Jeff Garrett 45:01

Yeah, I agree. I I've said this a lot over 2025 I would advise anyone so from real gear heads out there, I would advise anyone who's thinking about in this conversation to build versus buyer. Remember the Big Data craze and how everybody was like, Oh, we're going to go build our own Hadoop cluster. We're going to do all this big data analytics, and this turned into Frankenstein projects of that never went anywhere, half baked designs. And what ended up happening is big data analytics was really just kind of productized into some of the SaaS based applications, or the in house applications that we bought off the shelf and used today. So I think the same thing for most organizations, right? We will have outliers. We always do. But for most organizations, especially in mid enterprise organizations, they're going to use productized offerings, and that's going to be the most efficient way to do it before you don't want to it may look, from a cost perspective, cheap on paper, but the capital of people you sink into it, and the man hours you sink into it, I think, in the end, are going to show that it was really a negative investment to try to build it out yourself.

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Aaron Bock 46:08

100 100% agree. Before we go last, last question, I know you talked about AI, and I think you were getting ready to talk about other technologies, like, what are some of your other predictions for 2026

J Jeff Garrett 46:20

Yeah. I mean, I think a couple other things. Well, I will say so three, maybe three predictions for 2026, one of them is around AI. I do think I'll start with this one, because I don't want to end on doom and gloom. I think AI will make us AI usage will make organizations more vulnerable. First, you know, I think that's something to think about and consider. It's kind of going back to cloud. And as cloud became popular and caught on, and more people jumped in the cloud, and they're just deploying things. You know, we heard all these stories about publicly facing IP addresses and storage buckets being open and people being able to go in and just pull out sensitive data, because it's just somebody's you know, Glacier storage is wide open on AWS. I think initially, the wide adoption of AI will make us more vulnerable, and then we'll have to, you know, make sure we're dealing with that from a security standpoint. So I think that's something we're just ultimately going to face going into 2026, a couple of other things, maybe not so doom and gloom is that is finops. I finops is something that's been around. It's not a new topic. But I think it takes, I think it takes a little bit more center stage for some organizations, and maybe organizations who wouldn't have seen themselves worrying about finops and cost optimization. Is because, again, all these changing models of infrastructure prices by SaaS based applications shadow IT and SaaS finops is going to have a wider breadth than just where it started, which was kind of in cloud optimization. It's going to have ramifications across all of it about, how are we optimizing our spend? Again, going back to IT leaders, you know, being asked to have economic, you know, produce economic outcomes for the business. So how, how are we doing cost savings in that too. So I think finops is going to have a wider reach across organization sizes in 2026, and then the last thing, you know, kind of, in the cyber security world, we talked about, MDR, I think the age, as we move into, you know, there's the age of more agentic MDR, I mean, it's just staying ahead of the threat actors and the way they're using I think we're going to see that security, cyber security landscape and those platforms continue to advance, and so I expect to see a lot of the non human assisted the rise of non human assisted MDRs in 2026 and that being adopted by organizations.

A Aaron Bock 48:53

Yeah, well, thank you for joining us today, Jeff. We're at the end of our time, and thank you for sharing what you and your team have seen in 25 and excited for 2026 for those of you out there, if you are not you know, if you've never heard of a value added meeting or talk track that Jeff is referring to, I encourage you to reach out to a technology advisor on our website today, and you can have one of these strategy conversations with your organization, with Jeff and his team. So I wish you the best of luck, Jeff in 2026 you and your team. Thank you for all that you do, and for those of you out there that are interested in in having a more detailed strategy conversation, please reach out to us and thank you for listening to the IT Matters podcast. We wouldn't be where we are without all of you listeners out there today supporting us. So best of luck in 2026 and I hope you have a great rest of the day.

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Aaron Bock 49:48

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