

Episode 6:

Guest: Neil Bunn n, Google

10/27/20

Speaker 1 00:00:04 I'm Danielle Royston and this is Telco in 20.

Speaker 1 00:00:19 Hey guys. Thanks for joining us today on the podcast. We've kicked off a super cool series called the BFCs. You remember what that stands for, right? Elon Musk has his B F R, and I have my B F Cs - the big fucking clouds. If my kids were here, they'd say "busted." I'm talking about the hyperscalers – the big cloud vendors that have spent billions and billions of dollars to perfect their operations security network and software and let you use it. I'm talking about the top three cloud vendors, AWS, Google Cloud Platform and Microsoft Azure. Which one should you choose?

We've invited each of them onto the podcast to make their case about why they are the right BFC for telco. So all you CTOs out there, listen up. Today, we're talking to Google, so let's take 20.

I'm so excited to have Neil Bunn on our show today. If you check him out on LinkedIn, you'll see that he's helping change the world with Google Cloud, which I totally love. Neil's official title at Google is head of customer engineering, media and telco, at Google Cloud Canada. And I met Neil while I was CEO of Optiva, and even got him to travel with me to MWC 2019. Welcome Neil.

Speaker 2 00:01:40 Thank you. I appreciate being here. That was quite a trip. It was a fun ride.

Speaker 1 00:01:43 And maybe the last time we're all, you know, going to be at MWC, which is like this crazy show that everyone in telco knows about. It's like eight halls and more than a hundred thousand people. It's better than even the big car shows. Yeah. Super impressive. I hope it returns. We'll see. So what do you do for Google? Like what's your day job and how do you spend your time?

Speaker 2 00:02:04 Yeah, so I've been with Google for a couple of years now and predominantly all my time spent in telco ,and I have a team of engineers and really our job is to just go and help our clients modernize, become more efficient and just become way more effective and cloud is a path to doing that, right? We try to do that obviously with Google, but

as we'll probably touch somewhere in this interview, even if it's not Google, that's okay. From my engineering team, we just love helping our clients.

Speaker 1 00:02:27 Focusing on customers is always so awesome.

Speaker 2 00:02:29 Well, especially now in COVID, it's been amazing.

Speaker 1 00:02:31 I think a lot of people are just like, holy crap. How do we keep our business going?

Speaker 2 00:02:35 Very, very few people could have ever imagined, "Oh, I got 30,000 workers supporting telco or telecommunications across the whole country." And no, none of us can go in to wherever it is.

Speaker 1 00:02:45 I've definitely seen the conversation in telco really changed really fast, maybe from COVID, maybe that's like the upside for telcos -- that they finally were like, "Oh my God, this is great. It's going to solve this."

Speaker 2 00:02:54 Nothing like global catastrophe to spur people into action.

Speaker 1 00:03:00 I'm pretty familiar with Google and it's famously difficult to get through the recruiting process. It's one of the best and coolest companies to work for in the world. What's going on at Google Cloud right now that gets you super excited to jump out of bed and work really hard every day.

Speaker 2 00:03:16 Well, you know, there are so many amazing projects, but one thing I just love is the work that we're doing with Verizon around client care and a product we call CCAI, Contact Center AI. It's so hard for people to get through customer support and really what all of our customers want is to simply get something done, whether it's customer service or support or adding a feature or adding more data. All of those things are just so hard and CCAI allows us to isolate the really hard problems where you still need a person involved.

But at the same time, it allows us to move things from just phone interactions to voice or text or chat and to seamlessly move from one to the next. Like I start a call, but I got to take my kids to school. My worst nightmare, I'm sure it's yours too, is dropping after you've made it through the 45-minute queue to talk to somebody, right? Like, okay, I can't carry on this call. I'm just gonna move it to SMS on my phone. So some of the things that we're able to do there are just

amazing. I'm looking forward to seeing that project not only worked for Verizon, but for all sorts of telcos.

Speaker 1 00:04:19 I mean, I think people are like, that's insane trying to solve a problem across multiple systems, right? Entering the same data multiple times because the systems are just legacy. And so by moving all of these applications into the public cloud and leveraging things like CCAI, you could totally build a ton of loyalty to a telco that solves that problem. It has a great experience, right?

And so you know that I've been a Google girl for a while now, and I love you guys and I love your technology, but what about AWS? They're the market leader. What would be your top three or four reasons telco customers should choose GCP over like your competition, AWS or Azure?

Speaker 2 00:05:01 Well, I'm going to spin it a different way. I think what makes me excited at Google is that we've always embraced the concept of hybrid, whether that was on-prem because we know some things will never make it in cloud, but also across providers. It's okay if you're going to use AWS and Azure, and I'll be completely honest, I think the vast majority of clients are going to use multiple clouds. And so we've had things that allow us to do container organization and manipulation across multiple clouds. You can run those on Google Cloud, or you could run them on AWS or on Azure. And we're starting to see that across all of our products.

You know, one of the big things from Google Next was BigQuery Omni. The ability to actually run BigQuery, one of our coolest pieces of Google Cloud technology, but now you can run it in AWS, right through Google. So I don't think it's so much about "pick a cloud and only one cloud." I think it's about "how are you going to use cloud?" And I think what makes Google somewhat unique at the moment, how much we're embracing the fact that it's not us or them it's, uh, what parts of each of us should you be using and how are you going to use them?

Speaker 1 00:06:06 That's awesome that you guys are so open to that idea and it's not like an us or them. So I've been a big spanner person. I've been really promoting spanner kind of aggressively. I think there were a couple of announcements that you made at the most recent Google Cloud Next. I mean, we talked about Contact Center AI, I think spanner, maybe BigQuery. Are there some key products that you think the telco industry should pay attention to?

Speaker 2 00:06:32 Well, first I gotta thank you for always loving spanner. I mean, as an engineer, it's just miraculous a globally distributed acid compliant database. I mean, just so, so awesome in so many ways, but if we kind of look at Cloud Next, I mean, there were lots of fun things there. Certainly Anthos, we snap back a year or two, we started disclosing Anthos and what our vision would be. And I think there were lots of people that were skeptical that we'd really have Anthos running on all these different platforms, but to show that it's actually accomplished that in a very, very short time, I think makes it super relevant.

BigQuery Omni was interesting because it solves the problem. Some of your data is going to be in Google. And in which case you use BigQuery naturally, cause it's one of our pride and joys, right? But sometimes it's just not going to be either because your clients are already in a different cloud or some of your applications, like we said, we're very pragmatic, but to be able to get the power of BigQuery in somebody else's cloud is super interesting.

The last one that I thought was super interesting was ConfidentialVMs, right? Anytime I'm dealing with, uh, telecommunications providers, they have linkages to sensitive workloads. They may have government workloads; they have all sorts of things around data. And of course we all go to the same place immediately. Like, here's how we encrypt at rest, and here's how we encrypt in transit, but we've never been able to talk about encryption at a processing level. So being able to actually compute on encrypted data and actually keep it encrypted while we're working on it is phenomenal for those that are skeptical or challenged by data privacy legislations in any country.

Speaker 1 00:08:11 Yeah. And the security always comes up a ton with the telcos and people ask me like, how do you solve that? And I'm like, I just put them in a room with Google for 30 minutes. It's like a mic drop. Right? You know, everyone's like, got it. This is awesome. I have no more questions, and all their concerns just go away. And so as a security story, not only is it strong, but it's getting stronger. It's neat. Yeah. It's super cool. I love the technology. It's totally great.

So in March, Thomas Kurian, CEO of Google Cloud, went big on telco partnerships and announced partnerships with Amdocs and Netcracker. And so how is Google helping those vendors kind of work closer to the public cloud? Are we talking about getting them into Kubernetes containers and it's really hosted software, or are these guys really opening up their applications and rearchitecting or refactoring for the public cloud?

Speaker 2 00:09:04 It's much more a case of refactoring and prepping, but absolutely I think Thomas's focus on telco is really becoming obvious over the last six or seven months, not only

in the announcements, but also in the hiring and the pace of hiring into those teams. But all of the partnerships that we're doing really are about that full reimagining of those stacks and modernizing those stacks. So, you know, now we're talking about the ones that need to kind of catch up and do that full modernization stack. And it really is about going back and completely refactoring those applications and making them truly cloud native. That's gonna take a long time though. There's gonna be lots of investment.

Speaker 1 Next just concluded. If I were to send my listeners to go check out a session or two telco specific, what sessions do they try to go check out?

Speaker 2 00:09:59 I would definitely go watch the Anthos announcements. The Anthos ones are really, really interesting because I think that's the place that a lot of telcos are going to kind of focus on, right? How do we really leverage the hardware investments we already have? How do we also make sure that we're able to modernize things when you're in the cloud to kind of future-proof us, um, and a series of those announcements inside Anthos are all very, very applicable to, uh, to telcos.

Speaker 1 00:10:27 Cool. I love to hear about customer stories. It makes things real and tangible. I don't know if you have any telco customer stories that you can talk about where they took some lame legacy application and moved it to GCP and got some huge wins. I love these stories. And so let me go get my popcorn while you talk.

Speaker 2 00:10:48 Well, you know, it's interesting cause some of them are traditional telcos. Some of them are totally different with a client here during COVID, which again, as you kind of indicated, who would have expected all their people couldn't come into the office and needing to literally get reconnected to their environments? Uh, so needing to spin up thousands and thousands of virtual desktops in the space of just a couple of days to get a workforce back up and running. Um, we ended up doing that with Telus and then writing a whole use case on how other telcos could use that for remote work from home. And then, you know, the other one that's super fascinating to watch are a number of the things we're doing with Vodafone around analytics mapping and AI, and leveraging a whole series of these things that really only Google has. You know, our AI is phenomenal, but then when you add on top of that, our mapping capabilities and what we know about the world, and then you add on top of that provider data that obviously Vodafone would have the ability to re-optimize your network and plan that out in a much more efficient way.

Speaker 2 00:11:50 Some of those stories are really, really interesting because they kind of point to that future. And then there's just so many interesting things going on in the

background about, you know, re-imagining the future of entertainment and delivered services on top of telco services. I think every telco I talked to, what they don't want to be is just a bit mover, right? They don't want to be a pipeline and they aren't, right? They're inherent to all of us. They're the few people who kind of get to enter our homes. And so helping them kind of re-imagine that service delivery. And there's lots of announcements coming over in the next six months or so about different things we're doing in media and entertainment tied to telcos around the world. That should be super interesting for lots of people.

Speaker 1 00:12:32 Well, I think a lot of times telcos think their value is the network, but I think the key to a telco is the subscriber. I mean, everyone will say we focus on the customer and we focus on the customer experience, but they've neglected that experience. And I think that telcos, that sort of win are the ones who figure out how to really deliver an awesome 21st century customer experience. And you can do it with all these cloud concepts. So yeah.

Speaker 2 00:12:55 Yeah. I mean that's what it's all about. It's all about the clients, right?

Speaker 1 00:12:58 Yeah. That's how you can build loyalty as services are connected really quickly and I have an awesome experience. I'm excited to call you because it's going to be really easy to resolve.

Speaker 2 00:13:07 And to see those services as not individual services, but actually as a whole suite of things that they're getting from their telco, I think the interconnectedness of wireline and mobile and TV, but the linkage of all of those things back together into one seamless experience, that's amazing for telcos, and cloud helps enable that in so many different ways.

Speaker 1 00:13:29 So Google offers Google fiber in the United States, you have your Loon project to get internet access to rural areas. I get a lot of times telcos are like, Google's a competitor, right? What does Google say to that?

Speaker 2 00:13:43 I think in some areas there's definitely always going to be places that as a big business, Google experiments with and explores and like Loon is, is an innovation area for us. How do you deliver something to an area that doesn't have it? So it's kind of hard to see that as competition, in most cases, we mostly have a deep partnership with telecommunications providers, right? So for all the examples of like Google fi or Loon, we're providing YouTube and other things that drive 5G adoption, and we're delivering tools like Android to create a healthy device ecosystem, you know, that enables paths to revenue. I think when people are really pragmatic about it, Google delivers far more paths to revenue for telcos

than we would ever be in competition. I certainly know Thomas's mission and mandate and his statements to all of the telcos that he goes and meets with is, "I want to be your partner in a complete go-to market. I want to increase your revenue. I want to increase your client satisfaction." Those are not the statements of a competitor. Those are not the statements of an organization that wants to do anything other than enhance customer experience and then find a path to doing that. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:14:55 Yeah. And so do you want to name drop a little bit, you know, what are some telecom companies that are GCP customers? You know, Vodafone, I think maybe Telefonica and Orange were a couple of the newer ones that made announcements.

Speaker 2 00:15:08 Yeah. We've done a lot of work with Telefonica, Orange and Vodafone here in Canada. TELUS, um, we're actually doing work with all of the telcos in Canada at this point, you know? So as time goes on, it's less about who are our customers and more about who aren't and why aren't we working together? Cause there's so many different places that we can work together. Okay.

Speaker 1 00:15:30 And so if an exec listening wanted to get a hold of someone at Google Cloud and start that process and start to explore, what's the best way to get ahold of Google? Do you know, is it one 800-Google? Like how do you do that?

Speaker 2 00:15:43 Yeah. I mean, that's part of my team's job and the teams around the world is to be super proactive. So if you're an exec and you haven't heard from us, um, let us know. The greatest thing about Google is how collaborative we are.

Speaker 1 00:16:00 Yeah. Do you think people should contact their local Google office, is that like the best way to do it?

Speaker 2 00:16:05 Yeah, we're super-fast internally. So it's really reaching out to anybody in Google. We now at least have a telco dedicated team, which is fantastic.

Speaker 1 00:16:14 Well, that's a really great way to end our chat. And so, Neil, thank you so much for sharing what's going on with Google, Google telco, and why telcos should really consider GCP as their hyperscaler of choice. So thank you.

Speaker 2 00:16:31 Yeah, no, it's appreciated. Thank you very much for having me and for, uh, for the time to talk about areas of passion. It's fantastic. Thanks .

Speaker 1 00:16:38 Stick around because we're ending each podcast with a Telco in 20 Takeaway. I have 20 seconds to tell you something you need to know. Neil mentioned how TELUS hire Google to help them shift to remote working in a short period of time because of the stupid pandemic, but I can help you. I just published an article in that bad-ass magazine, Fast Company about it. That's because I've been using remote work for more than a decade to cut costs and boost performance. Companies are finally recognizing how successful remote teams can be. Check out my article about the future of remote work and how to make the most of it. We've included that link in our episode resources, as well as a link to Google Cloud Next presentations. Accessing those presentations requires registration, but once you sign up, you'll find great info on the things Neil talked about, like Anthos, the super awesome ConfidentialVM, BigQuery Omni and more.

So I want to give a huge thanks to Neil Bunn and thank you to all of our listeners. Don't forget to hit that subscribe button, share our podcast with your colleagues. And if you liked what you heard, give us a review. Let's connect on LinkedIn and on Twitter at telco dr. While you're there. Sign up for our super awesome email at TelcoDR.com that's T E L C O D R.com.

Speaker 0 00:17:58 Later, nerds!