

SAAS NORTH IRL! Our favourite event of 2021

SAAS NORTH came back in real life this year to reconnect the Canadian SaaS Ecosystem, and we had the privilege to join, along with 1000 other attendees, at the beautiful Shaw Centre in Ottawa on November 17 & 18th.

After more than a year of virtual events, we weren't sure what to expect. We were blown away by the lineup of speakers, programming, and networking opportunities amongst founders, investors, executives, and service providers ready to explore what success looks like for Canadian SaaS companies in 2020 and beyond.

The 2 days were jam packed and buzzing with the best in SaaS. Providing incredible value and resources for rapidly scaling Founders and their teams.

Rapid growth in various SaaS verticals presents unique challenges across operations, human resources, marketing, and management. The event provided an opportunity to learn about people, culture, growth, community, securing investments, and so much more. Everyone in attendance was able to walk away with tactical strategies to adapt, react, and thrive in the ever-changing cloud-based software market.

It was no shock that a ringing theme in almost every single conversation and the speakers were centred around people, hiring, and culture. A task that is exponentially tougher when you're resource-strapped in a competitive market.

If we learned anything ... it's that you just can't beat an in-person event, and the Canadian Tech Ecosystem is absolutely on fire!

5 favourite take-aways (from the perspective of an HR

nerd)

Betakit keynote stage: State of SaaS 2021

It's tough to summarize the knowledge dropped by the lineup of speakers including founders and investors of several 2021 Unicorns and 2022 "Soonicorns". We were proud to see our clients and some of the biggest names in Tech like Trulioo, Benevity, Boast.AI, and Thinkific hit the stage to speak on everything from growth, partnership, to fintech.

There was a huge increase in investment and support for SaaS in Canada from 2020 - 2021, and we can expect even bigger things next year.

Combating the Great Resignation

We heard from the people teams at [Vendasta](#), [Jobber](#), and [Thinkific](#). With how crazy the market for talent is right now, you know we have to talk about attracting and retaining talent in "uncertain" times. What do your employees have keeping them at your company when a Recruiter inevitably slides into their DMs?

We are competing for talent in a virtual space, which means competing with other countries and companies with deeper pockets. The good news is, It's not just about the money - people aren't just changing jobs, they are shifting what they care about and leaving organizations that don't meet expectations.

It's crucial to anchor your culture in your values. The hiring process also needs to be deeply anchored in values and culture. While you have to be efficient, be prepared to dedicate a

significant amount of time and resources to the hiring process. You will kick yourself down the road if you don't ensure your new hires are aligned with your values and adding to the culture.

We are all concerned with the customer journey... but you should also be deeply investigating and familiar with the "employee journey" within your company.

People and Culture Challenges: The 4th Industrial Revolution

We attended a breakfast presented by [UKG Human Insight Group](#), as well as a "food for thought" lunch hosted by [Stratford Group](#) to talk about attraction, retention, and engagement further.

Hiring is one challenge, but a mere 15% of employees are actually engaged at work. Reasons and timing for leaving in the first 12 months echoed earlier conversations. Career Development accounts for 22%, Work-Life Balance 12%, Manager Behaviour 11%. Where, when, and why is your churn happening?

A legal contract is one thing, but you also have to be aware of the psychological contract between an employee and their employer. This refers to the individuals' expectations, beliefs, ambitions and obligations as perceived by both parties.

In previous Industrial Revolutions, workers were fighting for traditional rights like safety on the job, regulated working hours, and benefits. Facilitated by technology, we are now experiencing another revolution in worker's priorities. Expectations have expanded to include growth, belonging, culture, autonomy, and purpose just to name a few.

Even with limited resources, there are key things you can implement to prevent churn. Like providing meaningful work, access to promotions and continuous training for leadership,

valuable resources, coworkers they get along with, and facilitating connection in a virtual environment.

Try regular engagement surveys and interviewing your top performers and find out what makes them successful. Hiring coaches or providing coaching certifications for internal staff is another suggestion we can definitely get behind.

DEI: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Breakout rooms presented by [Crescendo](#) and [Quakelab](#), spoke passionately about DEI. Diversity is the demographic mix, referring to all of the ways that individuals differ (race, disabilities, gender, religion...). Inclusion is the practice of ensuring that people feel a sense of belonging and support from the organization. Equity and equality for all unique individuals should be the result.

Diversity is so much more than representation in the workforce. True inclusion and equity means the same access, opportunities, and communication for everyone in the organization.

So while it's very cool to visually see a mix of women and people of colour etc, that's not an accurate assessment. For example: Are men progressing faster and occupying more leadership positions than their counterparts? Are minorities more likely to be paid lower salaries or stuck in entry level roles?

It starts but doesn't stop with hiring.

5. Mental Health for Founders

An important topic for everyone this year, especially when it comes to finding a balance for Founders. Let's get real, it's not sustainable to keep working 80 - 100 hour work weeks. It's also the precedent you are setting for current and future team members.

Of course, our favourite solution is strategic hiring and building a team that will help you succeed. In order to align with your goals and what you want to achieve, it could mean bringing on a solid executive team to run the show day-to-day. On the other hand, you might benefit more from scrappy entry-level employees who are eager to handle multiple aspects of marketing or sales.

Lloyd Lobo, the Co-Founder of Boast.AI (and several other companies) was generous enough to share his story of overworking and almost dying from COVID and the new outlook it gave him. He said something along the lines of who is standing around your gravestone is the only thing that really matters in the end. Who is with you during your journey is much more important than the journey itself.

Consider what's important to you. Take time off, book that vacation, and don't forget to spend time with family and friends.

Long story short - we're going back next year!

