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Why Business Needs More Competitive Services

Submitted by: Australian Services Roundtable



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Session III. Why Business Needs More Competitive Services

My name is Vivianne Arnold. I am from an outback sheep station in Australia. You might have seen films that feature a water tank and a sheep shed alone in a sea of red dirt and salt bush. That is what our property looked like - although as my mother says, "it wasn't as romantic as it looks in the movies."

We had no paved roads, no electricity lines running to the property, and we relied on an old and extremely temperamental generator for power.

But we had a CB short wave radio. Some of you might be old enough to remember those crackling, static-y squawk boxes. And I had the benefit of an innovative Australian use of that technology called School of the Air. Kids used the short wave radio to talk to their teachers. This was the start of an outback kid accessing technology to help see and learn beyond local boundaries. Years later I became the first in my family to go to university.

Fast forward a few more years and innovative technology gave me my next big break. A US based multinational technology company, you might have heard of, named Microsoft, had a subsidiary in Australia and they hired me as a marketing manager. Microsoft didn't care that I was young, they didn't care that I was female, they didn't care that I was the first in my family to go to university. They only cared that I was smart, was great at my job, and that I could create and use innovative technology. I was promoted to be the first female Marketing Director at Microsoft Australia. Then I was promoted to a global marketing role at head office in the USA. Microsoft prepared and submitted a very thick visa application for me and it was successful.

After a couple years I was promoted again to a regional marketing position based in Paris covering Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Microsoft didn't care that I was Australian, my experience working as Marketing Director of the Australian subsidiary and then at global head office in the USA made me the perfect person for that regional role. Again Microsoft organised a thick French visa application for me, my partner and my cat.

In Paris I was promoted again to a global marketing role as a Worldwide Director. I was the only person in my new team not currently living in the USA. But I had the full benefit of digital relationships with Marketing Directors in Microsoft subsidiaries all around the globe. Microsoft didn't see why I shouldn't just do my global role in Paris, so I did. This girl from the Australian outback spent nearly a decade working for an innovative technology company all around the globe.

Fast forward again. I founded and am the CEO of an executive search and consulting firm, Franklin Phillips. I saw an opportunity to help companies find technologically innovative executives to head up Asia Pacific regional functions, whether those Asia Pacific roles were based in Sydney, Singapore or Hong Kong.

Franklin Phillips finds the executives who have experience in multiple Asia Pacific countries. We look through the entire Asia Pacific for those executives. And when we place a candidate in a role we often move them from one Asia Pacific country to another. Our APEC countries need executives with experience in multiple Asia Pacific countries. When thinking about staying competitive, top talent is an integral part of continued success. This is why APEC countries need to grant 3 to 5 year working visas to foreign nationals with relevant experience. Our companies and our region will benefit. Technologically advanced companies are not

naturally constrained by national boundaries. Constraining medium term working visas only constrains the growth of our companies.

Large multinationals are not the only companies that technology has freed from national boundaries. The freedom also applies to growing small and medium companies like my company, Franklin Phillips. Our company has no permanent office and no permanent servers where we store our data. We use cloud technology and our team can access our virtual office from anywhere in the world. This means we can choose the best team members for our company from anywhere in the world.

- My wonderful executive assistant, Myrbeth, works from just north of here, Batangas, in the Philippines, because she has 8 megabytes per second internet available.
- Our head analyst works from home in Pune, India where she has 10 megabytes per second.
- Our project manager works from the beach in Thailand where she has 30 megabytes per second.
- My co-founder and I get 100 megabytes per second at home in Sydney.
- After APEC I am on my way to a serviced apartment in Singapore with a whopping 1 gigabyte per second.

I can only hire from areas with competitive internet speeds. And the necessary speeds will only get faster. Australia's internet is behind Singapore's internet. Where is your country in the rankings? Our team spends all day on Skype and Slack communicating with each other, our clients and our candidates. We edit documents simultaneously in Google docs. We submit our expenses using Xero. These disruptive online subscription services are based on the free flow of data and high speed internet.

In our notes, our company holds personal data about our candidates, and confidential data about our clients. This data is not located in one country, it is located in the cloud. This data isn't just accessed in one country, it is accessed in the Philippines, Australia, Hong Kong and all over the world. This is why data privacy regulation needs to allow data like ours to cross borders with clear and harmonious regulation we can easily follow, and no red tape to slow down small and medium businesses like ours.

In addition to being the CEO of Franklin Phillips, I am also here as the President of the Australian Services Roundtable. Services are the engine room of Australia's economic activity and 80% of Australia's economy is services based, yet only 20% of Australia's exports are services. I want Australian and our APEC neighbours to think beyond borders, because for professional services to remain competitive, we need to cut red tape, allow the free flow of data, use technology to bring together remote teams and benefit from professional working visa mobility.

My career has been based on innovative technology, working visas and international business. I believe these are the secrets to competitive companies large and small. I've come a long way from short wave radio and School of the Air. And in fact the sheep station where I was born now has paved roads all the way to the nearest town. Myrbeth, my executive assistant in Batangas, lives with her family in a rural area that has power lines but occasional power outages. So we helped her finance a generator for her house. It's a temperamental power generator, just like one we had on the sheep station. But as long as it runs, her internet is rock solid. And so is our company.

Let's keep the data flowing for competitive professional services companies in APEC.

Thank you.