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Tech Leaders, Trump Team Search for Common Ground

By David Jones • *E-Commerce Times* • *ECT News Network*
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There appears to be some optimism in the air following Wednesday's highly anticipated sit-down between the Trump transition team and more than a dozen top Silicon Valley executives at Trump Tower.

Outsourcing and domestic hiring policies were contentious issues during the often volatile presidential campaign. However, the Trump transition team and executives who attended the summit suggested that the two sides found common ground on a number of issues that could spur economic growth and get the industry to ramp up production and hiring within the U.S.

Among the leaders in attendance were Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, Apple CEO Tim Cook, Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Alphabet CEO Larry Page, Alphabet Executive Chairman Eric Schmidt and Intel CEO Brian Krzanich.

Trump previously had met with Microsoft cofounder Bill Gates, who reportedly compared the president-elect's efforts to transform the economy to John F. Kennedy's quest to revolutionize space exploration.

PayPal cofounder and noted Trump supporter Peter Thiel also was in attendance, functioning as the key liaison between the incoming administration and largely pro-Clinton Silicon Valley contingent.

Trump expressed interest in reconvening the attendees in the future, possibly on a quarterly basis.

Economic Impact

The U.S. economy is enormously dependent on Silicon Valley for job growth and innovation, notes a PriceWaterhouseCoopers report released Wednesday by the [Consumer Technology Association](#).

The tech industry supported 15 million jobs, contributed US\$413 billion in taxes, and contributed \$3.5 trillion in economic output in 2015, according to the report.

CTA is committed to working with the Trump administration on areas of mutual interest, including lowering corporate taxes, repatriating profits, immigration reform, reducing regulations and investing in infrastructure, said CEO Gary Shapiro.

"There is a lot of common ground, and largely thanks to Peter Thiel's personal efforts the incoming Trump administration has an unusual focus on making the tech segment more successful," said Rob Enderle, principal analyst at the [Enderle Group](#).

That is ironic, he continued, given that aside from Thiel, the tech segment "was massively behind Clinton," he told the E-Commerce Times.

Some of the conflicts between Trump and Silicon Valley may have been discussed at a smaller meeting held earlier in the week, Enderle noted, but Wednesday's high-profile meeting focused largely on areas such as removing government regulation, and making it easier and cheaper to sell domestically produced tech products.

There are a few important areas that did not appear to be on the agenda, he suggested, including on-shoring of manufacturing, taxing profits worldwide, and opening security to law enforcement.

Trump "has never had a problem with the immigration of highly qualified people that tech firms need," said Enderle, "and he is aggressively anti-regulation -- and tech firms love that."

Mutual Interest

Both Silicon Valley and the transition team need to build bridges in order to find areas of mutual benefit and cooperation, suggested telecom analyst [Jeff Kagan](#).

"Trump has been doing a great job of reaching out to both sides and bringing them together," he told the E-Commerce Times. "His agenda simply seems to be getting us all to work together to solve our problems and grow once again."


It might take a while for those on opposite ends of the political spectrum to find common ground, Kagan acknowledged, but there will have to be a level of mutual interest to help restart economic growth.

Many of the positions taken, along with the tone of the Trump campaign, created a great deal of consternation within the largely left-leaning Silicon Valley community, with many concerned about the potential implications not only on immigration and tax policies, but also on workplace diversity, open access to technology, and privacy rights -- issues that recently have been front and center within the industry.

[Silicon Valley Rising](#), which has been at the forefront of issues surrounding diversity and women's rights in Silicon Valley, urged the tech industry to confront the Trump transition team on those issues prior to Wednesday's meeting.

The incoming administration must be held to account, the group maintains.

"We don't know how the unpredictable Trump team will act going forward," said Derecka Mehrens, cofounder of Silicon Valley Rising.

"We hope the tech industry will stand with our community to defend human rights and the contribution of all immigrants," she told the E-Commerce Times, "from the programmers to the women who toil every night cleaning tech campuses." 

David Jones is a freelance writer based in Essex County, New Jersey. He has written for Reuters, Bloomberg, *Crain's New York Business* and *The New York Times*.

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