

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AFTER COVID-19

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IN THE AFTERMATH OF COVID-19, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION WILL BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

In a matter of weeks, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused global disruption. As countries across the world lock down their populations and close their borders, anxiety over economic disruption is growing.

At this point, no-one knows when or how this is going to end, nor what the impact on business at whole will be. But one thing is for sure: the COVID-19 aftermath will have to be approached with both resilience and creativity.

Professional services firms will be on the frontline when it comes to rebuilding a post-COVID business environment. Here's how you can prepare for the aftermath.

The Crisis as a Wake-Up Call for Businesses

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In the first weeks of the crisis, many businesses understandably went into survival mode. This included postponing or reviewing planned infrastructure and tech investments, including digital transformation projects. As many countries went into lockdown mid-March, Econsultancy and Marketing Week research found that half of the UK and US marketing professionals surveyed said that strategic initiatives in their companies had been delayed or reviewed. At the same time, 53% were planning to delay or review recruitment plans.

Several weeks later, however, many businesses are choosing to review those decisions. According to Sandy Shen, Senior Director Analyst at Gartner, “The value of digital channels, products and operations is immediately obvious to companies everywhere right now”. The impact has been widespread: research by Rakuten Intelligence has shown that order volume for online grocery retailers had increased by 210% in mid-March 2020, compared with the same period a year beforehand. While only 5% of British workers regularly worked from home in 2019, millions are now doing so.

The crisis has served as a digital “reality check” across industries, with the need for widespread remote working, an unprecedented boom in online shopping and a shift towards contactless payment methods creating new habits that may well be here to stay.



COVID-19 is Changing Digital Transformation Priorities



No-one was able to foresee the full impact of the pandemic, but that didn't stop many businesses from pivoting to offer crucial services during the crisis. From distilleries producing hand sanitizer to opera houses making protective equipment for healthcare workers, organisations are demonstrating their ability to shift resources towards priority areas. As the dust settles, the ability to transfer skills and investments over to digital platforms will enable companies to mitigate the negative impact of the crisis, both in the immediate aftermath and the years to come. Businesses would be well-advised to prioritise the following aspects:

- **Remote working capabilities**

Remote working will play an important role in the post-COVID "new normal". Not only are social distancing measures expected to continue for at least a few months, but companies are coming to realise that productivity doesn't necessarily depend on sharing the same office space. As a result, organisations are having to integrate the needs of a remote workforce into their digital transformation priorities.

- **Online customer experience**

Digital transformation projects should focus

on providing customers with optimal online experiences at a time when supply chains may continue to experience disruption and face-to-face contact remains limited. Businesses are advised to focus on leveraging technology to handle routine queries and operations, thus freeing up service reps to mitigate more complex situations. Options can include chatbots, smartphone apps, email or online self-service platforms.

- **Cybersecurity**

With more and more operations taking place online, security is more crucial than ever before. Furthermore, malicious actors are exploiting vulnerabilities in existing systems to their own advantage, leading to a spike in phishing attacks, malware and ransomware. Companies must act now to ensure the safety of their data and that of their clients.

Working to effectively reallocate resources and focus on priority areas will reinforce companies' ability to adapt to evolving needs and thus weather the storm. External expert advice will not only help ensure that resources are distributed correctly, but also provide much-needed support in a complex period for organisations across the board.

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