What's next for IT?

How could the present alter the perceptions and approach to IT?

To read the extended version of this article with added insights, visit Newsflash Online:

techdatanewsflash.co.uk/focus

Digital transformation was already driving rapid change, and the unprecedented events of the last few months may have accelerated that and changed attitudes to technology for good. In this special Focus feature, we look at the many different ways in which the worldwide pandemic could alter the perceptions and approach to IT.

Everyone has their own opinion about the global pandemic but one thing everyone tends to agree on is that the changes it brings will be permanent. Customer priorities and directions will shift and that could have really big implications for the IT industry.

Over the last few weeks, many more users have experienced what it's really like to work at home. They have enjoyed the time-saving and stress-busting benefits of not having to commute to work, but have also had to learn how to cope with the distractions of being at home.

Increasingly, organisations and users have ventured further into the cloud and started to use collaborative tools in earnest. Will they now be converts and evangelists to the cause? More people have started to use online ordering and services. Will that continue?

CONTINUE READING ▷

Fully tested

Business contingency and disaster recovery processes have been fully tested. Were they up to the task and what will companies want to change in this respect now? Organisations that had no such plans may now be looking to put them in place.

Ensuring good security and data protection was already a key goal, as well as a constantly moving target. But with everyone working at home, the goalposts have been moved again.

The necessary response to the outbreak has brought about some very swift changes to IT buying and consumption priorities. There has been a rush to acquire equipment to enable home working and to sign-up for cloud-based services. Some IT projects may have been accelerated, others have been put on hold with technical and IT staff unable to perform installations.

Changed priorities

There was some disruption to production and shipments in the earlier stages, and while this now seems to have abated for the most part, priorities may need to change, and manufacturers may need to build-in more contingency against unexpected events.

For the channel, with so many new technology developments taking place at such a rapid pace now, constant learning and knowledge development has become vital. Partnerships and networking have become more important too, but all face-to-face events have had to be cancelled for the foreseeable future. Tech Data went virtual with all events from the middle of March, for example.

Looking at the situation more broadly, the power and potential of artificial intelligence, as well as the importance of being able to gather and accurately analyse data, have been thrown into sharp relief.

The big question now is 'what will be the new normal?' How will things change and how will we – as a channel – need to change and adapt to meet customer needs?

HOME & REMOTE WORKING

Work comes home

The shift to working from home (WFH) translated into a spike in orders for products that enable home working. 'It put the focus on devices, VDI and collaboration software. We have seen a big demand for these solutions', Andy Brown, Technical Services Director at Tech Data, told us.

While it's hard to say where exactly this demand came from, Andy suspects it was mostly from companies who were scrambling to equip staff properly for home working, rather than those who were well-prepared and able to make the switch with relative ease.

Will the switch to home working be sustained? Andy Brown thinks it will. 'There will be a shift in favour of remote/home working at the expense of physical premises in my opinion, as businesses realise it is possible to run without the shop-front or physical office sites.'

As a result, there may be a change in approach to real-estate that will impact the commercial property market, as businesses switch to cloud-based central resources and allow their teams greater flexibility to work at home or in any other location.

> 'There will be a shift in favour of remote/home working at the expense of physical premises in my opinion...'
>
> **Andy Brown**
> Technical Services Director,
> Tech Data

CLOUD

Burst of activity sees cloud uptake accelerated

Cloud usage has been soaring over the past few weeks and there now looks to be a strong and sustained shift towards cloud and managed services. Microsoft said that over one seven-day period (11 – 18 March), the total number of new daily active users of its Teams collaboration service grew by 12 million, to reach 44 million worldwide. Microsoft also noted that over 650 organisations now had in excess of 10,000 Teams users.

There had already been strong and growing momentum behind Windows Virtual Desktop, and this has now accelerated further.

These are just some examples of the surge that all public cloud providers have seen and the important point is that Tech Data is ready to meet the demand and provide reseller partners with the support and resources they need to enable rapid adoption and use of cloud services.

COLLABORATION

A whole new experience

As millions have been compelled to work at home, there has been a huge surge in the use of collaboration applications and services. This set off a wave of demand for products that support effective collaboration, such as headsets, displays and IP cameras – as well as laptops and desktop accessories such as keyboards and mice.

As a consequence, the value of using video when conferencing has been highlighted and that's starting to change attitudes and buying intentions, said Anna-Marie Constantinou, Business Unit Director for Maverick AV Solutions.

'Previously, a lot of people would have used voice conferencing regularly but might not have seen or appreciated the value of having a full video and collaboration experience. Now they've seen that for themselves over a period of some weeks, we fully expect that to translate into higher demand for meeting-room set-ups back in the office.'
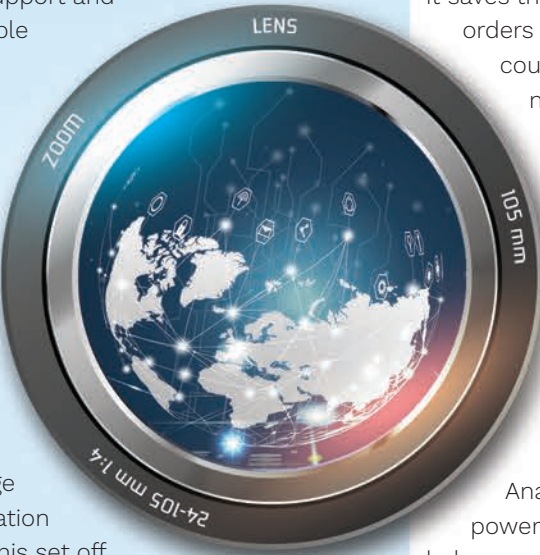
E-BUSINESS

Online becomes the preferred option

Tech Data's InTouch platform is the hub of its day-to-day business and during the period of enforced home-working, more customers have started to use it on a regular basis. The number of sessions initiated on the platform was up 44% in the period around the imposition of the UK lockdown.

'There has been a huge demand for InTouch. People need that remote access, because they can't always use the phone as easily as they could in the office and it's a one-stop shop, so they really can do everything they need to do there' said Jack Dingley, e-Commerce Business Development Manager at Tech Data.

The hope and expectation now is that the higher level of usage will continue. 'That's exactly what we are hoping for, because it is much more efficient and cost-effective, and it saves the customer time when they don't have to ring in orders every time. The sales team will still be there of course, and you will still be able to call but hopefully, more customers will start to make regular use of InTouch as well now.'

AI, ANALYTICS & INFRASTRUCTURE

Huge investment accelerates development

Analytics and IT – as well as immense compute power – are being harnessed across the globe to help researchers, health services, governments and other organisations to address the challenges that are now being presented to every nation, organisation and individual.

Last month, IBM was one of a number of companies that helped launch the COVID-19 High Performance Computing Consortium, which leverages vast computing power to support researchers in the development of treatments and potential cures. Amazon Web Services, Google Cloud, Microsoft and Hewlett Packard Enterprise are also backing this effort. Separately, Intel® and Lenovo partnered to donate a dedicated supercomputer cluster to genome sequencing specialist, BGI Genomics.

Ian Jeffs, Business Unit Director, Datacentre and Data Analytics at Tech Data, said there may well be a knock-on impact for these technologies once the current situation has abated. 'With any event such as this, you will get technology that has been developed finding its way into the market at some point. Huge amounts are being spent to develop algorithms and there will be findings that emerge from this that vendors can learn from and use in their technologies.'

BUSINESS CONTINGENCY & DISASTER RECOVERY

Being prepared

According to Andy Brown, Technical Services Director at Tech Data, businesses that were ready to go with the business contingency plans have really felt the benefit of being prepared. 'We've seen those businesses who had mature and tested BC plans able to react and transform quickly to the new business conditions and support staff to working from home much faster.

'Equally, those that did not have plans in place have been consumed by trying to reactively switch from office-based working.'

He fully expects there to be a surge of organisations wanting to put rock-solid BC plans in place once normal business activity resumes. 'Absolutely, you can guarantee it. BC plans will be looked at stringently. We can help by using the technical resources we have and their experience in designing solutions such as backup, recovery and archiving (BURA), BC, data replication, VDI, site failover and so on.'

EVENTS

Going virtual

Tech Data moved early to decide all its events should go virtual. 'We were quite quick off the mark,' said Linda Patterson, Group Marketing Director UK and Ireland for Tech Data. 'Early on, we went to our vendor partners and said we think there might need to be a delay, and initially a lot of the requests were to push events out and defer them to the next quarter. However, as it became more apparent that we might be in this for a bit of a long haul, there is more openness – certainly with the vendors I have spoken to – about using different methods.'

Webinars and collaboration tools are being used quite extensively and even round table group meetings are being held virtually. There is even some prospect of the big Tech Data Live event later in the year being staged as a virtual event, but this is yet to be finally decided.

After experiencing virtual events, there won't always be an assumption that events must be held in a fixed location to which everyone must travel. 'We have to work out the best options and formats for different types of events. It's been a real blessing that Tech Data is very technologically advanced and in having the resources and technology to allow people to work at home and events to be staged in a virtual environment.'

'Tech Data has a highly-experienced team who managed through the last financial crisis and, as always, we will do all we can to support our customers...'

Nick Tiltman
Credit and Finance Solutions Director, Tech Data

TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

Online learning gains credence

When the UK went into lockdown on 23 March, it meant that the Tech Data Academy had to suspend all classroom-based courses. Fortunately, it was ready to deal with such an eventuality, and delegates have responded very positively, said Richard Whitson, Academy Training Business Development Manager at Tech Data.

'Historically, classroom-based training has always been the most popular choice for customers, especially where content is highly technical. Attendees value the opportunity to question the instructor and classmates on how to apply generalised learning content to the specific issues they face in their own IT environment.'

With customers prevented from attending training centres, Tech Data switched to using its Individual Multimedia Video Presence (iMVP®) training environment. This enables anyone to attend instructor-led sessions from any location. It creates a high-quality virtual environment, giving attendees a fully-interactive experience with seamless two-way audio and video communication allowing them to share ideas and ask questions in real time.

Tech Data's Channel Academy can also act as a useful way to bring teams closer together. Sales managers can register all their sales team and get reports and updates on their progress and users can access and track their own learning as well. All resources can be accessed anytime and on any device.

You can register for the Tech Data Channel Academy online sales training at **channelacademy.techdata.com**.

The Tech Data Academy technical training resource continues to deliver a wide range of instructor-led classes using iMVP® including Microsoft, VMware, IBM and Cisco – the full schedule can be found at **academy.techdata.com/uk/schedule**. A short video demo of iVMP® can be also be found at **vimeo.com/222592818**. The range of on-demand technical training from the Tech Data Academy can be found at **academy.techdata.com/uk/on-demand**.

CREDIT & FINANCE

Experience counts

While it's too early to say what the longer-term impact might be on the channel in terms of finance, the immediate requirements have been to fund additional business and to stretch-out payment terms to some degree.

Nick Tiltman, Credit and Finance Solutions Director at Tech Data, said: 'We have obviously experienced an uplift in volumes, which places pressure on credit lines, but we have in the main been able to accommodate that. There have also been some increased requests for extended terms or payment holidays, and we are managing these on a case-by-case basis. There is also government support and deferred VAT and PAYE payments, which will help ease the strain on some SMB customers. Our insurers are being supportive as well.'

Having an experienced team in place has really helped, he noted. 'Tech Data has a highly-experienced team who managed through the last financial crisis and, as always, we will do all we can to support our customers at this unprecedented time. Our Finance solutions team are also working hard with our customers providing access to loans and leasing where required and possible.'

SECURITY

Taking security home

Security has been thrown further into the spotlight by recent events and the current situation has shifted the emphasis to securing remote workers and making sure they have access to the solutions they need, said Ali Nixon, Security Business Unit Director at Tech Data.

'The security challenges are simple. Firstly, the ability to allow access to data and key sensitive systems whilst not physically plugged into the corporate network. Secure VPN connections and multi-factor authentication solutions are on the rise. Most business do not license for 100% of the workforce to be working remotely at any one point, so this is an immediate challenge being addressed.'

Vendors are helping by providing offers and promotions on key products for business continuity solutions, Cisco has an offer on Dupo device authentication and RSA is running a series of webinars and promotions, for example.

In addition, Tech Data has pulled together a 'Securing the Home Office' service, which makes specialists available to help talk through the potential security risks and outline best practice scenarios with a fully remote workforce, and help partners attain the status of a trusted advisor with their customers.

LOGISTICS & SUPPLY CHAIN

Going the extra mile

The main impact for Tech Data's Logistics operations at Magna Park has been the increased strain on its personnel. They had to very quickly get used to stringent new processes that involve regular temperature scanning, social distancing and working at different hours, to mitigate risk as much as possible, or commit to overtime to maintain customer service levels.

Simon Coldwell, Logistics Director at Tech Data, has been massively impressed with the response. 'There are many people in supply chains working tirelessly to support businesses and maintain critical services. We've seen super-tight discipline and it has made me even more proud to work alongside such dedicated colleagues and support [security, cleaning and carrier] partners.'

While the situation will continue to change, it's not anticipated that the Logistics function will be further impacted in any significant way. But more customers may want to start making use of advanced configuration and drop-shipment capabilities to minimise physical contact points.

Tech Data – your trusted advisor

While the current situation is perhaps auguring one of the biggest shifts in attitudes and perceptions we have seen for some time, technology and its use in business, public services and by individuals, remains in constant development and evolution.

Whatever changes may come, Tech Data will continue to play its role as a trusted advisor to its customers, providing the products, services, enablement resources and support they need in order to grow sales, conduct profitable business, keep costs down and enhance customer satisfaction. We are here to make it easier for you both to meet the challenges your business faces and maximise the opportunities that you have today and in the future.

To read the extended version of this article with added insights, visit Newsflash Online:
techdatanewsflash.co.uk/focus