



BUSINESS AFTER COVID-19

Small Business Transformation

Objective

The purpose of digital transformation as it pertains to small business is to adapt to the new reality. New technologies are assets to use for growth. How can digital tools help business protect their actual position? How can they help small or young firms compete against large or established firms? How can they eliminate pain points, reduce friction, and accelerate success? These are the questions that every digital transformation initiative should strive to answer after the COVID-19 pandemic.

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INTRO

Public gatherings are being cancelled, schools are switching to online curriculums and the impact to political voting turnout is substantial. As small business leaders, we are faced with market uncertainty, disrupted supply chains and a sudden and immediate need for an effective work from home policy and digital transformation path.

While today a larger number of companies have a work from home workforce, many companies we see have mostly traditional work at the office setups. Albeit more modernized than years past, most companies still rely on a core business system, hosted on the corporate network, with key supporting files also hosted on a network file server.

In just a short period of time, COVID-19 is testing our plans to run our businesses with an entirely remote workforce. While some may argue the appropriateness of that response, the reality is breaking news continues to cite company after company going that route.

So, are you ready?

It's a question for all of us. We are testing our readiness as well, beginning with testing rolling work from home weeks for our Assurance, Tax and Advisory Practices. While we hope the current coronavirus disruption is short lived, it may be the next pandemic that necessitates a formalized ongoing response. Whether today or "tomorrow," being "work from home ready" is something that should jump to the top of the priority list for CEOs and board directors.

How You Can Be "Work from Home" Ready

Providing stable and secure access to your enterprise architecture and collaboration tools is essential. Even beyond a pandemic, business as usual should be supported by the following technologies to streamline your employees' work.

Enterprise Architecture

Gone are the days where every employee works out of one centralized monolithic ERP system that's locked down on the corporate network. Specialized applications now offer enhanced features for your industry and business model. Connecting those applications with the right technology interface and standard data models provides better enterprise insights with a lighter technical footprint. Hosting these in the cloud improves mobile access to systems and data, with better, faster and more secure connections.

Collaboration Tools

Remember the days when you had to log into the company VPN to access your business emails? It felt great to eventually remotely share project plans, financial models and reports on the file server. Skype and other communication tools further connected us with our laptops and phones. That evolution hit overdrive in the past few years. Strategic initiative tracking, cloud file sharing and video conferencing are enabling better collaboration than ever before, requiring no in-person presence.

In addition to mitigating business risk, investments in these technologies will equip your business to participate in the gig economy and satisfy the working style of millennials. Everyone is looking for ways to attract and retain the best talent; this is a positive step.

Looking at the Bigger Picture of Digital Business Transformation

Digital is a hot topic and represents various potential processes and technologies. Work from home enablement is a part of any larger, thoughtful digital plan.

Hardly New

Digital transformation isn't new. We've seen investments in ERP implementation, large-scale custom systems, workflow automations and reporting tools over the past two decades. However, these were often rigid in nature, designed without the end-user/stakeholder in mind, and thus failed to deliver on promised value.

What's Changed?

Rather than focusing on discrete functions and individual tools, a new frontier of digital technology can support the enterprise-wide ecosystem. And it's reinventing the workplace at this very moment.

Leading organizations are focusing on decoupling growth with human capital needs, and these organizations are making investments to ensure their resources are being optimally deployed with a focus on high value work.

What are the Opportunities of Digital Transformation?

The possibilities are seemingly endless regarding how deploying thoughtful digital strategies and tactics throughout your company can enhance the business:

- Agility & Efficiency
- Enhancing the customer experience by delivering products/ services real-time and on-demand
- Streamlined and digitalized processes
- Hyper ability to manage selling, general and administrative (SG&A) costs
- Integrated Community
- Streamlined communication and interactions across the entire enterprise
- Closer interaction with customers
- Growth and development centric employee culture
- Differentiating Capabilities
- Integrated, holistic decision-making ability
- Building the culture and processes that seamlessly support the integration of the human and digital resource
- Better Decisions
- Enhanced ability to solve current and future business problems
- Ability to accelerate idea incubation to execution

By-and-large, enterprises have invested more heavily in transforming their customer facing systems and processes. Their success has been limited due to a lack of similar investment in

the back-office. The biggest opportunity, and the key to success, is to focus on designing and executing digital solutions that seamlessly integrate customer-facing and back-office processes. Below outlines the full spectrum of digital transformation.

Telecommuting

Everything you need to know before offering your employees flexible work.

Remote workers. Mobile professionals. Digital nomads. Road warriors. Call them what you will, but telecommuters are driving the future of work.

Telecommuting was once shrugged off as another trend for choosy millennials. Now, it's an accepted approach to how we work (and live) and an opportunity for hiring managers to cast a global net. The World Economic Forum calls it "one of the biggest drivers of transformation" in the workforce.

But some employers still aren't sure whether to take the plunge, worried that allowing employees to work from home means they'll never work. As it happens, the opposite is true.

If you're curious about why so many people are going virtual or how it could benefit your business, this is the guide for you. Let's explore how the world of remote work works and what you'll need to get started.



Telecommuting means working remotely, from home or another location outside the office.

What Types of Companies Offer Telecommuting?

Telecommuting isn't a catch-all solution. Activities that require face-to-face contact, equipment handling, or some sort of physical presence don't lend themselves well to remote environments.

As a rule of thumb, remote-friendly work falls into two categories: It's online, and/or it's independent. Telecommuting works particularly well for companies in the following industries:

Sales and marketing
Customer service

Healthcare
Computer and information technology
Education and training
Administration

Telecommuting companies of all sizes report multimillion-dollar cost savings from blanket telework programs. Of course, some roles translate to virtual environments better than others. Most companies evaluate eligibility on a case-by-case basis, according to the candidate's job requirements, past performance, and time in the role.

What about hiring remote workers? You have a few options. Remote-specific job boards like **FlexJobs**, **Remote.co**, **We Work Remotely**, **Remote OK**, and **Jobspresso** target (but can't guarantee) people with remote experience. You could also post the job on LinkedIn, Indeed, or your job search engine of choice, making it clear that remote is an option.

Telecommuting benefits both employers and employees, but it isn't without its drawbacks. Let's compare both sides.

For Your Business

The best telecommuters are rare creatures. Not everyone can self-regulate and communicate effectively from anywhere.

On the plus side, you're saving office space, which means there's no need to worry about your company's potential growth. And here's the interesting part: Office space for the average worker costs about \$11,000 per year. Limiting manpower reduces major overhead while doing the environment a solid. Even better, you increase employee satisfaction and retention, which leads us to the pros and cons.

For Employees

Developing the self-motivation and discipline needed to work from home is arguably more challenging than finding it. Some remote workers also report feeling lonely or directionless.

But if done right, telecommuting reaps big rewards. While saving time, money, and the planet, most telecommuters find that working from home (or coffee shop, or cabin in the woods) creates a work-life balance, a distraction- and stress-free environment, and a greater sense of control over their work.

Together, these benefits make for happy employees. And happy employees are usually great employees. An enormous 91% of remote workers feel more productive working at home. So, the more remote workers, the bigger the dent in the trillions of dollars U.S. companies lose to productivity issues each year and the greater your workforce retention. It's a no-brainer, right?

For Both Employer and Employee

Well, not quite. It's important that your candidate's priorities align with your own.

For example, is in-person collaboration more important to your company than making room for future growth? Perhaps it's not the right time for your employees to telecommute yet. However, you might be willing to invest in tech that makes remote team-building much smoother.

Consider what you're willing to trade off. Then, find a compromise.

With that foundation laid, you're ready to set formal boundaries.

Telecommuting Policy: Why Your Business Needs One

In any area of your business, time or resource constraints can put policymaking on the back burner. The same is true with telecommuting, especially on a casual or temporary basis. Though nearly two-thirds of companies allow telecommuting, fewer than half have formalized a policy.

So, are they necessary? The short answer: Yes.

In a remote workforce, there's greater potential for unclear expectations. Miscommunication can quickly escalate without a policy in place. With one, you set clear goals from the start.

How to Create a Telecommuting Policy

You won't find a perfect set of parameters for every business. Feel free to adjust according to legal requirements in your industry and consult legal counsel. For the most part, though, your telecommuting policy should cover the following:

Eligibility and approval

Flexibility

Equipment and cybersecurity

Workspace and location

Communication

Dependent care

For each clause, ask yourself a few important questions:

Eligibility and Approval

Do you need a formal process for vetting and approving remote employees? Are you looking for specific attitudes or work ethics in your candidates (like strong communication or responsiveness)? Should they go through supervisors or higher up the chain of command?

Flexibility

How many days per week can employees telecommute, if not full time? Does it depend on seniority or other factors? Should your employees be reachable during core business hours? Or do they have the freedom to choose as they get the job done?

Equipment and Cybersecurity

Will you provide your remote workers with any equipment (such as computers, phones, desks, or office supplies)? Who owns and maintains it? Are passwords enough to protect your corporate data, or do you need encryption and GPS tracking? Should employees avoid unsecured coffee-shop WIFI?

Workspace and Location

Should your employee work in a dedicated office space? Should that be secure, too? Is it safe? Check with your legal team, but you may be liable for injuries within work hours. As for location, should telecommuters stay within a certain radius or are you limited by country or state?

Communication

What are the best ways for employees to contact you? Will you set regular check-in calls? Perhaps less-frequent (monthly or quarterly) on-site requirements? How can you make yourself and your remote worker's team as approachable as possible?

Dependent Care

Whether it involves the kids or the dog, telecommuting is not a substitute for dependent care. You can and should make exceptions for sick family members, but employees need to design a schedule for dedicated work.

Expect candidates to make a case for their individual needs but try stick to the same rules for everyone. Consistency trumps the favoritism card.

That said, you may need to update your policy as you learn what's working and what's not.

Best Practices for Remote Team Management

Now that we've covered the pros, cons, policies, and what other telecommuting companies are doing, we'll wrap up with four best practices for managing the remote team of dreams.

Use a communication platform.

Virtual communication doesn't have to be a roadblock. Often better planned, phone- and web-based conferences cut through water-cooler chatter and impromptu meetings to get things done.

Try a video and audio-conferencing tool like WebEx, Zoom, Skype for Business, or Slack. And not just to collaborate. Get creative with ways to build trust and connections in your team, like sharing wacky office photos or setting up dedicated "fun" chats.

Head to the cloud.

It's easy to lose track of projects within a dispersed team. Take advantage of cloud-based file hosting providers like Dropbox and Google Drive to sync and store work online. Trello, Basecamp, or one of these project management tools can also keep everyone organized and track productivity.

Don't be a stranger.

You don't want to micromanage employees, but you do want to be available and supportive, track progress, and keep them in the loop. How about regular coaching? A weekly one-to-one should do it. A quarterly meet-up or yearly off-site goes the extra mile in making remote workers feel part of the team.

Celebrate success.

Technically, feedback is part of coaching. But it's more important and easier to forget when working remotely, so it deserves its own spot here.

Involve the entire team.

Get face time when possible to deliver constructive criticism the way it's intended. When your employee does a great job, let them know!

It may sound obvious, but some supervisors don't realize they've left remote workers hanging — or the negative effects. Positive (and detailed) feedback builds amazing team spirit.

Not fully on board yet? Here's your biggest takeaway: Test and tweak as you learn what works for you and your workforce. Start small with a handful of employees, measure productivity and roll out a larger telecommuting structure if all goes well.

But if you're sold, go for it! Considering the positive impact on the business and its people, telework is worth considering before your competitors do. Involvement creates a great feedback culture.

Food, restaurant and service industry

Food Industry

Fast-flying social media. Rising material and labor costs. Agricultural inputs insecurity. Shrinking margins. Constantly changing consumer preferences. Fresher. More convenient. Local. Organic. There is no question this is one of the most challenging times for the food manufacturing sector, but it is also one of the most exciting and hopeful. In the Middle East and North Africa, and globally, these challenges are arising at the same time as digital industrial solutions are increasingly available.

From the Industrial Internet of Things to connected factories to predictive maintenance and intelligent asset strategies, the dramatically lower costs of smart sensors, the cloud, big data, and analytics is providing the tools food and beverage companies of all sizes need to overcome today's challenges and prepare for tomorrow's opportunities. This digital tornado represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make not just incremental improvements, but a transformative step-change across a company's manufacturing operations.

The food and beverage industry are experiencing a period of transition and challenge. Large global consumer packaged goods companies are facing shrinking margins and lower growth, with the security of agricultural inputs an emerging challenge. Gulf countries, for example, have joined Asian countries such as China in looking to secure agricultural supply through the purchase of farmland in Africa and beyond.

Consumer packaged goods companies, which have been consolidating over the past decade, are looking for ways to spur growth at a time when smaller, more agile brands are expanding

quickly, spurred on by consumer preference for local, authentic, healthy, organic products that speak to their values. As well, consumer packaged goods companies face a world with fewer untapped markets, so growth cannot rely only upon emerging markets.

Change management thinking: there is no doubt that the impact of digital industrial solutions can be dramatic. However, the process of moving a company into the digital world is as important as the technology itself. It is a journey that is very different from any type of IT implementation. For starters, it is a process that can only succeed if the leadership is fully committed and driving the change. It is a precondition. If the CEO and top leadership do not believe, then do not start. The driving force for this change must come from the top, with the leadership saying, this is what we want to do.

Because so much collaboration is required within a company undergoing a digital transformation, the whole culture must be ready. If there is not a general feeling that this is the way to leapfrog competition, it is difficult to make much progress. Digital transformation drives industrial operations efficiency improvements by accessing the right information at the right time to make the right decision. To get its full impact, everyone must be on board.

The transition also must be focused on solving specific problems, for example, addressing a high defect rate or frequent unplanned maintenance. Do not talk about the new technology. Talk about the pain, the problem you want to solve. Moving to decision-making that is guided by applications is a big shift for those working in the plant as well. It is important, to involve operators and supervisors in the design and implementation of any digital industrial solution. This not only helps ensure the solution will address real pain points, but it also builds more ownership in the new system and creates champions within the organization.

Increasingly, integration will be a defining feature of the food and beverage industry, both regionally and globally. Manufacturing plants will use integration to achieve the operational performance required to remain competitive, while linkages among suppliers, consumer packaged goods companies, and retailers are needed to drive out inefficiencies and address customer needs with pinpoint accuracy. This integration will be built on digital industrial solutions and Industrial Internet of Things capabilities.

For food and beverage manufacturers to be part of this future, they must begin the process today. That is not only because adopting these solutions now provides a competitive advantage, but also because the digital transformation process takes time to become fully operational and advantageous. The benefits, though, are huge.

20% performance improvements today; new business models and revenue streams tomorrow; and future proofing to ensure manufacturers are ready for the food and beverage sector that will use integration to deliver lean supply chains and just-in-time manufacturing to meet highly targeted and fluctuating consumer demand.

Restaurant Industry

It should come as little surprise that the restaurant industry is highly adept at embracing rapid change and innovation. From ordering apps to kiosks, loyalty programs and artificial intelligence, quick serves today are harnessing technology to meet evolving consumer preferences for improved speed and ease of check-out. A recent report revealed that the online ordering business grew 23 percent in the U.S. last year.

As the industry continues its robust growth—with consumer spending totaling \$299.6 billion in 2018, nearly double what consumer spending was 15 years ago— many leading quick-service restaurants are embracing digital transformation to capture greater market share.

Since consumers, particularly millennials and Gen Z, are especially digitally savvy, there is growing expectation that restaurants must adopt new technologies to offer better in-store and online experiences. This expectation is most pronounced when it comes to placing orders. A recent market survey found that 39 percent of quick-serve guests placed their meal orders using a smartphone app. This represents a significant increase from 2015 when ordering by mobile device was only 11 percent. This same report found that 28 percent used a kiosk and 27 percent used a tablet to place their order.

Gift cards, also known as branded currency, is presenting new sales growth opportunities for quick-service restaurants, while enhancing customer loyalty and reducing the overall cost of payments. First Data's 18th Annual Prepaid Consumer Insights Study found that for the fifth year in a row spending lift from gift cards is on the rise. The survey found that for every gift card purchased, consumers are typically spending on average \$59 more than the original value of their card.

Another important trend in quick service is connected commerce, which brings together the convenience of online technology and the proven brand attraction of brick-and-mortar stores. Connected commerce leverages the latest technology to bring added value to the consumer and the merchant alike. One such example involves a popular quick-serve that was struggling with lunch-hour traffic at its stores. Drive-thru line-ups wrapped around the block and the que was equally long in the lobby area. This was creating frustration for customers and jeopardizing sales. By launching a mobile app for ordering, the quick-serve was able to remove some of the choke points around POS and the squawk box, speeding up orders and increasing same store sales – a win/win for customers and the business.

Another example of connected commerce in action involved a major chain that introduced a mobile application enabling customized food selections. Customers could add food items to their menu choices without feeling pressured at the POS. Even though these add-ons increased the price of the selections, customers appreciated the ability to create items that were uniquely their own. Not only did this increase basket size per order, but by enabling customers to share their customization choices with friends, the concept ended up going viral. In addition, this made repeat purchases that much easier because customized choices could be saved in the app.

Many quick serves are introducing self-service ordering kiosks to allow customers to control their own ordering experience instore. Research has shown that about 31 percent of surveyed quick-service guests have used a kiosk, while 54 percent of those say they expect to use a kiosk within the next year. The same study found that kiosks in general have a higher margin than counter orders, delivering an average lift of 15–30 percent per check. Connected commerce has seamlessly integrated multiple aspects of the customer experience to take quick-service restaurant digital and bring value to all participants in the value chain. It enables merchants to promote lower cost payment options to consumers, such as ACH, along with loyalty offers and other promotions. This provides another win/win for customers and merchants as patrons earn rewards, while merchants drive down the cost of payments.

Another key component of today's digital transformation is the leveraging of customer data and analytics to lower the cost of customer acquisition. More and more quick serves are looking to tap into data around customer behavior and purchases in order to make highly contextual offers. Take for instance when a quick-service restaurant collects data on a customer and recognizes they have already eaten their main meal. Armed with this knowledge, they present that customer an offer for a cup of coffee, a snack, or maybe a dessert item. Consumers are more appreciative of these types of targeted offers because they are more relevant.

Quick serves today are increasingly focusing on the opportunities presented by digital transformation. Many are embracing technologies that enhance the quality of the customer dining experience, delivering more of what consumers are clamoring for.

Service Industry

Digital disruptions have transformed how companies and their customers interact. This is especially true in the professional services industry. Channels, business models, and revenue streams are being transformed by apps, cloud computing, machine learning, and on-demand digital services. Executives are being forced to turn to digital transformation to stay competitive.

But is the professional services industry on the right track?

Two areas affected by digital transformation within the professional services industry include:

Linear talent acquisition: Talent today has evolved substantially over the last 10 years. Collaboration apps, mobility, the globalization of talent, and the resourcefulness of digitally savvy professionals has produced a new class of workers. This has contributed to the fact that 38% of the workforce is now considered “non-employees.”

The growth of services automation: The rise of new technologies, including cloud computing, Big Data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, has enabled automation of repetitive and predictable tasks. Some of this automation can now be managed by bots. Bots are taking the place of admins, customer service representatives, data researchers, and executive assistants. At the same time, cognitive technology solutions can learn to analyze data, build models, test strategies, and make recommendations to decision-makers.

What these changes mean:

First, expertise is being digitized. A combination of advanced smart automation and on-demand talent sourcing is allowing professional services firms to address changing capacity issues with minimal investment (risk). It is unclear how much of the deep analysis and insights workload will shift from human workers to sophisticated machine learning and cognitive solutions, but the shift is underway. Firms that take advantage of these technologies are likely to enjoy a significant competitive advantage in the coming years.

Second, on-demand talent acquisition is mirroring the shift to on-demand IT. Just as on-premises IT investments have been shifting to a hybrid model of on-premises and cloud-based solutions, talent investments are shifting towards a hybrid model of employees and contingent workers. Through this digitally enabled model, firms are not as limited by their budgets as they once were and can now staff up or down as needed and generate non-linear growth.

Increasing the ratio of remote and contingent workers presents new challenges for business leaders, HR professionals, recruiters, and project managers. There are cost efficiencies of being able to hire and access expertise on demand.

Access to online skills development and training for employees adds a new dimension of agility and value creation for firms looking to develop their employees and help them upgrade their skills. The same access to training and professional development can be leveraged to fill knowledge and skills gaps for contingent workers before assigning them critical tasks. This ability to skill-up on demand is an integral element of this new digitally enabled hybrid model of talent management.

Third, execution is being digitized. Technology helps firms automate and scale service delivery. They can expect lower costs, higher revenues, and improved outcomes. For smaller firms, this lowers barrier of entry. These firms can now address the challenges that kept them from competing. As capacity scales, firms will find themselves in a position to leverage talent and technology. They will be able to develop new types of services or find ways of delivering services in new formats.

As collaboration tools become more intuitive, teams will learn to work better together. This access to specialized solutions allows professional services firms to run processes and provide a consumer-grade experience for users.

Data analytics and automation solutions allow firms to identify problem areas and opportunities. This will generate deeper insights in real time. It will also inject more precision into predictive models.

Last, the next digitization frontier focuses on customer engagement. One aspect of the digitization of business that we shouldn't overlook is the increasing consumerization of customer acquisition, development, and retention. A combination of technologies enables firms to anticipate customer needs and improve operations. The same solutions allow for a faster response across all channels.

Virtual Events

Nowadays, plenty of business is done virtually.

For instance, you might begin your morning by answering emails and editing a colleague's blog post via Google Doc. Your colleague is working from home today, so you Slack him to let him know when the piece is ready.

In the afternoon, you have a 1:1 via WebEx with your remote manager.

Then, around 4 PM, you log into a company's webinar to learn more about Social Media Marketing in 2020. The webinar has a panel of experts, and you're able to download the recorded webinar later for future reference.

Undoubtedly, online tools and experiences are an integral part of a modern marketer's role.

However, there is one aspect of business that seems, until recently, almost entirely untouched by virtual experience: conferences.

Our historic mindset around conferences is that we board a plane to a conference, bring our business cards, and prepare ourselves for a week of keynote speakers, breakout sessions, and networking events that enable us to spread the word about our own products and services, while collaborating with other marketers who might have useful tools or suggestions of their own.

In 2020 after Covid-19, there will likely be a rise of virtual conferences. Here, let's explore the benefits of virtual conferences, look at some examples of successful virtual conferences to inspire you, and check out a few tools that can help you plan your own.

But first — let's talk about why virtual conferences can benefit your business in the future.

Virtual Conference Benefits

There are plenty of major benefits to hosting a virtual conference.

For one, it can lower the price of admission, enabling smaller businesses with limited budgets to purchase tickets to your conference and offer their own unique insights.

It also lowers the cost your business would have to pay for conference space, on-hand staff, catering, security, and much more.

Additionally, it allows people from across the globe to interact with each other without needing to spend exorbitant amounts on flights and hotels. Imagine how much easier it is for marketers from India, Ireland, Australia, and the U.S. to collaborate virtually, rather than trying to gather in-person.

It also may help you attract high-demand speakers who don't have the time to commit to an in-person conference but are happy to share industry takeaways via a quick video call or pre-recorded presentation.

Additionally, a virtual conference enables you to create a product — recordings from your conference — that you can continue to share and use as a lead generation tool for months and years after the initial live launch.

And, finally, there's the obvious: sometimes unforeseen circumstances can make in-person conferences in certain locations simply impossible.

If you are shifting from a live event, try to add extra value to the viewers who are now tuning in online. Do an extra session. Offer more Q&A time. Give an extra special offer. Find creative ways to add extra delight moments.

The Cloud

The cloud refers to a centralized location on the internet that stores data, making it accessible anytime, anywhere, from any connected device. Businesses both large and small have embraced the cloud because it has several benefits. Financial institutions and banks also use cloud services as the reach and serve an ever more global customer base.

The cloud-based business allows workers and customers to interact on a regular basis, even if they are on opposite sides of the globe.

Small Business Cloud File Storage

Cloud storing files—instead of on-site—can save a significant amount of money in hardware costs. People have access to and can work with documents they don't have in their personal possession.

Saving and accessing files on the cloud is easy, making it an attractive option, even for nontechnical small business owners.

Flexibility and Automation

The cloud and the way you use it can grow and change as your business needs grow and change. Instead of having to invest in information technology to keep your file storage system updated and maintained, most applications that use the cloud automatically update themselves.

Of course, there also are negatives to using the cloud. Security of data and loss of complete control over that data are serious concerns. However, there are ways to protect your data to ensure it always remains accessible and secure. In most cases, the benefits far outweigh the risks for small business owners. Also, if anything should happen to files stored on one cloud server like a massive power outage you can still access the information stored there through other servers.

Here are some of the ways small businesses can use the cloud. Review this list and how it applies to your business as you explore how the cloud can help you use technology to do more with less.

Data Backup

As a small business owner, you probably are already aware of the importance of backing up your data. The Cloud simplifies the process by allowing your data to update as you work automatically. It also creates copies of your data off-site where it will be safe from any local natural disaster, theft, or malfunction.

Mobile Working

One of the great benefits of technology is the ability for small business owners to create fully functional mobile offices. The cloud fits in perfectly with this because it allows you to access and sync your data from wherever you are, allowing you to take your office with you on the road.

Information Sharing

Whether you have in-house staff, or a team spread across a distance, the cloud makes sharing data effortlessly. Once you have your data backed up, sharing files can be as easy as sending a link, eliminating the cumbersome process of emailing large files.

File Storage

Many small businesses use images, audio, and video to enhance their marketing activities. These files often take up a significant part of your hard drive space, which can be costly. The cloud allows you to shift the storage of large files off your local system, saving local storage for the files you need to access every day.

Growth Planning

The cloud is scalable, so it allows small businesses to create a plan for growth that utilizes the benefits of the cloud without a significant up-front investment. You can start small and gradually increase your usage over time, paying only for the services and access you need. The cloud is also self-managed by the apps that provide the services, so you can eliminate or reduce the need for an in-house IT staff to manage your technology.

Small business owners who want to reduce costs without sacrificing their ability to do business and compete with larger companies are using the cloud. If you are ready to put the cloud to work for your business, you can start small, so you can see the benefits without making major changes to your operations. Over time, you will discover new ways to use and benefit from the cloud

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: SOLVING TRADITIONAL PROBLEMS WITH TECHNOLOGY



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Customer focus

Before a digital transformation can truly begin, the company must switch its mindset from being -focused to being customer-focused. The driving force behind technology decisions should be customers, and the goal should be to make their lives easier instead of making things easier for the organization. A customer focus is the basis for all other digital transformation decisions

Organizational structure.

Companies need to break down internal silos to create a cohesive organization that embraces change. That means getting executives and leaders on board with the new digital vision.

Change management

Change is hard, no matter how much it will benefit the company. One of the most common reasons digital transformations fail is because employees don't support them. The most effective change management efforts are aligned with the modern, dynamic business environment.

Transformational leadership

A successful digital transformation starts from the top with leaders who drive employees towards the vision. Every executive and leader must play a role in championing digital change and uniting the digital transformation with the company's larger, long-term goals.

Technology decisions

Digital transformation impacts the entire organization, not just one department. An average of 15 people is involved in most technology purchase decisions, which means that everyone's voices need to be heard.

Integration

All data systems need to work together and be integrated into the company's internal processes. A streamlined data strategy is required for a successful digital transformation.

Internal customer experience

When focusing on digital solutions for customers, companies also need to consider their internal customers—employees. Getting employee feedback and providing consumer-grade technology solutions empowers employees to provide an amazing experience.

Logistics and supply chain

Digital transformation can be powerful in improving the speed and reliability of the supply chain, from how fast products are manufactured to the speed and efficiency of order fulfillment and delivery. To fully leverage a transformation, companies need to look at how the supply chain can be digitized and improved.

Data security, privacy and ethics

Adopting new digital solutions opens the doors to new questions about data security. Most consumers think their personal data is at risk, which means that adopting company-wide standards for privacy and security should be top of mind. With the many examples of "Zoom Bombing" last week, with hackers sneaking into people's private meetings — again we are

reminded that any data breach or hack can erode your brand. School districts are now looking to alternatives to Zoom.

Evolution of products, services and processes

Digital transformation requires a change in thinking about how an organization delivers its products and services, and even the products and services themselves. Successful companies push past what's always been done to find the most efficient and innovative solutions.

Digitization

Digital transformation touches all areas of the organization and blurs the line between digital and physical stores. That means moving past segmented operations to digitize every aspect of the business.

Personalization

Digital transformation provides unparalleled opportunities to offer personalized service to customers. Leverage digital solutions to understand customers and provide recommendations and experiences that are unique to them.

Digital transformation is an ongoing process, which means continually working through these 12 steps. Change and venturing into the unknown can be difficult, but the benefits that come from creating a forward-thinking, customer-focused, digital company can be lasting. Perhaps this is the silver lining for businesses in the age of COVID-19, forced change can be positive - for your employees, partners and customers.