

How technology will help shape the evolution of work in 2021 and beyond

 By [Robin Fisher](#)

23 Dec 2020

We have learned this year the true meaning of digital transformation across every industry. That is, reimagining businesses to better serve customers and understand their needs, and having the agility to respond to changing circumstances. Where many organisations may previously have thought that digital transformation was a nice-to-have, today it is imperative.



Robin Fisher, area VP of Salesforce - emerging markets

With a new year, a new set of challenges will come. While there will always be unknowns, we can expect businesses to increasingly look to technology to help them survive, recover and grow. Flexibility will be key to delivering the digital-first experiences that customers and employees demand. Access to data and artificial intelligence (AI) tools will help companies to revolutionise their customer experience. What's more, in 2021 customers will increasingly expect companies to deliver a demonstrable positive impact on the communities they serve.

The development of technology will continue to shape the way we do business, the future of work, as well as provide opportunities for companies to make a positive difference to the world around them.

Serving the digital-first customer in a digital-first world

This year we learned just how quickly consumers can adapt new technologies to stay connected with loved ones, to shop and access essential services online. As market trends and customer expectations evolve faster than ever, in 2021 businesses must innovate at pace.

We're likely witnessing the end of the two to three-year digital transformation project; value needs to be delivered within months. In the digital economy, speed of implementation, cost and value to the organisation and to customers, as well as to competitiveness will measure the success of the digital transformation.



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As the demand for online retail and consumer goods increases, global digital revenues have grown by 54% year-to-date, and so will companies' use of AI-powered technologies to engage and serve customers.

Beyond restaurants and health service providers, for instance, we'll see the continued rise of the appointment economy, guaranteeing convenience virtually and in-person. Bots, too, should become an integral part of company strategies to support customers 24/7. From virtual try-ons to smarter delivery and pickup options, every customer experience must be connected, personalised and seamless - from whatever device they're using, and whichever store they're visiting.

Technologies that fuel the needs of today's customer

Covid-19 presented a moment of truth for businesses. Many were not as streamlined and resilient as they once thought. In 2021, saving costs whilst boosting resilience will be top of mind for every Chief Information Officer (CIO) and business leader. We can expect the simplifying, streamlining and digitalising of processes - including channel portfolios.

Take, for example, the financial sector where banks may close a significant proportion of brick-and-mortar branches. How companies seek to provide all of the services and experiences that customers expect on their smartphones instead will have a far-reaching impact upon their business models.



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Companies leveraging cloud computing have shown us what it means to be resilient in time of crisis. These migrations will only accelerate in 2021 - enabling scalability, availability and accessibility of information from any location. When, where, and how a company deploys these tools will set leaders ahead of the pack.

Increased automation, AI, as well as forecasting models will help them to better predict and prepare for what the future may bring. To make the most of these technologies, data literacy skills must be foundational to every role at every level of an organisation.

The evolution of work-from-anywhere

It's fair to say that how we work has changed forever. Take health and safety, for instance. While many people will continue to work from home throughout 2021, ensuring the wellbeing of those who do return to physical workplaces will require a huge cross-functional effort. We can expect the office experience to be recreated, to become more intentional.

The ways that companies communicate will also evolve. Those which have opened unprecedented access to their leadership team, providing regular updates to keep teams informed, engaged and productive, will want to keep these lines of communication open as we emerge from the pandemic.



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With regard to where we work, this year has shown that working from home can be a legitimate option. In 2021 and beyond, it's important for employers to continue to explore new, flexible work models.

We can expect businesses to create new HR packages and technical capabilities to attract and retain the hybrid worker - and brands to market new products which tailor to their lifestyle needs. Meanwhile, flexible arrangements can offer greater life-work balance and create a more equal workplace by increasing talent pools.

Business must be an even greater platform for change

We are in the midst of several crises at once - a health crisis, an economic crisis, and climate crisis. The importance of a business's role in corporate citizenship has been cemented and the urgency for businesses to give back to communities has never been greater.

Solutions like technology trees and collaboration will play an important role in reimagining how we do business and create the change that the planet needs. Together, we can take this moment to invest in a more resilient and inclusive economy. In 2021, the role of business as a platform for change will no longer be the exception, but the standard.

ABOUT ROBIN FISHER

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