

THE ANYWHERE OFFICE OF TOMORROW

Five Strategic Areas Defining Anywhere Ops in 2021

From Chaos Comes Order

When I think about the impact of Covid-19, I'm reminded of the humble fire ant of the Amazon. Like most ants, the fire ant nests underground, and they do so in relative safety. That is, until their nests flood during the wet season.

But rather than resigning to their fate, the fire ants scramble, saving their young, protecting their queen and organizing themselves into a tight-knit formation. From the chaos comes order. The entire colony lock legs to form a cohesive unit. With the aid of tiny hairs on their legs, they trap pockets of air between their bodies. As the flood waters look to engulf them, they defy all odds and float away on a life raft made of the fire ants themselves. Eventually, they find safety on a tree above the waters where they wait out the floods. When they subside, the fire ants return to their normal.

As in nature, so it has been in the world of business over the last year. The fortunate businesses have found innovative ways to stay afloat while others have seen their entire industry decimated. But through it all, technology has helped us stay connected, acting as our very own digital life raft keeping us afloat, allowing us to tackle new challenges and opportunities. And they have done so by empowering workforces to work from anywhere, enabling them to survive the flood.

So as we return to some form of normality later this year, one thing is for certain: our solely office-based lives are well and truly over. Digital transformations are accelerating, ushering in a new age of the anywhere office – with its own unique challenges to overcome. The question for business leaders is this: When the floods subside, how will the world of work have changed for you? Will you be ready?

In this report, we bring together cutting-edge thought leadership from across the C-Suite, highlighting the five key elements of the Anywhere Operation of tomorrow: Workspaces; Culture; Cloud; Experience; and Cybersecurity.

Special thanks to our contributors Jon Cosson, Lisa Forte, Cecilia Harvey, Ed Hodges, Björn Goß, P-O Johansson, Colin Manson, Ade McCormack, Laurence Parkes, James Stewart, and Gunjan Verma for taking part in this and sharing their expert views.



Craig McCartney
Managing Director
CEO.digital

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020 forced many enterprises and businesses to go fully digital, whether they wanted to or not. As the end of the pandemic comes into sight, the recession deepens, and the world tentatively plans to reopen for business, new strategies are needed to fuel recovery – and growth. Organisations can no longer take the reactionary approach that we saw last year. We need a proactive strategy, one that has flexibility built in. Digital technology is playing a central role in this fight.

Through a recent survey and a series of interviews with senior and C-Suite thought leaders in technology, we aimed to discover the top strategic areas for businesses in 2021. What we learned is, while there are individual challenges ahead, most businesses will face one major hurdle this year: how to establish a truly Anywhere Operation.

Our findings revealed five key strategic areas C-Suite leaders are looking at this year. We learned how organisations are fuelling digital collaboration, returning to the office, and how they are connecting with customers on an omnichannel basis. We also heard about the unique challenges of cybersecurity, corporate culture, and data strategy this year. But tying it altogether is a central business mission: to build a truly Anywhere Operation that unites companies and ensures they can meet whatever challenges the future might hold.

We hope you enjoy the insights we've gathered from a range of C-Suite leaders, and hope they help you rethink your own strategies as you migrate to Anywhere Operations.

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Anywhere Operations Is the New Reality

Overnight in 2020, office-bound companies were forced to adopt remote working. That rapid shift towards offsite operations meant departments across the organisation had to find new ways of working – and all those new processes were underpinned by IT. But the urgency of the situation had one fatal flaw: it meant IT (and the organisation at large) had to adopt short-term fixes to keep the ball rolling.

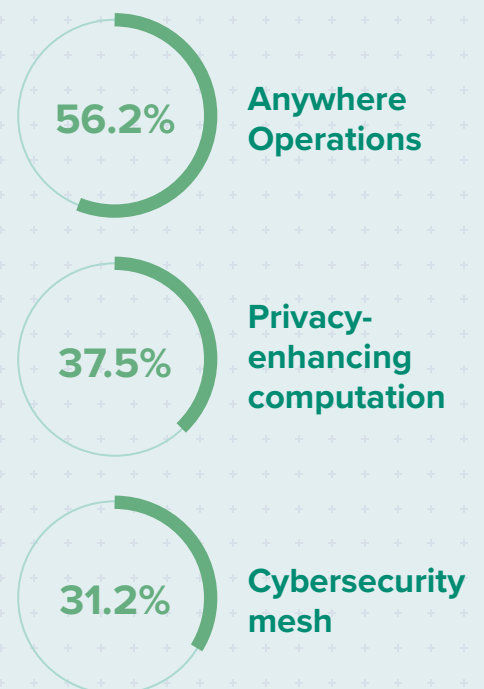
Attention turned to implementing VPNs, SaaS apps, adopting some elements of cloud. But these were sticking plasters. Now, those short-term fixes are exposing underlying, long-term challenges. For some, those issues include the ongoing, high cost of on-prem infrastructure. For others, it's about providing a seamless employee experience where monotone processes from the office "heyday" are digitised and, where possible, automated.

But it's also about promoting the office culture that encourages collaboration, positive mental health from human interaction, and innovation. Some individuals feel we have lost some of that during the pandemic and they will be keen to rekindle the fire. However, the reality is this: the days of everyone working in the office all the time are over.

Many people relish the time they have gained back by not commuting into work, and they're enjoying the new work/life balance too much to give it all up. C-Suite leaders should instead see this as an opportunity to build not just a better digital infrastructure, but a better overall business – even reassessing what it means to have an office space. With the end of the pandemic in sight, organisations should look to fix the long-term challenges posed by short-term remote working fixes and create a resilient IT infrastructure to support not just remote working, but **Anywhere Operations**.

Gartner's 2021 Trends

Asked which of Gartner's nine strategic areas to define 2021 would have the greatest impact, 56% of our survey respondents opted for Anywhere Operations. Privacy-enhancing computation (38%) and cybersecurity mesh (31%) followed.



CHAPTER #1

Digital & Physical – The Hybrid Workplaces of Tomorrow

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- C-Suite leaders and their workforces are opting for a hybrid combination of remote working and office-based working
- Digital workspaces are fast becoming the thread that will connect remote workers with those in the office
- A human-centred design approach will be the only way of ensuring an Anywhere Operation delivers on productivity, collaboration, and employee wellbeing
- With less time spent in office, leaders will need to review the office space itself with building analytics to extract most value

Digitise the Office, Automate Processes, Work Anywhere

One of the most notable differences between simply remote working and Anywhere Operations will be the digitisation of many traditional processes. Even before the pandemic, many of these processes seemed outdated, but now, in an era of mass remote working, they simply aren't feasible or resilient. In 2021, we're seeing more of this digitalisation of the office environment.

During our interviews for this report, we heard about countless companies that had had to transform outdated processes so a distributed workforce could continue efficient operations. One such example was that of an accountancy firm that used to print and file most of their documentation – in 2020. Pandemic restrictions forced the firm to digitise those paper-based processes and move storage to the cloud.

This is just one example of automation, but hyperautomation, the notion that anything that can be automated should be automated, has gained greater traction in the past year. Deloitte even went so far as to claim that hyperautomation, powered by AI, was “the next frontier”. When it works, hyperautomation has the

potential to empower and upskill workforces, integrate disparate systems, enhance agility, and deliver an increased ROI.

But for Lisa Forte, Partner at Red Goat Security LLP, there is a possibility of automating too much. We've seen “a lot of automation [in the past year],” said Lisa. “The trouble with that is that very slick, automated processes are often very brittle, so there's very little room for flexibility. A human-driven model is slower, but you can make more decisions on a case-by-case basis and you can adapt the policy to fit things so it becomes a lot more malleable than an automated system. I think it will need to be a hybrid of both.”

Going forwards, the focus must be on balancing automation with human needs, a sort of human-driven digitalisation. Otherwise, a blind focus to digitising every process and function may, ironically, have a negative impact on the workforce and operations. It could affect compliance and oversight, and automated services can sometimes be difficult and costly to scale. But by properly assessing where automation will deliver the most value, C-Suite leaders can have the best of both worlds.



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Lisa Forte
Partner
Red Goat Security LLP



However, there is a danger that organisations are failing to take this human-centred approach to digitising the office environment. On [The CEO.digital Show](#) in February 2021, Citrix's EMEA Solutions Strategist, P-O Johannsson, discussed digital workspaces as the future of work.

P-O pointed out that as we have moved toward remote working and digitalisation, sometimes we've taken shortcuts and have ended up with several apps all notifying employees of the same things, at the same time. This 'white noise' is the enemy of productivity and can even have a negative effect on mental health.

It is the downside to digitalisation and makes for an environment that hinders rather than aids work.

As C-Suite leaders look to embed more digitalisation into their organisational infrastructure, they should weigh the value of each new standard app. Solutions like Citrix's digital workspace aim to craft a seamless and positive end user experience, while automating and transforming many of the traditional office-bound processes.

But not everything can be digitised, and nor should it be. For some users, hardware plays an even more important role.

A Revolution in Talent Acquisition Is Coming

It's also worth noting that companies that enable working anywhere can hire anywhere. Historically, organisations have been confined by the talent that's available on their doorstep. This has essentially caused a Butterfly Effect, producing talent hubs and infrastructure inflation in the process. The surge in remote work has given companies the opportunity to bring in the best talent and specialists from around the world, or what Colin Manson, CEO of Xergy Group Ltd, refers to as "gig workers". The ability to hire from a global pool of talent is leading to greater innovation, creative collaboration and reducing overall costs across businesses.

For Xergy Group Ltd's CEO, Colin Manson, we're starting to see the widespread integration of the gig economy, akin to the one in US market, around the world. Finding talent in this kind of marketplace could be challenging, so now would also be an appropriate time to rethink future talent procurement. Is your network large enough? Or do you need to streamline your talent engagement?

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If you look at the US market, the gig economy is embraced in mainstream working structures. Leading the way, they are empowering both the gig worker and the employer to overcome obstacles such as their complex state-by-state employment policies. Gig workers solve this challenge by enabling companies to not only work with employees outside their jurisdictions, but from anywhere in the world.

The success of this trend is, in part, driven by new ways of working. Gig workers are embracing newfound confidence to take career ownership and pursue passion projects. Similarly, companies who adopt flexible employment structures now have access to a global community of talent, so they can pick from a world of experts for their projects and aren't confined by locality.

Colin Manson
CEO, Xergy Group Ltd,
developed by Proteus



Software vs Hardware: End-User Experiences & Bringing the Office Home

When most people talk about building an Anywhere Operations infrastructure, they tend to focus on the software side of things. They think about delivering SaaS apps and rolling out virtualised workspaces.

But for Jon Cosson, CISO at JM Finn, it's also about the hardware. A leading wealth management firm, JM Finn, like other financial institutions, relies heavily on physical phones. Imagine the stock market trading floor and you'll understand a little more why financiers prefer them. For JM Finn's end users, therefore, remote working posed a problem. The end users prefer using physical phones to conduct business, but now they found themselves in a position where they couldn't go into the office – and workforces everywhere were turning to solutions like Zoom and Teams on their laptops to stay connected.

“My priority for the next 12 months is how to facilitate that [hybrid] business strategy,” said Jon. “How are we going to make it work when we've got people working at home and in the office in the same meeting? We're all on WebX and Zoom now, we have no choice, but how are you

going to integrate technology in a working environment where people are both in the office and at home, whose role in that meeting might be diminished, so that wherever someone is they still feel as engaged and have that interaction in meetings?”

The firm is already well on the way to addressing the issue, JM Finn rolled out physical phones with video conferencing capacity to everyone in the company. When the team moves back into the office, in whatever capacity, they'll find the exact same phones on-prem. All these phones are connected to the system, so all that's left to each user to do is sign into the phone. As a result, employees are reachable and they're fully equipped to do their job on their terms, no matter where they are.

But this is just one example of how organisations are streamlining experiences between the office and home. A larger issue is that of software access. For instance, whereas in an office everyone is pretty much guaranteed the same hardware – a PC, a desk, extra monitor – they may not have that equipment at home. How do you ensure a consistent experience

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Jon Cosson
Head of IT & CISO
JM Finn



for employees if your business operates on Windows-based desktop apps, but your team only has access to tablets at home?

“What we learned was that we assumed everyone had a computer at home already, and they did, but it was their tablets, their mobile phones, their smart products,” Jon told us. “Most people got onto the internet via tablet, but most of our applications were desktop-based, requiring a PC or a dumb terminal to operate. We’re rethinking how we deliver applications now, asking ourselves, ‘How do we embed what’s critical to our operational effectiveness and make that work on smart devices?’”

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What this demonstrates perfectly is the need for C-Suite leaders to prioritise employee experiences when migrating to an Anywhere Operation. Ultimately, the success or failure of your business will rely on how well your employees get on with your system and way of working. If, like at JM Finn, your employees prefer physical phones, accommodate that.

Likewise, if your employees find it difficult to deliver their work within the suite of apps you have, do you need to reassess the apps you have or offer more training? Investing time and resources cultivating an enhanced employee experience will pay dividends, and it’s something we’re about to see a lot more reflection on this year.



Time to Review the Office Space Itself

This is a time to be more ambitious than aiming to simply connect remote workers to the office. Organisations can also use this period to completely reassess the office space itself. C-Suite leaders must start asking themselves tough questions about the value of retaining their office in the city in its current form, or having an office in the city at all.

For Ade McCormack, Organisational Transformation Strategist, organisations have the opportunity to evolve the office space, in whatever capacity that plays a part in post-Covid work, and turn it into a kind of “cognitive gymnasium,” where ideas and innovation are cultivated. The advantage of remote working, he said, was that employees have the chance to do the other, life-admin tasks, and then spend more time focused on delivering the best work they can because they aren’t stressed about other things in their life.

Ade pointed out that some companies had already tried to reduce the cognitive load of employees before the pandemic. For instance, companies like Facebook and Google have previously tried to create a community within the office, where they don’t have to worry about food and can get help or advice for other aspects of their life outside work. But the

acceleration in remote working has had the same effect in terms of minimising cognitive load, with employees without a commute gaining back more of their day, and even being able to interweave personal chores into their ‘working day’

In a study commissioned by Slack last year, most skilled office workers said they have no interest in returning to work in an office full time. Citing opinion from workers in the US, UK, France, Germany, Japan and Australia, Slack found that only 12% of employees would opt for full-time office working. Tellingly, 72% of workers said they would prefer a hybrid combination of both office and remote working.

With opinions so strong, it’s clear that many organisations will have to balance the two operating models. But in practice, this will mean fewer individuals are in the office at any one time. What’s more, individuals may question the value of going into the office, the question facing organisation leaders is, how do you generate the most value from your office space?

As part of an Anywhere Operations model, C-Suite leaders need to reassess what we want to achieve when employees do come into the office. Should the space be primarily for collaborative, in-person meetings? For community and culture building? Or as a shared



There’s a really interesting company called ATÖLYE based out of Istanbul whose model is to run co-working spaces where they also build networks of experts so that they themselves can take on consulting work. They pull together teams from those that work in their space. Will we see more of that kind of space?

James Stewart
Partner & CTO,
Public Digital



space with other companies with whom you may be able to build new opportunities, such as in a WeWork?

On the other hand, is there a value in retaining the office as it was before March 2020? In engagement terms, of course there are benefits to the traditional office. But times have changed – now the focus should be about how we bring the still-useful traditional values to the company regardless of where employees work.

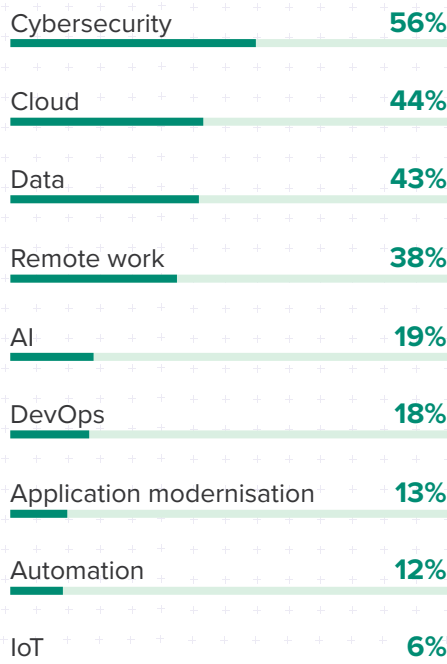
Building analytics may help in this regard, as well as with meeting sustainability goals. WeWork famously utilised building

information modelling and spatial analytics to craft more efficient offices for members. Quick feedback forms on the experience in each room could help to ensure meeting spaces have more of what employees need, for instance. As employees start to return to the office, organisations should look to doing likewise in an effort to extract the most value from a shared physical space.

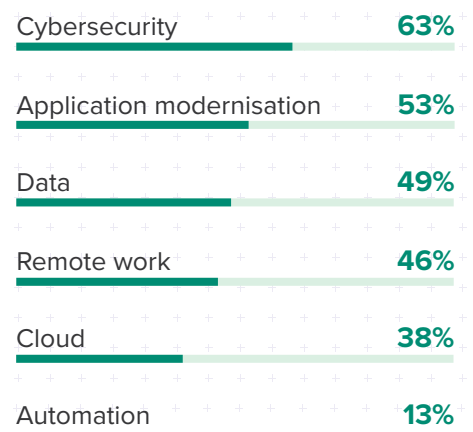
But this is just scratching the surface. To establish an Anywhere Operation that lasts, other strategic priorities soon emerge, including digital transformation and corporate culture.



What Did Our Respondents Say: At the start of 2020, what were you focusing on most?



By the end of the year, 50% of our respondents had said their priorities had now changed. Cybersecurity remained on top, but other areas received more attention:



CHAPTER #2

Redefining Corporate Culture in an Era of Accelerated Transformation

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Digital transformation has accelerated in the last year through necessity, with “five years of transformation seen in just three months”
- Some companies were unwittingly primed for this enforced digital transformation as they’ve made iterative moves towards digital workspaces for years – Office 365 a simple yet important case in point
- When we don’t share the same physical spaces, C-Suite leaders will have to take greater strides to cement a corporate culture that fosters cohesion and innovation
- Digital transformation is now the norm, with most cultural resistance swept aside – the next stage of business evolution will centre on enhancing digital infrastructure, with resiliency and flexibility key

Transformation Through Necessity

The pace of change since the start of the pandemic has been staggering. As Ed Hodges, CEO at HelloDone, pointed out, “We’ve had an acceleration of the use of digital where five years has happened inside of three months.” We have necessity to thank for this acceleration. But what was truly revealing was that, when push came to shove, cultural resistance to digital transformation was firmly swept aside.

In essence, we proved that digital transformation and the embrace of resilient, cloud-enabled infrastructure can be achieved today. It doesn’t have to be the long-term project that gets bogged in quagmires. It also showed that perhaps the cultural resistance to digital transformation – for whatever reason, be it budgetary or simply a, “This is how we’ve always done it,” attitude – has actually been a case of technical ignorance.

However, for Colin Manson, CEO of Xergy, this digital acceleration in the past year didn’t come out of nowhere. It has long been in the pipeline. He argues legacy-drive systems have been undergoing a digital transformation back when

Office 365 was integrated years ago. The constant development within IT has been contributing to a form of digital revolution without us realising. What has been a lifeline for businesses at the start of the pandemic is now a strategic investment, opening the door for innovation and overall competitive advantage.

“Legacy server-based systems are complex, meaning any attempt to synergise solutions is driving companies to rethink their software architecture,” Colin told us. “This has been the biggest challenge for us when selling-in to prospects. However, we’re seeing companies starting to embrace cloud-based solutions. [Before], we were pushing against a closed door.” That is now starting to change as businesses begin to

understand the choices they have to make. To remain competitive, they must respond to this change and embrace the vast benefits or they can watch themselves fall behind.

But commitments to tools like Office 365 obviously only scratch the surface of digital transformation, and more can be done. Rufus Leonard’s CEO, Laurence Parkes, says the pandemic has showed decision-makers the merits of transformation and that it can be achieved at scale, at a pace faster than previously thought.

It has acted as an encouragement to C-Suite leaders hoping to greenlight larger projects in the future, instead of the smaller, iterative ones that consume focus



The MACH Approach

You may have heard about MACH technologies and principles before. But these elements are gaining more headway today. The acronym stands for Microservices, API-first, Cloud native, and Headless. It is a modular approach to technological development that allows for stability and speed, scalability and cost reduction, and helps to empower companies with a multi-channel presence.

currently. Laurence believes we'll see a gradual releasing of budgets in 2021 so more long-term projects can be undertaken. And when we do, he believes companies should opt for the **MACH approach** to digital transformation, which would help to establish a foundation from where companies can experiment and react to external pressures from a place of safety.

What we're seeing, then, is a clearer understanding, across the C-Suite that digital transformation is a positive change within the organisation. And this is fuelled by what Gunjan Verma, CTO at The Travel Corporation, argued was a realisation that we can no longer be reactive.

"From a technology and digital perspective, agility and resilience became very important," he said. The question he raised was, "How do we have the agility built into our roadmaps and technology stack to be able to adapt and adapt quickly to how customer demand changes" in 2021? "Every customer has now been touched by digital in a positive way. We leaders have to acknowledge that if customer behaviours are changing, we have to follow."

In other words, digital is here to stay.

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Colin Manson
CEO,
Xergy Group Ltd



Companies Seek New Ways to Promote Corporate Culture



Prior to the pandemic, it was commonplace to hear talk from senior leaders resisting the idea of remote working because it would impact office and therefore corporate culture. It simply wouldn't be possible to replicate the ethos of the company remotely, so the argument went.

For many companies, the past year has put paid to that argument. For some teams, including Björn Goß, CEO at Stocard, the person, team and culture have always been important. Spending time together after work was important, too, but they were keen to preserve this during lockdowns. For his team, Björn notes this had a positive impact, something that he's also noticed among other companies. Now, more people can get involved in activities after work, whereas before some people would need to leave early due to their commute.

"Customers have been telling me how closer their teams got together because now they were doing after-work events in a digital format," said Björn. "Instead of just a couple of people joining, more people joined because they were at home anyway, they didn't have to go anywhere [...] and it strengthened how the team connected on a personal level."

But while coming together for a Zoom-based social might work for

your existing team, it can be more difficult if you're onboarding new talent. Colin Manson from Xergy highlighted the issue companies are up against with new faces and young, impressionable team that is unfamiliar with office etiquette and the interactivity that comes with it. Promoting interaction and motivating staff is decidedly harder if you're not physically present to mentor independent work and foster collaboration. But this is where managers must step up, Colin argues.

"How would I be confident that everyone in there was pulling their weight? How do you do

an [annual performance review] with somebody at the end of the year?" Instead, Colin argues companies need to take a more trusting approach in navigating remote working structures. "The pandemic has proved remote working does not equal a decrease in inefficiency," said Colin. "With the technology at our fingertips, it's quite the opposite. Companies should be evaluating outputs based on productivity and encouraging employees to use technology to their advantage. They can have greater autonomy over how they work and where they work which improves the work/life balance."



For us, digital transformation always starts with teams who work differently. So this experience of the past year is an opportunity to look across your organisation and get that sense of why some teams have flourished and others haven't, and what do we learn about our organisation and the further transformation we need to do from that experience. There's this the real importance of using 2021 to reflect on that.

James Stewart
Partner & CTO,
Public Digital



In some instances, senior leaders are thinking of adopting surveillance tools to monitor employee activity. But every leader interviewed for this report was keen to point out the downsides to this type of surveillance. For Ade McCormack, the sudden shift to remote working may have resulted in “micro-micromanagement and monitoring devices of people and so on, and if anything that might have created greater distrust.”

He continued, “So those organisations that would really benefit from remote working were those organisations that already had that trust in place because the leaders knew their team were focused on the common goal.”

Employees under surveillance are more worried about meeting minimum requirements, looking good, or, potentially, gaming the system than producing their best work. It was little surprise then that our respondents cited trust as a key driver of corporate cohesion and innovation, claiming it was a necessity in the remote working age.

But trust is just one element of corporate culture that leaders must get right in this day and age. Going forwards, it’ll be up to senior leaders to find new ways of motivating staff to deliver their best work. To do so, they’ll need to prioritise the building of an exceptional digital workspace that brings disparate teams together.

For James Stewart at Public Digital, a successful digital transformation initiative begins with teams who work differently.

It means looking at how each team is working and assessing who is working well and who isn’t, and what you can do to address those issues that are holding some teams back. From here, you can start building the foundation of your new organisational infrastructure.

It will also require a “recognition that we live in an unpredictable environment,” said James. “Everything we do have that’s inflexible is a liability.” As we build back, companies must go through a period of reflection to ensure they move away from a reactive way of doing things to be more proactive and resilient. “War gaming” scenarios could help departments prepare for unforeseen circumstances, for instance, and many of the lessons to take from one war game scenario could apply to others.

Jon Cosson of JM Finn told us how, by pure coincidence, the firm had war gamed a scenario where they would need to work remotely in a crisis – two months before the pandemic hit. His team had been able to stamp out issues then, so when the lockdowns were announced the company seamlessly moved to remote working.

In essence, then, there are two major inter-related areas for C-Suite leaders to focus on to build a creative, collaborative, and productive culture within an Anywhere Operation: Trust and Preparation.

Trusting the people you hire to do their job – with guidance from the C-Suite – will lead to

more innovation and will put the organisation in a position to better weather future crises. In turn, preparing your organisation for unforeseen circumstances will breed more trust from the workforce flowing upwards. The two areas are reciprocal and will be the bedrock of cohesive corporate cultures in 2021.

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We’ve got to get out of this mindset of control. We’ve got to get the fact that we pay this person to do the job, they’re professionals and we trust them to do that job. There will be controls around it, but that’s the challenge for this year: What does the new working environment look like, and what can IT do to ensure it’s secure, it’s robust, and it’s flexible?

Jon Cosson
Head of IT & CISO,
JM Finn



CHAPTER #3

On-Prem vs Off-Prem Data Centres in 2021 – Time for a Rethink?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- With so much effort put into transforming the organisation into an Anywhere Operation, some IT leaders have found themselves with a big problem on their hands: their on-prem infrastructure
- When they move more operations to the cloud, organisations will benefit from greater computing power – they must use this time to review data strategy to aid decision-making going forwards
- In 2021, IT leaders must convince the rest of the board of the need for moving to the cloud – less employees on-site; rigid and hard-to-scale servers; costs; sustainability; and limitations where it comes to data analytics

2021 Will See a Reassessment of On-Prem Data Centres

The rapid changes seen in the last year, as we've seen, necessitated shortcuts. According to James Stewart of Public Digital, this provided an opportunity to reflect on what worked well before – and what really didn't. For James, this is a chance to address those latent frictions that held companies back.

One of those frictions will undoubtedly be the legacy issue of on-premises infrastructure. Unfortunately, those companies that pumped significant resources into developing their own data centres and servers in-house have then found themselves in a world where few people are in the actual office, connecting instead to the company network from anywhere.

IT leaders are therefore already questioning the value of keeping all but the most essential processes on-prem. But compounding the issue is the fact that on-prem infrastructure is by its very nature limited. Companies are locked in by vendors for several years, needing to invest and build more capacity than they need to allow for some scalability and meet peak usage.

However, in the cloud these issues are heavily mitigated. With a hyperconverged infrastructure approach, companies can scale their systems up or down as necessary – and pay only for

what they use. It's an approach that cuts overhead costs, both in terms of contracts and real estate (on-prem servers take up a lot of space).

In a similar vein, operating in the cloud allows organisations to benefit from more computing power than they could ever require. This is going to prove invaluable in the years to come, as organisations continue to find competitive advantage in AI-powered solutions. The best AI-driven initiatives will only come from those organisations who are willing to invest in public cloud, harnessing its raw computing power to process data at an unprecedented speed. But therein lies another issue waiting for modern businesses: data.



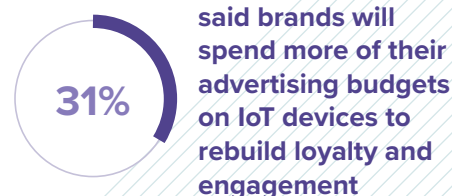
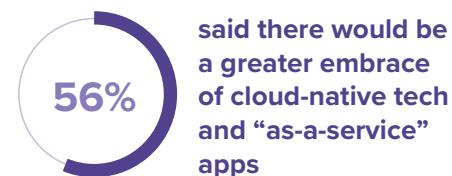
People had to move really fast [when moving to remote working and moving experiences online], so there have been some shortcuts taken, but they've also seen where that might have been some latent friction and challenges with how they were working. It's really going to trigger a reflection of how we can improve the experience and even redesign it.

James Stewart
Partner & CTO,
Public Digital



What Did Our Respondents Say:

We asked how our respondents felt that technology and organisational strategy may evolve over the next 12 months:



A New Data Strategy for a New Era

As we move into 2021 and begin thinking past the age of the pandemic, there's one question that should be getting more attention than it currently is: Will we start to see a shift in how we approach data?

In an era of remote working and mass ecommerce, data will be of even greater value to organisations across industries. It will empower organisations with the intel they need to make appropriate business decisions in a difficult and unpredictable world. Therefore, more business leaders are appreciating the need for greater data gathering, but that isn't enough. More attention on the importance of data could result in a further scramble to collect any and all data possible – with disastrous consequences.

AI is the clearest example we have of the dangers of collecting data indiscriminately. Of course, AI requires data to function. It uses data to learn, find patterns and make decisions, much like humans do. But unlike humans, an AI isn't currently able to tell the difference between useful and useless data. Therefore, data strategies that promote indiscriminate data gathering will result in more useless data being fed to AI, resulting in what Ade McCormack calls, "artificial stupidity".

While organisations have done a great job of building the data-gathering infrastructure, the challenge is now to identify what data is most relevant, valuable and actionable. Data may be the new oil, but as Ade rightly highlighted to us, oil in its raw form is crude. You must distil oil to create valuable and useable resources like petrol or synthetics. The same thinking must be brought to data.

Appearing on [The CEO.digital Show](#) in December 2020, Cecilia Harvey, CEO of Hyve Dynamics, told us about how she champions value extraction from data by focusing on the potential of enhanced physical sensors to distil the crude oil of data.

"Sensor technology is a strategic enabler," Cecilia argued. "It'll really help get employees back to work, kids back to school, and customers back to stores." Specifically, these sensors can help some sectors by providing more granular and reflective data, gathered in the field. Cecilia argues that this can cut costs as you won't need as many testing facilities, as is the case in

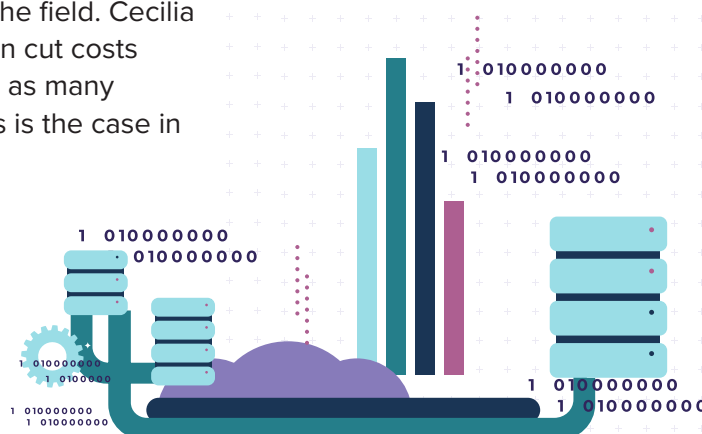
About The CEO.digital Show

The CEO.digital Show is CEO.digital's new peer-to-peer podcast series where we talk to the most influential thought leaders about how tech is continuing to change the way the world does business.

Each episode, we interview major thought and industry leaders to learn how they are embracing new technologies and strategies to create new value and success for their companies.

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the automotive and aerospace industries. But it also requires a keen understanding of what you want to look at. When analysts have more relevant and accurate data to work with, they can make more appropriate business decisions.

For Gunjan Verma, CTO at The Travel Corporation, we've done the hard work of building data-gathering infrastructure already. The onus is now on delivering value. "Data for data's sake isn't going to deliver the marketing value we want it to," Gunjan told us. "We've captured all our data in big data lakes, but we need to start creating resource to make that valuable."

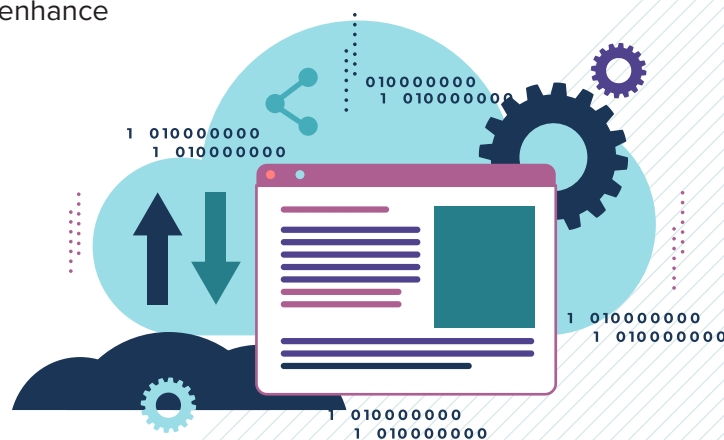
"I feel that we've done the plumbing, the data pipes are all there and we're getting our information, it's all good," Gunjan continued. "But now we need to improve how we use that data, first to make decisions, get our analytics right, our dashboards right, get our frequency right, and then we can get things like personalisation right."

Ultimately, when companies optimise their data strategies they find themselves in a better position to make effective business decisions at the best time. As we move further into 2021, roadmaps must become agile and reflective of customer behaviour.

"How do we as businesses, or tech teams within business, adapt our roadmaps to the change of customer behaviour?" said Gunjan. "How do we have the agility built into our roadmaps and

technology stack to be able to adapt and adapt quickly to how customer demand changes? It's not a static change we're looking to address, we want it to evolve."

By addressing data strategies this year, looking at where they fall short and where they can be improved, organisations will be able to bounce back from the worst economic pains of the last year. Moreover, it will create more opportunity to enhance experience.



“

I feel that we've done the plumbing, the data pipes are all there and we're getting our information, it's all good. But now we need to improve how we use that data, first to make decisions, get our analytics right, our dashboards right, get our frequency right, and then we can get things like personalisation right.

Gunjan Verma
CTO
The Travel Corporation



CHAPTER #4

Prepare for a Customer Experience Revolution... And More Direct-to-Consumer

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Physical hasn't gone anywhere in customer experience – even though most customer interactions in the past year have been digital
- To reclaim some of their dominance, FMCG companies are looking to take their distribution and sales in-house with Direct-to-Consumer approaches, powered by micro-distribution centres
- In 2020, we saw teething problems with D2C adoption, but this year organisations must make a concentrated effort to deliver exhilarating digital customer experiences and use these to branch back into the physical
- Communication, as with almost everything, will be key to success within the CX space – how can you ensure smoother, more relevant and timely comms with your customers?

Like the Office, Hybrid Physical/Digital Commerce Will Be New Norm



One of the biggest and most notable changes in daily life last year was the closure of retail outlets. Shops around the world closed their doors to consumers and moved online instead. We've all heard about the demise of some retailers, never to open their doors again. At the time of writing, digital-native fashion brand ASOS has recently purchased Topshop and other Arcadia Group brands, putting the future of their physical stores at risk. Even so, physical stores will continue to exist in the future – but evolved.

During our research, it became clear that retailers too would embrace Anywhere Operations in 2021. Of course, many retailers

have had a dual approach to sales for years, with both digital and physical presences.

However, the last year demonstrated the importance of connecting those two spheres to provide a more holistic experience for customers. As Ed Hodges, CEO at HelloDone, said, "I don't think those that have physical retail stores have automatically assumed that, from here on in, it's all going to be digital and we've got to shut everything down. If anything, I think it is the clarion call for omnichannel marketing."

Connecting those channels means improving how brands

What Did Our Respondents Say: how do you see tech evolving over the next five years ?

When we asked our survey respondents, how do you see tech evolving over the next five years, more than 75% of them said there would be a higher priority of experience, mass personalisation and micro-moments. 44% also said AI adoption would proliferate and improve human lives on- and offline. And 31% remained hopeful that the majority of companies will have learned how to process their data effectively.

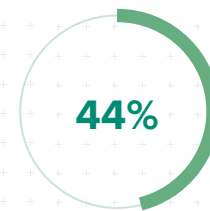
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I don't think those that have physical retail stores have automatically assumed that, from here on in, it's all going to be digital and we've got to shut everything down. If anything, I think it is the clarion call for omnichannel marketing.

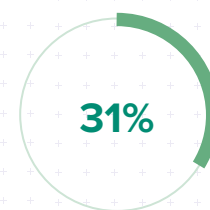
Ed Hodges
CEO,
HelloDone



Higher priority of experience, mass personalisation and micro-moments



AI adoption will proliferate and improve human lives on- and offline



Companies will have learned how to process their data effectively

communicate with customers. In-store experiences are characterised by interactions with staff members, and the sensory aspect of touching your products. Customers have the opportunity to talk with staff members about a product, and ideally leave the store feeling fulfilled and positive. Digital experiences, on the other hand, are limited in this regard – so how do you bridge the gap? One source of frustration in the digital buying experience is the distribution and delivery side of things. Ed Hodges points out that we can manage customer expectations by communicating where their purchase is.

The answer may be in the channels that customers use every day – and multiple times a day. Social media channels like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp could be utilised to deliver timely, relevant and personalised messages to customers. “The only way these large organisations are going to compete,” Ed told us, “is by massively improving the way they communicate with their customers, from the moment they hit the buy button right through to their front door, via the likes of WhatsApp and other messaging channels that make it easy to ask to change delivery timings and handle returns.”

Scalability in this mode of personalisation is going to be a major challenge, and that’s where AI could help. Natural language processing has now reached such a point that companies can build virtual agents that are able to detect and answer multiple customer queries, even if they’re bundled in the same sentence. This is a complete game changer when compared to legacy chatbots, which often left users more frustrated than before they interacted with it. Now, we have a chance to do and be better with our communication on a mass scale, thanks to AI.

But it isn’t just about what the organisation can do for the customer. It’s also about what the customer is willing to do. “What customers are now really accepting way more is this hybrid model where you do a couple of things on the digital platform, but then if you need something more individual, it’s more normal to click a button and jump on a video call with somebody,” Björn Goß from Stocard told us. “It’s an interesting shift I think will stay. We’ll see consultations in a remote way [for instance],” he said.

With customers more willing to interact with brands on a variety of channels, we expect to see a greater emphasis on, and adoption of, omnichannel strategies in the coming year. It may be worth reviewing your own...

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From the moment they’ve bought it online, how do I look after them rather than hand over the relationship to a carrier? How do I give them the trust all the way to their front door from my shop?

How do I avoid customer frustration around potentially longer delivery time frames, because there’s more volume and less people to [handle goods]? And how do I manage their expectations so I prevent them losing faith and trust in my business, and ultimately going to another supplier which better communicates with its customers?”

Ed Hodges
CEO,
HelloDone



Greater Proliferation of Direct-to-Consumer & Micro Distribution Points to Follow

In our interview with Gunjan Verma of The Travel Corporation, he argued that, “what the pandemic has done definitely is put digital in the forefront as one of the key competitive advantages you need to communicate with the new consumer, which is now more digital savvy than pre-pandemic.”

It’s this digital savviness and comfort around digital channels that is fuelling new strategies at retailers and B2C companies. Not only is it requiring a complete overhaul of the digital presence of many companies, it is also forcing them to look at how they deliver services and stay connected with customers.

Direct-to-Consumer approaches – usually where an FMCG company takes distribution in-house to deliver, you guessed it, direct to consumer – are becoming ever more popular. After all, as Björn Goß of Stocard told us, “If you’re a retailer or manufacturer in extreme situations, you have to take extreme decisions. If your store is closed, do you want to do no business or try something new, like selling online? It usually won’t make up for your losses, but it is a step you wouldn’t have taken under normal circumstances.”

But for a lot of smaller companies, the resources to create a direct-to-consumer infrastructure that scales will be difficult to come by.

We’re more likely to see long-established, large organisations enhance their own distribution process by creating micro-distribution centres throughout their territories. “With ecommerce growing to the level it did last year,” says Ed Hodges, “we’ll be seeing the further growth of micro-distribution points, because people are going to expect stuff coming to them faster, following the Amazon trend.”

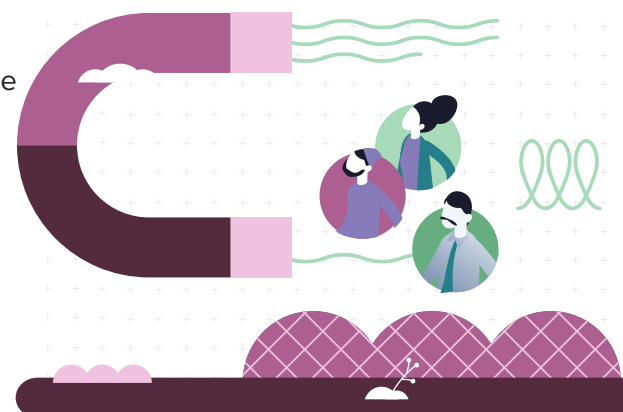
This enhanced infrastructure will be for naught though if brands don’t communicate their capabilities and offers to customers. Björn highlighted the value of brands finding new ways to communicate their offers to customers, something Stocard can deliver straight to user’s phones while streamlining loyalty card and payment experiences for in-store shopping.

In 2021, retailers should assess whether there is a business case for improving distribution or, in the case of FMCG companies, setting up their own. It is the logical next step as the world moves to an Anywhere Operation mentality. And not considering the move could cost market share at a time when companies can’t afford it.

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If you’re a retailer or manufacturer in extreme situations, you have to take extreme decisions. If your store is closed, do you want to do no business or try something new, like selling online? It usually won’t make up for your losses, but it is a step you wouldn’t have taken under normal circumstances.

Björn Goß
Founder & CEO,
Stocard



CHAPTER #5

Keeping the Show on the Road with Adaptive Cybersecurity

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- With everyone working separately, there's never been more opportunity for malicious agents to attack businesses – and they are taking it, despite the pandemic
- CISOs and leaders across the board must put extra emphasis on working safely online in 2021, and continue educating their workforces
- Social engineering remains a particular threat, especially where isolated and distributed employees are concerned
- They must also ensure their software and hardware enables employees to do their jobs, or we risk a greater proliferation of 'Shadow IT' and an unnecessary increase in vulnerabilities

Same Threats, Greater Risk in an Anywhere Operation

“2020 was the best year to be a hacker,” Lisa Forte, Partner at Red Goat Security LLP, told us. “It was the best year, they made a tonne of money and they had a tonne of success.” Why? “Because of the uncertainty and disruption caused by the pandemic.” Last year, there was an influx of cybersecurity attacks, and even hospitals were a major victim. One woman in Germany died as a direct result of a malware attack. “We’ve got to stop pretending that there’s a red line that attackers won’t cross, because there isn’t,” Lisa said.

As we continue to build an Anywhere Operation, we simply cannot afford to treat cybersecurity as an afterthought. Done right, we’ll enjoy the many benefits to modern business and to work/life balances that come from Anywhere Operations. But if we get cybersecurity wrong, malicious actors will attempt to exploit the situation to their advantage. With employees working anywhere, there are more attack vectors to exploit than ever before.

Fortunately, we live in a world where powerful cybersecurity solutions are widespread and easy to integrate into existing systems. The real threat comes instead from social engineering attacks.

For Jon Cosson, the disruptions we’ve seen since the pandemic have created an opening for social

engineers to dupe unwitting employees. These hackers exploit the unique circumstances of the pandemic to build rapport with their targets. They even draw on social media to learn more about their targets and the most effective way of tricking the victim into a false sense of security.

“This is why it’s so important that people have cybersecurity awareness,” said Jon. “Because people need to have their own firewall turned on. It doesn’t matter how astute you are, at some moment in time you’re going to get caught out.”

Our growing reliance on technology in the workplace may be responsible for the rise in vulnerabilities, but when it comes to social engineering, technology may also be this year’s saviour. For instance, some older users may distrust technology because they don’t understand it. Jon used the example of open banking, where older users may refuse to use an app on a smartphone to do their banking because they think it isn’t safe. But you’re more vulnerable to fraud talking to someone over the phone than you are by accessing your finances through an encrypted app.

So this year, expect to see more emphasis given to cybersecurity awareness as CISOs attempt to

resecure the enterprise for an Anywhere Operation set up. If you’re not already thinking about it, there’s no time like the present.

“

If you put the greatest locks on one door, if you put the most powerful and the best quality locks on a door to stop someone coming in, and the person inside opens the door and lets someone in, they’ve bypassed everything.

Why are hackers going to try and circumvent some really powerful systems? Most cybercriminals want the easy option, because ultimately a criminal doesn’t want to do something if they don’t have to.

Jon Cosson
Head of IT & CISO,
JM Finn



Convenience vs Security: Treading a Fine Line

Lisa Forte demonstrated that security and convenience have always been at polar opposites. But that view of security and convenience working against one another should be relegated to the past. Instead, organisations should take a new approach, working hard to build systems that are both easy to use and highly secure – especially in an Anywhere Operation. As we've already discussed, it's far simpler to secure your IT infrastructure when everyone is accessing it from the same network.

But when the workforce is distributed, you have to contend with potentially thousands of external connections and requests into your systems from unsecured networks. Compounding the issue is how rapidly we had to shift to remote working last year.

“Cybersecurity is a big enough challenge for organisations anywhere working within a confined, enclosed, protected area,” said Jon Cosson. “But last year, March/April time, people

were just throwing any old kit out there so they could continue to function.” Corners may have been cut by accident, and organisations will have to review their current setup to ensure it's up to scratch.

From a technical standpoint, then, an Anywhere Operation has a lot more to contend with on a cybersecurity front than one in a single office. But on the whole, we've been talking about these issues for years, resolving them with firewalls and other technical protections. We've also been educating users on the dangers of accessing company systems from free Wi-Fi hotspots.

The real danger, unfortunately, comes from employees themselves. Without the constraints of the office environment, access control will be even more vital to protect company hardware and systems. Otherwise, we may see increasing cases of “Shadow IT”, the deployment or use of

“

I think we've always had this problem [of Shadow IT]. Human beings as a species are very resourceful and will always try to find the quickest way of getting from A to B. It's our job in IT to give them the tools to do that in the best way not just for the users but for the business, and explain to them why they shouldn't use other solutions.

If we don't do that, we have to accept that people will use whatever apps they can, even ones from their personal life, to get the job done because that's what they know. We have to be better.

Lisa Forte
Partner,
Red Goat Security LLP



IT-related hardware or software that haven't been approved by the central IT department. The risk is higher because remote employees are more used to the idea of downloading and using cloud-based services, and if they believe a new app will help them complete a task then they will download and use it – sometimes, without getting it vetted.

Likewise, if employees feel that the security protocols are an inconvenience or hindrance to their work, they may take steps to circumvent security. “There’s the challenge,” said Jon. “To make it simple for the end party, make it complex if they want it to be, but ultimately make it do what it’s supposed to do as quickly as possible and as securely as possible.”

CISOs within an Anywhere Operation must develop a cybersecurity strategy that understands user needs and facilitates a seamless flow of work. Rebalancing the needs of security and convenience in a hybrid remote/office environment will therefore be a main priority in 2021. We’ll also see greater emphasis paid to cybersecurity training as CISOs attempt to bolster their technical defences with social engineering education and awareness within the workforce.



There’s the challenge, to make it simple for the end party, make it complex if they want it to be, but ultimately make it do what it’s supposed to do as quickly as possible and as securely as possible.

Jon Cosson

Head of IT & CISO,
JM Finn



Compliance Isn't Going Anywhere

With so much to worry about as security leaders attempt to keep the organisation secure in an era of Anywhere Operations, it is inevitable that they will overlook something, somewhere. Compliance could be that Achilles' heel.

Jon Cosson told us that compliance and security go hand-in-hand. But in the scramble to maintain operations last year, Jon believes “compliance for many firms has been watered down.” This is a complete oversight, he argues, as prioritising compliance also means prioritising security.

“Privacy and security have kind of taken a backstep,” Lisa also said. “This has probably been helped by the fact that the ICO has intonated its intention is to go easy on companies during this pandemic for losing data because they understand the stress everyone has been under. [...] I think probably that certain security measures have been abandoned in order to make a speedier transition into this model.”

But our interviewees were keen to demonstrate why organisations shouldn't take a laid-back approach to these issues just because they can. A proactive move now will put the organisation in a better position later to exploit the true potential of an Anywhere Operation.

And with a greater risk to enterprise security given the exponential rise in cybercrime in 2020 (some [studies](#) suggest there was a 600% increase following the Covid-19 pandemic), time is of the essence. We've all done the hard part of transitioning to remote working – now we must ensure our remote operations are up to standard, too.

LOOKING FORWARD

The journey towards an Anywhere Operation that excels is ongoing, and there will be many strategic challenges along the way.

But for those C-Suite leaders that rise to the occasion, think proactively about how to build a flexible, resilient business with a hybrid model of office and remote working, the benefits are ripe for the taking.

As we've seen the key strategic areas to focus on affect the entire business. C-Suite leaders must strategise for further office digitalisation, rethink what it means to have an office space, and lead a complete revolution in corporate culture and attitudes towards digital. They must also think creatively about how to reorganise their IT infrastructure to enable Anywhere Operations with the scalability, flexibility and security they need to thrive.

In 2021, C-Suite leaders must step up and ensure their organisation no longer simply reacts to events. They must establish resilience and flexibility throughout the business.

The time is now.

CONTRIBUTORS & SPECIAL THANKS TO

Alongside our survey respondents, we interviewed several C-Suite and thought leaders from across a spectrum of sectors and industries. We also drew on our own podcast series, *The CEO.digital Show*, for more research. We'd like to thank these individuals for their time and insights.



Jon Cosson
Head of IT & CISO,
JM Finn



As Head of IT and CISO of JM Finn, Jon Cosson draws on more than 35 years' experience in the IT industry to deliver secure business solutions through a grasp of broad industry trends and new technologies. He holds numerous industry-recognised cybersecurity certifications, including CISSP, CISM, CICISO, and MBCI, and is undertaking a PhD currently.



Lisa Forte
Partner,
Red Goat Security LLP



Lisa is a partner at Red Goat Cyber Security. She also co-founded the Cyber Volunteers 19 initiative that is a 3000 strong force of volunteers helping hospitals around Europe stay secure during the pandemic. She worked for one of the UK Police Cyber Crime Units before co-founding Red Goat Cyber Security in 2017 to provide social engineering and cyber-attack exercising expertise to companies around the world.



Björn Goß
Founder & CEO,
Stocard



Björn Goß was born in Heidelberg. He studied at the University of Mannheim and the London School of Economics and Political Science. In 2012, Björn founded Stocard together with his colleagues David Handlos and Florian Barth. Together they built today's leading mobile wallet in Europe, with over 50 million users. Stocard is actively shaping the future of shopping and banking with the digital management of loyalty cards and mobile payments, and much more. To found Stocard, Björn dropped out of his PhD and left McKinsey.



Cecilia Harvey
CEO,
Hyve Dynamics



Cecilia is CEO of Hyve Dynamics, a pioneering deep tech sensor technology company. Cecilia is also the founder of Tech Women Today and Ladies Who Launch. An outspoken advocate for diversity, she works tirelessly to close the gender and racial gap while opening doors in the technology sector. Cecilia's recent achievements include being on the 2019 EmPower 100 Ethnic Minority Role Model List.



Ed Hodges
CEO,
HelloDone



Ed Hodges is CEO of HelloDone, an AI-powered customer engagement platform which helps e-commerce companies improve the post-purchase experience for customers. Ed specialises in creating and bringing digital channels to market. He was responsible for building the founding mobile app and digital capabilities for retailer Tesco as well as banks RBS, Lloyds and Vanquis Bank.

CONTRIBUTORS & SPECIAL THANKS TO



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As Solution Strategist for EMEA, P-O is accountable for strategic mapping, solution development, communicating the Citrix vision and guiding customers through the transition journey to the Cloud. This field CTO-style role provides customer advocacy and business level solution expertise focusing on Business Value Engineering. P-O has over 20 years of experience, and in the past decade he has focused on sustainability, end-user experience and productivity.



Colin Manson
CEO,
Xergy Group Ltd



Colin Manson was one of the founders of international Oil and Gas consultancy Xodus Group Ltd in 2005. As CEO of Xodus Group from 2005 to 2015, Colin spearheaded the global and capability growth of the Company to 750 staff over 14 offices in 8 countries. He is now CEO of Xergy Group Ltd, whose Proteus OS technology aims to help digitally transform project resourcing in the energy sector.



Ade McCormack
Organisational Transformation
Strategist



Ade McCormack focuses on helping organisations and societies thrive in the digital age. He has worked in around forty countries across many sectors. He has lectured at MIT Sloan School of Management on digital leadership and currently works with Cambridge University on their executive education programmes. Ade is a former FT and CIO columnist, as well as having been a former CIO100 judge. He has written six books on digital matters.



Laurence Parkes
CEO,
Rufus Leonard



Laurence Parkes is CEO of the award-winning, independent digital experience agency, Rufus Leonard. Throughout his career and his time at Rufus, Laurence has proven himself a powerful strategic operator and passionate supporter of client transformation, earning many accolades including a Gold Digital Experience Award, Gold Cannes Cyber Lion, and Gold IPA Effectiveness Award. As CEO, Laurence spearheads the agency's strategic and business ambition; engineering a meaningful difference to people through our clients, in turn helping unleash the full potential of the digital economy.



James Stewart
Partner & CTO,
Public Digital



James is a technology leader with extensive hands-on experience building capability, setting direction, developing and operating digital services, and leading organisations through substantial change. Through Public Digital and as an independent consultant, he works right across organisations from board-level to operations teams to embed internet-era practices. Previously, as a co-founder of the UK Government Digital Service, James played a wide variety of roles in the digital transformation of the UK government, from hands-on technology lead through to Deputy CTO for Government.



Gunjan Verma
CTO,
The Travel Corporation



Gunjan Verma is the Chief Technology Officer for The Travel Corporation (TTC.com), the world leader in travel. With a strong background in consumer internet, Gunjan brings with him a wealth of experience, driving technology, innovation and the digital agenda across TTC's global business. Prior to joining TTC, Gunjan was at Groupon as Managing Director of Operations in Australia and New Zealand. He has also worked in various transformation, operations and tech roles within Accenture, Coca-Cola, and Linde Group.

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