A GUIDE TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE THROUGH THE COVID CRISIS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unforeseen event that continues to pose a serious challenge to business continuity across industries. Numerous factors arising due to COVID-19 have put forth unforeseen implications on the relationship between your customers, suppliers, partners, and other stakeholders.

The impact of COVID-19 has been uneven throughout industries. While essential industries such as healthcare have been overwhelmed by the patient inflow, most industries have to deal with an overall negative impact due to reduced demand and movement restriction. Organizations are forced to shift their focus from daily operations to long term survival plans and effectively riding out the crisis with minimal impact.

> "We have not seen the end of the crisis. Nor do we know exactly when the recovery will come. But it will come, and the CEOs who can best prepare their businesses effectively for a more digital future will give their companies the best chance for a brighter future."
>
> **- McKinsey**

But true to the old adage, behind every crisis, there is a hidden opportunity. Leaders who are decisively addressing challenges arising from the pandemic, while also implementing digital solutions to shore up resilience and maximize their position for demand uptake post-crisis are set to gain a lot from the opening up of the economy.

While business continuity is the utmost priority for most organizations, it is the businesses considering to rethink their business strategies, operating models, and customer engagement channels in digital terms are widening the gap between their non-digital peers. According to a report from Kantar, 35% of the businesses are already leveraging technology and digital solutions to make an effective business impact.

COVID-19 is bringing rapid shifts on a massive scale in the business landscape. Even among such uncertainty, it is apparent that the future is digital. Digital Transformation places businesses to effectively meet challenges of a surge in demand or production cuts without putting increased pressure on existing systems. The acceleration of the adoption of digital technologies is so rapid that waiting for the recovery might put your organization far behind in the race.

The focus of the whitepaper is to understand the business implications of the pandemic in your sector and provide digital solutions to handle temporary business disruptions and maximize position for demand uptake post-crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is a black swan occurrence. Within a period of a few months, the pandemic has exceeded even the direst of predictions to cause havoc on human lives and businesses. The effect of the pandemic is being felt in each and every aspect of the business environment. Businesses have to rethink their operations, supply chain, customer experience, workplace, business systems to keep their employees safe and survive the crisis. For better or worse, the business landscape in the pandemic aftermath would no longer remain the same.

The COVID-19 pandemic is rapidly spreading across the world and has infected millions of people to this date. Due to it's faster transmission rate and farther reach than any of the epidemics in recent history, many countries have implemented stringent measures such as nationwide lockdowns to prevent the accelerating of infections. Physical distancing, movement restrictions, and compulsory use of personal protective equipment are some of the other measures implemented to slow down the spread of the virus.

For businesses, it poses difficulties on many fronts-- tighter cash flows, supply chain bottlenecks, temporary demand reduction resulting in production inactivity, among others. Though the implications on sectors may vary, the cascading effects will affect organizations of any location, size, or industry. The long wait for vaccination is adding to the uncertainty of the nature of recovery.

> "Digital-first companies are 64% more likely to achieve their business goals than their peers."
>
> **- Adobe**

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Health and Safety Concerns

The pandemic is primarily a health crisis, where organizations must prioritize the health of the workforce over any business concerns. COVID-19 is a highly contagious viral pathogen that can spread through exhaled droplets within one meter or through infected objects, such as telephones, desks, or equipment.

Due to the close proximity of people in a typical office setting, workplaces are primed to be hotspots for COVID-19 contagion. To avoid their employees from catching the virus, organizations have taken various measures like remote working, adequate social distancing measures in factory floors & warehouses among others.

Handling Remote Workforce

Remote working was gaining popularity due to advances in networking, cloud computing, mobile apps, and digital forms. The arrival of the pandemic has accelerated the concept for most service-based roles and organizations, where they would find little incentive to return to office-based workplaces. Some major organizations around the globe are even considering keeping a part of their workforce remote forever.

But the transition has not been smooth sailing for many companies. Businesses had to rush to build capabilities to enable their entire workforce to work from home, thus some unprecedented major challenges of remote working still remain.
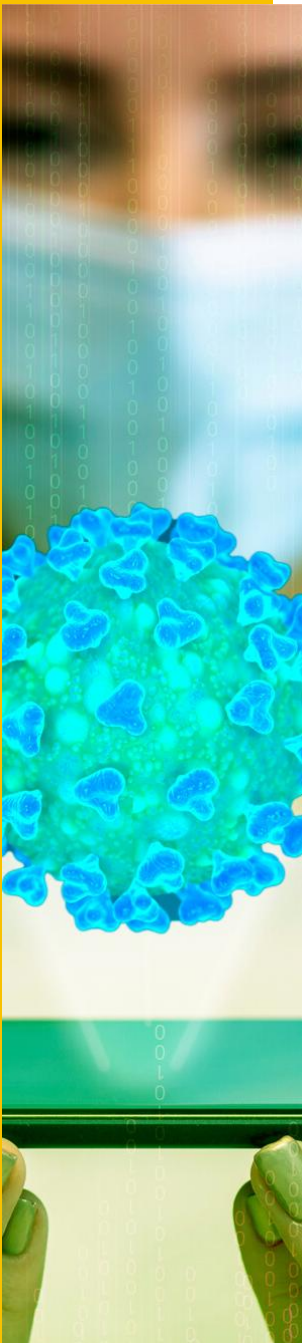
Keeping track of team productivity, communication setup beyond email for quick responses, adequate computing, and network capacity in place for a productive work environment are just some of the challenges faced by organizations.

Asset Management

The COVID19 pandemic has skewed demand for essential products over non-essential items, hence some plants might face over production while the rest have to cut down production temporarily. For plants that are not operating at full production capacities, the role of asset maintenance remains critical for breakdown free operation when demand rises in a post COVID world.
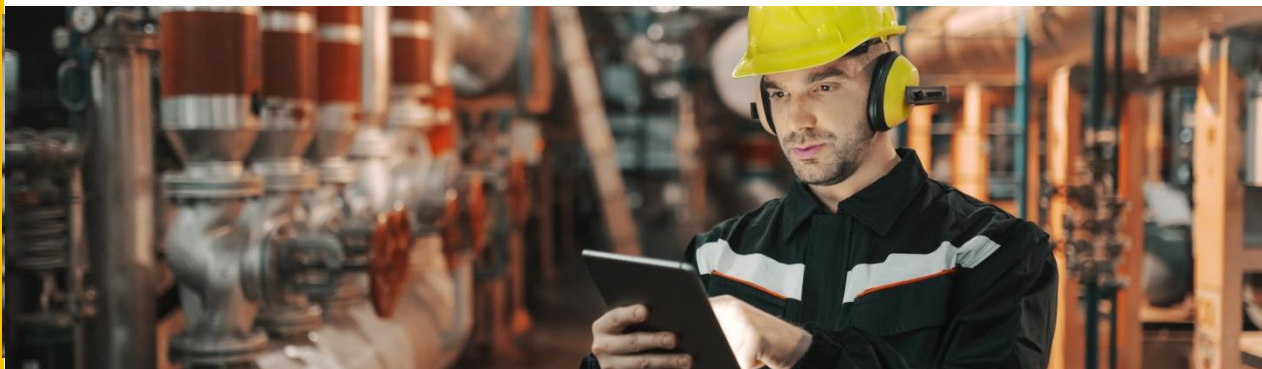
A majority of the workforce in asset-heavy industries are involved in the production capacity, hence they cannot be performed remotely -- increasing the pressure on organizations to put adequate social distancing measures in place. Typical work from home advice meted out will not be helpful for such organizations under these circumstances. With proper planning, flexibility, and communication, businesses can effectively keep their employees safe while carrying out essential inspections and maintenance activities.

Businesses that have carried out digitization projects prior to lockdown are able to carry out effective remote maintenance to a certain degree. For successful asset maintenance during COVID 19, organizations require a careful balance of avoiding close proximity among workers to negate the risk of contracting the virus and ensure the availability of key experts for a smooth resumption of production capacities when required.

Sales and Marketing

The role of the sales and marketing department is now more critical than ever as they are at the center of how customers and consumers perceive their organization during the pandemic. COVID-19 has brought an abrupt halt to traditional face to face sales and marketing methods leading to increased adoption of digital interaction. Sales and marketing teams are under increased pressure for demand generation amidst decreasing consumer interest while also setting limiting expectations regarding product and service delivery reflecting on-the-ground realities.

INDUSTRY SPECIFIC CHALLENGES DURING COVID-19

The effect of COVID-19 on the economy is complex with many industries facing adverse negative consumer sentiments and movement restrictions. The impact on each industry is unique where a blanket solution would hinder successful recovery. For a successful transition from survival to return to the new normal, a deep understanding of nuances of COVID-19 implications within the sector is required.

• Oil & Gas

Due to widespread demand-reduction and oversupply, the prices of crude oil have plummeted in just a few months and led to a rapid reduction in oil storage capacity all across the world. Suppressed demand on a wide range of petroleum-derived chemicals & products is putting a severe strain on the supply chain in the oil and gas market. The oil and gas industry has been one of the adversely impacted sectors from COVID-19, with little scope of upside in near term future and high uncertainty in the medium term.

• Chemicals

The impact of COVID-19 on chemical industries has been uneven. Chemical plants producing items towards consumer packaged products, food, personal care, medicine, and medical products have amped up production due to surge in demand. Whereas plant facilities manufacturing primary components for auto parts, construction materials, among others are forced to cut down or halt production.

Movement restrictions and nationwide lockdowns have also thrown the process of obtaining raw materials and delivering finished products to consumers in disarray.

• Utilities

Utility companies are usually well prepared for emergencies, dealing with natural disasters on a regular basis. But COVID-19 has made even the best of preparations inadequate. Widespread quarantines, social distancing, nationwide lockdowns have disrupted operations and the ability of the utility companies to react to situations. Power load reduction, shortage of assets, and equipment well past their mandated levels & inability to procure critical components in the lockdown are some of the immediate problems facing utility companies.

• Manufacturing

The majority of the manufacturing production is on-site with a large number of workers operating in close proximity, hence the effects of coronavirus are especially acute in the manufacturing sector. Reduction in demand and supply chain disruptions have put an additional strain on the cash flow and production capacities of the manufacturing units. The unknown nature of recovery has put a hold on major changes as manufacturing companies are preferring to ride off the pandemic to resume to full capacity.

• Healthcare

The healthcare infrastructure is strained as healthcare workers are struggling to cater to the huge influx of COVID-19 infected patients, coupled with the fact of a dire shortage of essential medical resources not being met by the supply-side due to lockdown.

People with other medical conditions are postponing their care visits to reduce the risk of virus infection, in effect, drying up the other revenue streams for healthcare institutions. The adoption of telemedicine has increased as a result to counteract it. Healthcare professionals now diagnose patients and dispense out medical advice over digital medium without putting the patients or themselves at risk of contracting the virus.

• Consumer Packaging Goods

Being an essential commodity, consumer packaged goods companies have to overcome twin challenges of supply shortage and anticipate demand during COVID-19. CPG companies need to be agile to cater to rapidly shifting consumer demands while also keeping their production units safe from possible contagion.
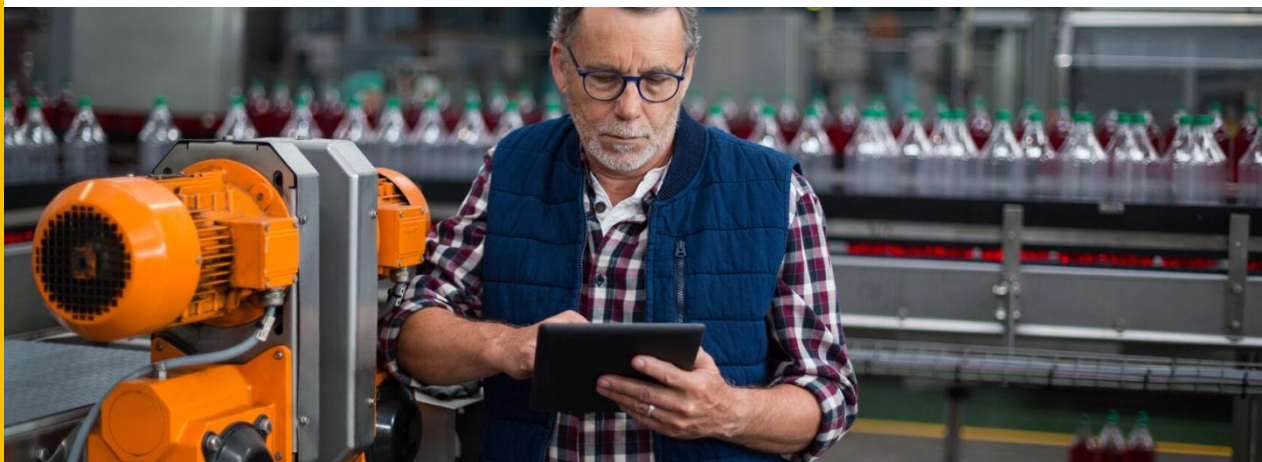
• Fleet Management

With the movement of goods and people at a fraction of the pre-COVID-19 level, the fleet management industry is facing an acute crisis. On the other hand, emergency delivery demand throughout the nation is causing fleet managers with limited capacity to work longer hours magnifying major driving risk factors-- distractions and fatigue, amid pandemic health concerns for their drivers.

COVID19 is causing structural changes to auto insurance claims. Physical distancing has become so pervasive and essential, the need to keep claims officers and drivers safe from contamination risk have fleet managers and insurance companies to find alternate digital solutions, such as enablement of virtual claims via Chatbots.
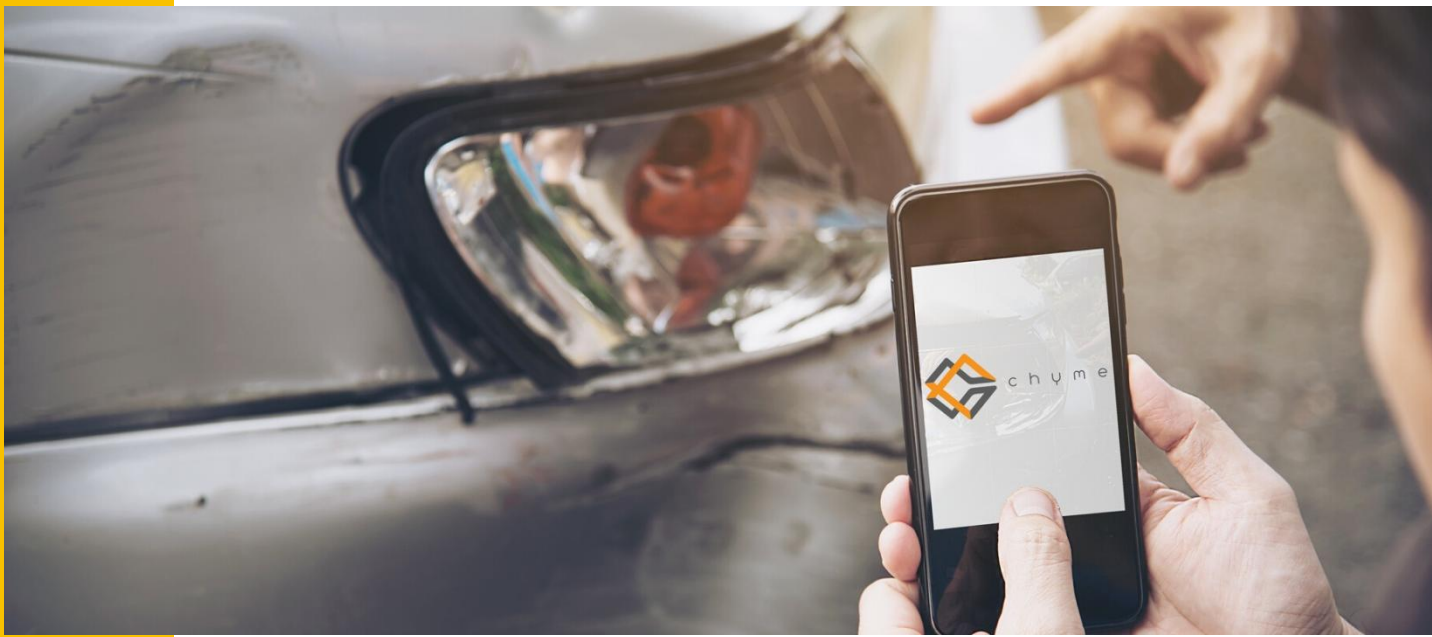
# GO DIGITAL TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE BEYOND COVID19

As businesses are in a state of flux, digital strategies are the most viable solution to face rapidly changing industry dynamics and consumer preferences. The current situation is a unique environment for organizations with enough incentives and minimal risks to take such an approach. As some organizations are accelerating their digital projects, following digital solutions can well place your business for a digital-led recovery as well.

> "When traditional channels and operations are impacted by the outbreak, the value of digital channels, products and operations become immediately obvious and CIOs can present a more convincing business case"
>
> - Gartner

Low Code Application Development
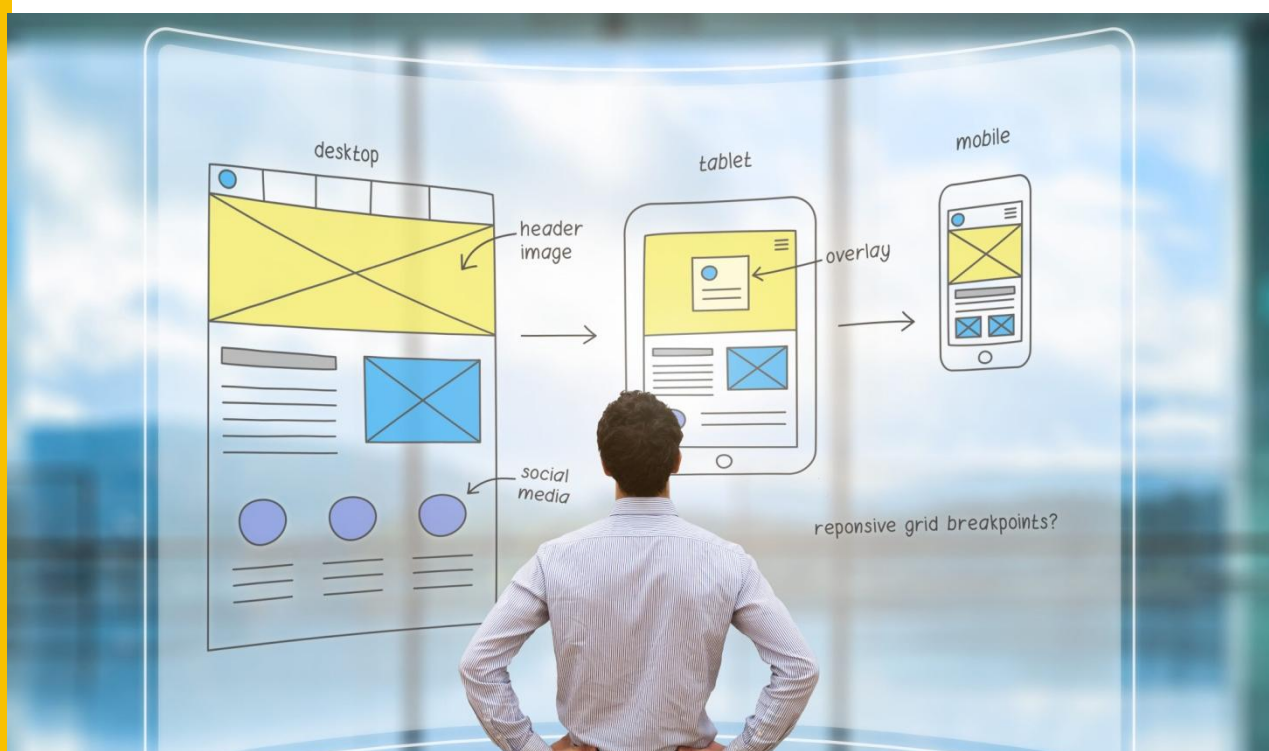
As COVID-19 response requires faster digital adoption, the responsibility to facilitate the digitization lies on the IT departments who are increasingly getting strained for resources and time.

As a result, Low Code App Development platforms are witnessing increased adoption which allows business users to build apps faster with minimal coding.

Even before the Pandemic, Gartner has predicted that by 2024, Low Code Application Development will be responsible for more than 65% of all development activities. The estimate is only expected to rise.

Low Code app development is simple visual development approach to build mobile and web apps using Drag and Drop components and graphical user interface. It enables the businesses to quickly build and deploy business apps for faster response.

Augmented Reality

Due to its variety of use cases, Augmented Reality is gaining significant traction during this pandemic period. Among its inherent benefits are significant savings on cost and employee time without compromising on quality. The possibility of Augmented Reality is nearly limitless in a remote working scenario during the crisis. Some popular use cases include employee training, virtual assistance for workers on the production floor, providing a reliable and comprehensive platform for customer virtual visits, and product model creation to share with customers and aid in sales.

Augmented Reality is among the core of technologies for effective workplace transformation. With proper annotation data layers over recorded videos, employee training can produce even better results than on-site training. Virtual customer visits through augmented reality enhance customer experience making them more inclined to try out the product which can be as effective as on-store visits. For field services, it is a reliable and safe way for workers to get assistance from experts without them being present on site.

Chatbots

The consumer behavior was already shifting towards conversational interfaces before COVID-19 pandemic accelerated its adoption. Due to social distancing measures and people avoiding to wait in long queues, many have resorted to interact with businesses over calls and other customer service channels to avail services. It has resulted in a high average waiting time to connect with a service representative leading to poor customer experience or loss in sales.

In this age of convenience and quick solutions, Chatbots can change the dynamics to favor businesses and help overwhelmed customer service personnel better handle huge influx of incoming queries.

Most of the queries are simple and similar to one another, which can be conveniently resolved by sophisticated Chatbots, leaving their human counterparts to answer challenging and unique questions.

Chatbots can act as an effective internal communications tool for the increased number of distributed and remote employees. Employee PTOs, queries related to HR policies, leave status, and other internal functional questions are easily answerable by Chatbots. If connected to the enterprise cloud system, Chatbots can even fetch documents when requested.

Chatbots according to its design can play a critical role throughout the employee lifecycle, including recruitment, on boarding, and retention, thus decreasing touch points in a social-distancing environment.

For partners, vendors, and other external stakeholders, Chatbots can resolve critical but simple queries such as purchase order status, inventory level. Customers can even place tickets via Chatbots when it is connected to a ticketing system. Such capability is especially essential for business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Digital Forms

Digital Forms are integral to any type of business response an organization can provide against the COVID-19 crisis. Be it remote working, on-site safety, social distancing, effective maintenance, and more, digital forms are the most effective tool to have for business continuity at the time of the pandemic.

Mobile forms provide decentralized access to data collection, Workers can collect and share data without passing on paper forms, which is believed to be effective carriers of the COVID-19 pathogens. While using paper forms, managers seldom have the supervision capabilities to understand the on-field situations to direct workers effectively, leading to a lack of quality in work deliveries.

Mobile forms, on the other hand, empower managers to make effective decisions and enforce workplace precautions by providing greater employee visibility

In the case of emergencies, your team is better equipped with mobile forms enabling rapid response to the situation in need. Supervisors will know the exact condition and nature of the situation on hand and mobilize the workforce to effectively tackle the situation. The real-time data enables managers to effectively plan inventory storage, schedule maintenance, and monitor asset health.

Companies can shift their maintenance cycles from time-based to performance-based using IoT enabled data, eliminating premature parts replacement thus saving cost or overextending production with an underperforming asset which will ultimately lead to unplanned plant downtime.

Mobile Apps

Cellular devices are versatile, prevalent and powerful, rendering mobile apps as an increasingly important tool for business continuity. They are critical to keeping teams productive in a social distancing environment. Adding to the urgency is the fact paper forms are effective carriers of COVID-19 pathogens where it can survive for days only to infect one of your employees when they come in contact with it.

Asset-intensive industries such as utilities, mining, construction and manufacturing, are in a tough situation. They have to keep the machinery and equipment in working condition in a low demand environment while also maintaining a social distancing environment to keep the worker safe. Custom mobile apps make it easy for asset based organizations to continue their operations.

Mobile apps eliminate virus carrying, error-prone paper forms from maintenance processes. Workers can carry out risk assessments, inspections, work order rounds, asset maintenance and reporting in a scheduled process while maintaining required distance between coworkers. Things (IoT) to boost capability and productivity.

As the electronic data is directly entered into the mobile phones, managers have real time information access to develop processes that maximize performance, prioritize critical tasks and ensure plant floor safety.

For essential firms, such as fleet management and utilities, mobile apps provide safety to field force employees and ability to respond quickly during emergencies. Operation managers get quality real-time on-field data to manage compliance and provide required guidance to field technicians. Mobile apps can be customized to include powerful features including Augmented Reality (AR) and Internet of Things (IoT) to boost capability and productivity.

Internet of Things

Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) has demonstrated clear value to organizations that made bold investments in it during pre-COVID times. IoT-enabled plants are able to better ensure employee safety and security, improve liquidity, lower costs, and improve operational flexibility among other range of benefits.

Internet of Things automatically transits on-site data reducing the need for personnel for asset monitoring. Using real-time information IoT enabled plant floors to enable remote employees to plan action and decisions to perform required tasks with safe distancing measures. Plant workers can measure production levels, conduct root causes analysis, and execute maintenance tasks without the need to be in the vicinity of other people.

With the help of positioning devices, like RFIDs or GPS tracking, workers can transmit their location and thus enforce proper planning for social distancing. Using IIoT tracking insights, managers can design workflows that minimize personal contact between workers. With appropriate use of temperature sensors and other remote health monitoring devices, managers can track workers' health and foresee any abnormalities and take appropriate actions to ensure employees' health and safety.

HANDLING SECURITY AT THE TIME OF CRISIS

An increase in remote working has put information systems of many organizations at risk and the role of cyber security is taking a center stage. In an ISC survey, the cyber security incidents during COVID-19 has increased by 23%. While remote working is comparatively less safe than working in an office setting, a combination of the measure at an organizational level and personal level can keep your systems safe from a security hazard.

- Advice employees to avoid public wifi and make use of personal connection with embedded security.
- Encrypt data sent through emails.
- Make a clear guide on how to use software that is employed in work.
- Make use of Mobile Device Management for effective control of remote devices.
- Exclusive use of official VPNs for remote work.
- Accommodate increased capacity for a large number of users.

PREPARING FOR POST PANDEMIC WORLD

Coronavirus has inherently and silently changed the business scenario to a large extent. Consumer sentiment is at an all-time low and demand is forecasted to be lower than pre-COVID levels even after the crisis has subsided. At present, business continuity is the core challenge for most organizations. Solutions to problems regarding employee safety, dealing with volatile demand surges and falls, handling remote workforce among others are the most pressing needs. But organizations ignoring this trend will find it harder to compete with businesses that have actively tried to adapt to the changing consumer needs.

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"There is a tendency to see digital technology as an opportunity or choice. However, the mounting pressures of a rapidly shifting business landscape are turning digital from a choice into an imperative. The longer a business waits, the more marginalized it will become."

– Deloitte

COVID-19 provides a perfect opportunity to reimagine every aspect of businesses. Organizations that had implemented digital transformation initiatives prior to the onset of the pandemic are much better placed than their counterparts in handling the situation. Many companies that missed the boat are eager to start their own initiatives once the crisis subsides. So much so that businesses with digital transformation projects planned in years have cut-shorted it to be implemented in mere months. Digital Transformation leaders are effectively reimagining every aspect of their business functions, from customer service experience to better handling of operations and bring forth better transparency in their expenses.

By accelerating digital adoption and creating new digital-enabled business models, organizations will have numerous advantages such as making data-driven decisions, better able to listen to their customers, produce a lean and agile operating environment, improved employee and workplace satisfaction, higher-skilled workforce and more, effectively driving organizational productivity to a new scale.

Digital transformation initiatives will help businesses bridge the gap to the new reality and position themselves well ahead in the future. It has the ability to enhance the identity of an organization of any industry or scale. Survive and thrive beyond the crisis to implement new qualities and enhance organizational capabilities for years to come.

ABOUT US

Unvired Enables Digital Transformation resulting in Enhanced Competitive Advantage for Enterprises both large and small globally.

Unvired is a Digital Solutions provider of Mobile/Web Applications, Digital Forms, and Artificial Intelligence enabled Chatbots for Enterprises. Headquartered in Houston, TX, and with customers in N. America, Europe, South Africa, and APAC, Unvired is committed to helping the businesses respond to COVID-19 by rapidly building and deploying high-performance business apps that enable remote operations and social distancing.

To support the businesses during these unprecedented times, Unvired is offering free POC and special price considerations to build and deploy social distancing apps that enable work from home and manage efficient field service. Contact us now to speak to our advisors or send an email to sales@unvired.com if you have questions.

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