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**Connect and protect  
your business for the  
future of work**



**It's safe to say that the world of work has undergone an extremely fast, drastic, and irrevocable transformation in the past year.**

Gone are the days of physically, geographically, and technologically confined workplaces—and workforces.

This abrupt and complete overhaul has been challenging for businesses and employees alike, as everything from operations, work stations, data management, leadership strategies, internal communications, to employee wellbeing and more, have succumbed to what is now deemed the 'new normal'.



## Say hello to hybrid

It's important to note that emerging technologies have been influencing and revolutionising our ways of working for a long time now. But the COVID-19 pandemic has served as the final nail in the coffin for 'business as usual'.

Whether it's flexible work, work from anywhere (WFA), or remote work, the undeniable truth is that the new world of work is hybrid. As regions around the world enter and exit periods of temporary lockdown, many employees grapple with an ever-changing work setup split between home and the office. Remote-first companies, on the other hand, have their employees work from home permanently, rendering the need for a physical office space completely obsolete.

Renowned futurist Dr Bruce McCabe sees the way forward as a delicate balance. People are ultimately social creatures, and temporarily removing the four walls of the office cannot change that. Whether bustling city centres will rise once again is yet to be seen, but flexible work, and the need for team interaction and collaboration, remains a sure thing for the foreseeable future.

More and more workers are also seeing flexible working arrangements as a priority, not a privilege. According to a 2020 study by Growmotely, 97 per cent of workers do not want to return to the office full-time post-pandemic. Similarly, a 2021 Gallup report found that 55 per cent of workers would look for work elsewhere if the remote work option was taken from them. Engagement levels were also found to be higher among remote workers, at 32 per cent, compared to only 28 per cent among office workers. For businesses, supporting and responding to the demands of their teams will be non-negotiable in order to maintain positive levels of employee productivity, engagement, and retention.

However, the impacts of remote work are not limited to work culture and morale. Having your employees work from anywhere also comes with critical security implications. Prioritising cyber security is a must, as you streamline and secure information across your head office, branch offices, and remote workforce.

More businesses across the country are working to implement and manage cloud platforms for their data and processes. Australian government agencies are

also doing the same, with the added obligations of maintaining data sovereignty and residency through in-country data centres.

As you transition to modern systems, it becomes clear that adapting to the demands of hybrid work means understanding that security and connectivity go hand in hand. For example, a vast number of public and private sector organisations now look to network solution providers for support with their network infrastructure, such as IP transit, IP WAN, SIP, SD-WAN, IP telephony and cloud on-ramps for dedicated data centre connections. Ultimately, ensuring high levels of user security, data protection, and availability will become critical to businesses well into the future.

## Digitisation: the big disruptor

Digital disruption is certainly a hot topic of the moment, but the true ramifications of this technology-led phenomenon have yet to take full effect in the

world of work. Some of the biggest consequences will include increased demand for digital skills, which will affect organisations' talent planning efforts and workers' employability.

No industry is immune to the impacts of digitisation, and the need to upskill will be felt across every economy. According to the Swinburne Research Report, the most in-demand digital skills around the world will cover:

- software programming and engineering
- data analytics
- visualisation
- IoT (Internet of Things)
- IT architecture
- security

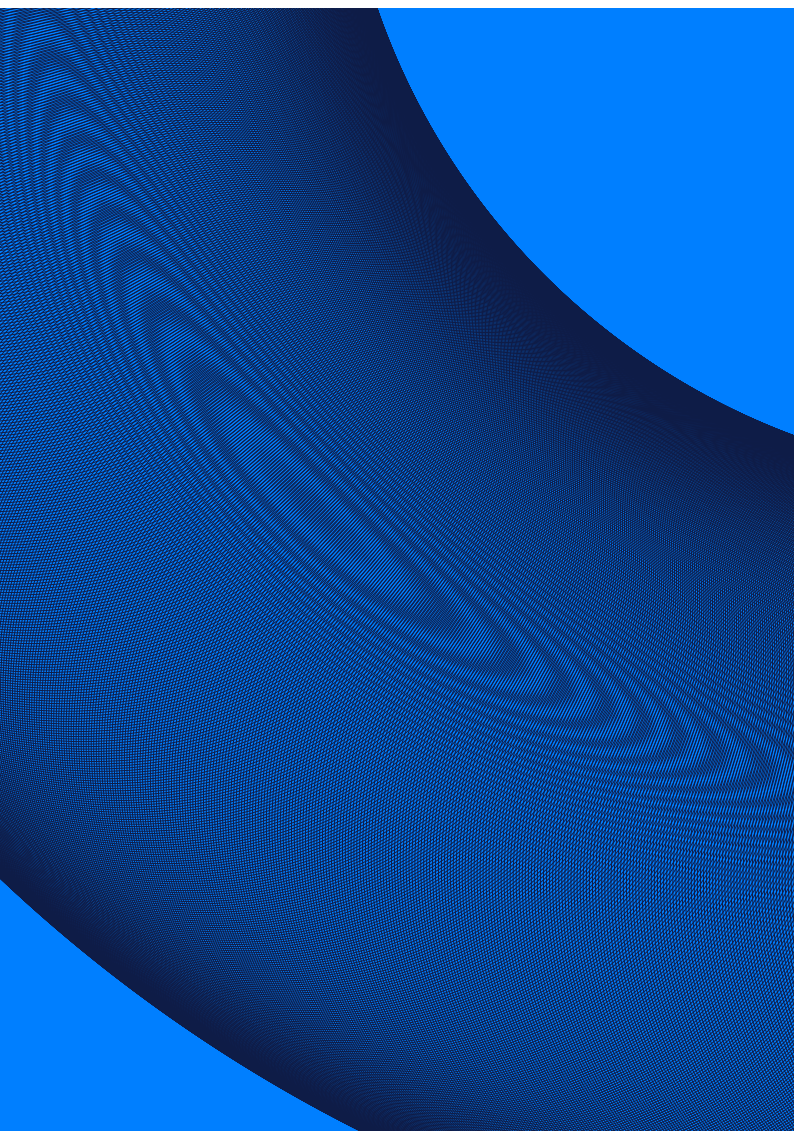
Upskilling the global workforce to bridge the digital divide has become more challenging amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Organisations are noticing a widespread skills shortage in IT and cybersecurity, due in large part to migration and travel restrictions that are limiting available talent pools.

Businesses who haven't done so already will need to ramp up their hiring for these advanced digital skills, and where possible, offer internal learning and development (L&D) programs to allow existing employees to upskill in these areas. Until now, many organisations have instead turned to outsourcing to meet their company's digital needs. In the future, relying too heavily on offshore workers may slow them down when compared to competitors who have made these capabilities a priority in-house.

Similarly, delivering a positive employee experience is a key differentiator for businesses in the battle for top talent. Investing in technologies that support smarter ways of working, such as agile collaboration and internal communication tools, helps keep employees feeling engaged, productive, and supported in their roles and teams. With the inevitable physical divide that comes with remote working, these digital platforms and channels, together with incentives such as regular employee recognition and rewards, are a must in order to support both employee wellbeing and employee experience as a whole.

## Operating further and faster

Artificial intelligence (AI) has come leaps and bounds in the past few years. New generations of more capable autonomous systems have emerged, from autonomous vehicles to automated check-out registers in supermarkets. Driven by improved





mechanics, sensors, and software, AI and machine learning are predicted to account for trillions of dollars through improved labour productivity. Currently, the finance, automotive, and telecommunications sectors lead AI adoption.

Meanwhile, for businesses, about half of the activities carried out by workers could be automated. In fact, automation software and robotics are already replacing various human tasks, including data entry, reporting, CRM, payments and invoicing, marketing, shipping and inventory management, customer support, hiring processes, and much more. This means that most workers—from builders, to bankers, to CEOs—will work alongside rapidly evolving machines. The nature of these occupations will likely change as a result.

## Elevating the experience

Digitisation also presents a unique opportunity to reinvent your customer experience (CX). The e-commerce industry, for example, has seen remarkable growth in the last few years, even amidst the economic challenges of the pandemic. Australian retail ecommerce revenue is forecast to grow by a compound annual rate of 4.22%, reaching \$45.7 billion by 2025. This is in large part due to the enhanced shopping experiences that online retailers can offer customers, using technologies such as live 24x7 support chatbots, augmented reality (AR), voice search, personalisation, AI-powered predictive marketing, and API-driven features.

E-commerce businesses have been particularly fast on the uptake of these technologies, but government agencies and businesses across all industries can, and must look to deploy similar optimisation strategies.

This may include optimising all consumer-facing platforms for mobile devices for improved user experience (UX), mobilising teams to boost productivity via speed to market and faster customer response times, or leveraging automation and DevOps tools to debug and streamline your processes. As customers continue to expect more from brands, investing in innovation and CX to design truly customer-centric solutions will give your business a significant advantage over competitors.

## Conclusion

**The COVID-19 pandemic may well be the biggest disruptor that most of us will see in our working lives.**

The good news is that disruption is a catalyst for innovation. Out of such drastic change comes a willingness to try new things, and to re-examine the way things have always been done.

For businesses and governments, right now is an excellent time to try new ideas, and embrace new technologies for the benefit of your employees, citizens, and customers.

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