Digital Acceleration in the Pandemic; How Organisations can Adapt to the New Normal
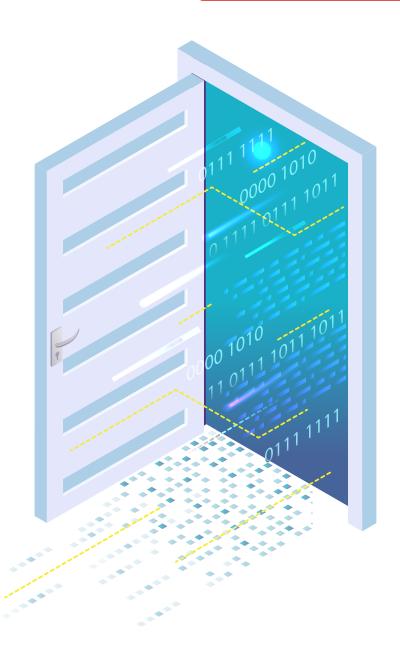
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Digital Transformation – an accelerated imperative

The need for digital transformation is not new. As a recent Harvard Business Review article noted: "technological advancements were already changing the world over the past two decades, from living standards to the very nature of our work."[1]

What we have seen this year is an acceptance that digital transformation is an imperative that all organisations need to undertake. A BDO blog summed up this sentiment when it stated "If there were any lingering doubts about the necessity of digital transformation to business longevity, the coronavirus has silenced them."[2]

There has definitely been an acceleration. A survey eFax conducted revealed that 77% of IT decision-makers would have accelerated digital transformation sooner if they were aware of the full impact it could make on their organisation in just a few months. What's more, 60% of respondents are accelerating the speed of their transformation projects as a direct result of the disruption the pandemic wrought on their workforces.[3]

It is clear that the businesses that survive the current crisis will be those that have been able to adapt business models, target customers with services relevant to their exact needs and, ultimately, be much more agile than they might otherwise have been.

Or, to look at it another way, it will be digital businesses that come out of this intact.

Talking about something like digital transformation is one thing but – what does it actually look like in reality? It is all very well pointing at the likes of Amazon and saying to be more like them, but when you are a business with thirty years of legacy operations behind you, being more Amazon is not a case of just flicking a switch.

In this paper, we will look at how digital transformation can actually bring intangible benefits. Drawing on exclusive new eFax research, we will highlight what businesses in different industries see as the key drivers in their digital journey, where they think they would be had the pandemic not prompted action, and what the lasting impact of digital transformation will be.

The benefits of driving digital transformation

Part of the issue with talking about something as all-encompassing as digital transformation is that it can end up feeling a bit intangible. For decision-makers being told they need to digitally transform, it can be somewhat overwhelming.

Being able to break down what benefits you can see, and what value they can unlock, is critical to understanding how an organisation can transform. To identify where businesses on their digital transformation journey were seeing a positive impact, eFax spoke to IT decision-makers at major global enterprises across a variety of sectors.

The results show that digitalisation brings immense opportunity across all aspects of the business – from infrastructure and operations, through culture and employee engagement, to the end-customer themselves.

An agile, innovative and secure infrastructure

So, what are some of the most important benefits our survey respondents have realised through the acceleration of digital transformation? When it came to the foundation of a company, being able to increase agility and innovation, completely remove paper-heavy processes and improve business operations and security all scored highly.

What are the most important benefits your company has realised by accelerating digital transformation during the lockdown?

	Results
Increases agility and innovation	43%
Completes the removal of outstanding paper-heavy processes	37%
Improved business operations	30%
Improves security	20%

By transforming their infrastructure and operations, these organisations are laying the groundwork for greater innovation and improved user-facing experiences. From a sector perspective, those enterprises in business and professional services were most likely to see the overall benefit of increased agility and innovation, with 63% of respondents highlighting it as a major plus, compared to 43% overall. They were also most likely to use digital transformation to remove paper-heavy processes, with 75% of firms seeing it as a positive, compared with 37% overall and just 26% of those operating in retail, distribution and transport.

The clear focus on getting these foundations in place highlighted that, across all sectors, businesses are aware of the need for the right infrastructure. They're also cognisant of the fact that an intuitive front-end is only as good as the backend databases informing it.

And it is not just what it means for customer-facing innovation, either; without the right infrastructure and support, employees themselves are unable to perform effectively.

CASE STUDY

Digital transformation in action – how turning one paper-based process digital saved £800 per employee

McCabe Group works in partnership with hundreds of developers and contractors to carry out groundworks and civil engineering projects ranging in value from £80,000 to £4 million. The group's site workers and project managers rely on receiving documents such as contracts, blueprints, drawings and plans to get the job done. Communication between sites and partners is essential and McCabe's preferred communication tool, the fax machine, was holding up work and costing the company approximately £800 per week per person.

It needed to find a cost-effective method to send information remotely, that eliminated the risk of losing any while guaranteeing that information was secure and stored efficiently at all stages of the process. To do that, it turned to eFax's Cloud Fax solution, which enables faxes to be received as PDF or TIFF files in an individual's email inbox. It also gives each user access to inbound/ outbound information on the move, eliminating the need for fax hardware, supplies and maintenance, while providing electronic storage for files.

Using cloud faxing has drastically improved time management and information flow freeing up managers to spend more time on site. Jobs are being completed faster, while communication between offices, sites, clients and suppliers has never been more efficient. McCabe Group estimates that using cloud fax services has completely eliminated the time and cost traditional fax machines were incurring for the business.

Empowered, collaborative employees, thriving in a digital culture

That is why it was heartening to see that many businesses experienced the benefits of digital transformation through how they encourage collaboration across departments, foster a digital culture, and ultimately improve employee empowerment.

What are the most important benefits your company has realised by accelerating digital transformation during the lockdown?

	Results
Encourages collaboration across departments	48%
Fosters a digital culture	47%
Employee empowerment	37%

Even before the pandemic, those organisations that were able to properly equip their employees with the tools and the support they needed were better placed to retain valuable talent and see benefits to productivity. One study found that a quarter of workers would consider leaving a job or rejecting a new role based on a negative technology experience.[4] Coming at a time when hiring people with the right skills is increasingly difficult, it is clear that businesses need to put in place the right environment for their employees to operate effectively.

That has become doubly important for organisations having a significant portion of their workforces now based out of the office. Technology has become the glue that connects teams, both in terms of allowing them to actually get their jobs done, and in keeping them connected, collaborating and communicating.

As we noted above, this goes beyond having intuitive user experiences in front end apps (important though that is). Everything about the way we are expected to work now needs to have the right foundations, even to the extent of being able to offer the likes of hybrid working (where a portion of workers work from the office, and others from home, with fluidity between the two). In fact, a separate eFax study found a huge majority (95%) of UK IT decision-makers are confident in the digital transformation steps they've put in place to enable the move to a hybrid workforce, highlighting the benefits of being able to use digitalisation to create the right environment for workers to thrive.

Leading to better experiences across the world

What are the most important benefits your company has realised by accelerating digital transformation during the lockdown?

	Results
Creation of new digital products and services	32%
Greater customer insights and better customer experience	26%
Opened the door to more globalisation	26%

That said, empowered employees and the right foundations are not the end goal. Ultimately, digital transformation has to deliver – in increased revenue, growing market share and better profitability. That means it needs to deliver better experiences for end-customers, whether they are other businesses or consumers.

It was no surprise to see our respondents highlighting the benefits of being able to understand the customer in more detail and using that to create new digital products and services. These were major positives for the decision-makers we spoke to.

The latter also has a critical role to play in opening the door to more globalisation and international expansion, providing businesses with a scale and reach that they might previously have struggled to access. A digital organisation can grow overseas with greater ease and offer a more consistent level of experience, all while maintaining central control. Suddenly, those that could not expand (or lacked the confidence to do so) were in a much better place to enter new markets, whether through a full launch or with pilot schemes and test projects.
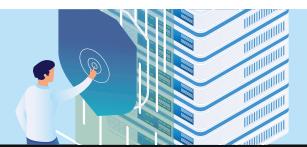
Sustaining a lasting impact

Of course, while the pandemic has massively accelerated digital transformation initiatives, that journey needs to be sustainable. The vast majority (94%) of respondents felt that their projects had made a lasting impact on their organisation. This is positive to see, as the external trends COVID-19 has driven forward are here to stay.

There has been an increased use of self-service and e-commerce with remote working and contactless payments and interactions (such as delivery). This means that businesses that want to engage with more digital users (whether consumers or employees) are going to need to ensure that all their transformation efforts have a lasting effect.

This is not about getting through the next couple of months; it is laying the groundwork for a new way of operating, irrespective of industry. Based on what the decision-makers we spoke to have said, many organisation recognise the benefits of digitalisation and are primed to tackle whatever comes next.

Realising the benefits of digital transformation

We all know digital transformation is an imperative. However, that doesn't mean that there is universal understanding – the uniqueness of individual organisations can make it hard to quantify the impact of such a large undertaking.

However, what we have seen from the IT decision-makers we spoke to shows that there are universal truths, which lead to major benefits. Digital transformation needs to be conducted in a structured way that builds foundations, empowers employees and creates the right environment to deliver new products and services that connect with customers, wherever they are. The companies that have done that, even under the pressures of the pandemic, are well placed to benefit in the coming months and years.

About the survey

eFax commissioned Vanson Bourne to survey 100 IT decision-makers in organisations with more than 1000 employees in August 2020.

[1] https://hbr.org/2020/09/how-to-harness-the-digital-transformation-of-the-covid-era
[2] https://www.bdo.com/insights/business-financial-advisory/strategy,-technology-transformation/covid-19-is-accelerating-the-rise-of-the-digital-e
[3] https://uktechnews.co.uk/2020/08/23/efax-research-reveals-it-decision-makers-accelerating-digital-transformation-due-to-disruption-caused-by-covid-19/

About eFax

eFax launched its digital cloud fax service with the goal of using the convenience of email and the speed of the internet to make it easier for people to send and receive faxes. eFax lets users and our 11 million customers receive, review, edit, sign, send and store faxes by email or through a web interface. Our appeal and success are built around three key features: the widest selection of phone numbers; an easy way to send and receive faxes and voicemail by email; and a fast, reliable and secure communications network.

To learn more about outsourcing to a digital cloud fax model with eFax, visit us at: eFaxCorporate.com

European Headquarters

eFax
European Headquarters
Unit 3, Woodford Business Park
Santry, Dublin 17, Ireland

Contact Sales:
UK 0800 689 0588
Rest of Europe +353 (1) 656 4950

Web:
eFaxCorporate.com

Follow Us