

What's the one thing all businesses need to pivot right now?

 By [Robin Fisher](#)

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Covid-19 has seen businesses around the globe accelerate their digital transformations - making years of progress in a matter of days in some cases. During the early stages of the crisis, organisations had to prioritise their most mission-critical functions to stabilise and pivot. Digital transformation emerged as one of those high-priority areas.



Robin Fisher

According to Salesforce research of C-level and senior business leaders in Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA), over four in five (82%) said their business has digitally transformed in response to Covid-19.

However, three in five (60%) believe this transformation is only temporary. As businesses move into the recovery phase, the critical nature of digital will become apparent. Businesses that maintain a transformative mindset will be better prepared to serve customers, increase productivity and engage their workforce as we move into the next normal.

Companies that rapidly shift to full, scalable, multi-channel digital transformation will better serve their customers, employees and partners and will be able to fully engage with their stakeholders through the pandemic. This will leave them in a strong position to capitalise on the new normal as we exit Covid-19.

Planning for the short- and long-term

In the early stages of the crisis, the big challenge facing business leaders was the need to make important decisions quickly. The vast majority of businesses (87%) confirm that they have found planning for both their long- and short-term future challenging.

As businesses enter the stabilise and recovery phases of the crisis, digital transformation will increase in importance. In the early stages, online became the frontline for many businesses – for some it presented the only channel on which they could safely engage with customers, employees and partners. In South Africa, for example, this has seen a relative boom in e-commerce for fast-moving consumer goods.

Now it is about providing positive experiences across every channel available. For example, almost half (45%) of business leaders say they will focus on employee engagement as they recover from the pandemic. This involves delivering on the digital learning, virtual exercise and online mental health training programmes that so many employees benefited from during the lockdown period.

Almost three in five (68%) businesses plan to make a greater investment in training and promoting employees permanently. This is vital at every layer of business to help businesses maintain their company's culture in the next normal; improve employee morale; and manage teams remotely.

Transforming the customer experience

While some businesses are concentrating primarily on transforming their businesses to adapt to today's context, over half (55%) think an increased focus on online sales and services is a permanent feature of business. This was demonstrated as retail giant Mr Price Group announced that "online sales post lockdown were up 75%", while noting that average weekly online sales for the 20 weeks to 15 August were "above the levels reported in the week of Black Friday in 2019".

A similar number of businesses believe online growth will be accompanied by a permanent shift towards flexible customer service. Given how quickly customers grow accustomed to new digital experiences and expect them as the norm, businesses that do not take a long-term view of digital transformation risk being left behind.

For example, Salesforce's Snapshot global research series shows that over half (57%) of businesses and organisations have provided surveyed consumers with personalised customer service. This is an interesting statistic considering that Salesforce's State of the Connected Customer report, conducted pre-pandemic, shows that 52% of customers say companies are generally impersonal. If businesses are providing a higher level of personalised service in spite of the challenges faced during the pandemic, customers will expect this to not only continue, but to markedly improve.

Expertise, speed and empathy

While personalisation is a key element of great customer service, the Snapshot research indicates that expertise, speed and empathy were the three most important customer service qualities during the pandemic. Again, comparing this to previous research, 71% of customers expect businesses to communicate with them in real time, with over half (55%) preferring digital channels over traditional ones. The digital customer experience is therefore fundamental.

Businesses must focus on building 360-degree customer views that enable them to have more empathetic and contextually aware engagements. Furthermore, the information needed to provide a personalised service needs to be rapidly accessible. For context, over half (56%) of customers expect to find whatever they need from a company in three clicks or less. This margin for error, already small, is decreasing all the time.

Moving beyond coping

For business leaders, the process of stabilising businesses has been a challenging one, but for many it has led to build a greater understanding of what customers and employees need from them.

The companies that are able to keep a transformative mindset will come out strongest. Businesses need to consult with their trusted digital advisors, and make honest assessments of their preparedness levels for the future of work.

ABOUT ROBIN FISHER

Area Vice President, Salesforce - Emerging Markets

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