



WHAT WE (AND OTHER BUSINESSES)  
**HAVE LEARNT**  
SO FAR FROM THE CORONAVIRUS  
**PANDEMIC**

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W H I T E P A P E R

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# THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGING BUSINESS

2020 will forever be known as one of the most impactful years in history for businesses. The coronavirus pandemic caused disruption for all; resulting in forced change to react to the circumstances.

Digital transformation projects had to be severely accelerated. With many businesses realising just how quickly they can adapt when they must. Just like any time of disruption new start-ups have emerged through seizing opportunities.

COVID-19 has single-handedly caused the biggest shakeup in business...ever.

As lockdowns continue for the short-term whilst the vaccines are rolled out, the situation remains precarious. Especially from a business standpoint.

Some businesses are going to come out of this much stronger in the market, and sadly some aren't even going to see the other side.

This white paper will look at the key aspects from a business and technology standpoint, culminating in key learnings the coronavirus pandemic has taught us (and many other businesses).

## COVID-19: THE NUMBERS

9.9 million jobs furloughed as of December 2020 (UK Government)

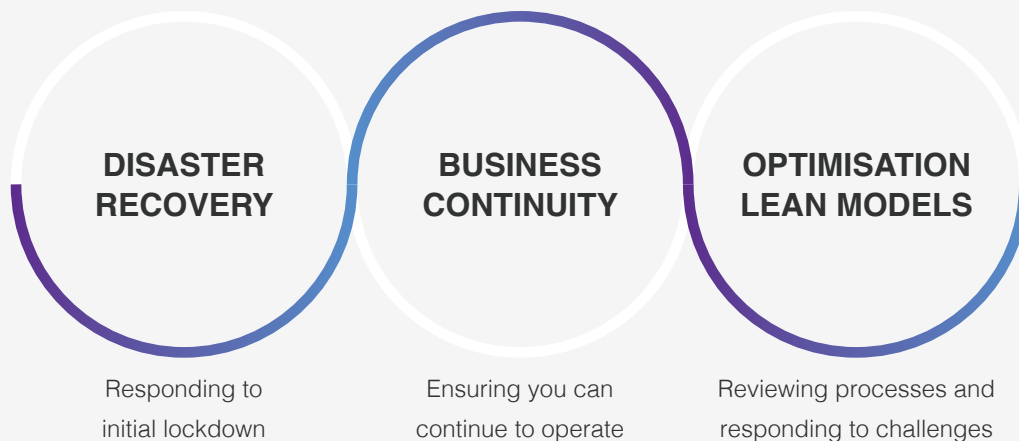
1.2 million employers furloughing (UK Government)

49% of people working from home (Office for National Statistics)

# WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH GET GOING!

COVID-19 has accelerated digital change and the introduction of collaboration tools and automation. Businesses have finally realised that they no longer need to be confined to an office space. Or that their people need to be chained to a desk. The digital shifts experienced over the past year are going to form the basis of what everyone is calling 'the new normal'.

We identified 3 core stages of planning for a COVID-19 response strategy:



The optimisation of lean models is where we are now. Businesses are reviewing their processes, systems and operating models in response to the need to adapt. Businesses have surprised themselves. With a McKinsey & Company study outlining that businesses have on average accelerated their digital offering with 7 years of progress in a matter of months!

But it's time to get back into the driving seat, so that your business, not COVID-19 is driving your digital change.

## BUSINESS AGILITY IS AN IMPERATIVE

Some simply were not ready to face this much disruption. But there's nothing like a crisis to spark innovation. We've seen businesses accelerate the rollout of [communication and collaboration tools so that staff can work from home](#), restaurants, pubs and bars pivoted to offer take-a-ways and home delivery services. Even new start-ups have emerged as opportunity has been uncovered.

- An extra 84,758 start-ups were founded in 2020 compared with 2019
- Equivalent to 12.3% increase year on year
- The highest percentage growth since 2011 and highest actual growth on record

*(Based on Companies House data)*

Business agility is your organisation's capability to be adaptive, flexible and creative through a changing environment. Being agile means that you can respond quicker to opportunities or threats that are both internal and external.

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***“Success today requires the agility and drive to constantly rethink, reinvigorate, react, and reinvent.”***

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*BILL GATES*

Our customer Markerstudy were observing the pandemic as it continued to look like the UK would be locking down as many other countries had already. Thanks to their agility as a business, they were able to move 3,000 staff to homeworking in just two days. Of the 3,000 employees, 1,400 of them were in customer facing roles. The technology in place enabled them to take inbound calls from brokers, customers and partners from home.

Agility not only helps from a business continuity aspect, but also forms the basis of a resilient organisation. One that can outlast a pandemic and anything else that damages the economy for that matter. For this reason, many have been able to find agility in the cloud. Markerstudy for example were able to respond quickly to the need to work from home by deploying a [Mitel IP solution](#) and [Mitel Contact Centre](#), managed as a hosted solution in a secure cloud.

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***“As the technology and business continuity strategy was already in place and we predicted that lockdown was going to happen before it was officially announced, we were ahead of the game with our deployment strategy.”***

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*ADAM MILLER,  
GROUP HEAD OF IT, MARKERSTUDY*

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## LESSON #2

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### OFFICE EMPLOYEES WORK JUST AS WELL FROM HOME (IF NOT BETTER!)

Being able to transition to home working has been crucial for most businesses. One thing we've learnt is that it's not only essential to have the option to in uncertain times, but that employees for the majority actually work better.

Fifty of the biggest UK employers said that they have no plans to return all staff to the office full-time in the near future (BBC). Some smaller businesses are even ditching their offices all together!

The new normal is set to become a mixture of employees either working fully remote or in a more hybrid way. Being able to work both in the office, from their home and well, pretty much anywhere else that has internet access.

Although the past months have been the biggest working from home experiment ever, businesses have had no choice but to take the gamble. We think it's paid off (and there's plenty of research to prove it).

- 55% of workers believe that their colleagues are just as, if not more productive now than before the first lockdown (*Deloitte*)
- Remote employees work 1.4 days per month more than those working in the office (*Business News Daily*)
- Once the crisis is over, 57% of the workforce would like to be able to continue working from home, either full-time or some of the time (*YouGov*)

As with any drastic change however, there are challenges that come with working from home. There has been more of an emergence of burnout, with people working too much. Microsoft Teams chats on a Saturday and Sunday have increased by over 200% (*Microsoft*).

There are also the mental health concerns surrounding working from home. 60% of adults say their mental health had got worse since lockdown and working from home (*Mind*). Making it clear that it's not only crucial to [teach employees how to work well from home](#), but to also to teach them how to switch off from work and reach out when they need help.

Working from home all the time just doesn't suit everyone. Introverts have enjoyed it more in general, whilst extroverts have found it more challenging. The future is likely to see a workforce that has the option to work from home more. There's likely to be more hybrid approaches, with employers combining being in the office and working from home.

### DIGITAL PROJECTS CAN BE DELIVERED FASTER THAN WE THINK

COVID-19 was the biggest driving force behind digital transformation we may ever see. Prior to and at the start of the first lockdown, businesses worked hard and fast to get the solutions and services they needed in place to ensure they could continue to deliver at least something to their customers. Even if it was only a fraction of what they usually delivered.

From rapidly adjusting to home working, to taking your food services online with Just Eat or Deliveroo or switching from being an all in-person event, to an all-remote event. Many of these digital initiatives were delivered at accelerated speed in just days.

Which begs the question: why does it usually take us so long? Due to the acceleration required to deliver projects during lockdown, perhaps many companies reduced some of their belt and braces processes of change management, believing that the risk was worth the reward.

The need to deliver these digital projects quickly has in fact sped up the adoption of digital technologies by several years according to some executives (*McKinsey & Company*).

Our customer [Mercury Holidays](#) realised that they needed to address challenges brought about by a huge influx in digital interactions when the UK and other countries locked down. Thinking ahead they chose to implement [INBOX](#) for digital enquiry management, a solution that can be delivered in just three days (requirement dependent). Mercury was able to streamline their customer enquiries into one blended view and prioritise and automate responses.

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***“In the most challenging business climate we have ever seen, the biggest gain for us implementing the INBOX solution is efficiency. We have automated the organisation of our workload during this hectic time and now have the ability to implement self service for our customers which will lead to improved efficiencies and vast cost-savings.”***

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NEIL WHITAKER,  
HEAD OF IT, MERCURY HOLIDAYS

With it proven that we can deliver digital projects much faster when the need arises it is unlikely businesses will want to take their feet off the gas. The new normal will bring new challenges; now is the time to be speeding up not slowing down.

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## LESSON #4

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### YOU MUST WORK AT THE SPEED OF (OR FASTER) THAN THE CUSTOMER

The crisis required many businesses to reimagine and become innovative with their customer experience. Forced to think about their online journey, customer communication channels and ways to deliver on customer needs faster.

Businesses that didn't think about where their customers would go next during the pandemic risked further problems like a lack of sales, bad press and a higher volume of complaints.

We worked over lockdown to implement solutions that kept our clients ahead. One of them was a university. Not wanting to receive the same backlash as some of the leading universities during the second national lockdown when students were back, they set up a crisis contact centre for parents and students to ask their enquiries.

The initiative was driven by their forward-thinking marketing department. 10 agents from IT and marketing utilised a [Mitel Contact Centre](#) to respond and answer enquiries. Keeping both students' and their parents' minds at rest.

The project undertaken by the university has put them into a position where they will have a contact centre designated for times of crisis as seen with the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the pressure of being able to deliver the best possible service increasing, this is also going to place the emphasis on being a data-led organisation. Our customer Markerstudy implemented our [SIP Management Portal, NETX2](#) to be able to control their customer call environment and journey.

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***“To be able to generate not just reports using NETX2, but real-time insight into call behaviour is a fantastic boost to our ability to be a responsive data-led organisation. It gives us a unified and meaningful view of the environment, saving time and effort.”***

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**LOU LWIN,**  
GROUP HEAD OF ENTERPRISE ARCHITECTURE, MARKERSTUDY

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## LESSON #5

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### PUT PEOPLE FIRST

As well as all the amazing benefits delivered from being able to work from home, we've also seen a darker side. Typically, employees that are introverts have thrived in the working conditions, whilst extroverts have struggled with the lack of interaction with colleagues.

More than half of adults (60%) and over two thirds of young people (68%) have said their mental health has got worse during lockdown (*Mind*). It's never been more vital for businesses to put their people first. Especially for those who live alone, working from home can sometimes be a lonely situation. It's part of the reason why it's vital to have measures in place for regular catch ups and check ins with colleagues.

Whether you have a short team call at the beginning of the day, 10-minute watercooler-type chats, or a scheduled pub quiz. As social creatures communicating is a need.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of businesses to help their people find the right balance to meet their social needs. This could mean in the new normal, hybrid ways of working, with people working both from home at in the office to strike the right amount of homeworking for them.





# KEY TAKEAWAYS

The past year has pushed businesses to the limit. From shifting people to a work from home setup rapidly, to completely new ways of operating, COVID-19 has changed business forever. Key learnings:

- 1** Business agility is an imperative – Rethink your processes to become more able to react to the changing business environment.
- 2** Office employees can work just as well (if not better) at home – You've got all the communication and collaboration tools in place but do you have the monitoring and measuring tools to optimise performance?
- 3** Digital projects can be delivered much faster than we think – Don't take your foot off the gas. We know digital change can be delivered faster.
- 4** You must work at the speed (or faster) as the customer – Becoming data-led is crucial, do you have the metrics and measures in place to monitor the customer experience and journey effectively?
- 5** Put people first – A happy workforce = happy customers.

There might be more pandemics to contend with, or other situations of crisis that rock the business environment. Those that have continued to accelerate their digital plans will be the ones who are best prepared for it.

# ABOUT BRITANNIC

Britannic are award-winning specialists in business communications, systems integration, digital transformation and managed services. Our technical expertise and consultative approach have helped hundreds of midsized UK businesses with their digital requirements.

Working with customers to understand their business goals, processes and culture, Britannic develop digital strategies, tailored to each client's needs. As leaders in innovation, Britannic are proud to bring disruptive technologies, such as artificial intelligence, web real time communications and business process automation to customers.

Britannic partners with industry-leading vendors such as Mitel, Avaya, Bizvu, Red Box and ComputerTel. Trailfinders, North Herts District Council, Markerstudy Group and the Kennel Club are just a few of the customers that have transformed their business with Britannic. Hit the ground running with your digital transformation project.

## GET IN TOUCH TODAY.

**01483 242 526**

**HELLO@BTLNET.CO.UK**

**WWW.BTLNET.CO.UK**