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# What Comes Next: Visualizing the Future After the Great Pandemic of 2020 – Part 3

## Marketing/Sales and Technology

*(Part 3 of 3)*

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This three-part article offers possible post-COVID-19 changes to our work environment, from a variety of perspectives: social, design, technology, marketing and sales, legal, financial and government. In part 1 – found [here](#) – the article looked at the impacts of the pandemic on social bonds, the workplace and government regulation. Part 2 – found [here](#) – examined the possible changes after the pandemic that could reshape how lawyers protect their clients, as well as the financial management and parameters of future transactions.

This final part 3 of the article discusses the potential future of marketing and sales, as well as technology, that will be impacted by COVID-19. To paraphrase the former mayor of Chicago, I hope these thoughts may help us not waste this crisis and instead prepare for a brighter future.

### Technology

Remote working has accelerated the need for universal embrace of technology. Here are several thoughts on this aspect:

Universal Competence. Gone are days of luxury when you could dictate or scribble your notes in the margin or on the page, hand them to an assistant and expect flawless deciphering and typing in a rapidly produced work product. Typing and correcting is now second nature to most of us, either diminishing the demands on our assistants' time or freeing them up to perform other tasks. The ubiquity of desktop computers and laptops, coupled with at least one or two other personal gadgets, to produce work product will only intensify.

Better Connectedness From a Distance. Just as voice conference calls are second nature and taken for granted, videoconferencing will soon become universal, thus reducing the need to travel or come to the office. As video's reliability and resolution improve, just as the photos in every generation of wireless phone were exponentially better, video calls' use, cost effectiveness and efficiency will further diminish the need for travel and office space. We might reduce the reflexive compulsion for business travel, and attendance at events and conferences. This has been especially so during the pandemic as virtual lunches and events have blossomed. Video is not going to replace the need for people to meet and interact in person at some point in any business relationship or transaction. It will, however, alter the paradigm and make more acceptable much fewer in-person contacts.

Enhanced Acceptance of Remote Working. Any stigma to working remotely will ebb if not disappear. In fact, the converse may be true, as people wonder why that guy always comes to the office – can't he just get his work done at home and save time and money and not imperil himself and others? Improvements in and wider use of remote technology applications may also support the need or culture of diminished in person transactional interactions. We have already seen this dramatically with less in-person negotiation sessions as people just send markups back and forth and less in-person closings as PDF and DocuSign tech have eliminated the need to perform these time consuming and costly tasks in person. Just as the need to be chained to your desk is called into question, we could see a reassessment of other business travel and in-person interaction. Further in the future, litigation may be revolutionized by more video depositions and even motion calls in court to reduce unnecessary exposure.

More Backroom Automation and Sophistication. The need for broadband, cabling, wifi, bandwidth, data storage, data compression, backhaul, caching, routers, hubs, processing power, internet of things, bits and bytes will be the lubricant to this generation, reducing if not replacing the role of oil in previous generations. Remote working will increase the risk of hacking and heighten the need for secured networks fortified against cybertheft and introductions of malware. Further, the adoption of more sophisticated applications of technology such as AI and machine learning will accelerate. In the legal profession, for example, AI and machine learning will enable corporate and litigation document review to be conducted more efficiently and at remote locations. The need will intensify to support the seemingly insatiable demand for video and other broadband service.

Increasing Strategic and High-Level Management Role. The dependence on technology to operate our businesses and lives, already acute, will become more critical. Most companies of any size will have a “C” suite officer whose job is to have the data running seamlessly through the ether (the modern equivalent of the trains running on time). Technology will be recognized universally as the glue holding the business together in crucial periods, and there will be no excuse for downtime, slowness or dysfunctionality, whatever the perceived cost.

### **Marketing and Sales**

Reaction to the pandemic may recalibrate the old adage that there is no substitute for pressing the flesh and looking them in the eyes. Of course, we will not become hermits and rely only on video and email to communicate with clients and prospects. We humans will always need interpersonal interactivity. Our clients will always want to see their service provider in person.

Interpersonal contact will still form the cornerstone of deep and trusting relationships. That said, the plethora and omnipresence of in-person meetings, meals and events, particularly those involving travel and being around a multitude of strangers, may become more circumspect and curtailed. As a result, here are some ways approaches to marketing and sales may change.

Diminished Travel and Entertainment. Business trips, tradeshow, and even meals and entertainment are petri dishes for breeding microbials. Sitting in a crowded basketball arena, constantly passing beers down the 20-seat row and then passing the germ-ridden money back to the vendor, or standing up at a theatre every time a patron wants to brush by you to get to her seat conjures up frightful images of too little social distancing. Pre-pandemic income tax code revisions diminished or even eliminated deductions for some of these items and, unless reassessed, will only contribute to the declining use of this tactic.

Increased Communication With Information and Videoconferencing. The future may simply substitute pressing the flesh with increased pressing the keyboards by writing relevant alerts, blogs and newsletters. Or pressing the videoconferencing button. Or more podcasts and video webinars. Shorter calls with no ability to multitask since you are on screen may even enhance the connectedness and experience, allow more interaction, and further save time and cost while allowing more time with family and friends.

Creative Use of Technology in Lieu of Direct Marketing. How do you meet new people and develop and expand your network in this environment when interpersonal contact is reduced? Perhaps business travel and conferences will simply diminish in frequency but certainly not be eliminated. A new emerging culture may increase Zoom video and other “virtual” introductions. Video cocktail parties, lunches, gab fests, etc. could become *de rigueur*. Expanded social media interactions, particularly LinkedIn, will accelerate. Certainly email introductions are a common means of making introductions now but could certainly accelerate in the future. In fact, organizations could set up random “speed dating” and similar video introductions for their members. Virtual conferences are even starting to emerge in lieu of recently canceled gatherings; this trend could definitely gain traction in an age of continued social distancing needs. Instead of going to a conference and scrolling through the register of attendees, perhaps a conference host can arrange introductory conversations between those requesting conversations.

Digital Marketing. The trend toward digital marketing will accelerate even more. This will become an increasingly more sophisticated and indispensable tool to segment and target the potential customer base than it is now. Just as many leads are now generated through digital and then closed and serviced by an account team, the paradigm may change as customers may not expect, or I daresay want, as much face-to-face service as in the past. Moreover, many small and midsize firms will recognize the need to broaden their reach and sophistication with the use of these tools. Whether digital marketing will be used as an offensive weapon as

it is now, or will evolve to a defensive one, where you need to adopt this tactic to avoid being left behind, this trend will certainly accelerate.

### **Looking Ahead**

Some might say that all the talk of major transformational shifts due to the COVID-19 pandemic is an overreaction. After all, pandemics are rare black swan events. There will soon be a vaccine. Many die every year during flu season. Society has to balance health and safety against a booming productive economy. All of this is true. However, in the past 20 years we have had several worldwide pandemics, like SARS, MERS, H1N1, avian flu, Ebola, to name a few. We have also had societal and business altering events like 9/11 and the financial pandemic in 2007-8. Some might even observe that these "black swans," being not so rare, are more like "black ducks."

Ignoring the trends of spreading diseases in a rapidly globalized world, as well as the likely occurrence of other truly unforeseeable occurrences, is to ignore the need to properly address the ramifications of these events and perhaps recognize a way to improve our ability to mitigate disruption in the future. While no one has a crystal ball, the possible responses to the pandemic may lead to profound changes or accelerate existing trends in our working environments in a broad panoply of areas, not the least of which includes those discussed above.

Our future office and work environment, whether in the context of socialization, office structure, technology, marketing and sales, legal, financial, and governmental will be as profoundly different in the future as was our country before and after the last world war. Once the genie is out of the bottle, it is difficult to put back in.