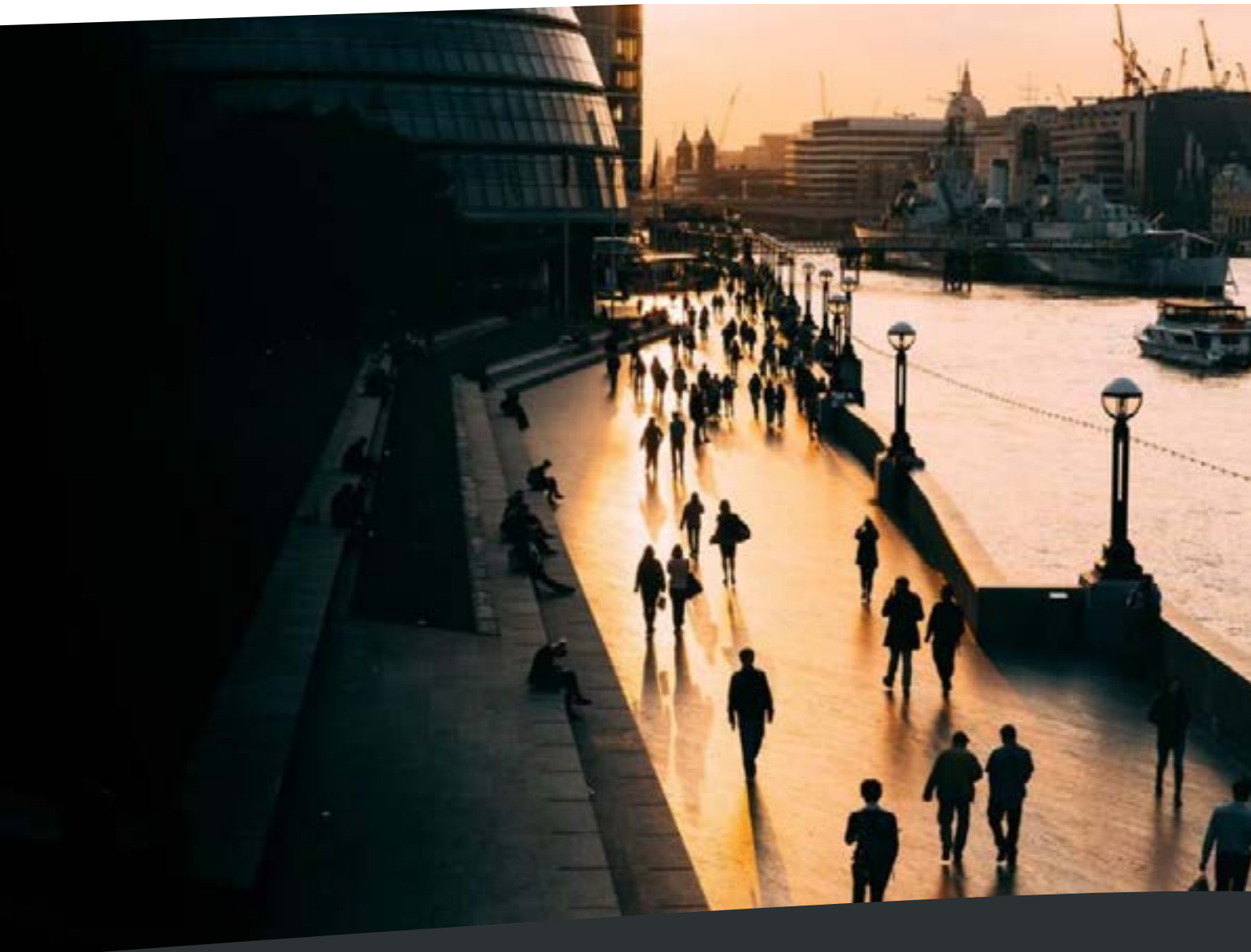


Blue Saffron

Managed IT



Five key findings from lockdown

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Introduction

Blue Saffron, in common with many in our industry, have worked at pace and with diligence on customer projects to relocate, reorient and in some cases rearchitect the fabric of their IT service – to adapt to what has been hailed as one of the biggest shifts in working practice in the last hundred years. The experience has been a roller coaster!!

From the many conversations we have had with suppliers, customers, consultants and industry observers, we have taken some time out to reflect and share the experience of migrating and supporting hundreds of companies and thousands of users. An independently commissioned research piece in association with Larato has also helped to widen our intelligence gathering pool.

Amongst the many recent conversations we have had, five key areas stand out as critical for delivering the improvements businesses want.

1. Remote working and the redefined workplace (5 min read)
2. A more agile business model (5 min read)
3. Improved information security (5 min read)
4. Data led decisions and automation (4 min read)
5. Rethinking your customer experience (3 min read)

Remote working and the redefined workplace

The onset of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown saw a mad dash by businesses to enable home working, a set-up for which some firms and their employees were ill prepared. With rushed decisions came compromise and short-term fixes. As things settle down, businesses are now revisiting what the workplace future looks like and where IT can adapt and its role. Along with independent commissioned research, we've taken our own look at firms' reactions to lockdown, what is happening as they re-emerge into a less restrictive environment and how Blue Saffron can support to make companies future-ready.

What happened through lockdown?

What is apparent from the many conversations we've had with suppliers, customers, consultants and industry observers is that a company's relationship with IT is likely to change, perhaps indefinitely! Resilience is vital and evolution is necessary. From the outset, the IT community scrambled to respond to virtual working demands, the most common hurdles being:

- The need for secure access to corporate services and office networks. In the first two weeks alone, we assessed, constructed and tested software for hundreds of individuals to get them securely online.
- Unstable domestic broadband connections. Our team successfully triaged the "chain" from end user device, through to residential broadband set ups, ensuring optimal configuration and recommending equipment upgrades where necessary.

- Unavailability of End User Devices – typically laptops. There was a frenzied rush to procure laptops for staff during a global shortage. Our response was to repurpose office PCs as remote access devices, installing, configuring and testing them gave clients an immediate and much-needed remedy.

What is happening now?

As lockdown restrictions have cautiously lifted, the workplace has again shifted. 75% of businesses are actively assessing the best way to get their employees back to the office and debating the future of home working, workforce retention and what life looks beyond furlough. While the flexibility and autonomy of remote working has led to some signs of greater productivity as work/life balance improves, the economic upside to reframing the workplace allows for significant cost savings on rents, travel, infrastructure spending and more.

Given the operational nuances of each business, Blue Saffron has adapted intelligently to specific client requests and requirements, developing remote working solutions to meet mid-market Enterprise needs. As one customer commented,

*"Our current managed desktop service could not natively run audio and video services. As our use of Teams has increased exponentially, Blue Saffron have designed a new modern workplace architecture where this is no longer a problem."
– professional services firm, central London.*



When it came to the intricacies of furloughing, we designed repeatable solutions that were managed using the Blue Saffron Knowledge Base and workflow automations, allowing anything from email forwarding, through to Microsoft License removal, mailbox conversions and more. Easy to use, each process was entirely reversible allowing for greater flexibility in these transitory times.

What happens next?

A saw-toothed recovery means adaptability is key and Blue Saffron, like many in our industry, have worked with pace, diligence and experience to relocate, reorient and rearchitect the fabric of myriad firms' IT services. So, what needs to happen next?

With 52% of our survey respondents believing that 10–25% of the workforce will continue to work from home over the next year, businesses need to consider the opportunities and challenges they will inevitably face.

- Remote working. The rush to set up home-based working did not always lead to the best deployment of resources. Opportunities to consider contracted and more flexible employment models are compelling. Now is the time to step back and take a considered approach to working out a feasible IT strategy for the future.
- Business-grade connectivity. Now that the suspension of network supplier deliveries has abated, and business broadband is more affordable there is little question that robust, reliable connectivity is within easy reach.
- Cyber-security protection. Given that 53% of respondents felt that one of the biggest challenges to adapting to lockdown was IT security, while 74% reported that their own customers were concerned about cybersecurity, companies will require a considered and well thought through approach to such precautions.
- Cloud-based applications. With 65% of companies using cloud and hosting capabilities

during lockdown, there has only been increasing demand for such agile technology. Now is the time to think long term.

- Collaboration. Our survey highlighted that companies relied on video conferencing like never before. It also showed that it was rare for businesses to fully leverage the capabilities of software suites to their full capacity. Training is essential. With a marked shift of phone based activity from the central office to remote working locations, both the convenience and security of extending collaboration tools to allow phone contact (teams voice) has borne many benefits.
- Upgrading equipment. The rush to get employees up and running meant corners were often cut, proving short term and expensive. Step back, take a breath, review where investment needs to be made and get good advice
- IT support. Decisions, some difficult, will need to be made on how IT support will evolve. More than 50% of companies are considering external support agencies, whether in the form of a partnership, hybrid model or an ad hoc project based engagement.

What is clear is that the re-engineering of working practices is a topic for hot debate and one that 75% of companies are actively engaged in. While some companies have confirmed that remote working is likely to remain in place, other firms are keen to mix it up, between office, work near home set ups in suburban workspaces and/or virtual working. Any solution will require a mix of thought, flexibility, a robust infrastructure and quality support.

Our customer satisfaction retained its 98% rating, even with a significant rise in support requests, highlighting our skill, dependability and professionalism. As one happy customer confirmed,

"It was a tough time for us, but the Blue Saffron team were fantastically supportive, not only in keeping us running, but identifying and innovative solutions that boosted our productivity and kept control of our costs" – South East headquartered accounting firm

A more agile business model

The intensity of change for companies has recently hit an all-time high as lockdown became our new reality. Suddenly, forced investment decisions were being made at great speed as firms' business plans went up in smoke and quick fixes gained traction. As lockdown slowly lifts it is vital that leaders and management teams work closely with business partners to shore up their firm's resilience and future success, while remaining agile in the face of economic uncertainty.

What happened through lockdown?

The impact of COVID-19 was swift. Some companies went straight into survival mode, looking for ways to reduce spending on IT by suspending current initiatives, cancelling contractors, deferring all non-essential purchases, renegotiating supplier contracts and furloughing or reducing employee numbers. Others saw it as an opportunity to ride the collective wave and join forces with experts in specific fields to navigate a change in business procedure and organisational structure.

Blue Saffron was on hand to help negotiate the pitfalls of imposed lockdown. As one satisfied customer commented,

"It was a tough time for us, but the Blue Saffron team were fantastically supportive, not only in keeping us running, but identifying and implementing innovative solutions like Teams Voice, that boosted our productivity and kept control of our costs". – Operations Manager, national education recruiter

As belts were tightened and budgets were scrutinised, it became clear that enlightened investment during a business turnaround could pay dividends in the future. Technology, now more than ever, is at the forefront of business sustainability and success. Blue Saffron has a proven track record of supporting companies as they adjust to fluctuating circumstances, providing skilled advice, robust project execution and considered redesign of operational capabilities. In some cases, business models have evolved into completely different beasts. As a happy client confirmed,

"Blue Saffron put together a project to move us to zero footprint IT – this means we can look at office space and working practices in a completely different and more liberating way."

"As a CTO of a major recruitment firm shared – many firms have taken a technical capacity hit, we are no exception – our confidence in outsourcing some key operational tasks Blue Saffron has paid significant dividends"

"the service review, a formal channel for effective and continuous dialogue has been key to enacting change, a refreshing change from previous outsource partners" – top 20 UK recruiter



What is happening now?

The answer is plenty but top of the agenda and now more than ever companies are looking at their business continuity plans (BCP) and how to adapt to the everchanging landscape created by the pandemic. Our survey suggests that at least 60% of respondents are considering additional outsource assistance. This reflects the ongoing enhancement required to sustain remote work scenarios, procure devices, set up resilient, flexible and secure networks, disaster recovery systems, IT security and more.

There's a wealth of IT solutions out there and as part of revising BCPs, companies need to take a comprehensive look at how technology will support their business decisions. More than ever the versatility of each partnership is crucial to the dexterity of a company and its success.

What happens next?

A business cannot base its future success and agility purely on an IT department's procurement decisions. Success demands a holistic strategy, and will invariably require changes in business procedures, organisational structures, leadership assignments and a host of other business considerations to ensure strong, long-term progression.

- budgets: Enlightened investment during a business downturn can pay major dividends and creates a unique opportunity for leadership to work more closely with business partners shoring up company resilience.
- saw-toothed recovery: There is bound to be uncertainty associated with any curative timeline. Outsourcing or hybrid solutions offer flexibility when riding such disruptive waves. As one of our customers commented, "Blue Saffron were invaluable help, without fuss or hesitation they

stepped in to assist in supporting our staff in what was a very difficult period."

- business resilience: There is sure to be a renewed interest in liberating working practices, monitoring productivity and performance measurements, while streamlining output and ensuring business continuity.
- cloud flexibility: Digital business models are now more imperative than ever. As one of our clients acknowledged, "Redeploying our Sage accounts department to the cloud provided speedier and more secure access for our accounts department."
- collaboration: Of the 63% of companies who used Microsoft Teams during lockdown, 46% were using it for the first time, while 65% stated that they were intent on continued use post lockdown. It is now opportune to leverage the far-reaching capabilities of such collaboration suites.
- training: The key to ensuring optimal success is knowledge. This is an area of huge importance as technologies evolve and the portfolio of applications increases almost daily.

We know from past crises, that companies who take a slash-and-hold approach fare worse than those that both prune and thoughtfully invest. This crisis has created a unique opportunity by making companies reflect how their operations were disrupted over the past few months and develop IT initiatives in conjunction with general business decisions to make them more resilient and successful in the future.

Blue Saffron have a proven track record in supporting companies with their immediate and long-term needs. Customer satisfaction runs high, endorsed with feedback on a recent redesign and implementation of a customer environment,

"the design Blue Saffron put in place meant the transfer to home working was a breeze." – HR Manager, Midlands based professional services firm

"investment maybe a tough call in this market", said Business operations manager "but change is a must- Blue Saffron's open approach to assistance in developing business plans has been highly refreshing"

As technology has become more of a priority than ever, businesses need to source expert advice to enable budget-managed, resilient and dextrous solutions. That's what we do best.

Improved information security

As we enter this radically altered operating environment companies face many challenges, not least the additional burdens placed upon cyber security defence. Business need to be able to provide protection for themselves, their employees and their customers. And many of the cyber security protections must now evolve to ensure resiliency and protection.

Whilst Covid-19 has, and will, continue to act as a catalyst for change within the cyber security industry the new challenges thrown up by the pandemic haven't displaced existing cyber security issues.

Both our recently commissioned survey – IT Leaders and Covid-19- (85%) and our customer base (90%) validate heightened business concern with the risks associated with cyber security.

Our conversations and research have uncovered five major challenges for the upcoming period.

Challenge One: Not all Employees will return to work

There is little doubt that we are seeing the emergence of a very different workplace. More people are going to continue to work remotely, whether full-time or part-time, and businesses are going to have to deal with the impact of the predicted recession.

This new environment brings with it many challenges, not least for company cyber security plans.

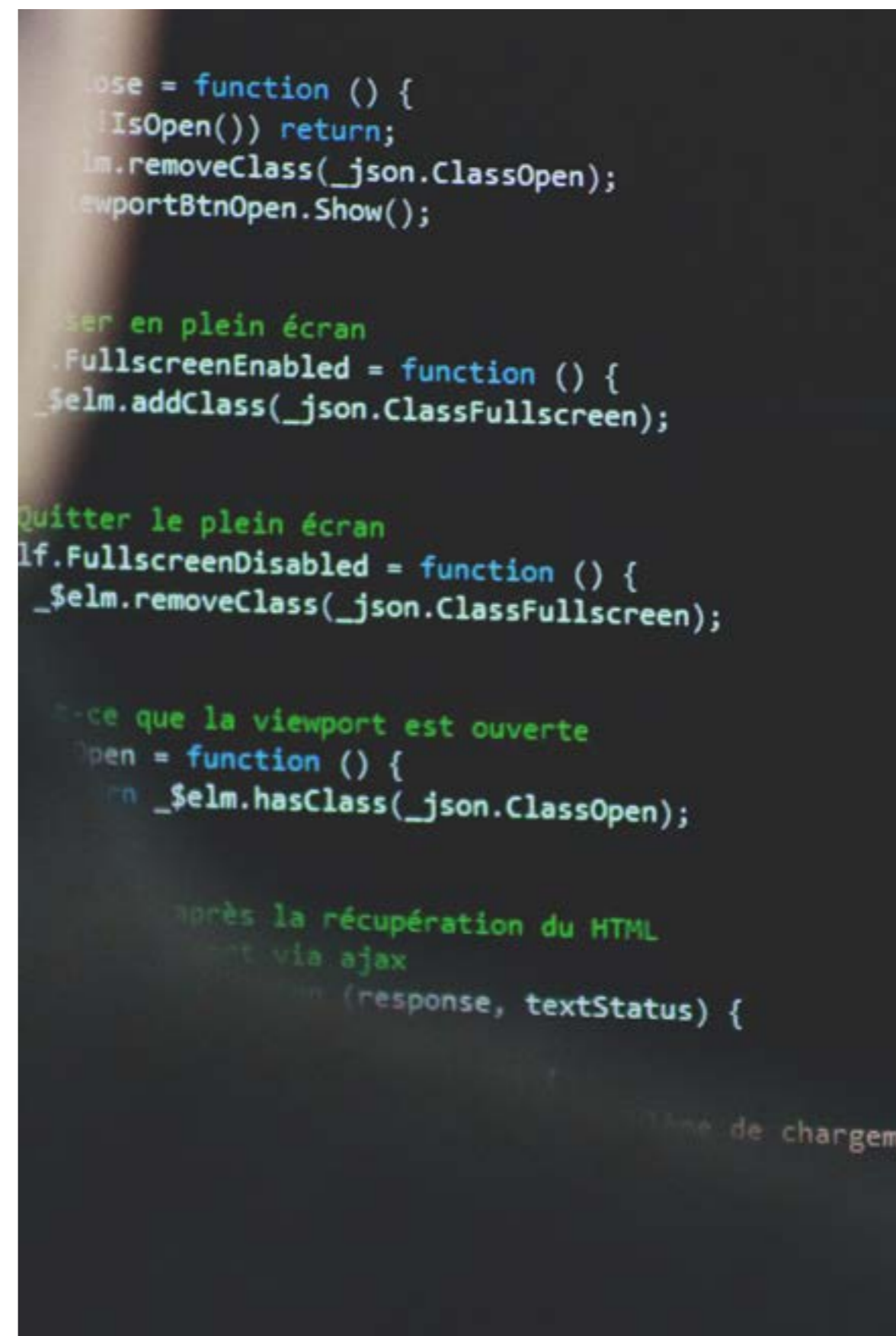
If businesses are to properly secure their critical assets and develop their security strategy, they will need to properly understand their newly expanded workplace.

"We work with a lot of personal data. Our rapid move to homeworking left us feeling exposed on IT security. But Blue Saffron provided helpful pragmatic advice and helped put in place additional safeguards for our most sensitive data" – west coast based mid-sized professional services firm

Challenge two: an increase in cyber threats and scams

Online threats have risen by as much as six times their usual levels over the last five months. Whilst the mainstream media has perhaps been prone to an over exaggeration of the impact of remote working and potential security lapses, what is unequivocal is that the security "attack surface" – the things that hackers can attack – has altered significantly.

This is Real and not imagined. To provide some idea of scale, scale, Action Fraud recorded over 32k reports of cyber crimes in last 13 months, the national cyber security centre have removed over 300,00 links to investment and celebrity scams, and the government reported that almost half of business (46%) have had a security breach or attack in the last 12 months.



Challenge three: a potential recession

The UK has now officially entered recession which will place pressure on operating budgets and might mean that businesses are tempted to reduce their spend. This could come in the form of job cuts, delayed projects, or cuts in technology and services.

Although Cyber security has seen healthy growth in spend in recent years, this should be no grounds for complacency. Establishing more efficient ways of working should always be front and centre. One of the best ways that companies can do this is by taking advantage of technology that automates time-sapping processes and determining how well their current solutions integrate with each other.

Surviving the economic outlook will depend, in part, on making the best use of data. Within the security realm, this means having a good comprehension and understanding of risk to prevent attacks – but it doesn't necessarily mean that costly investments will need to be made. Businesses should look at their existing tech stacks, identify inefficiencies and establish ways to get the solutions to work more collaboratively.

“Blue Saffron helped to get us compliant with GDPR regulations and in turn made sure all our staff knew what to do to keep our data safe” – CIO, mid-sized professional services firm

Challenge four: cloud security accelerating digital transformation

Although Covid-19 has put many transformation projects on hold, cloud adoption and substitution continues to increase at pace. It isn't just investment in cloud services that's increasing – interest in technologies like networking, VPNs, firewalls, identity management and a host of others, are helping to accelerating digital transformation.

With significant increases in recent IT support

activity, it is important that those responsible for security have the capacity, resources and agility needed to support the businesses as it spins up new services and undertakes new initiatives. Setup and configuration should be both repeatable and executed well to prevent any new risk being introduced to the corporate environment. If there are any chinks in the armour, they risk falling into non-compliance. At a time when fiscal stability is paramount, the threat of attack and the risk of landing fines from regulatory bodies cannot be underestimated.

“Blue Saffron's flexible assistance has been invaluable in helping deliver a major overhaul to our IT systems ” – bespoke online travel agency

“Our in-house team were stretched to capacity during the first quarter of this year. Without fuss, on time and on budget, Blue Saffron delivered a substantial upgrade to our remote security defences” – NASDAQ listed recruiter

Challenge five: Remote Working – Reassess and Rework

For many businesses, one of the challenges of deploying remote working at pace was the oversight of security technologies. Concern over this was borne out by our independent research:

- a full 88% suggesting that addressing security was one of the top priorities.
- 65% of enterprises believing their security risks had increased.
- 74% reported that their customers were more concerned about cybersecurity and data protection.

To better protect themselves, businesses should

develop a cyber security model that accommodates working from home on an ongoing basis.

To secure their remote workforce, organisations must define how to handle employees with hardware or software issues, know how to maintain management of remote computers (including patching, configuration and detecting any potential compromises or policy violations), and should have a plan of action that can be used if internal IT systems become overwhelmed.

End-point security (broadly end-user devices like desktops, laptops, and mobile devices) should figure highly in activity, and even basic anti-virus protection will often include artificial intelligence to block advanced viruses, malware, exploits, and ransomware attacks.

One of the most requested tasks during the early phases of the pandemic was the auditing of home-based working environments and optimising the configuration for more appropriate equipment without compromising security.



Data led decisions and automation

There's nothing like a world crisis to focus minds on the health of a company's infrastructure. The discovery that processes, analytics and workflow along with the underpinning technologies designed to operate work centrally, suddenly required the dexterity to perform across a distributed workforce and came as quite a shock to many. Many practices and measures that have long been implemented required a timely and forensic shake-up to allow data collection and handling to be immediate and real-time. Just the ability to anticipate changes in customer behaviour or supplier performance could have massive positive implications.

What happened through lockdown?

Lockdown highlighted the sheer volume of manual processes as well as how the information requirements of many business leaders have changed quite dramatically. While some data needed to remain static, management teams often wanted it more frequently and in greater detail. The versatility of their set up was tested fully when requests for new types of information were made – sometimes revealing significant deficiencies in the quality, consistency and timeliness of pre-existing data management practices.

Perhaps of greater importance was the need to anticipate and respond to fluctuations in supplier performance and customer behaviour as circumstances rapidly changed. This is where data management and predictive analytical capabilities come into their own.

Gone are the days where forecasts are accurate, we're in an environment where we have learned what you really need to have a handle on are the metrics, insights, and what's actually happening on the ground—the dashboard of daily life.

Where workforce locations have dispersed, there is now a fundamental need for management to know how these measures have impacted on productivity, both what's improved and what hasn't. Studies suggest that in the last three months around 25% of large companies have bought new software to passively monitor the workflows of their remote employees, while 90% of survey respondents cited a desire to measure the productivity and effectiveness of remote working. It's a trend that Blue Saffron are in a prime position to help with.

What is happening now?

Investing in optimising and improving workflows and processes has never been so salient and can eliminate the time on manual tasks; ensuring employees access the right information and complete it at the right time. It can also improve business velocity, eliminate errors, minimise rework and reduce labour costs. At Blue Saffron our customer shared automation and knowledge base approach has had a very positive impact on efficiency when processing changes in service and employee circumstance.

Blue Saffron's dexterity in supporting enterprises has seen a range of projects successfully implemented across a variety of differing budgets, demands and requirements.

Our Zendesk powered customer support portal has been invaluable in collecting and sharing data on trends and helping to drive change in planning, remediation and strategy. One customer commented,

"we saw a 60% improvement in time taken to process changes to employee HR service requests"

Other key technologies that have helped to improve workforce productivity and access data more effectively, include the class defining collaborative features embedded in Microsoft 365 Power Automate, an important component of Microsoft's Business Application "Power Platform", which can help companies rapidly build workflows to connect data services and sources.

For the more complex and customised solutions, Blue Saffron has used Jitterbit, an award-winning technology that helps companies drive innovation by rapidly connecting disparate systems and infusing intelligence into business process, to huge impact. Typical applications include the connection of cloud-based customer relationship systems and premise-based counterparts, or perhaps securely opening up, free or subscription based, data services for private or public consumption by your customer and supplier base

For one recruitment customer, struggling with the limitations of the native reporting capability within their Customer Relationship Management and accounting systems, we extracted and securely stored data in a faster more accessible format to take reporting to the next level. More

A finance departments' workflow was enhanced through eradicating much of the manual process associated with supplier invoicing through the automation of workflow from email capture, archiving and reformatting of attachments and transferring of invoice data for their accounting system.

Many companies are questioning current levels of investment in data collection and analysis – is it sufficient to be able to adjust and make decisions? To increase agility we are going to have to work to access input on customers, input about the changing regulatory environments, our suppliers and partners.

We have helped customers drive improved adoption of the Microsoft 365 product suite (Teams, One drive, Email) through actionable insights provided with Microsoft's Power BI.

What happens next?

There is undoubtedly a lot to think about here. Consultation and inclusion are a must and in these unorthodox times, we will all be looking for greater productivity and efficiency. It's a delicate balance and our customers are clear that "trust" is incredibly important. Blue Saffron work with a number of key technologies that support companies in improving workforce productivity, while sharing and accessing data more effectively.

Rethinking your customer experience

The holy grail for any company is customer satisfaction. Get that right and loyalty inevitably follows. As lockdown restrictions were implemented and any semblance of normality disappeared, businesses had to react to unforeseen implications on a daily basis. It would be true to say that some have fared much better than others.

What happened through lockdown?

Companies with a more agile outlook were quick to implement new pricing policies, discounting practices, order tracking and more, while keeping customer-facing applications and back office systems updated in a matter of hours. Others were not so nimble and took days, if not weeks to make key changes, leaving customers dealing with ill-prepared contact centres, malfunctioning websites and unanswered queries.

The exodus of employees to home-based working showed glitches and short falls in IT setups that required quick thinking and strategic solutions. BSL were able to ensure that critical customer-facing and support systems were accessible and performant. Online trading expanded rapidly as social distancing was established and support of the community, NHS and worker well-being took on a critical role within companies' mindset, shaking up how businesses needed to respond to keep customers happy.

What is happening now?

Adaptation has been the game changer where businesses have adopted best practice to changing customer behaviours. Technology has played a key role in the customer experience. Three preeminent customer engagement themes have come to the fore:

1. Conversations. Customers want a more human conversation where there is a clear exchange of information, knowledge, and understanding. Collaborative platform like Microsoft Teams and Teams Voice have been key to supporting this experience.
2. Journey. Customers want and expect a clear, multi-channel journey with clear next steps, a clear process and a clear outcome.
3. Satisfaction. The customer has a need that they want fulfilled; regardless of the issues they want satisfaction.

While nothing is set in stone, the enterprises that retain flexibility will inevitably preserve customer faith and longevity. With that in mind, 48% of respondents from our recently commissioned survey, 'IT Leaders and Covid-19', admitted that finding new ways to solve existing problems was essential to survival, it is where intelligent partnerships come into their own.

Blue Saffron was swept up into the centre of the pandemic maelstrom as customer requests for support surged. Executing, in many cases, critical troubleshooting, the team found ways to reconfigure systems for cloud telephony customers, while Website and Customer Portals allowed Blue Saffron to enable real-time updates for those in need.

Other projects included the relocation of a contractor payroll processing system to allow remote administration, for one recruitment consultancy. While a bespoke travel agent system, designed and supported by Blue Saffron, ensured excellent customer

While 41% of our survey respondents admitted that survival was their greatest priority for the next 12 months, 36% felt that managing increased demands from their customers was crucial.

What happens next?

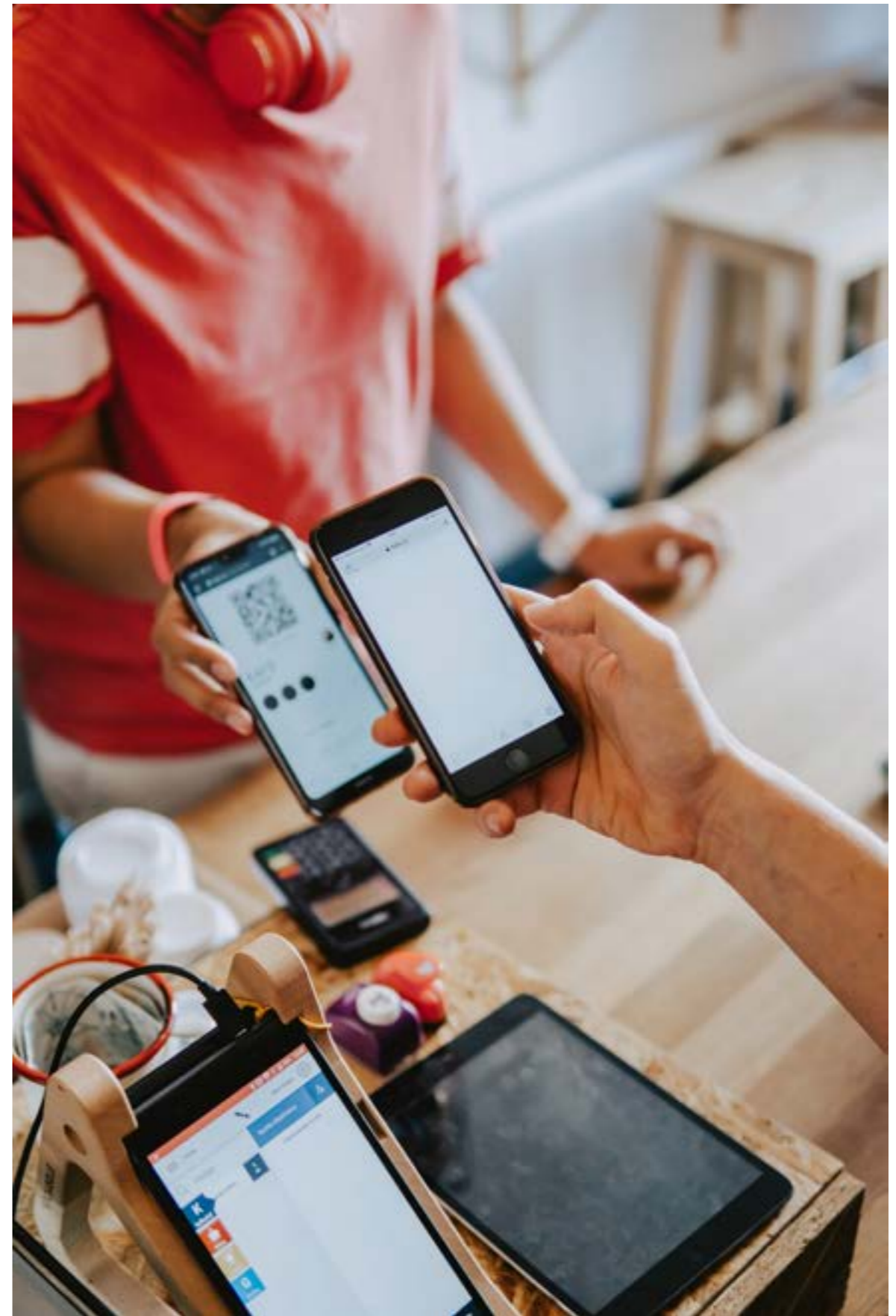
Customer behaviour has fundamentally changed over the past few months, which challenges the equilibrium across a whole range of sectors. The requirement now is for companies to understand and identify the customer trends and patterns which will

endure in the long term. Companies who can get their hands on this insight can use it to adapt their

customer experience, better support their customers through this time, and make the necessary changes to continue those relationships when all this is over.

Digital engagement, safety and data analytics will all play a key role in delivering an exceptional customer experience. With 65% of respondents admitting that responsive and reliable support was the most important attribute of a supplier of technology services,

Blue Saffron are well placed to provide all-round, value-for-money strategic expertise to safeguard the customer experience.



The insights in these comprehensive articles are the result of supporting hundreds of customers and thousands of users through a highly challenging period of fast-compressed change.

As technology has become more of a priority than ever, businesses need to source expert advice to enable budget-managed, resilient and dextrous solutions. That's what we do best.

If you could benefit from some expert IT advice, contact us today or talk to one of our experts on 0844 560 0202.

About Blue Saffron

We are one of the UK's most progressive independent suppliers of essential services to midsize businesses, focused on communications and IT. Whether you are looking for fixed line or mobile telecommunications, internet access, or IT services such as data backup, security, email, or desktop management BlueSaffron can help. We package, price and bill our services clearly and simply, with a unique commitment to intelligent customer service. Our independence makes sure we are completely impartial and can leverage our stable of world-class suppliers to meet your needs. To arrange a Blue Saffron Mobile audit for your business, get in touch so we can discuss your requirements and provide a proposal for your audit.

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