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A Frost & Sullivan Webinar Summary

The Only Certainty is Uncertainty—Prepare Now to Handle Anything that Comes

In 2020, we learned the importance of flexible communications. We recently interviewed Melanie Turek, VP & Fellow, Connected Work at Frost & Sullivan, to get her thoughts on what to prepare for next.

► **What should my top investment priority be for 2021 and beyond?**

What we are recommending to our clients more and more is that they really make sure that their technology investments are setting them up to be ready for anything, regardless of what comes their way. Post-pandemic, we're looking at workspaces with no real defined physical boundaries as companies move to hybrid setups and as people start to bleed their day in and out of different time zones and work-day periods. Companies must embrace technology in order to make all this work. We have the infrastructure, networking capabilities, and internet capabilities to support a lot of really great communication software today. Now the trick is getting it out there, making sure that everybody who needs it has it and that everybody understands the best ways to use it going forward.



► You mentioned hybrid work—how is that changing?

Frost & Sullivan research has found that the percentage of the global workforce that was working from home in 2019 was only around 5%. This doesn't include people who might have taken a day here or there but as an intentional, working-remotely position. We expect that by next year, that will be around 40%, depending on the geographic location and the industry. So that's a pretty significant shift. And that's going to translate into a lot of hybrid workplaces, where on any given day, some people are working from within the corporate office, but many others are working from home or another remote location.

► How does a hybrid environment affect work?

For starters, we're expecting to see a lot more flexibility going forward, but it will look different depending on the company, its culture, its values, and also what it does and where it's located. Regardless of that, we really do think that offices aren't just going to be where folks go to sit at a desk and focus on their individual work, but rather as sites for collaboration. So they'll be places where we're really starting to engage employees more, where they can work together and also build better relationships.

For those who are able to and want to work at home, that will be marked much more by individual productivity and efficiency. I think one of the things a lot of us learned in the last year is that we can actually be pretty productive when we're left to our own devices. Getting rid of some of that background noise, both literally and figuratively, that surrounds us in an office can really be a boon to focus. That has helped us work on the things that we're actually supposed to be doing every day. So it will be up to us to figure out, both as employees and as employers, that balance between individual work and collaborative work. The goal will be making sure that we can enable that for folks, regardless of who they are in the organization or what role they play.



► How does digital transformation factor in?

When we've talked about digital transformation in the past, it was often in a way that was not necessarily meaningful or actionable for a lot of corporate leaders. When the pandemic hit, we were able to see how digitization really works in practice. If you look at something like digitizing workflows, well, that's concrete—and it will be very important going forward.

So in HR, for example, they had to pivot really fast to develop remote work policies to make sure that they could continue to recruit and onboard in a way that felt like you really were bringing employees into the fold, but of course, you had to do it all virtually via video and online training. But at the same time, you need to figure out how to keep that corporate culture, how to keep your employees engaged, how to keep their morale up, make sure that they felt supported on a personal level when it came to their wellness.

Another example is sales, where suddenly everything went from being in person to being online. It's really interesting to think about how much of a cultural shift that was for salespeople. Part of their livelihood is getting in front of people, face to face, literally in the same room. That changed overnight for them. Going forward, we want to keep the new stuff that worked and embrace the idea of returning to some of the best practices we had before the pandemic, and finding out how to mix those two.

We also made a big shift to digital marketing because there was a lot that we couldn't do in person and on the ground. And of course, there were huge changes around management—understanding how to motivate employees, how to judge employees on their work, how to redesign employee engagement, how to make sure people were getting the job done. We got a crash course in all that. Now we want to make sure that we keep the best and lose the worst of what we discovered over the last year.

► **What specific technology can help us through this?**

UCC (unified communications and collaboration) is certainly not new, but a lot of times, tools get deployed according to a department or a geographic area. Large organizations are sometimes using UCC tools from different vendors and suppliers, some of it cloud, some of it on-premises. So what we're seeing is that this is a real opportunity to get a handle on the kinds of technologies that you've got out to your employees and making sure that you're using it well to support what you really need to focus on. For a lot of companies, that means standardizing on a single platform across the organization and various lines of business.

As you do that, if you're like most companies, you're going to be focused on how these tools can help you improve the customer experience and your overall efficiencies.

► **What should companies focus on going forward?**

We advise that as you look toward moving into that next phase of renewal, you focus on three key areas for innovation: business continuity, customer experience, and internal communications and collaboration.

And really, those are interconnected. In the end, it's all about people. It's about making sure that regardless of what happens in your company's life, your people can continue to do their jobs from anywhere. They can communicate with one another, they can collaborate together, and they can work on processes and workflows without any interruption.

Beyond the technology is building a virtual team culture. Making sure that you are, in fact, putting people first and that that's not just lip service, but it's real. You're going to have meetings where some people are in a room together, and some people are dialed in virtually. So we've got to remember that we have to change our culture once again as we go forward to allow for those different permutations.

► **So how do I make all this happen?**

Our research shows that the move to cloud is just speeding up all the time. And for good reason: it has such significant benefits around so many key areas. Start with cost optimization and risk mitigation, which are absolutely top of mind. It also helps a lot with operation efficiency and agility because you're able to outsource all the tough stuff to somebody who's really an expert. Ultimately, at the end of the day, it does what you need it to, which is provide a truly world-class customer experience.





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