

How is your business driving future network development?

Today, businesses need to support multiple customer touch points. From traditional customer services communications to the rapidly expanding mobile commerce channel, how can a company manage these channels into an integrated environment that delivers infrastructure cost savings, efficiency gains and future proofing?

As businesses transition into post-pandemic enterprises, the trading landscape and the channels they use to connect with customers have changed. The pandemic saw a massive shift in online retailing, but COVID-19 also transformed businesses processes and how workforces needed to be managed and supported.

Enterprises pre-COVID had been continuing their digital transformation journeys. A significant component of those journeys was the continued development of their network infrastructure. These plans are being redrawn in reaction to the change businesses have experienced and how the relationships with their customers have also evolved.

The network infrastructures many businesses had in place now need to work much harder, be increasingly secure across multiple endpoints, support a

dispersed workforce and – above all else – deliver new experiences to customers. In its *2021 hybrid cloud report*, NTT revealed that 66% of businesses say that improving their agility is critical in 2022, with 77% also pointing to business continuity as key organisational changes that must take place over the next 12 months.

Nick Jackson, managing director at Cways, commented that now is the time for networks to evolve if businesses are to thrive post-pandemic: “Being able to adapt and scale and quickly spin up ‘cloud services’ has helped some organisations and frankly given them competitive advantages over those who have not migrated to the cloud. COVID has forced them to do so,” he said.

The new digital landscape all enterprises need to navigate has been rapidly changing in response to how businesses themselves have evolved. Having an agile foundation of network infrastructure is a prerequisite to thrive post-pandemic.

Neo networks

The cloud has become the foundation onto which many enterprises have built their digital services. A hybrid approach to cloud deployment will expand to deliver the flexible network, application and collaboration support companies need.

Connecting to these cloud services will also see significant shifts in performance as 5G and Wi-Fi 6 continue their rollout. These additional fast connections will become the basis for new agile business processes, which will enable businesses to innovate at every customer touchpoint.

What has radically changed is consumer expectations, particularly when shopping. The trend for multi-network access is a clear trend. The omnichannel has rapidly evolved to support this retail behaviour. Having network infrastructure and network capabilities to support an increasingly unified approach consumers are taking with their purchases is critical to appreciate, and forms the basis of the omnichannel approach to network performance and headless ecommerce.

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Research from *Klarna* indicates that more work does need to be done to fully realise the potential that the omnichannel can offer. For example, nearly 90% of consumers use multiple channels, but half feel that their experience is inconsistent.

Alex Naughton, head of Klarna UK & Ireland, said: “If retailers want to see a return on their omnichannel investment, they need to ensure they avoid any disconnect and fully understand shopper priorities. It’s clear in-store shopping is still incredibly important for consumers, so retailers should look at how they can make their stores a more experiential, cultural space that inspires shoppers.”

As Igal Rotem, CEO at Finaro explained, your business’s network needs to be ready for the next revolution in retail – voice. “Mobile commerce is so much more than just pressing icons and buttons on a phone screen,” said Igal. “Take voice shopping, for example. In 2022, voice shopping is forecasted to hit \$45B, up from \$2B in 2018 – that’s a rise of 2,000% in just four years. That would have been unfathomable just two years ago before COVID hit.”

Connected customers

For the past few years, customer experience (CX) has been a core driver behind business innovation. The development of CX accelerated during the pandemic as consumers shifted their attention and their purchasing online.

Malcolm Koh, customer experience strategist at Zendesk, said in a CX Network report: “It’s important to be customer obsessed as disruptors are increasing the benchmark of customer service and redefining boundaries. These days, there are a variety of options from self-service help centres – a community to answer your questions immediately. A support helpline request can take up to 20 minutes but now, we are used to getting our answers almost immediately. When companies are laggards in CX, they lose out.”

The future will mean having network capabilities that can fully realise CX. McKinsey calls this the ‘phygital, where the physical and digital are connected. This is inevitable as we have already seen physical stores and their online counterparts becoming symbiotic as enterprises have continued to connect these channels in more intimate ways to satisfy consumer demand.

Cways’ Nick Jackson concluded: “The COVID-19 pandemic has digitised our world from online consultations, ecommerce and AI machine learning. All these things have accelerated as people shift and adopt new ways of engaging with the outside world. This, in turn, will drive the need for more adaptive, proactive, and intelligent ways of delivering services, all powered by smarter technologies and networks.”

The digital networks your business’s customers use are the touch points that must be constantly enhanced. Is there a ‘new normal’ for network infrastructure and performance? Indeed, the drivers behind the evolution of these services have shifted to consumers who demand faster, integrated digital

experiences from the brands they covet. Today, having a robust, effective, agile, and secure network infrastructure is not an IT exercise, but a business-wide imperative.

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