

# The A-Z of workplace technology

*Building productive,  
profitable and people-focused  
environments in 2021*

*“So, let’s see what 2021  
brings for us all.”*

# Foreword

“There wasn’t a lot of time for crystal ball gazing in 2020. Even the most strategic thinkers had to shift their perspective, with some focusing far more on the ‘here and now’ than they ever had before.

For many business leaders, it was a case of survival. Knee-jerk reactions and agile decision making were therefore to be expected. And sadly, not all organisations survived, despite their commitment and passion to adapt.

For those still here to tell the tale, 2021 will be a big year. For some, it will be a complete reset. For others, it’s the opportunity to now take things up a notch.

Because if we take our eyes away from COVID-19 for even a short moment, and remember what is possible with tech, who knows where innovation can take us.

The pandemic has forced an accelerated adoption of technologies that were previously only on the radar of large enterprises, for example, or those with bleeding-edge digital transformation teams. It has broken down perceived obstacles associated with making the shift from legacy systems and processes, to newer, smarter ways of doing things. It has shown that evolution – and in some cases revolution – needn’t be that tricky. And I don’t think businesses, large or small, will look back now.

What previously felt irrelevant, or even impossible...perhaps isn’t anymore.

So, let’s see what 2021 brings for us all.

Dozens of industry professionals have made this guide a reality. It’s the first time we’ve brought together these trusted minds, and we are grateful for the time and input everyone has contributed. We hope you enjoy what you read, and we look forward to exploring these topics, together, as the year unfolds.

Stay safe.”



*Tim Mercer*

**Tim Mercer, CEO, Vapour**

# A = Analytics



“Analytics have long been a common feature in many firms – especially larger corporate entities keen to derive maximum business value from their enormous amounts of data. Yet elsewhere, a number of businesses have continued to shy away from data – whether due to time constraints, an inability to access the metrics that matter, or, in some instances, a fear of what may be uncovered.

However, the events of the past 12 months have changed the playing field entirely.

Organisations’ newfound ways of communicating, for example, have forced an accelerated adoption of unified comms and collaboration systems, within companies of all shapes and sizes. ‘The way we’ve always done things’ has been eradicated in favour of a more flexible approach to working. And, with pressures to maintain – if not boost – employee productivity, morale and the customer experience, UC analytics are now more important than ever.

You don’t know what you don’t know, but now is not the time to run your business in the dark. 2021 is the year that businesses need to better use the data generated by their communications systems, to inform – and transform – how they work, collaborate and perform across their voice, video, messaging and conferencing platforms.”



**Jon Pickering, CEO, Tiger**

# B = Back-ups

“Is it possible to categorically say what is the best backup routine for organisations in 2021? No. Businesses work in different ways – collecting and storing various types of data of multi-level complexities. And then there are budgets to think about, among numerous other factors.

But as part of a robust disaster recovery strategy, every firm – large or small – requires a backup plan. And it’s shocking how many still leave things to chance.

Data loss can occur for many reasons, ranging from a hardware malfunction to a ransomware attack – or even a simple colleague mistake. The ability to restore the compromised system to the nearest possible recent state, is therefore crucial.

In deciding upon the best-fit strategy for your business, it’s important to consider the volume and variability of the data you need to back up, the speed with which you’d need to recover it, and your own security protocol.

I expect to see far more organisations opting for hybrid backups in 2021 – keeping a local copy of systems and data on-site for speed and convenience, complemented by a secure off-site backup too for a dual-pronged approach.”



**Tim Mercer, CEO,  
Vapour**

# C = Colocation

“Organisations are becoming increasingly in-tune with their need for a ‘safety net’, particularly in the event of the unexpected happening. Demand for colocation – a service that delivers added resilience – is therefore rising.

‘Colo’ allows businesses to rent rack space for their own servers, storage or networking hardware, in an external data centre – an off-site location. The colo service provider delivers the cloud security, cooling and power – with various managed service, connectivity and failover options also available. All the customer provides, is the equipment.

This approach will only grow in popularity, I suspect – particularly as some organisations are terminating leases and rationalising their sites as a result of COVID-19. It offers business continuity assurances during otherwise uncertain times.”



**Jason Fenwick,  
Senior Cloud Infrastructure Engineer, Vapour**

# D = DRaaS (Disaster Recovery as a Service)

“2020 taught us that there are some things businesses simply can’t plan for. However, when it comes to adapting to unanticipated change and protecting an organisation from what lies ahead, creating a robust disaster recovery strategy provides an important sense of preparedness.

Once devised, the strategy needs to be rolled out and actually tested, even if under simulated conditions only. For many businesses, the need to relocate operations to remote locations forms a very real part of a DR plan that will have been extensively prepared for. But, if such businesses had ordered headsets for the team to use when working from home for instance, and this equipment had never been tested prior to use, imagine the shock – and impact – if the headsets were then found to be faulty when

colleagues came to use them in an emergency.

It could be something as simple as this or far more complex, which has the potential to cause unnecessary disruption when business continuity is really crucial.

So, consider everything from equipment to connectivity, and communications to cyber criminals. And if you don’t know where to start, speak to a DRaaS specialist, who can be on hand with everything you need, complete with a service wrap for peace of mind.”

**Jason Fenwick, Senior  
Cloud Infrastructure  
Engineer, Vapour**



# E = Ethical AI

“Ethical AI centres around the moral rights and wrongs of artificial intelligence, in both its development and utilisation. AI can have the same biases as we do – because we created it! We need to be responsible parents and ensure that AI is trained on data sets that represent the population as a whole. We also need to think about where it is appropriate to use it – it’s easy to get carried away by the hype, but just because we *could* deploy it doesn’t mean that we *should*. Used *appropriately* it can achieve great things.

Despite all the talk about artificial intelligence at innovation forums, for example, there’s nothing really that intelligent about it! It’s good at following rules, particularly when there is deep and narrow data. It’s not brilliant on the other hand at conversations, it doesn’t handle emotion very well and it often struggles with spotting context – something humans are much better at.

If you plug the two of us together, however, so AI takes on the boring and mundane stuff, and transfers the things it can’t do well, over to people, you get the best of both worlds.

My gut feeling surrounding AI is that it is incredibly powerful and can enhance the customer experience, but you need to ensure it is deployed appropriately.”



**Nicola Millard, Principal Innovation Partner, BT**

*“The growth of insecure or unknown devices ... has stretched trust beyond breaking point.”*



**F = Firewalls**

“At the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, some organisations were unprepared to have their entire workforces work remotely. Many had to put interim solutions in place, often held together with duct tape and band aids.

After realising that telework is becoming the new norm for operations and not just a temporary solution in a short-term crisis, many organisations are looking to revamp their telework technologies to make them more robust and secure, especially when faced with network performance issues.

This also includes putting branch-like solutions, such as a next-generation firewall (NGFW) with SD-WAN capabilities, into the home offices of employees with

high levels of access to data and the network, such as IT admins and executives.

In addition, many CISO are investing in zero-trust network access. The growth of insecure or unknown devices attaching to the network, along with a host of breaches due to stolen credentials, has stretched trust beyond breaking point. Network administrators must adopt a zero-trust approach to network access so they can see and control all devices and users across the entire network. With proactive protection, organisations can ensure their networks are secure from the latest threats.”

**Fortinet**

# G = Gigabit-ready UK

“In March 2020 – before Rishi Sunak’s role became consumed with the financial battles of COVID-19 – the Government reiterated its plans to invest £5bn to help spread gigabit-capable broadband networks across the UK, by the end of 2025.

This announcement proved to be timelier than anyone could have imagined when the nation’s need for connectivity became more pressing than ever – not least because entire workforces began trying to maintain ‘business as usual’ from home.

This second wave of digital growth will not come easy – evidenced by statistics from summer 2020, which suggested only 22% of UK premises could access a gigabit-capable service, at that time.

But when it comes, the benefits will be vast. For example, the Centre for Economics & Business Research (CEBR) has revealed that the full

fibre roll-out – coupled with 25% of UK labour working from home by 2025 – could create 1.2 million jobs. The economic impact of this employment uplift would be astronomical, especially right now.

The speed and agility with which organisations – particularly in the digital sectors – could work, if empowered with faster connectivity, would also unlock vast growth potential for the nation. Innovations based on the Internet of Things (IoT) often require vast bandwidth, which would no longer be hampered by unreliable connectivity – instead, the UK could push ahead with its ambition to be the digital centre of Europe.”



**Sharon McDermott,  
Managing Director  
and Telecoms Lawyer,  
Trenches Law**

*“Faster connectivity  
would unlock vast  
growth potential for  
the nation.”*

# H = Healthtech at work

“There was a time when only the bigger brands would contemplate investing in healthtech – or even healthcare strategies in general – to protect the physical and psychological wellbeing of staff.

Now this couldn't be further from the truth.

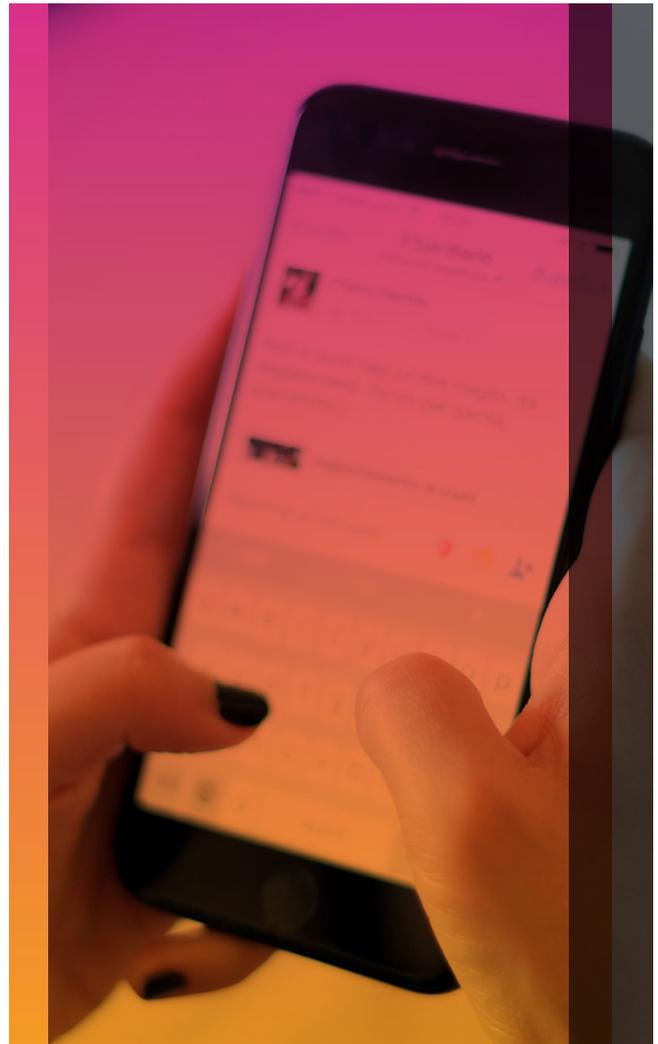
Many factors have influenced this mindset shift – not least COVID-19. A number of responsible employers have invested in return to work innovations and vital signs checkers, for example, to ensure it is safe for colleagues to be present.

But COVID-19 has not been the only catalyst.

For instance, with a globally ageing population – and an estimated 2.1 billion people expected to be over the age of 60 by 2050 – healthcare pressures are mounting on a truly worldwide scale. The UK Government is increasingly looking to technology to help address this, and businesses should too.

After all, consumer demand for greater digital health empowerment is clear – evidenced, not least, by the growing uptake in wearables and fitness apps. So, providing the purpose of healthtech at work is clear – i.e. that it is there to truly care for people and help them improve their health – and of course as long as it is engaging and easy to use, it will be readily embraced.”

**Nick Halliday, CEO, IDS,  
and Co-Founder, MyVitals**



# I = IoT

“Over the years, IoT – the Internet of Things – has become a bigger and bigger buzzword, with more people showing an interest in it, whether or not they even know what it truly is.

The back end of 2019 saw a wave of adoption, which perhaps tailed off in 2020 for reprioritisation that I think needs no explaining. But we’ll see a resurgence of interest in 2021 – it will become mainstream – not least because narrowband solutions with their low data and power consumption rates, provide an ideal architecture for IoT deployment.

So, what is IoT?

It refers to the interconnectedness of physical devices and systems, collecting and sharing data, over the internet, without the need to involve a human. From switching on a lightbulb using a smartphone, to managing water flow for a utilities firm across an entire district, the capabilities can be

embraced by businesses small and large. Everything usually centres upon smarter, more responsive and intuitive ways of operating.

Challenges arise when organisations try to venture too far with an IoT strategy without specialist support. Most SMEs have a dedicated IT or telecoms provider, so start by asking them for help.

However, only a small number of companies will have done anything in this space. From sensors in the ground, to software in the cloud to make sense of the data, it takes something quite sophisticated to deliver a solution designed with effortless simplicity in mind. So, don’t shy away from collaboration – that’s when really exciting things can happen.”

**Anton Le Saux,**  
**Head of M2M & IoT, Zest4**

# J = Jitter

“In technical terms, jitter measures the time it takes for a packet to arrive from the source to the destination. Real-time protocol relies heavily on jitter.

It is vital when it comes to voice traffic (telecommunications), for example. If the network is slow, there will be a delay on the receiving handset which significantly affects the call quality and user experience.

The goal is to reduce the jitter – or latency. Some irregular fluctuations in data transfer are perhaps acceptable, but we’re talking 30ms and under. Key to this is a squeaky-clean network and strong connectivity.”

**Salim Ramzan,**  
**Senior Network Engineer, Vapour**



# K = Knowledge hubs

“We often feel like we are drowning in information – much of which we find tricky to process or understand. Information comes to us in a vast array of formats and styles, which often makes it difficult to collect and even harder to use to our advantage. So, what we need to acquire, is not just information but knowledge. Knowledge refers to the awareness or understanding that comes from someone or something that can absorb, interpret and analyse information. We all make better decisions when we have knowledge not just information.

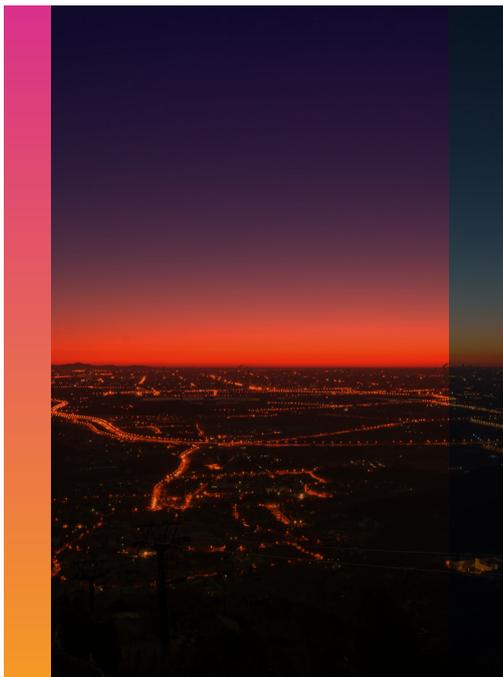
Finding others who can help us interpret information is never easy and this has driven the emergence of knowledge hubs – which come in many shapes and sizes but are often a collection of institutions or networks, dedicated to capturing,

sharing and exchanging experiences with others, in order to accelerate development. These hubs tend to arise where there is an acute need – biotechnology in Cambridge, finance in London, media in Salford, automotive in Birmingham and so on – and they often bring together government departments, companies, universities, not for profits and a wide range of individuals who all benefit from the open exchange of insight and understanding. We’ll see many more of these emerge, in 2021.”



**Andrew Hatcher,**  
**Mentor in Residence,**  
**Entrepreneurship Centre,**  
**Cambridge Judge Business**  
**School**

# L = Layer 3 VPNs



“Layer 3 VPN (Virtual Private Network) connectivity occurs on a core MPLS network – in other words, usually on a service provider’s router. In Vapour’s case, this is a highly resilient private network with 99.999% uptime, which has cost more than £2m to build.

Layer 3 VPNs require more processing power but actually allow for multiple routing, with ease – great for organisations wishing to communicate across the network from various locations. The architecture is scalable too, allowing for thousands of customer sites and VPNs which presents a degree of future-proofed business planning.”



**Salim Ramzan, Senior Network**  
**Engineer, Vapour**

*“A ‘one size fits all’ approach probably isn’t ideal.”*

# M = Managed support

“The definition of managed support differs from one person to the next. To a data engineer, for example, anything relating to ‘managed’ typically has private network connotations, whereas to the employee of an IT services provider, every component of their entire proposition could fall under the ‘managed support’ umbrella.

The picture becomes even more muddled when you step into the mind of a regular organisation, whereby the term could arguably define anything from a little ‘hand holding’ to a fully outsourced provision.

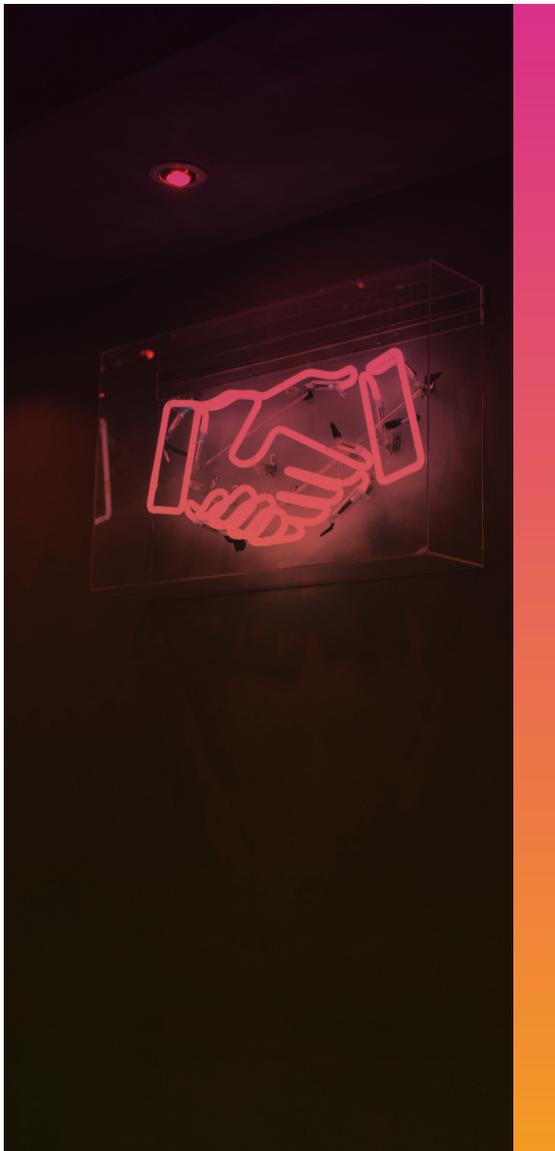
There isn’t necessarily a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ with any of this of course, providing there’s clarity between the supplier and customer concerned.

A ‘one size fits all’ approach probably isn’t ideal – that’s why we offer three layers in our business. Client controlled – where customers receive training so they’re empowered to make ongoing changes themselves, without the need for our input; a monthly subscription – inclusive of an agreed number of updates per month; and ‘pay as you go’ – which means we’re here when you need us.

This keeps everything clear and clean for supplier and customer alike – transparent agreements are the foundations to a solid and successful relationship.”



**Carol McGrotty, Head of Operations and Compliance, Vapour**



# N = NLP

“IVRs are dead! For too long, businesses have relied on Interactive Voice Response systems to streamline their incoming calls. However, huge advances in machine learning and data science mean that Natural Language Processing (NLP) is now a reliable, scalable and viable replacement for the comparatively antiquated IVR technology.

We no longer have to feed customers with numerical menus which undoubtedly irritate, frustrate and delay interaction with the people we typically want to impress the most. Instead, “tell us why you are calling today” is now the go to watchword of intuitive voice-driven customer interactions.

From that point onward, a machine agent may be able to handle the entire enquiry, or the technology can collect vital information so that

a more meaningful conversation can be had between the contact centre agent and customer. We’ll see more businesses, of all shapes and sizes, embracing NLP in 2021 and beyond. It saves time for the customer and organisation alike, drives a better brand experience, and also acts as a mechanism to collect insight from individuals, as to why they’re calling.

Voice-instructed enquiries are how we are increasingly interacting with our personal devices in the home, so why not when we deal with businesses too? Let NLP do the boring stuff better.”



**Edward Winfield,**  
**Director Global**  
**Partnerships,**  
**Content Guru**

# O = On-demand

“As individuals we have grown familiar with – if not expectant of – the provision of on-demand products and services in so many elements of our personal life, so why not in the business environment?”

On-demand computing does what it says on the tin – provides organisations with the technical resources they require at any given time.

In terms of cloud Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS), for example, organisations can invest in the servers, connectivity, hardware, backup, firewalls, recovery strategy and security that they need. Choose the right provider and this resilient outsourced model provides maximum peace of mind, and it can be scaled up or down with ease.

After the turbulence of recent times, I’d say this on-demand provision is more important now, than ever.”



**Craig Holmes, Head of Cloud, Vapour**



# P = Public vs. Private cloud

“The public vs private cloud debate will rumble on in 2021 and beyond, and there can be no ‘one size fits all’ answer. However, for this very reason, 2021 will be the year when people become more embracing of a hybrid model.

There will always be legacy applications that businesses rely on better suited to a private infrastructure, whether that’s an on-premise solution or a dedicated private cloud network provided by someone like Vapour. Finance systems and ERPs are just a couple of examples.

But the benefits of public cloud are accelerating, and are therefore becoming regarded as the norm for where agility is required.

A hybrid model may sound like it’s further complicating the matter, but in fact it’s not. A hybrid approach is simply about ensuring the right cloud infrastructure overall. My advice if people are confused or unsure, is to engage a specialist who understands this environment inside out, to undertake a short consultancy exercise – not least because funded assistance is currently available to support this discovery.”

**Gavin Young, Client Manager, NTT UK Limited**



*“Speak to the employees themselves, but give them a ‘safe space’ in which to talk.”*

# Q = Questionnaires

“Paying greater attention to employee health shouldn’t just be a priority because it is in ‘management vogue’. It represents employers’ fundamental duty of care to staff. A genuine commitment to evaluating and improving the physical and psychological wellness of colleagues, is therefore required at management level. Ideally it should cascade down throughout the whole workforce too, so that better health becomes the cultural cornerstone of the business.

When implementing an employee wellbeing strategy, relying on ‘dummy data’ is dangerous – so too is an infatuation with absence rates. In fact, industry stats indicate that there are five times as many people at work while experiencing a mental health condition, than there are colleagues absent from the workplace when encountering the same problems. In short, absence data lies!

The first step to uncovering the health of a given workforce, is therefore to gather the metrics that matter.

An independent assessment tool – or questionnaire – with utmost reassurances when it comes to colleague confidentiality, is one of the most effective ways to determine how people are truly feeling. Knowing which questions to explore is also key. Topics including sleeping patterns, musculoskeletal complaints, hydration levels, nutritional habits, physical activity levels and mental wellbeing, are just some of the areas that should be covered.

The promise of immediate results and – importantly – proposed next steps, also reinforces the employers’ commitment to the process and the follow-on support that will be provided. But don’t just leave it there – please, take action.”



**Harry Bliss, Founder,  
Champion Health**

# R = Robotics

“Despite Robotic Process Automation (RPA) being around for a number of years, only 13% of early adopters have scaled their RPA programmes beyond 8-10 software robots. One of the key factors holding even these innovative thinkers back, is that the initial RPA deployments have focused on low value, back office tasks alone – and not end-to-end processes.

It’s different now. People – and not just early adopters – realise that RPA is a real strategic enabler. It can be used right across the enterprise, from the contact centre, to shop floor, supply chain and more. RPA can handle more intelligent processes than simply mundane, repetitive tasks, such as understanding documents, generating reports, analysing large data sets and holding conversations with employees and customers alike.

We read so much about robots stealing our jobs, but 2021 will be the year the narrative changes. RPA will protect jobs, free up time for employees to bring their human skills to life, drive up productivity and – ultimately – boost customer service levels too.

Take a contact centre for example. The software robot works alongside its human co-worker to process all the information requests in real-time while the agent speaks to the customer. Whether that’s presenting the chosen details of a broadband package through to guiding the agent on how to handle a distressing call about COVID-19. This can slash call handling time whilst improving the quality of human interaction on the call. The robot can’t be personalised or empathic, but it can cut out the ‘noise’ that may otherwise get in the way of how growing – or increasingly pressured – businesses deliver the quality of service they want to be known for.”

**Tom Davies, CEO, Robiquity**



*“2021 will  
be the year  
the narrative  
changes.”*



“SD-WAN solutions have become increasingly popular as organisations demand fast, scalable, and flexible connectivity to and between different network environments.

The objective of any SD-WAN deployment is to establish and maintain a high user experience while lowering the overall total cost of ownership (TCO) for connections between remote offices and users and business-critical resources and applications.

But as with most technologies, the wrong SD-WAN solution can significantly inhibit an organisation’s ability to quickly adapt to changing business demands, rather than accelerate them. And the most significant challenge is that the wrong SD-WAN solution can introduce serious security challenges that can bring the entire system to a screeching halt.

Because SD-WAN can enable organisations to compete more effectively and efficiently in today’s global marketplace, it is critical to understand what differentiates a Secure SD-WAN solution from the more generic set of technologies and

services described as SD-WAN. Secure SD-WAN consolidates advanced routing with advanced security capabilities into a single, integrated solution that can be controlled using a single management and orchestration interface. This provides a level of protection and flexibility that is simply not possible when an IT team is forced to deploy security as an afterthought overlay, running on top of SD-WAN functionality.

But there’s another aspect to secure SD-WAN that’s sometimes overlooked in the industry-wide rush to categorise and market the technology. The internet is unpredictable, and network outages—no matter how robust the WAN infrastructure is thought to be—are sometimes unavoidable. Fortunately, the best SD-WAN solutions are designed to bridge gaps in internet reliability to deliver exceptional application performance. How? By quickly self-healing when an outage or disruption impacts connectivity, by switching to an alternative transport model.”

**Fortinet**

# T = Teams integration

“The mass shift to remote working in 2020, created an incredible uplift in the application of collaboration tools, with Microsoft Teams experiencing landmark spread in the market.

An article in Computer Weekly for example, showed that as of 14 June – almost three months to the day since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown – use of Teams had grown by 894% when compared to base usage during the week of 17 February.

With Teams and 365 now a regular feature within so many organisations’ tech stack, demand for enabling full voice capabilities natively within Teams – without relying on Microsoft’s calling plans – will only rise in 2021.

Direct routing via a Microsoft-certified SBC (Session Border Controller) is key to powering this. And finding the right provider, who will also deliver responsive support in the event that you need it, is the place to start.”



**Tim Mercer, CEO, Vapour**

# U = UC+

“2020 is the year that the world embraced unified communications (UC) and online collaboration. But 2021 will be the year when people think about how the technology can change the nature of work.

UC platforms proved that working from home can be relatively straightforward – it was the ultimate proof of concept to show how UC can deliver business value. So, what’s next?

Features like simple video calling, and integration with traditional desktop handsets and phone numbers will soon become par for the course. Enabling geographically distributed teams to

conference on the fly, share files, and truly collaborate from within a single environment will become much more important. With the global shift towards work-from-anywhere, the way people work has changed for good, and UC solutions now need to enable this change. The good news is that many are, and we’re only scratching the surface of what’s possible. It’s a very exciting time to be within the communications space.”



**Alison Hastings, Regional Channel Leader – UK and Ireland, Avaya**

# V = VDIs

## (Virtual Desktop Infrastructures)



“A VDI is the practice of hosting a desktop operating system within a virtual machine, run on a centralised server. The desktop images can then be accessed by different types of devices such as PCs, laptops, thin clients (lower performance computers) and mobile devices, from any location. By running centrally, the VDI enables administrators to improve security and manageability of the entire estate.

In truth VDIs are not new. However, because they enable an organisation to enhance the support they deliver to remote colleagues – by running the VDIs centrally to improve security and manageability of the entire estate – this technology has seen a rapid explosion in adoption, as a result of COVID.

However, the monumental mindset shift towards workplace flexibility – and a mounting awareness of the need for agility and affordability – means VDIs will be here to stay, long after the pandemic.

Because VDI then takes advantage of a centralised pool of computing power and storage – typically in your data centre – it means that the individual user machines in the network require fewer resources. You can therefore typically invest in less expensive end user machines without sacrificing performance. This approach can also reduce the time and cost associated with maintenance, as updates and patches can be made once and pushed out to all, rather than having to update one device at a time. And in the event of a device being lost or stolen, the centralisation provides an added layer of security between data and a potential cybercriminal.”



**Gavin Young, Client Manager,  
NTT UK Limited**

# W = Working from...anywhere!

“As the months unfolded following the outbreak of COVID-19, the media became saturated with one research study after the next – each unveiling the latest viewpoints of employers and the UK workforce alike.

10,000 respondents to a piece of research by real estate firm CBRE, for example, revealed that remote working is here to stay, with 85% of employees stating they’d prefer to work remotely for at least two to three days a week.

However, the interesting and encouraging point about this survey – versus so many others – is that enabling colleagues to work remotely is very different to simply presenting a working from home strategy alone.

In the *true* interests of flexibility, a working from *anywhere* approach is surely a more modern and relevant mindset. The same study suggested that 60% of people will return to the office for community and collaboration, for example, which shows that the office isn’t dead, as so many people would have had us believe at the start of the pandemic. Wider research has also found that a number of people are struggling with the psychological impact of remote working – not least among the millennial demographic, reportedly. The ‘office vs. home’ debate really does therefore need to move on a little.

So whether people choose to operate in the traditional office environment, home, a co-working space, a beach or wherever, when we get past this virus, this should be possible, if employers are now as embracing of flexibility as they claim.

This won’t be without its challenges of course, not least from a secure connectivity perspective, but that’s why cyber-savvy organisations are already building their SD-WAN strategies, for instance.”



**Carol McGrotty, Head of Operations and Compliance, Vapour**

*“The needs and wants of the workplace are multifaceted and often fast-moving.”*

# X = CX, UX, everything X!

“The experiential economy is something that a number of businesses – particularly those with a strong sense of purpose – have embraced for some time. However, others have perhaps traditionally only paid lip service to a commitment to putting people at the heart of everything they do.

Of course, many organisations may continue to do this, but increasingly discerning customers – in both the business and consumer environment – are continuing to push back on experiences that don’t meet their expectations.

Some brands will consider these expectations too high, while others will strive to surpass even the toughest standards. Whatever your stance, it all comes down to perspective. Try to see things through their lens, not yours.

If you are delivering a product or service to a customer, *they* are the people who are going to experience it. So, design it for their wants and

needs. Organisations that overlook this basic principle will, I fear, begin to get left behind.

The same can be said for internal customers – employees. Their needs and wants of the workplace are multifaceted and often fast-moving. But if they truly matter, as much as brands say they do, organisational processes, practices and cultures need to place them at the heart too.

Maintaining or enhancing the CX (customer experience) or UX (user experience) is no mean feat. But research, involvement and measurement are key to progressing this strategy in 2021 and beyond.”



**Lesley Gulliver, managing director, The Engine Room, and board director, Design Business Association**

# “Y?”

“It doesn’t matter how appealing the innovation, how shiny the new piece of kit, how ground-breaking the new piece of software is...

Of course, businesses should remain abreast of what’s possible through the use of clever tech. We love opening up customers’ eyes to the art of the possible, for example.

But any tech investment, large or small, should always come back to one simple question – why?

From an organisation’s perspective, decision makers should look at any solution with a clear head. Why do you need it?

Once you understand your objective(s), keep them in sharp focus. By concentrating on what you need to achieve, you’re far more likely to get there. Sometimes the bit in the middle, in truth, shouldn’t matter, so long as it does the job effectively, compliantly and within budget.

*Responsible* suppliers should maintain this ‘why’ perspective too. Sadly, a number of vendors have leant too heavily on their own agendas over the years, either because it’s all they know how to sell, or because they think it’s the path to earning a quick buck.

But in a world of continually-advancing innovations, when everything is increasingly about ease of use, ROI and long-standing trusted relationships, these snake oil suppliers soon come unstuck.

So, my advice would be to map out a carefully defined wish list for any piece of tech, before even going to market to assess possible partners. And, when talking to potential suppliers, ask for answers to *specific* questions – ideally with use cases and existing customer testimonials.”

**Alec Stephens, Sales Manager, Vapour**



*“Any tech investment should always come back to one simple question – why?”*



# Z = Zs

(and future generations)  
entering the workplace

“Whether you love or loathe the ‘Generation Z’ term, we cannot get away from the fact that digital natives are now entering the world of work, and when it comes to what they’re looking for from their employers, they appear to have a clear compass.

Is every Generation Z employee the same as the next? Of course not – they’re human! But there are some distinct trends among this demographic.

They want security, stability and the opportunity to grow. They will use technology to complete mundane tasks, as standard, and will confidently question inefficient ways of working. They will work autonomously and will turn to tech – particularly search engines – for insight. They’ll push back on businesses that don’t offer flexibility, but for employers who do respect the importance of work-life balance, they’ll graft in return. They’re competitive but open-minded, and truly passionate

about equality and diversity. But they’ll spot and call out if a brand is just paying lip service to something, as authenticity matters.

This might not resonate with managers and leaders outside of this demographic, but that doesn’t mean personal opinions or mindsets which centre upon ‘the way we’ve always done things around here’ should be allowed to cloud what will motivate this next generation of talent.

Allowing this disconnect to continue is extremely risky, so if you aren’t in tune with the needs of Gen Zs, start your research – they’re coming!”



**David Dewey, CEO,  
Shortlist.me**

# With thanks

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# Want to continue the conversation?

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