The tech developments that will thrive in a post-Covid-19 era

By Ronald Ravel

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Covid-19 has had an impact on both our personal and professional lives that is era-defining. The quickening of remote working has seen businesses of all sizes turn to technology to meet the needs of a new distributed workforce and maintain operational efficiency.

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While 2020 produced few new technological or business developments, it certainly accelerated many technology trends already in motion. In 2021, we'll see these trends continue to take off at speed, with new Internet of things (IoT) applications, technologies, and solutions reaching every sector.

Remote business will open new, unexpected use cases for wearables and mixed realities

The unprecedented working environment created by the pandemic has propelled technologies like assisted reality (AR) forward beyond proofs of concept, opening up new, perhaps less obvious, cases and demonstrating the potential of wearables in driving collaboration amongst remote teams.

Smart glasses provide a vehicle for interactive remote communication through document retrieval, workflow instructions and real-time data capture – bringing people face-to-face, so to speak.

Covid-19 has provided a unique opportunity for business leaders to re-assess and re-imagine their need for a traditional four-walled office, paving the way for 2021 to be the year that digitally savvy businesses double down on smart technologies to enable remote business. We'll even see businesses who have not yet imagined using wearables start to experiment with the technology.

Mobile edge computing will reach more sectors

Edge computing has continued to gain significant traction in recent years, yet it's this coming year that we'll finally see where this technology can bring real benefits. While public 5G is still years away from mainstream adoption, Forrester sees immediate value in private 5G – a network dedicated to a specific business or locale like a warehouse, shipyard, or factory.

This technology is here now and is ready to drive edge computing in 2021. The evolution of 5G and mobile edge computing technology will also provide a platform for enterprise wearable technologies to really come to the fore.

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Smart glasses allow field workers to carry out tasks hands-free, while still having access to the information and tools they need. With mobile edge computing solutions acting as the gateway, smart glasses are a natural next step and close to becoming mainstream for frontline and field-based workers.

2021 will bring quicker proof of concept to roll-out

This year we've seen business pivot to deal with a lot of changes in the face of Covid-19. A fifth of businesses have dialled up investment in digital transformation initiatives, with many making the impossible happen overnight or taking decisions in a matter of days rather than months.

In this extraordinary time, businesses have learnt how to adapt and progress more quickly than ever expected. As we move into 2021 and beyond, we expect this trend to come with us as businesses continue at an accelerated rate of learning.

Yet while proof of concepts for new technologies will be much quicker from experimentation to roll out phases, businesses will need to keep an eye on three key factors: data security, scalability and usability.

2020 has highlighted the need for accelerated automation in 2021

Unsurprisingly, 2021 will see a new and changed workplace, and technology will be needed to support it. Automation has been on the business agenda for years now, but as social distancing rules remain in place going into 2021, automation and robotics will likely become a core competence of multiple sectors in the foreseeable future.

However, in an effort to push out automation during the pandemic, many businesses have found themselves patching failures that have arisen since. In 2021, Forrester predicts that up to 30% of businesses will ramp up their focus on quality by better planning and testing their automation before deploying it in production or exposing it to employees.

IoT in healthcare will continue to increase, but not without stumbling blocks

The global IoT healthcare market is expected to grow to $188bn by 2025, at an annual rate of 21%. While IoT in the medical sector has been on prediction lists for some years now, it will see a renewed importance in 2021. A number of people stayed home in 2020, leaving long-term illnesses untreated.

In 2021, the rise of telemedicine and remote diagnosis will see healthcare professionals able to proactively monitor, support and provide care for these patients' health at home.

Consumer interest in wearable health devices, such as ECG and blood pressure monitors, will accelerate as patients appreciate the insight into their own health and the ability to share data with their doctor remotely, for an instant health evaluation. That said, IoT infrastructure, a lack of industry expertise, and security will remain a challenge.

We've no doubt seen impressive uptake of technology over the past year, as businesses have turned to sophisticated tools to stabilise themselves. As we enter 2021, and businesses look to establish themselves in the next 'normal', it's likely that we'll continue learning and innovating at an accelerated pace. Now, more than ever, we will see technology transform businesses in almost every sector.

ABOUT RONALD RAVEL

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