



RISE TO THE CHALLENGE

Shaping the workplaces of the future



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01

A CHANGING WORLD

This section explores how modern technology is enabling a major shift in the way people work, and the benefits this offers to businesses and their staff.



The way we work has been evolving for decades, in line with our lifestyles, attitudes and – above all – technology. Developments in devices, software and networking have enabled many industries to adopt more flexible patterns of working. People are being given more choice over their hours and locations to help them get things done more efficiently and adapt their schedules to their own circumstances.

Despite these benefits, though, until recently the trend had not become the norm. In 2019, more than a quarter of the UK workforce said they had worked from home at some point. But a much smaller proportion were doing so all the time.¹

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has made us realise what's possible. A study last year by the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research found that during the UK's March 2020 lock-down, the proportion of people working entirely from home rose seven-fold, from 6% of workers in January and February to 43% in April. And the percentage remained high in June, at 37%.²

As a result, many more employees now appreciate the benefits that remote working offers. It can give them the space to concentrate free of distractions, the time to build exercise into their day and the flexibility to manage other responsibilities alongside work. The research found that almost nine in ten employees who were working from home wanted to carry on doing so in some capacity in the future. And about half wanted to work from home often or all of the time.

Employers, too, are recognising the advantages of a more flexible approach. They understand that happy employees are productive ones. And as they invest in the technology to support remote collaboration, they're also seizing the broader opportunities it creates. Businesses have now realised that lots about the way they were working had become outdated. As Microsoft's CEO Satya Nadella observed in April 2020, "we've seen two years' worth of digital transformation in two months", including the widespread adoption of videoconferencing software and other collaboration tools.

REMOTE WORKING IS HERE TO STAY

As we emerge from the pandemic, business leaders expect much of this change to become permanent, as organisations increasingly embrace remote working. A PwC survey of UK CEOs last year found that large majorities expect an enduring shift towards remote collaboration (86%), automation (77%) and lower-density workplaces (68%).

But on-site working and face to face contact is still crucial in many ways – whether it's necessary for the work itself, to support people's mental health or to help build strong teams. This has led to predictions that we will see growing numbers of 'hybrid' workplaces: those that combine on-site and remote working.



THE RISE OF THE HYBRID WORKPLACE

A recent report from IDC forecast that by 2021, “at least 70% of digitally enabled small and medium businesses (SMBs) will operate under a hybrid model of working, with remote work emerging as a norm”.⁴

And research by Hitachi Capital into the views of SMB owners has found growing support for this trend.⁵ When the UK government first advised companies to work from home, about half these business owners felt positively about their staff working remotely, but this had risen to 74% several weeks later.⁶ More than three quarters planned to introduce work from home policies once the lockdown ended.

Organisations like these understand that while the current situation brings many challenges (which we’ll discuss in sections three to five), it has also created an exciting opportunity for positive change. By investing in modern technology, SMBs can support remote working, while also realising other benefits such as automation, reducing costs, and providing a better customer experience.

As PwC’s Head of Clients and Markets Marco Amitrano said in response to his company’s research findings, “the dramatic acceleration of trends around digital transformation and remote and flexible working means CEOs can now embed changes that otherwise may have taken a decade or more to happen”.

In this white paper, we’ll look more closely at the issues facing SMBs as they try to balance unusually tight budgets with the need to adapt and grow. How can they support their staff to be happy and productive amid major workplace changes? Can they keep their network secure when it extends right into their employees’ homes? And does this all mean more work for IT managers? Or is there an opportunity to simplify management and free up resources?

Technology can be the key to rising to challenges like these – and in the following sections, we’ll discuss how.

02

THE CHALLENGES FACING SMBS

This section considers the issues SMBs need to tackle in the current environment, and whether these could also bring new opportunities.

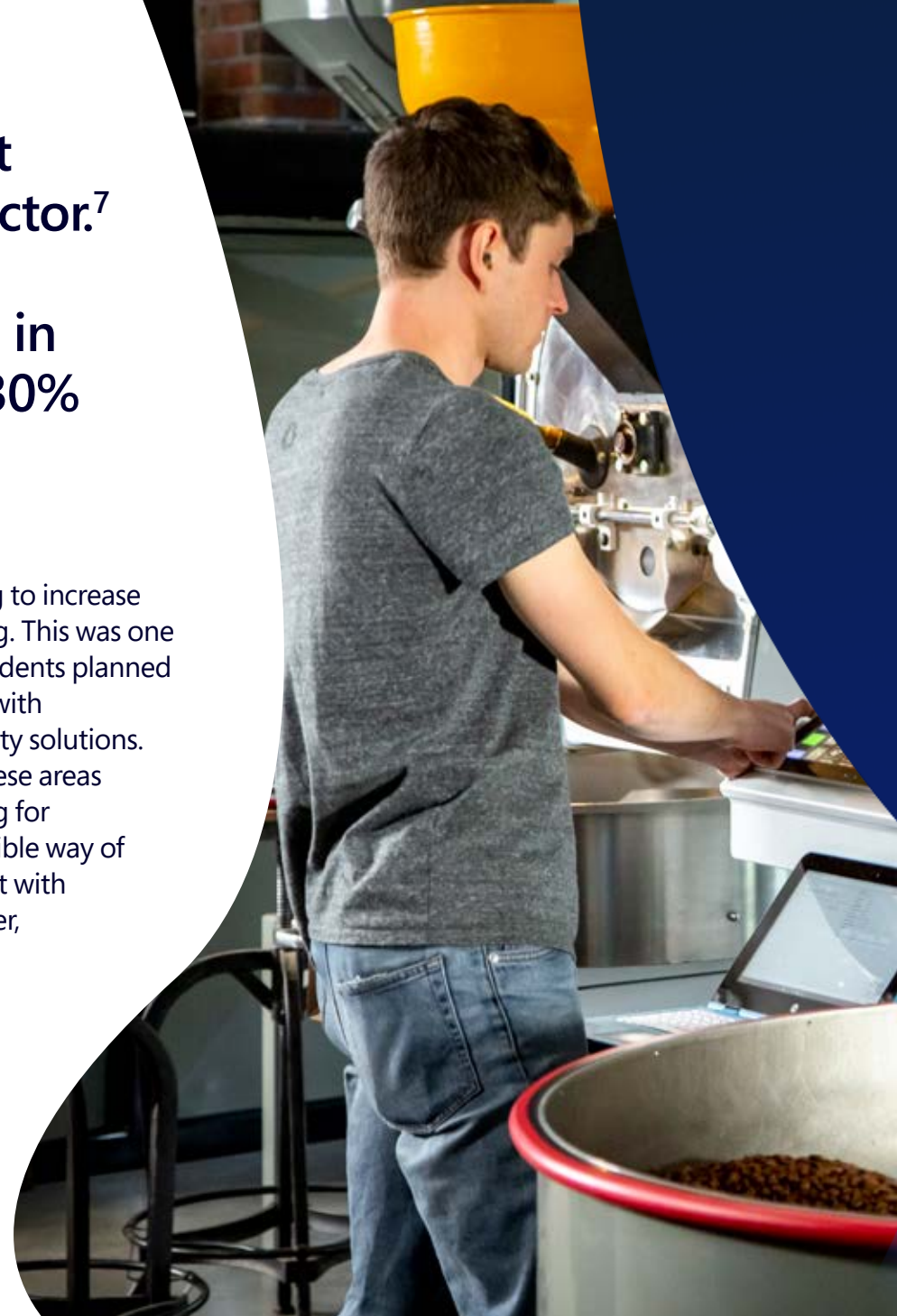


SMBs comprise over 99.9% of UK businesses, contributing about three fifths of employment and half of turnover to the country's private sector.⁷ And the number of new ones is growing. There were 220,000 new companies registered in the UK between July and September 2020⁸: a 30% increase compared to the same period in 2019.

These new ventures are joining a dynamic and rapidly changing part of the business world. But whether they are start-ups or established outfits, all SMBs are planning carefully for the future.

To understand the thoughts and priorities of the sector as it looks ahead, Microsoft commissioned a global study from Techaisle, surveying more than 2,000 IT and business decision makers at SMBs. The research found a widespread expectation of change, with about a third of businesses expecting at least some of the IT changes they had made due to the pandemic to become permanent.⁹

Well over half (59%) were planning to increase their investment in remote working. This was one of the top four areas where respondents planned to extend their capabilities, along with collaboration, the cloud and security solutions. The close connections between these areas suggest that businesses are looking for technology to support a more flexible way of working, enabling them to connect with suppliers, customers and each other, wherever they are.



OUT-OF-DATE TECHNOLOGY

Almost two thirds of SMBs (63%) said they were planning to increase their investment in digital transformation.

But the challenge to rethink old assumptions has come at a time when many are working with out-of-date technology. According to the survey, 32% of Windows 10 PCs used by SMBs are more than four years old, and 40% of SMBs either don't have or are not following a PC refresh policy.¹⁰

Manufacturing, personal services, and retail were among the industries with the largest percentages of Windows 10 PCs that were four or more years old, and the biggest lag in their refresh cycles.

Of course, budget pressures mean that business leaders must be careful about how they invest in newer technology. The research¹¹ found that the cost of new PCs (41%) and budget constraints (38%) were the top two reasons SMBs had not replaced older Windows 10 PCs. As one IT manager said, "We replace some PCs, but usually, the budget gets in the way of buying new PCs."

Any savings made in this way could be illusory, however, when the bigger picture is considered. The same IT manager estimated that using an older PC led to 8 hours a month of lost time. The research report says that "older PCs tend to be slower, harder to equip with current software, are more prone to crashes and failures, lack the latest connectivity capabilities, and miss much-needed built-in hardware security features – all of which harm business".



IMPORTANT CHOICES

This means SMBs are facing important choices as they plan for a changing world. While operating as efficiently as possible, they must also adapt and grow to meet new challenges.

- 1 How do you ensure a dispersed workforce can thrive?
- 2 How do you protect your business from new and evolving security threats?
- 3 How do you handle all of this remotely?

For businesses considering questions like these, failing to properly support new ways of working may be a bigger risk to competitive advantage – especially in our era of rapid technological change – than investing in innovation. And the impact of the decisions they take will be felt for years to come.

The most forward-thinking SMBs are likely to be those who understand that getting the right hardware and software in place can lead to long-term improvements in how effectively and securely they work.

Modern business technology is specifically designed to support this shift. Devices that support the Intel vPro® platform come with features that enhance performance, security and manageability, for example. And up-to-date Windows 10 PCs – often available through a device as a service (DaaS) subscription model – provide the tools for effective remote collaboration.

In the following sections, we'll explore the challenges presented by employee productivity, security and IT management in more detail – and how these might be turned into opportunities.

03

PRODUCTIVITY: AN IMMINENT CHALLENGE

This section looks at how modern collaboration tools and reliable devices can help your team work more efficiently and effectively.



Productivity has been a long-standing challenge in the UK: after rising by 20% between 1999 and 2007, it grew by just 4% between 2010 and 2018.¹²

Global research conducted by Forrester Consulting for Lenovo from 2019 found that 87% of SMB device buyers thought improving employee productivity would be a critical priority over the next 12 months.¹³ And the current transformation of the economy means the issue remains front of mind for many businesses. A natural concern is that the greater independence of remote workers may lead to a fall in productivity. But the research into remote working during lockdown (discussed in section 1)

found no evidence of this. In June 2020, 70% of home workers said they could get as much or more work done as they did six months earlier. The researchers said that since the strongest performers were those who were keenest to continue to work at home, “productivity may be boosted by a sustained increase in the prevalence of homeworking”.

But if recent experiences have helped businesses shed their reservations about remote working, challenges remain about how best to implement it. Forrester’s research found that employees’ experience of technology is a critical factor.¹⁵

“Productivity may be boosted by a sustained increase in the prevalence of homeworking.”

More than 80% of productive employees said they were satisfied with their work devices, compared to 47% of their less productive colleagues. And three quarters (76%) of productive employees were also satisfied with their device IT support, with only 42% of less productive employees feeling the same way the Forrester Study states:

“To help employees become more productive at work, companies need to enable them with the right tools and technology.”

SMBs that can do this could see significant-productivity increases. But equally, those that don’t may get less done. So how can businesses make sure they have systems and devices that support their employees to connect, collaborate, and communicate across different locations?



KEY PRODUCTIVITY CHALLENGES

As work has changed, so have the tools we use for it. A typical working day may now include group video calls, online chats and co-authoring shared documents – with these conversations involving team members, suppliers or service providers based in, and moving between, different locations.

SUPPORTING COLLABORATION

Email and a word processor alone won't cut it any more. But modern software such as Microsoft 365 is specifically designed to support the needs of businesses today. It's a cost-effective cloud solution that supports secure, real-time collaboration from anywhere. Your team can use it to work together from remote and on-site locations, as well as store shared documents in the cloud.

Familiar apps such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook are integrated with Teams, a collaboration platform that includes video conferencing, project-based group chats and shared task lists. This means you can seamlessly use these apps for different functions, supporting flexible and varied working patterns while keeping projects streamline and organised.

Microsoft 365 is provided as a cloud-based subscription, and we're always adding new features to give you a better experience. You can now personalise your view of a video call or create smaller groups using virtual breakout rooms. And last summer Together mode was launched. This uses AI technology to create a shared virtual background, so it's as if you're all in the same room. It helps people feel more engaged and makes it easier to focus on faces and body language.

Thriving businesses are those where all team members can contribute their best. Microsoft 365 is specifically designed to help you include everyone, whoever or wherever they might be. Teams offers live captions to support people who are hearing impaired, have different language proficiency or are in a noisy environment. The 'raise your hand' virtual gesture helps ensure everyone's voice is heard. And AI-powered background noise suppression improves the quality of your audio, even when you're in a noisy environment.

Remote working has led some employees to experience isolation, while others feel overwhelmed by work or miss familiar office routines. To help solve these problems, Microsoft 365 also supports staff wellbeing through a personalised dashboard that lets you schedule breaks, "virtual commutes" and mindfulness exercises, as well as providing prompts to boost team cohesion. And the Reflect messaging extension makes it easy for managers to check in about how their team is feeling.

GETTING MORE DONE

When your team is dividing its time between the office and other locations, productivity lost through inefficient technology mounts up. Apps that don't load, laptops that take tens of minutes to boot up, and systems that crash all eat into valuable time.

The owner of an accounting and insurance intermediary SMB told Techaisle that even an hour's downtime causes a "major block" to business. "We have an active in-house IT department, but a person-hours loss of 5% to 6% does occur. We know we lose money," they said.¹⁶

This is where fast, reliable devices really count. Modern Windows 10 PCs with Intel vPro platform processors have quick start-up times thanks to SSD technology, and their long battery life supports flexible working patterns that leave power cords behind.

Windows 10 Pro tools also help IT teams manage and protect devices, reducing the cost and time spent on security and support issues. On average, employees with new laptops and desktops running Windows 10 Pro save half an hour each week.¹⁷

The new 11th Gen Intel® Core™ Processors also facilitate faster speeds, stronger connectivity and powerful performance with Intel® Wi-Fi 6 and 6E. This responsiveness enables employees to get more out of modern workplace platforms such as Microsoft Teams, which by October 2020 was connecting 115 million daily active users worldwide.

Another Forrester Consulting study, commissioned in 2020 by Microsoft, found that SMBs using Microsoft 365 for Business also improved productivity by one hour per user every week. "We haven't missed a beat with communication either in the office or having people work remotely," said one US human resources partner interviewed for the study.¹⁸

FOCUSING ON WHAT MATTERS

Today's workplace calls for more efficiency than ever. As organisations evolve to stay ahead of the curve, many staff will be taking on new responsibilities. Others may be job sharing or working flexible hours. These trends call for user-friendly technology that enables people to focus on the task at hand – not on solving their tech issues.

Modern Windows 10 with Intel vPro platform devices offer the reliability and agility that SMBs need. Built for business, they excel at the fundamentals, with high-quality audio, video and Wi-Fi connectivity. Intel's new Wi-Fi 6/6E (Gig+), the greatest leap in Wi-Fi technology in 20 years, provides connections that are nearly three times faster, with the reliability to support bandwidth-demanding apps like videoconferencing and content sharing.¹⁹

The devices are specifically designed to work with Microsoft 365 and OneDrive file sharing, enabling seamless collaboration from anywhere. So your team members could co-create a document on their PC at work, make some edits on the train home, and later add a quick update from their phone.

As well as familiar programs like Word, Excel and PowerPoint, Microsoft 365 includes other Microsoft apps like Forms for polls and surveys, Planner for tasks management and Power Automate to streamline repetitive tasks. It also integrates with Power BI, which visualises data dynamically to support better business decisions.

And our PCs are enhanced with AI to give anyone professional-level creative capabilities for tasks like photo and video editing. 11th generation Intel vPro platform devices are designed to dramatically accelerate the future of AI-enhanced applications and workflows, with up to eight times better AI performance compared to three-year-old devices.

We've thought hard about the details to help you meet your challenges. Focus Assist mode lets you set times when you won't see distracting notifications. You can copy text on one device and paste it later on another. And some of our devices come with a digital pen you can use to take notes, navigate, edit or draw.

All these features and more come together to help your team work together more easily and effectively.

CUSTOMER STORY: CLIFTON COFFEE

Bristol-based coffee roasters Clifton Coffee supply, service and provide training to coffee shops. Having grown since its founding in 2001 to serve 850 wholesale customers in the UK and Europe, the business found that using multiple communication tools across several locations was creating confusion.

Switching to Microsoft 365 has enabled the business to support better collaboration and create more efficient workflows. For example, Clifton's director of coffee Josh Clarke now uses Teams to share video tasting notes from his coffee sourcing trips, saving 20 minutes per coffee. And the company's engineers can scan QR codes to enter data on Microsoft Forms about the equipment they're servicing.

“Having a more reliable record of machine usage means that we've been able to sell 30% more water filters since the move to Microsoft 365,”
says Clarke.

[Read more](#)



04

ENSURING AND ENHANCING SECURITY

This section discusses the security challenges posed by hybrid working, and how an integrated approach can tackle these threats.



Security is a critical issue for any business, and the changing nature of the modern workplace is creating new challenges.

The National Cyber Security Centre says that remote working exposes organisations to new risks such as devices being stolen or credentials – like usernames, tokens, or passwords – being compromised by an attacker.²¹

And when staff are routinely working across different locations and devices, the idea of protecting the perimeter of the business from threats no longer makes sense. We need a new way of thinking about security. And one that makes things simpler, not more complicated.

The £20m fine paid last year by British Airways for a data breach in 2018 shows the damage that security lapses can cause.²² Techaisle found that two thirds of SMBs had experienced a security breach in 2019-20. This resulted in an overall revenue loss of 3%, with some experiencing losses of more than 10%.²³ For many SMBs, that's hundreds of thousands of pounds.

The businesses surveyed said that malware attacks, identity theft and password compromise were their top security concerns. Without effective security, remote working can increase the risk of incidents such as these. This is reflected in the research findings, with more than half of SMBs feeling that using both the cloud (56%) and mobility services (54%) would put them at higher risk of a data breach.

So it's no surprise that a recent survey of 1,000 technology buyers by Spiceworks Ziff Davis found that a third (34%) of mid-sized firms cited increased security concerns as a reason for increasing their IT budget.²⁴

Managing security in a way that's robust enough to tackle these issues will require careful thought. But ultimately, it's a chance to develop new systems that reduce the burden on staff, protect assets and unlock new opportunities for growth.

KEY SECURITY CHALLENGES

With hybrid working, employees might use a range of laptops, desktop PCs and mobile devices – perhaps including their own personal equipment – to access company data. This can increase the risk of security breaches, whether through human error, targeted attacks, or a combination of both.

Recent research by Computing with 150 IT leaders found that 77% thought remote working would cause cybersecurity risks to increase.²⁵



SUPPORTING A DISTRIBUTED WORKFORCE

When businesses patch together ad hoc systems to meet new demands, it often leads to complex processes that are frustrating for staff and open up weak spots for hackers to exploit. What's needed is an integrated approach that can connect people, apps and data across different locations and devices.

Microsoft 365 Business Premium lets users access systems in a secure way, from anywhere. It offers multi-factor authentication (MFA), which can prevent up to 99.9% of identity attacks. With a single sign-on, users can access a wide range of apps without having to re-enter their password.²⁶ The software can also prevent users from leaking information accidentally – for example, by letting them control who can access files (even after sending them to external recipients) and restrict actions like forwarding or reply all on emails.

Your IT team can further mitigate risks by preventing employees from being able to download, copy or paste business information into personal applications. IT managers can also remotely wipe business data from lost or stolen devices, gain visibility into cloud apps being used across the company, and set up policies to ensure people are using Microsoft Defender Antivirus (read more about this software in section 4.1.2 on page 22).

11th generation Intel vPro platforms with Intel® Hardware Shield also contribute to making hybrid workspaces secure. With built-in features that offer below the OS protection and advanced threat detection right out of the box to enhance the overall security from the hardware to the operating system, the data and applications.

What's more, Windows 10 devices with Intel vPro technology include the BitLocker encryption tool, so you can protect company data even if a device is lost or stolen.

TACKLING CONSTANTLY EVOLVING THREATS

Cyber criminals are always developing new tools and approaches. Microsoft's 2020 Digital Defense Report, for example, details how attackers opportunistically tailor their tactics to take advantage of global events like the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁷

By July 2020, Microsoft had observed 79 variants worldwide of the popular Trickbot and Emotet Malware families that used COVID-19 themed lures. In the UK, HMRC has published examples of opportunistic phishing emails, suspicious phone calls and texts.²⁸ And in one thwarted phishing campaign in the US, about 2,300 HTML attachments posing as COVID-19 financial compensation information were caught in 24 hours.²⁹

This campaign was stopped by the advanced threat protection capabilities of Microsoft Defender, our comprehensive security suite that's integrated with Microsoft 365. Microsoft 365 Business Premium, specially tailored for SMBs, includes Advanced Security features like Defender for Office 365. It can scan emails and messages to

check links and files are safe. Malicious attachments can be automatically deleted, and people are warned when they click on a potentially dangerous link.

Microsoft Defender Antivirus consistently performs highly in independent tests.³⁰ Its advanced filtering protects you against a wide range of targeted and volume-based attacks including spam, malware and ransomware. It works alongside other security tools to help you prevent, detect and respond to threats across different locations and devices. This is powered by industry-leading AI that analyses trillions of signals worldwide to help you safeguard your business assets and protect sensitive customer data.

In addition, Windows 10 PCs with vPro technology provide security protection at a hardware level. Intel's platform proactively detects and responds to threats that attack points outside of the operating system (such as system memory) and can't be stopped by software-based security.

For its 11th generation processors, Intel engineers developed ground-breaking technology to help shut down an entire class of attacks that have long evaded software-only solutions. Intel also offers the industry's first silicon-enabled AI threat detection to help stop ransomware and rypotomining attacks.³¹

HANDLING A GROWING WORKLOAD

Changing security requirements can lead to bigger demands on your IT team. 73% of IT leaders told Computing ³² they thought keeping devices secure would become a much bigger challenge in the years ahead.

But with the right solutions (including DaaS, which we'll discuss on page 34), you can develop a more efficient approach that streamlines your security workload, saving time and money.

**Microsoft 365
Business Premium
gives you visibility
and control over
potential threats
to your devices.**

From a page in the admin centre, you can stay on top of active threats identified by Microsoft Defender, including information on which users and devices are affected and which need review. Another page allows you to keep track of which devices are running Defender, whether they have any active threats, and where actions such as updates or reboots are needed.

Organisations using Windows 10 can also save time spent on tackling security issues. For example, Windows 10 Pro baseline security includes default security policies, drive encryption and secure-boot features that help reduce total IT support time.

In a Forrester Total Economic Impact™ study³³ commissioned by Microsoft in June 2020, Forrester interviewed five organisations with between 450 and 2,500 devices that had completed or were finishing modernising their infrastructure with newer laptops and desktops running Windows 10. The organisations reported that desktop-related support contacts had decreased by an estimated 40%, and contacts that continued to occur were dealt with in about half the time.

These security capabilities mean your IT team has more time to keep an eye on the big picture, while identifying the highest priority threats to address. And they're enhanced by the Intel® Active Management Technology (Intel® AMT), a remote manageability solution that works across wired and wireless connections, allows IT managers to remotely discover, repair, and help protect networked computing assets. It means they can respond earlier and more effectively to potential security threats, even with a highly distributed workforce.

CUSTOMER STORY: BNZSA

The international direct marketing agency BNZSA has had a remote working contingency plan in place since 2019. This allowed it to smoothly transfer its 170 employees to working from home within one weekend during the COVID-19 pandemic, without losing an hour's work.

The company uses the features of Intel's vPro platform, such as remote IT support and hardware-based security, to support home working. "The vPro platform's security features are particularly important for us because we work with large amounts of data from our clients and we need to be GDPR-compliant," says BNZSA founder Brahim Samhoud.

The company is now planning a hybrid working approach for the future. "We're not going to go back to doing forty hours per week in the office, which is basically obsolete now", says Samhoud.

[Read more](#)





05

MANAGING IT SYSTEMS

This section explores how businesses can manage devices, keep systems secure and troubleshoot problems, all while saving costs.

As organisations evolve, the challenge of managing their IT systems often increases.

This is particularly true now that many employees are routinely working remotely and using cloud-based services rather than internal networks. Businesses need a system that's organised enough to manage centrally, but flexible enough to support lots of different users and devices.

When endpoints include personal and company computers both inside and outside the firewall, it can quickly become complicated to deploy and update IT. Especially if it involves IoT and edge devices. But business hasn't stopped, and team members adapting to a fast-changing environment will need prompt and effective support.

Computing found that remote working had been the most significant factor in the PC and client estate management challenges faced by IT leaders. Other important factors included an increasing IT workload, the growing number, diversity and geographical spread of devices, and the volume of security patches and updates needed.³⁴

More than three quarters (79%) expected remote working to cause significant device management challenges over the next 12 months. So it's not surprising that many businesses are investing in this area. Among the research participants, 55% were already using PC management tools; 25% were actively implementing them, and a further 14% were planning to adopt them in the next two years.

A developing hybrid organisation that hasn't got its IT management in order is likely to experience spiralling costs and worrying security risks. But robust management systems can act as a catalyst for transformation, enabling efficient ways of working that support innovation and growth.

IT leaders know that freeing up time from reduced servicing can help IT departments focus more on business innovation: 64% of SMBs say technology is a key factor in pursuing their business objectives.³⁵

So how can companies manage their IT estate in a way that supports digital transformation now and innovative future growth?

KEY IT MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

Just as IT estates are becoming more complex, IT managers are being asked to provide a simpler service. Deploying IT, enrolling users and assigning profiles can be time-consuming processes, but the pressure to do them more quickly is increasing.

Users expect be able to log on and start working from anywhere, while protected from ever-evolving security threats. And the approach needs to be flexible enough to adapt with the organisation as it grows.

Only 4%

of IT leaders felt that device management challenges wouldn't increase much over the next 12 months in Computing's survey.³⁶

Autopilot can help IT managers by allowing them to seamlessly deploy, configure and manage devices, including mobile phones.

Administrators can configure user profiles to streamline the setup process, and software can be automatically installed on new devices.

Windows 10 devices can be deployed using Microsoft Autopilot, a tool that makes it quicker and easier to configure devices remotely. It's convenient for businesses transitioning to a hybrid working pattern, because IT managers don't need to spend a lot of time creating images or make in-person visits to set up devices. New users can just log in and start working.

Autopilot also enables IT administrators to automatically configure profiles for certain groups of users or devices, control the use of administrator accounts, and customise the set-up experience. And you can use it to remotely reset, repurpose and recover devices as needed, making it simple to adapt your IT to changing circumstances.

MAINTAINING A 360-DEGREE VIEW

The IT estate of a hybrid organisation can easily become unwieldy. It's hard to maintain control and consistent standards across such a wide range of devices, locations, hardware and software.

These capabilities become even more powerful when teamed with Intel AMT, supported on vPro platform devices. This enables you to carry out remote management and maintenance, even when the computer is turned off or in a lower power state. This could include updating patches or upgrading software, for example.

And this can create serious risks. Over three quarters of IT leaders (77%) told Computing, that the consequences of absent or ineffective remote device management represent a financial risk, while 87% believed they were a major cybersecurity risk.³⁷

The problem can be made worse by years-long refresh cycles. Techaisle found that on average, SMBs replace their PCs every 3.7 years. And many businesses update their software at the same time as their hardware, meaning this too may often be out of date.³⁸

Organisations that can build standardised, flexible and up-to-date IT systems can keep their devices running seamlessly and securely at a time of rapid change. In the long run, this will also decrease demands on the time of IT managers.

Windows 10 and Microsoft 365 are integrated, regularly updated cloud-based services that make it simpler to control update rollouts, set up security policies, and new devices or security patches. Within this, there's also the option of using virtual devices with Windows Virtual Desktop, meaning sensitive data never has to leave the company's system.

DEVELOPING COST-EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

For many businesses, the cost of IT management is growing. In Computing's survey, 60% of IT leaders said that the financial cost of PC or client estate management had increased over the last two years.³⁹

At the same time, improving cost-efficiency is a major factor when buying new IT. Two thirds of SMBs told Techaisle that using newer Windows 10 PCs had made it easier to manage IT, improving efficiency.⁴⁰

Forrester estimates that upgrading to Windows 10 devices would lead to a 20% reduction in desktop management time, and that the IT input when deploying the operating system would take five minutes for each device, compared to almost an hour for earlier Windows versions.

These findings are echoed in the Forrester Total Economic Impact™ study cited above, in which IT teams report significant time savings when deploying new laptops and desktops and provisioning updated devices to employees. As one IT director states:

"With [Windows] Autopilot, my staff never touches the device. The user can authenticate to our network for the first time, get fully configured and secured, and set up with [Microsoft] Intune. We save several days a month in the user support team."

IT teams also report fewer and faster helpdesk calls due to reduced device-connection questions, improved hardware, and reduced risk and support time from misplaced, lost or stolen devices.⁴¹

And SMBs who had invested in Microsoft 365 for business told Forrester it had saved IT managers four hours a week, with less time needed for managing, updating, and troubleshooting applications.⁴²

For many organisations, the most cost-effective option may be to invest in IT now in order to realise long term savings. As we'll discuss in section 6, more businesses are now switching to a service model for their devices as well as their software. This delivers the benefits of up-to-date computers while spreading costs over a longer period and enabling a better understanding of costs per user. Some businesses also employ a company to manage their IT services rather than doing so in-house.

Whichever option you choose, an efficient, optimised and secure way of managing IT is essential to avoid costly downtime. Modern Windows 10 devices with Intel vPro technology help you achieve this.

CUSTOMER STORY: DEUTSCHE REIHENHAUS

In 2019, the Cologne-based affordable property company Deutsche Reihenhaus was looking for IT that could support its developers and engineers to work remotely, and simplify processes like handing over houses (which tended to use a lot of paperwork).

The company decided to update the majority of its IT in one go to modern Windows 10 with Intel vPro devices. Previously, this might have taken six months, but using Windows Autopilot, it was able to replace 165 of 250 devices within two. "Whenever we used to exchange a device, there was always some kind of glitch. Not this time," says the company's head of IT, Christian Schulte.

The new IT made it easier to adapt working practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Now that everything is cloud-based, our employees can work from anywhere without any problems," says Schulte.

[Read more](#)



06

REFRESH YOUR IT ESTATE

This section looks at the major business advantages that new devices have over older ones, and considers new subscription models for keeping technology up to date.



This paper has explored some of the benefits offered by modern devices and up-to-date software.

But just how new does your technology need to be? Research highlights how a few years make a big difference.

Techaisle⁴³ found that SMBs reported significantly better performance from new Windows 10 PCs with Intel vPro technology than those that were more than four years old. Compared to newer PCs, older computers were:

- More than three times more likely to have app and system crashes
- Three times more likely to experience a virus or malware infection
- More than four times more likely to have poor mobile network connectivity

Compared to newer devices, the older PCs also:

- Needed to be repaired more than four times more in the past year
- Cost more than three times more to run
- Led to almost four times more lost productivity

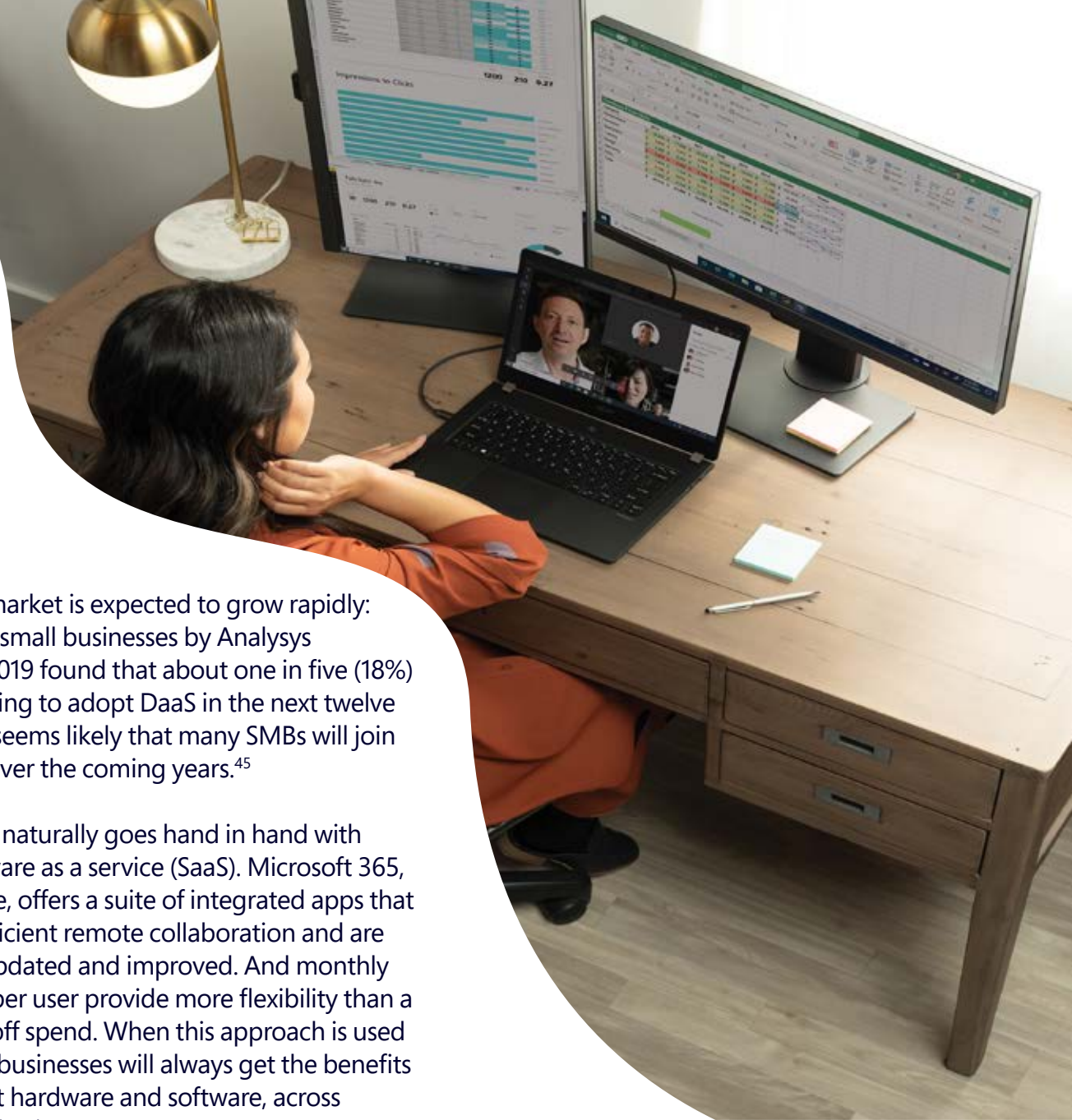
So not upgrading to the latest devices is a false economy. The researchers concluded: "It is a fact that the cost [of running old PCs] either equals or exceeds the purchase price of newer Windows 10 PCs. Replacing, rather than repairing and maintaining, reduces the cost of operations and frees up budgets."⁴⁴

DEVICE AS A SERVICE

Can SMBs harness the power of the latest devices without major capital costs? One option is to access hardware on a service basis, in the same way that modern software is often delivered. It makes costs more predictable, provides access to the latest technology, and ensures consistency.

The DaaS market is expected to grow rapidly: a survey of small businesses by Analysys Mason in 2019 found that about one in five (18%) were planning to adopt DaaS in the next twelve months. It seems likely that many SMBs will join this trend over the coming years.⁴⁵

This model naturally goes hand in hand with using software as a service (SaaS). Microsoft 365, for example, offers a suite of integrated apps that support efficient remote collaboration and are regularly updated and improved. And monthly payments per user provide more flexibility than a large one-off spend. When this approach is used with DaaS, businesses will always get the benefits of the latest hardware and software, across their organisation.





07

LOOKING AHEAD

Digital transformation has often been discussed, but in 2020 we saw it become a reality. As chief executive officer of Microsoft, Satya Nadella, noted in the company's FY21 Q2 Earnings Release of January 2021:

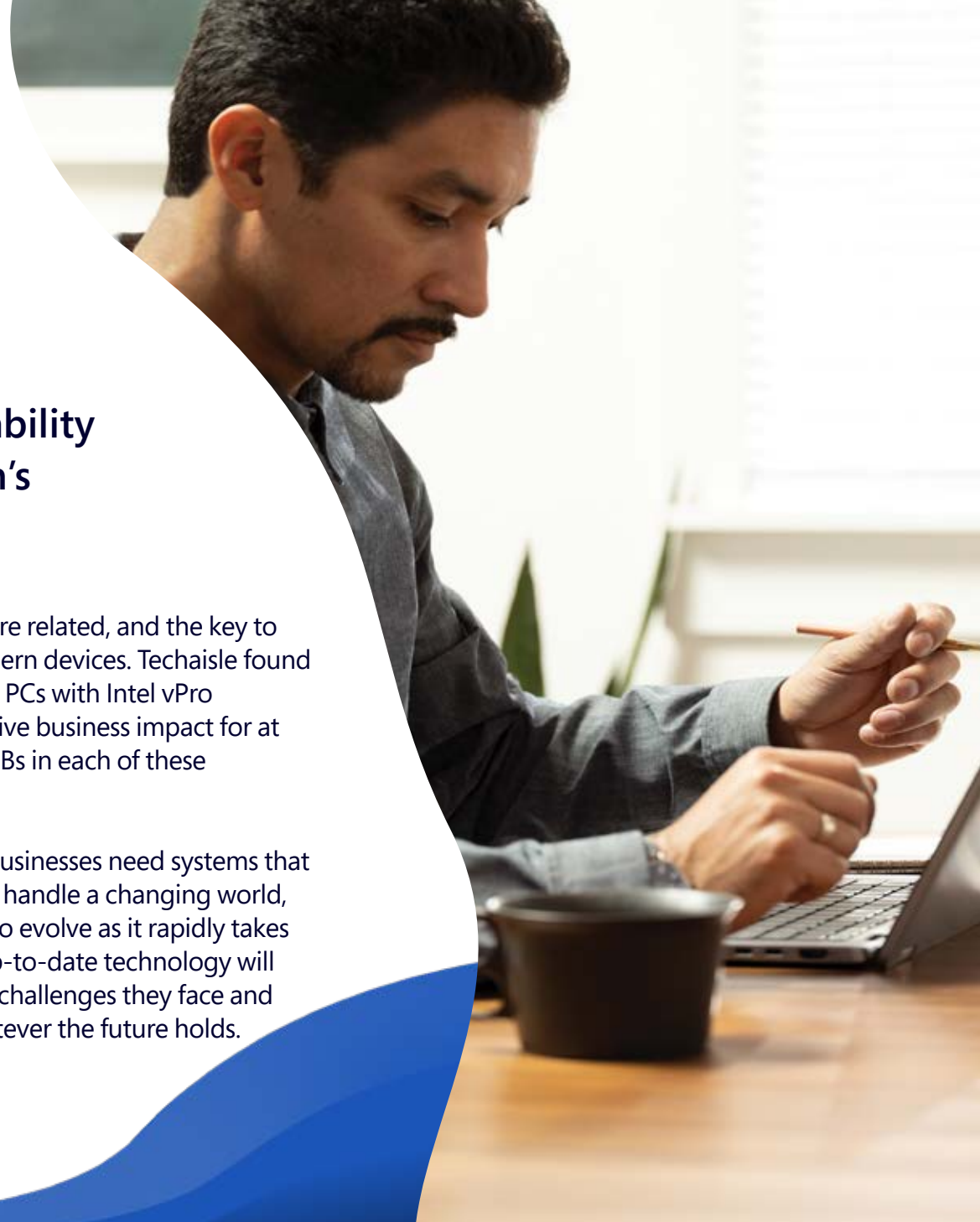
“What we have witnessed over the past year is the dawn of a second wave of digital transformation sweeping every company and every industry. Building their own digital capability is the new currency driving every organization’s resilience and growth.”⁴⁶

Many SMB leaders will recognise the accuracy of this insight from their own experience. Yet while change may have arrived faster than expected, the central challenges have remained the same. SMBs need technology that supports:

- **Improved productivity**
- **Strong security**
- **Dynamic system management**

All these challenges are related, and the key to meeting them is modern devices. Techaisle found that new Windows 10 PCs with Intel vPro technology had positive business impact for at least two thirds of SMBs in each of these key areas.⁴⁷

As they plan ahead, businesses need systems that are robust enough to handle a changing world, and flexible enough to evolve as it rapidly takes shape. Investing in up-to-date technology will help them rise to the challenges they face and ensure success – whatever the future holds.



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