

# Is Anybody Home?

## The Return

While the world waited for the scientific breakthrough of a vaccine for COVID-19, we created second lives for ourselves in an effort to battle boredom, continue to work and learn, and stave off the mental side effects of living in quarantine for as long as possible. Whether you picked up a book or crochet as a hobby, as the World Health Organization (WHO) and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) release more relaxed guidelines for vaccinated individuals, life is slowly returning to “normalcy.” We have heard many terms referring to how life will be when we return to the workplace. “The new normal” seems to be the favorite phrase utilized by pundits and senior leadership and, while that phrase sums it up, what does it really mean for us?

“NOW THAT MANY OF US ARE TRANSITIONING BACK, WE ONCE AGAIN MAY NEED TO RELY ON TECHNOLOGY TO PALLIATE THE GROWING PAINS OF RETURNING.”

The answer to the question in the title has, overwhelmingly, been “yes” over the past year. Our homes became our places of work, our movie theaters, our restaurants, our favorite happy hour spot, our children’s classrooms and everything in between. Technology played a pivotal role in helping us adopt this new way of life for a short time. We were still able to collaborate, attend meetings and seminars, and have some semblance of human interaction on a day-to-day basis. Now that many of us are transitioning back, we once again may need to rely on technology to palliate the growing pains of returning.

### The Future Is Sold Out: We Are Already Here

At the beginning of the pandemic, cloud and virtual meeting technologies were paramount to enabling remote work and collaboration, as well as social interaction supplementation. These technologies had been around for quite some time but saw a mass adoption and implementation take place, specifically in cloud technologies. One study

estimates that the number of organizations spending US\$12 million or more on cloud services almost doubled.<sup>1</sup> Using virtual meeting technologies for healthcare was somewhat accepted before COVID-19 but became unavoidable in some cases for those who needed health services in the past year. Utilizing telehealth technologies increased in the US by 50 percent in the first quarter of 2020, according to the CDC.<sup>2</sup> In these two cases, the future was already here and the pandemic acted as somewhat of a catalyst for adoption and acceptance.

So, what technologies might we start relying on now that we are leaving home for the workplace again? Now that workers and leadership alike have discovered the benefits of remote working (at least a few days a week), cloud adoption and implementation will continue to rise. New innovative cloud services such as Security as a Service will evolve, as will new innovations for automation and process streamlining. Internet of Things (IoT) and Industrial IoT (IIoT) will continue to trend upward as



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controlling not only buildings and small-scale devices but infrastructure as well have become commonplace. The ability to work remotely and have artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) features perform some of the more tedious work tasks will allow the workforce to focus on more important tasks.

The increased adoption of these technologies will, of course, result in the need for secure infrastructure and continual monitoring of information systems. Although these emerging technologies will, ultimately, be more secure as they go through their iterative evolutions, the need for humans to conduct cybersecurity and other IT functions will still be necessary.

### Who Thought We Would Ever Get This Far? Winding Down

As IT and cybersecurity professionals, our jobs are rarely routine. This field consistently provides new projects and issues to solve. This flexibility helped keep our heads above water during the quick transition from working in the office to working from home. The infrastructure and skill sets were there, we just needed to execute them at a much faster pace than normal. And we were successful overall. But now we need to continue forward and help return partially to the workplace.

My inspiration for this column, aside from the technological innovations that are occurring all around us on a daily basis, was the prophetic 1999 song *Is Anybody Home?* by the Canadian alt-rock band Our Lady Peace. The song is mostly about isolation and the need for human interaction and attention, something that most of us can intimately

relate to after the past year. As we return to some version of our old lives and routines, it is important to recognize that we are moving from our current normal back into a new one and make sure that we keep that in the back of our minds as we move forward. Technology will be there to help with this transition just as much as it was there for us at the beginning of the pandemic, but we have to be willing to adopt and try new things. Overall, it is up to us, the human element, to ensure it is done safely and securely and educate and help our coworkers and colleagues do the same.

“THE INCREASED ADOPTION OF THESE TECHNOLOGIES WILL, OF COURSE, RESULT IN THE NEED FOR SECURE INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONTINUAL MONITORING OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS.”

### Endnotes

- 1 Flexera, *Flexera 2021 State of the Cloud Report*, USA, 2021, <https://info.flexera.com/CM-REPORT-State-of-the-Cloud>
- 2 Koonin, L. M.; et al.; “Trends in the Use of Telehealth During the Emergence of the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, January–March 2020,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, USA, 30 October 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6943a3.htm>

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