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Tech Trends Roundtable

Separating Safe Bets from Far-Fetched

Here at IJYI, we are fascinated by tech trends – everything from the racing certainties to left-field long shots is of huge interest. Among the many important points of discussion, collaboration has taken a huge leap up the 'trending' list this past year. Thanks to the versatility and widespread adoption of tools such as Microsoft Teams, we recently had the ideal platform to bring together a group of tech experts to share some thoughts on where technology will take us next.

The year ahead...

The session highlighted some emerging contenders for 2021's top trends. For instance, if last year was all about quickly and efficiently adapting to change 'at least in technology terms', looking ahead, the way organisations view tech will continue to shift. As Karen Poulter, Head of ISD at Hutchison Ports observed, Brexit will present a range of challenges for many businesses, and technology will play an important role, particularly around **data sharing and communication**. Agility and innovation, she argued, would be key as all stakeholders adapt to new norms.

Similarly, changes brought about by the pandemic continue to develop, and according to panelist Juliana Meyer, CEO & Founder of SupaPass, many businesses are now in a race to become 'digitally mature' if they are to meet the needs of customers who can't currently source products and services in person. Failure to do so could, at the very least, see opportunities missed and at worst threaten the long term viability of businesses left behind by this period of change.

Skill set is key

Also among the many priorities businesses face going forward, finding people with the right skills is key. As Tim Robinson from Tech East put it, talent and skills are going to be in such demand that the issue, 'cuts across all the other trends this year', as demand for technical specialists outstrips supply. To an extent, this is because the pace of innovation and change has dramatically increased – partly through necessity, and also because many more businesses now understand what can be achieved by pursuing focused technology improvement projects that embrace digital transformation and the value of manageable risk.



Shift in working culture



Then there's the revolution in working culture, which is still underway. As Tom Ridges, Co-Founder & CTO from Lumilinks pointed out, a return to office environments will include more use of local space and co-working environments. There's a belief that many organisations and employees will want to retain the best elements of remote working and blend it with the traditional meetings, but without the need for large office environments.

This hybrid approach may offer some vital respite for empty town centre commercial property space, which could be converted into local office hubs, where a sense of community can grow.

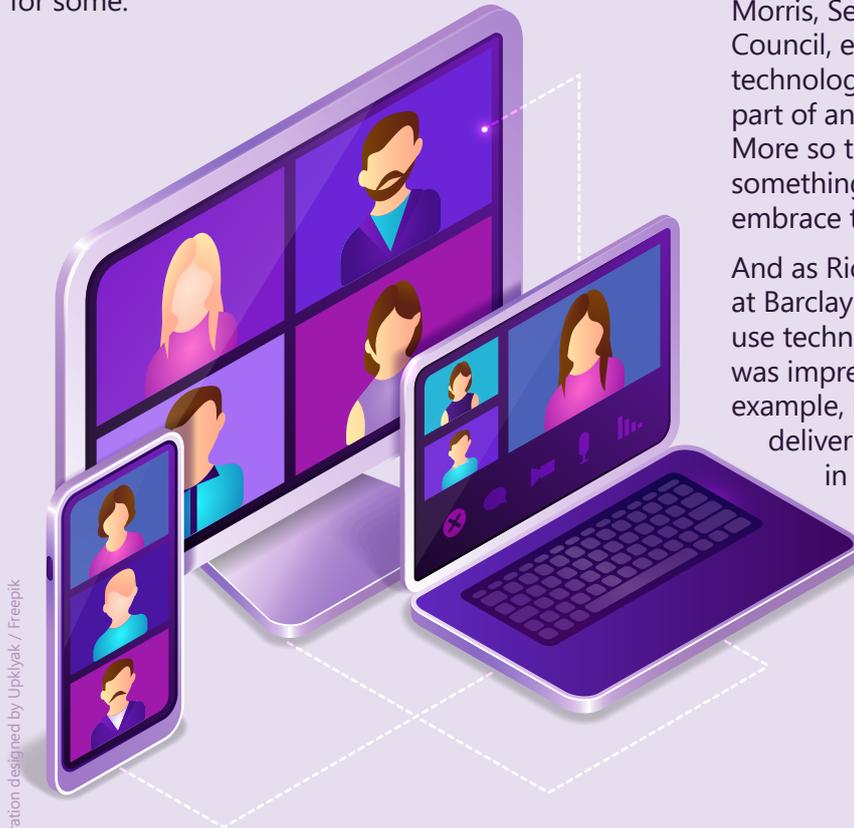
As one of our panelists pointed out;

“ business is becoming more global, but the way we live is getting local ”

Video-based communication

Given the format of the roundtable, it was interesting to hear how our experts viewed their current reliance on video-based communication.

It has proved an invaluable resource to keep people connected and is certain to become a permanent feature of working life going forward, but as Sam Currall, Innovation Manager at Hethel Engineering explained, 'webinar fatigue' is becoming a challenge for some.



Organisations will need to optimise their use of video in the long term to keep content fresh and embrace tools that make online events more interesting and interactive.

Despite the huge challenges organisations have faced over the past year, the panel was keen to reflect on their experiences and how, moving forward, valuable lessons have been learned. For instance, Gareth Morris, Senior Technical Lead at Suffolk County Council, explained that introducing collaboration technology so teams could work remotely has been part of an empowering cultural shift in the workplace. More so than ever, work is no longer a place, it is something you do, and organisations that don't embrace this philosophy will lose out.

And as Richard Pearce, Business Development Director at Barclays explained, the ability of organisations to use technology to react to unprecedented challenges was impressive. The financial services sector, for example, had to draw on its experience and agility to deliver access to government financial support, and in the process, act as a vital community link between businesses looking to innovate.

The discussion further underlined that there is clearly a real appetite to understand where technology can take us in the months ahead, and a shared belief that it has helped thousands of businesses successfully innovate in exceptionally trying circumstances. Here at IJYI, we'll continue to look closely at developing tech trends to help SMEs develop the most effective approach. We'll be running more roundtables like these and are keen to hear from anyone that would like to participate as a guest. Please get in touch using the details below:

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