



## **Connectivity for good**

**Communications service providers (CSPs) have worked hard to earn their unique levels of consumer (and business) trust. As they reimagine service and experience, they can maintain their reputation of protecting data privacy and security. Meanwhile, as they expand their service portfolio and footprint, they will be the critical enablers of closing the digital divide. CSPs' services are critical for global economic prosperity and physical wellbeing.**

### **What's going on**

Our lives have changed. Home has become the hub of all our activities—it has expanded to a place of work, education, shopping and entertainment for everyone in the family. We have come to rely on digital channels and communications, more than ever before.

Connectivity is at the core of our accelerated move to a digital lifestyle and is no longer “optional.” Not only is it essential for economic prosperity, but it is also increasingly talked of as a human right,<sup>1</sup> critical for well-being. It brings people together in a meaningful way, supporting human interactions. It's also life-enhancing in that it helps people focus on what matters.

During the pandemic, CSPs have built trust by playing an integral role in consumers' wellbeing, their ability to keep in touch with family and friends and stay productive in their work.



While many digital companies have developed a reputation for playing fast and loose with their customers' data, CSPs remain trusted stewards of their consumers' lives. In fact, 62% of consumers trust their CSPs for their data security.<sup>2</sup>

Now is the time to act.

There is a need to drive significant behavior change by helping consumers understand their data and feel they're getting a fair value exchange. Further, we need to build on a new, emerging social contract for society.

Increasingly, consumers—younger groups, especially—are choosing to deal with purposeful companies that are focused on the triple bottom line: people, planet and revenue. In response, CSPs have already started repositioning corporate social responsibility activities from being a periodic overture to establishing it at the core of their purpose. But more action needs to be seen.

At a time when the digital divide is increasing (in part, due to the pandemic and overall increased reliance on digital channels), CSPs have an opportunity to redefine connectivity to maximize the value it delivers—not just for individuals, but for society as a whole.

### **What's next**

CSPs will reclaim and redefine connectivity, upgrading communication offerings to be more relevant to people's needs and contexts.

Consumers' expectation of sales and services delivered to the home by brands across industries are rising fast. This is a shift that will long outlast the pandemic crisis. And this will affect CSPs that have largely served their customers for many years in the same way.

Brands build customer trust by acting in their best interests, creating personalized and insightful solutions while protecting

privacy. Already, CSPs are enabling people to connect with their loved ones and with work, supporting mental health, providing entertainment and enabling them to procure necessities and indulgences alike. Next, they will need to view their newly acquired, deeper level of customer relationship and trust as the launch pad to show they are about more than just connectivity. CSPs can help us emerge stronger by building on trust and relevance and by developing new partnerships, products, services and business models to help people live, work and play in the new normal. This also means enabling a united society by leading the way to make digital an equalizer to bridge the divide/gap and drive good for communities.



## Opportunities for reimagination

### 1. Smarter basics

Delivering strong foundations is frequently mentioned but rarely achieved. Connectivity, data and technology are everywhere but great experiences and value are not.

The opportunity here is to provide smarter basic connectivity to offer customers an improved and smooth experience. Flexibility and premium offerings through personalized exclusive content and curated services will help build better customer relationships.

A good starting point is to provide practical help to customers, to optimize their connectivity.

Many people have experienced (or seen others experience) bad WiFi access—it's a common pain point. But a CSP can now help customers find the best spot for the router in their homes by using an augmented reality solution.

Flexibility of product and pricing permutations is another step that can further improve the experience.

Consider Amazon Prime Video, which offers customers the option to buy or rent a series or blockbuster content that's not included in their monthly subscription.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Mint Mobile's unlimited plans tracks customer data and proactively recommends a lower cost plan based on the actual monthly usage.<sup>4</sup> Flexible and automated offers such as these should become standard.

Personalized flexibility is also needed. THE YES is an AI-powered shopping platform that works with fashion brands to deliver a customized and curated shopping experience. By learning users' preferences from "yes" or "no" answers to products they are shown, it can personalize the overall shopping experience—by building a feed, search results and shopping lists relevant to the individual.<sup>5</sup>

Simple heightened customization and curation like this can enhance the value of connectivity.



CSPs should also reconsider how to spark excitement and bring premium experiences to their customers to drive value. Even a simple homepage can deliver differentiated experiences.

Consider Lunar Banking, which combines personal finance and gaming to engage with customers, creating a sticky user experience with exciting updates. Working with eSports team Astralis Group, it offers users exclusive interviews and behind-the-scenes content, tapping into the rise of gaming fans looking for lifestyle crossovers.<sup>6</sup> This content encourages young consumers to stay connected and interested in their finances via the banking platform while the gaming component attracts new customer segments and builds understanding through active engagement.

Traditionally, CSPs sponsored sports teams or large arenas such as London's O2 arena. What if they expanded this sports involvement into the way they do business? Digitally engaging experiences have the potential to connect with customers more deeply.

## 2. Vanguard of data privacy

With harnessing data, many digital native companies have generated substantial revenue streams.<sup>7</sup> But consumers have a low level of trust in how these companies use their data, and poor transparency is a big concern. Their most common data concern is figuring out what companies are doing with their data, according to one study.<sup>8</sup> Another study showed only 44% of consumers think the value they're getting in exchange for sharing their data is worthwhile.<sup>9</sup>

CSPs have an opportunity to be at the vanguard of data privacy because they have an innate advantage. To capitalize on this advantage, CSPs need to define an easy way for customers to understand their data and feel they're getting a fair value exchange.

Data analytics and security have been key strategic pillars for CSPs for many years. CSPs already have a vast lake of first party customer data which can be compartmentalized into usable exchangeable data. They have also been more diligent with data usage than Big Tech firms, a number of which have drawn criticism for a fast and loose approach. This provides a solid platform for CSPs to delve into new data propositions.



Mine, which launched in the UK in early 2020, is the one of the first companies to enable personal data ownership. It has given back the power of data to customers, so they understand where their data is scattered across the internet, and how to manage it through a simple platform.<sup>10</sup>

Another fantastic experience is Dashlane, an advanced password management service. Google and Apple offer something similar, but Dashlane really stands out for its simplicity—from ease of setup and use to transferability across devices.<sup>11</sup> At a first glance, neither Mine nor Dashlane store, sell or analyze people's data.

CSPs need to consider a simple tool that can be the key to a customer's data, allowing them to see their digital footprint and protect them and their loved ones' peace of mind. They must also provide an easy way to share data when authorization is needed, such as for buying products online or confirming identity for new services.

CSPs also need to create an offering that anyone can relate to and allows them to see value in exchange for their personal data. Value exchanges could be centered around loyalty schemes—allowing customers to reap rewards for sharing information with an online marketplace, for example. Earning loyalty points towards exclusive offers or experiences is a simple and clear exchange of data for value.



### **3. A social contract**

A new contract for society is emerging as people increasingly choose to engage with purpose-driven companies and brands. This is a particular priority for younger generations as 74% of Generation Y and Z consumers want brands to take a stand on issues close to their hearts, research shows.<sup>12</sup>

As a result, established brands are under pressure to respond—such as by shifting their brand philosophy to show they are aligned and empathize with their target audience's interests.<sup>13</sup>

CSPs have already started to move in this direction.

BT's purpose "We connect for good" and Verizon's "We create the networks that move the world forward" are two examples of powerful vision statements.

Now, the opportunity for CSPs is to go further by building on the trust that they gained during the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>14</sup> to drive more positive change. For example, by connecting the digitally disadvantaged, they could help tackle problems like loneliness—providing connectivity rather than exacerbating it by leaving people disconnected.

The need to connect the unconnected has driven convergence between traditional CSPs and digital native platform companies. Facebook's solar-powered aircraft<sup>15</sup> and Google's network of stratospheric balloons<sup>16</sup> have both been attempts to meet the needs of customers with emerging technologies. CSPs have valuable infrastructure and technical know-how to enter underserved markets.

By working with councils, governments and communities, CSPs could help build awareness of the digital divide and work on closing it by identifying available support.

In Canada, Telus is working with the governments of Quebec and Canada to connect 80+ remote communities.<sup>17</sup>

Further, CSPs could create new initiatives encouraging digital haves to donate a line to digital have-nots with every new contract. Alternatively, they could notify users when they have unused data at the end of the month and provide an option to transfer it to someone in need.



CSPs could also build on people's growing interest in supporting local products, businesses and communities to share and build community skills. Their vast physical retail bases could even act as a learning space for organized skill-sharing, and this network could be digitized for wider reach. This is done very well on a larger scale by EduDo, a mobile learning platform with short user-generated interactive videos.<sup>18</sup>

People in a connected community can support each other better. In fact, the power of connecting the disconnected could be exponential with previously lonely people now in a position to support others. In the UK, a project called DevicesDotNow has provided devices, connectivity and support to more than 100,000 people in need to date.<sup>19</sup>

By increasing access to connectivity and building a connected community at a time when the gap between the digital haves and have-nots is widening, CSPs have an opportunity to create a new social contract.





## What CSP leaders can do

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### 1. Upgrade your basics

Review existing products and services to understand how they can be flexible and personalized. Establish the premium experience niche. What will bring that stickiness to your service and enhance your offer?

Create a short-term plan to quickly build premium content to share, then define a longer-term engagement plan to distribute relevant new content continuously to customers.

### 2. Build greater value into data sharing

Use the position as a data trustee to enable customers to understand the potential. Create the right experience for keeping their trust, make a simple and easy way for them to quantify the adequate exchange for their data.

Data is the new currency. CSPs can become the trusted, impartial data protectionists to improve customer experience and data standards across the board. Create strong proposals to realize this ambition.

### 3. Be a hero: bridge the digital divide

Become the local hero providing connectivity to the disconnected. Reimagine the benefits of connectivity to create new opportunities for individuals and society. Enable better accessibility in areas like telehealth and remote learning, which are here to stay in the post-pandemic world. Create the options for your customers to donate a line or share unused data. Encourage conversations for government and private sectors to collaborate to create sustainable and inclusive economies.





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