The communications experience reimagined
With renewed trust and record demand for connectivity, the communications industry—including communications service providers (CSPs)—has the chance to reinvent itself and play a more valuable and active role in our everyday lives and in society’s progress as a whole.

The communications industry has been suffering from stalled growth, lack of differentiation and risk of commoditization for years, but there are now signs that a new dawn has broken.

In 2020, just when we needed them most, CSPs delivered. Now, by reliably keeping us connected to the services, people and content we need and love most, they are renewing trust and building relevance every day.

Today, CSPs have the opportunity to build on this momentum and leverage their unique strengths to deliver even more for people, small- and medium-sized business owners (SMBs) and society at large.

Now is the time to step up and reimagine the communications experience. This means organizing the whole business around the delivery of exceptional experiences, which is what we call the Business of Experience. It means rewiring the customer-facing functions of the organization: marketing, commerce, sales and service. The Business of Experience is an approach that allows organizations to become customer-obsessed and reignite growth.

We see three opportunity areas for experience reimagination in connectivity.

1. A whole new (small business) world
2. The great home reset
3. Connectivity for good

The first is aimed at supporting SMBs in today’s digitally accelerated reality. The second is about enabling people to make the most of their new, multipurpose lives in their homes. The third is about how strong foundations can become a greater force for good.
Connectivity is dead, long live connectivity

For some time, consumers’ liquid expectations combined with rapid advances in artificial intelligence, cloud and 5G technology have been forcing CSPs to choose between two future business models: the ultimate, most efficient role for individuals, businesses and society at large or transformation into a new growth business built on less regulated digital services.

But with the raised demands and expectations caused by Covid-19, CSPs have realized they may have the potential to do both—and faster than anticipated.

Consumers are adapting their lives around a new home-based reality—36% expect to work at home more in the future than they have in the past, while one in five expect to purchase home electronics as a result of Covid-19.1

Their content consumption has skyrocketed, and they are looking for new ways to connect with each other virtually, and not just during the pandemic crisis. More than 50% of consumers expect to maintain increased content consumption post-Covid, and 74% expect to continue to connect with friends and family virtually.2

Connectivity is not optional—90% of consumers think home broadband is important and 68% think it is more important now than before the crisis. Working and living from home is becoming a way of life, and connectivity is the most critical component of that lifestyle.3

While many digital companies have developed a reputation for playing fast and loose with customer data, CSPs remain trusted stewards of their customers’ lives—62% of consumers trust their CSPs for their data security and 46% thought their CSP’s response to the crisis was above expectations.4

After years of invisibility, CSPs have had a chance to shine and prove they fulfill a critical role in our everyday lives. And with our homes becoming our everything, their legacy presence and reliability can be a competitive advantage against the tech companies.

Further, SMBs are realizing that CSPs could be a trusted growth partner. Meanwhile, at a societal level, there’s an opportunity to partner with the public and private sector to end the digital divide.

The time has come for CSPs to wake up and take advantage of these underlying trends, to fully embrace experience reimagination, and to boldly redefine connectivity to give it a new lease on life. This is a golden opportunity to reposition themselves away from being perceived as just a connectivity supplier to playing a more comprehensive role in society’s future economic prosperity and wellbeing.
Human trends

Reduced mobility has fueled record demands for connectivity as our homes have become the center of people’s work, study and personal lives. There is a need for connectivity services to adapt to new multipurpose spaces and experiences at home. CSPs can respond by offering a more tailored approach that knows when to dial up or dial down our needs of comfort, safety and control.

More happening inside our homes has had a direct impact on SMB owners, too. In order to survive, they have to radically change their ways of doing business. But most SMBs aren’t experts in tech. For many, ecommerce, digital marketing, cloud or security solutions are overwhelming and confusing. There is a desperate need for simple, tailored services and advice they can trust.

Despite today’s unanimous recognition that connectivity is essential for economic prosperity and physical wellbeing, a digital divide still exists. There is a clear opportunity for CSPs to show the way by reimagining access and services in the connectivity domain at a time when customers and employees expect businesses to lead on sustainability and purpose.

Business trends

Stalled growth and commoditization of connectivity, intensified competition from adjacent industries and evidence of partnership driven growth beyond connectivity are forcing CSPs to face the stark need for a more complete business model reinvention.

The search for value points CSPs towards growth-driving platform business models and the B2B market—the SMB market, especially where there’s plenty of untapped potential, particularly in providing digital and IT services.

Activating new paths to growth in a disrupted communications landscape is driving CSPs to have a more outside-in perspective, embracing partnerships and looking at how to reinvent their own skills and talent.
Unleashing human growth potential through connectivity

Disruptive forces are at play in the industry, creating the opportunity for new sources of growth for connectivity providers. The potential is real and could be exponential, but can only be unlocked if CSPs make radical, systemic changes to how they think, operate, and engage with their customers.

We see three overarching mindset and operational shifts that need to be embraced for experience reimagination to happen, regardless of which business model or growth segment they choose to prioritize.

From one size fits all to more modular, flexible solutions

CSPs’ advantage versus the big tech players is their existing customer intimacy and access to first party customer data. They need to leverage this and keep fueling a culture that is customer obsessed. Kill the tech jargon and make every experience simple and intuitive. Use this human-first mindset and insight to inform every aspect of their go to market strategies.

From a connector of people and services to an enabler of economic prosperity and wellbeing

Ultimately, even greater opportunity lies in shifting the focus away from legacy connectivity services and products towards what connectivity can enable individuals and communities to achieve more broadly in life. By opening up to partnerships, ecosystems and bringing more of the outside in, CSPs can fulfill a more purposeful role in not only keeping us connected, but also helping us grow as a more connected society.

From tech-first to human-first

Growth is expected to stem from a more platform and digital services driven strategy. As CSPs continue their digital transformations, the key to winning is doing it while maintaining a human first mindset in place.

The multi-purposing of our homes has impacted all of us, especially SMBs. As a result, services are needed that are more adaptable to our constantly shifting context and needs. People already expect and receive from other industries services and support tailored to their needs and delivered on their preferred channel in a seamless, intuitive way. This now must become CSPs’ new normal.

Organizations that set a high ambition level for human experience and embrace meaningful innovation will grow and sustain their mission while leading a positive shift in the communications industry.

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A whole new (small business) world

Small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) are overwhelmed by irrelevant offerings, providing an opportunity to redefine the CSP (communications service providers)/SMB relationship. By leveraging trust and understanding to make their offerings simpler, more tailored and relevant, CSPs can shift from service provider to growth partner and build longer, more valuable relationships.

What’s going on

Being a small- or medium-sized business (SMB) has never been easy. While SMBs represent more than 90% of businesses, many struggle to compete in a world dictated by big business.¹ And in today’s new normal, the ability to survive—let alone thrive—is tougher than ever.

Since the onset of COVID-19, 60% of SMBs have experienced sales decline.² With the acceleration towards digitization, many have had to find new ways of working and doing business.

SMBs are bakers, lawyers, builders—they have a craft. They are not IT experts, so they need help with understanding and using services to support their businesses such as digital marketing, security and cloud to name a few. SMBs can, therefore, be overwhelmed by the irrelevant offerings and the complexity of choosing the right mix of solutions and vendors.
CSPs have the opportunity to help them not just survive but to thrive. They can do this by eliminating generic, one-size-fits-all DIY marketplaces and by providing SMBs with much more tailored and personal experiences and support—how, where and when they need it most.

Get this right and CSPs can help SMBs focus on what they do best.

Competition is fierce with Big Tech encroaching. Amazon and Google offer a range of ICT solutions, for example. Meanwhile, some banks are making moves into the ICT space with smart partnerships leveraging open banking technology.

Starling Bank is now offering Cloud Cyber Security and business communication tools. The unique advantage CSPs have is renewed trust, however. SMBs trust CSPs, and this trust has been further deepened by the pandemic. CSPs have built an understanding of SMBs and their needs through years of serving them, creating customer intimacy and the sense of being part of the community.

Now, they need to use their omnichannel presence and the insights they already have to design and deliver a more relevant, intuitive and effective experience to SMBs.

Moving from selling connectivity to partnering as problem-solvers (becoming a one-stop shop/marketplace/business advisor) is a fundamental shift in the way CSPs do business. By pivoting in this way, they will build long-lasting and valuable relationships.

CSPs have every opportunity to set a bold ambition to redefine their relationships with SMBs. They need to take the lead and shift from selling “commoditized” products and services to becoming a true growth partner to small and medium businesses.
What’s next

Today, SMBs are facing a once-in-a-generation crisis. For some, the goal is to survive; for others, it is to thrive. All are an opportunity for CSPs.

If CSPs leverage their infrastructure, partner ecosystem, customer intimacy and brand equity, they have the chance to completely reimagine the end-to-end experience SMBs currently have with their connectivity and IT providers.

CSPs can capitalize on their desire to become tech companies while maintaining a human and customer centric approach to achieve greater success. To be a great digital growth partner to SMBs, they will need to leverage their human capital to drive efficiencies, build relationships and support individual growth.

SMBs also need to trust that they are receiving the best advice for their business. They are calling out for personalized advice and help to navigate transitions. Modular and interactive assets that are contextualized by industry could support such an haute couture-style of offering. CSPs could also leverage scale across multiple businesses to gain buying power, manage SMB costs and supplement support.

A good example is Enel X, part of the Italian energy services company that aims to revolutionize SMBs’ approach to business development. To achieve this goal, it launched a new platform to enable a new ecosystem specially designed for this initiative. Its solution supports SMBs to obtain liquidity, reduce financing costs and digitalize business processes.

Removing potential financial headaches or worries allows the SMBs to focus on their craft.

Tailoring must go hand in hand with simplicity, however. SMBs seek simple and clear information on products and business benefits. Few have much time to evaluate the merits of various product offerings. They need jargon-free information, transparent pricing with cost vs benefits, product comparison and a clear view of how offerings will help them meet their business objectives.

Opportunities for reimagining

1. Do take it personally

SMBs need to know that they are choosing the right options for their business, so CSPs will need to proactively provide tailored solutions to help SMBs achieve their goals.
SMBs want all interactions to feel human and personal. They also want to have confidence that their needs are understood and that interactions are proactive and adaptable. They seek simple and clear information on products and business benefits to help them make the right decisions for their business. They don’t want to waste time evaluating options and they want to trust that they have the information they need to make decisions.

CSPs must ensure product information is not too technical or jargon-heavy. It should give a clear view of business implications and it should be easy to navigate—by providing a roadmap showing installation and training timelines for different new digital products, for example, to help the SMB easily choose what’s best for their business. SMBs want continuity in the support they receive throughout their contract lifecycle via a single point of contact that is approachable, rather than just support as a new acquisition or when they are up for renewal.

They also want a partner who knows their business and is freed from restrictive sales targets to focus on customers’ business goals. And they need honest and unbiased advice and a view of what they have and where their market is going.

CSPs can meet all these needs by leveraging their scaled human capital. If they retrain their extensive retail, support and field forces to become SMB growth partners, they can be a helping hand to them and provide competitive advantage.

A do-it-for-me approach—outsourcing CTO or CIO functions, perhaps—will give precious time back to an SMB to focus on their business. The introduction of a 24/7 chatbot and extensive online services means that you can have personalized support when you need it, reducing the hassle.

Another example is WeChat, which offers such facilitation by being a one-stop shop for its users, which it allows an end-to-end transaction—from payments to booking flights and hotels—directly using the WeChat app. Companies can also launch apps within WeChat, allowing businesses to reach their users directly.

Experience Reimagination
Communications - A whole new (small business) world

Another inspiring example is Lemonade, an AI-powered insurance company which launched the world’s first open-sourced insurance policy, which sets a good example for providing clarity on complex offerings. By opening the policy for editing from the wisdom of the crowd, it has turned the traditional way of crafting an insurance policy on its head. Its goal is to make insurance “simple, fair and approachable to everyone.”

2. The human touch

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A do-it-for-me approach—outsourcing CTO or CIO functions, perhaps—will give precious time back to an SMB to focus on their business. As an SMB’s growth partner, a CSP can help and support in an outcome-based, personalized way. Frictionless and flexible support during installation and integration, including training for users and a focus on driving efficiencies, is vital.

Habito is an example on how to do this exceptionally well, providing an all-round house buying service, advising on negotiations, and taking on the paperwork. The introduction of a 24/7 chatbot and extensive online services means that you can have personalized support when you need it, reducing the hassle.

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Much focus is on digital—and rightly so. Yet despite this, there’s also a need for physical experiences and/or flexibility that will place a premium on them as we move out of the pandemic.

CSPs have an established brick-and-mortar footprint in communities that can be leveraged to connect with SMBs for local touchpoints, and to provide the face-to-face interaction that existing Big Tech companies are missing.

CSPs are ideally placed to cater to SMBs’ needs across the multiple channels they already use to service them—website, app, webchat, in-store retail space or even using their scaled human capital as growth partners—and provide frictionless, flexible support options.

At some point, SMBs will need somewhere to be physically with employees or customers—to provide retail advice, for example. Office-space-as-a-service will provide an opportunity to create new experience.

By repurposing their shop floors for customer interactions, training and team engagement days, CSPs can use their own space to provide SMBs with an office anywhere. By leveraging the idea of the boundaryless office, they can get to know SMBs better and have regular check-ins as their growth partners.

A CSP growth partner can also enable a community—such as by facilitating a live network providing start-ups with advice from established SMBs via peer-to-peer support within their own industry. Alternatively, it could connect local businesses with local customers—becoming a hero in the ever-popular support local movement, for example, and in turn building deeper relationships.
What CSP leaders can do

1. Personalize your approach to SMBs

Treat SMBs as individual businesses, not a homogenous group.

Be the provider to support them with their growing pains rather than simply offering generic products or information. Speak to them in a language they understand—business outcomes and goals rather than tech jargon.

2. Build longer-term relationships

Use your immense human capital to shift from being a current service provider to building long-lasting and valuable relationships. Maintain a human approach mindset as you continue your digital transformation to be their growth partner. Be ambitious in defining what a do-it-for-me approach could offer businesses.

3. Leverage your assets

Use all your channels including your vast retail space to support SMBs wherever, whenever and however they need it—for example, by providing anything from one-to-one care by specialist account managers to easily accessible insight and sector expertise, or repurposing retail spaces for community-based services and flexible workspaces.

Creating an office anywhere can build a connection with the community, a place to use for business and connect with others. Bringing human experience to digital offerings will prove to be a real differentiator.
02
The great home reset

Home has moved beyond the domestic and become the center of human experience. By unlocking the potential of smart home technology, communications service providers (CSPs) can adapt to create new partnered offerings that add value and delight. By capitalizing on their existing trusted relationships with users, they can orchestrate new multifaceted home experiences.

What’s going on

Technology’s continuous promise of the smart home has driven the industry to ideate and innovate to make this a reality.

At first, the design of a seamless utopia of connected devices and intelligent, personalized experiences seemed within reach in a consumer market ready for change. Leading this charge were the CSPs, perfectly placed in the home with long-standing, trusted consumer relationships and the capability to build a new suite of tools and devices around safety, convenience and security.

But today, the reality is stark.
Solution developers are taking a technology-first approach to deliver the latest and greatest, rather than seeking to understand the consumers’ needs holistically. They are led by what product they can build and distribute rather than what will create real value for consumers. The result is a smart home that is built with an incoherent ad hoc set of unconnected devices.

Meanwhile, there is a shortfall in technology adoption driven by products built on hypotheses rather than true customer needs. Devices are being manufactured with little consideration for how people will adopt them, and the lack of interoperability has led to inertia among mass-market consumers.¹

The dream of a smart home is not dead, however. The smart home market has potential for real growth, but only if the thinking behind its design is fundamentally reimagined to be experience-led. This means adopting a human-first mindset.

**What’s next**

Much has changed in the months since spring 2020, creating an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine the experience CSPs can provide consumers. Before the pandemic, consumers were spending more time at home.² Covid-19 accelerated this trend. As more of the external world entered our personal space, the home transitioned into the place where most of our human experiences in work, health and play take place.

In this new hybrid world, connectivity and technology have become vital enablers, but there are also new challenges.

Many people have had to adapt their spaces and routines to accommodate the new ecosystem of experience.

As a result, the idea of creating a one-size-fits-all smart home experience for the consumer has been disproven. This has been replaced with the knowledge that needs dictate that everyone be technologically proficient—or have a tech solution that works for all.

Unprecedented need for modularity and flexibility has shifted smart home strategy fundamentally.

Need and desire has grown for a new experience that is more responsive to changing human needs, behaviors, a diverse set of consumer circumstances, and demands around connectivity, security and devices. Meanwhile, frustration over suboptimal connectivity has been magnified.

CSPs have been the home’s connectivity conduit up to this point. Now, they have an opportunity to be a truly smart partner.
The notion of home has been reset. The rapid need to adapt to a remote working experiment has been a net positive for many people. A vaccine will not revert the world to its pre-pandemic state, and our homes will continue to be the center of human experiences in a way we could not have imagined in 2019.

At a time when consumers’ perception of their providers is increasingly being shaped around reliance and trust, CSPs need to grab this opportunity to reimagine their vision for the future home.

**Opportunities for reimagination**

**1. Multipurpose life**

People’s need for multipurpose spaces and experiences means that the connected home isn’t just about adapting to physical changes and uses but enabling need shifts in real time.

Consumers define the home as a place of comfort, safety and control. However, the definition of those words can vary depending on mindset and circumstance. As needs and experiences expand, so too do those definitions.

The smart home is no longer limited to security and energy saving. It is now a fundamental part of a home functioning across a spectrum of human experiences. Reliance on tech and connectivity is now a vital component of work, education and health at home.

As needs adapt and flow, CSPs should provide a tailored and modular approach to their services and products.4

To tap into the future home, CSPs must start by partnering with their customers to deliver front end services that enhance what they already have. We call this Connectivity+—and parental controls, Wi-Fi troubleshooting, new device pairing, and third-party device troubleshooting are the starting points. If CSPs can facilitate the new expectations of seamless service meeting their existing needs and simplifying features (e.g., device pairing), they can gain entry to the next step—transformation into a service delivery platform (with add-ons like faster speed for different times of day).

By creating this modularity of services, CSPs could create a tangible benefit with better value for their customers—enabling them to pay for what they actually use, for example, or to be less wasteful with money but also more environmentally responsible.
As consumers use parts of the home in different ways, technology should be adapted to create zones where multipurpose use of the space can be defined. In this way, CSPs could support consumers to move from home to home and bring their tailored human experiences with them.

Control will mean giving consumers the confidence to make proactive decisions about their human needs while also leveraging data and behavioral patterns to anticipate those needs in the future. Comfort will be about providing a stress-free environment to work and educate as well as a warm home.

2. Equality at work and home

Connectivity, adaptability and flexibility of experience and movement at work are inherently linked to productivity, work ethic, perception of employer and career progression. How do we ensure access to the tools at home that ensure equality in the workplace and beyond?

More than a quarter of participants in one recent survey reported inequality arising from the pandemic. Around 61% are worried that their employer would not be aware of all the work they do while 37% are concerned that they will not have the right supports to progress their career. Tackling this will require policy changes by employers as to how they view work from home, with considerations for availability, clear markers for productivity, and defined opportunities for flexibility.

Covid-19 shifted the “always on” approach to employment (a phenomenon we were already observing) to an even more, ever-present reality, according to a report by the UN. Further, there is clear evidence that, although both genders have seen their unpaid home workloads increase, women are bearing more of the burden. Now, as we prepare for a new “return to work” reality, there’s an opportunity for technology to help solve for these issues.

CSPs could be pioneers, creating a hybrid ecosystem that links home to office to ensure that the parent staying at home by necessity is not adversely affected. This can help drive progress in empowerment and flexibility.

They can achieve this by destigmatizing the work from home and enhancing the processes, capabilities and solutions that were rapidly adopted in lockdown, such as digital twins, virtual collaboration and handoffs, and new tools for working.
There’s also an opportunity for CSPs to work with employers to continue to build suites of tools at home and in the office that are driven by employee equality and ensure transparency and visibility across the workforce. What’s more, the impact of such solutions will not only be felt along gendered lines—it also has far reaching consequences across the digital divide. Accessibility, age, and socio-economic circumstances benefit from options that are fit for purpose across the workforce. With CSPs at the helm to deliver workplace accessibility solutions, companies will reap the benefits—those with above average diversity have shown to be almost two times more likely to be innovation leaders in the market.

The opportunity here is to trigger change, leading the charge for both employees and consumers to ensure that everyone can be empowered to work from home by providing access to connectivity. Access to connectivity is no longer a luxury—it’s a basic right to function in an increasingly online society.

The blocks on which we build equal opportunities for all are fundamental to society, whether that’s through tailored bundles or partnering with businesses to ensure their employees are given the access to the tools and services. All of this will lead to the creation of a level playing field across the workforce and community.
3. Palace or prison

Home is still home, which means it’s vital to ensure that it remains a safe and relaxing space for people. How can CSPs enable virtual work/school while still providing access to vital everyday services such as health and entertainment, all of which contributes to a positive human experience for every person in the home?

What’s become clear since the start of the pandemic is that how we view our homes has changed as the external world has infiltrated the personal—from home being a place of respite to a center of rotating human experiences. For some, this home base has been a blessing; for others, home confinement has been difficult.11

Through all this, however, the increase in time people spend at home is bringing CSPs and their customers closer together—in both service delivery and intimacy—as customers increasingly see their CSP as a trusted and relied-upon partner. This creates opportunities for CSPs.

The smart home is morphing into a modular ecosystem across device security, media, social experience, energy production, education, health and work. As this gains momentum, CSPs have an opportunity to build on the consumer trust they already have to develop data security options across these new human experiences. With trust, they can deliver the full promise of services like telehealth. With trust, data can be more than just a hypothetical commodity—it can be a solution whereby CSPs can connect a complex ecosystem of new digital offerings from physical smart devices to analytics-based services.12

To deliver on the original promise of the smart home—to accelerate flexibility and the seamless experience—CSPs’ efforts should be grounded in the data driven by human experiences in the home, and the devices and tools used to facilitate that. They should also consider leveraging those lessons learned from the way data is used in other industries13 to enhance the human experience for consumers at home.

Ultimately, CSPs can develop a clear understanding of how to automate things people don’t want to think about, and to help them make the choices they need to in real time.14
What CSP leaders can do

1. **Think modular and flexible**

When redefining the smart home, be modular and flexible in your thinking. Drive this thinking by prioritizing human experience and build technology to partner with those opportunities.

Consumers could choose to define their bandwidth levels to ensure that important times of the day, where connectivity is vital to function, can be offset by quieter periods of relaxation and device-free experiences, for example.

2. **Build equality**

Reimagine connectivity with a broad spectrum of consumers, circumstances and digital access in mind. Be ambitious in redefining the ecosystems that create equality in this space.

Develop products and services that look to serve equality across the spectrum of users—not just the new hybrid workforce at home. Consider, for example the older generation who look to connectivity as lifeline to a connected society, or the families who long for times to thrive in their own tasks but also find dedicated moments to come together.

3. **Own data security**

Capitalize on the growing reliance and trust amongst consumers to become the safeguards of their data—both for security and to create opportunities for smart home residents and the services they consume.

Consider how CSPs can become the home’s CIO for consumers, driven by data to create autonomy and real-time control.
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, 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.²

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.
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.\(^3\) Meanwhile, Mint Mobile’s unlimited plans tracks customer data and proactively recommends a lower cost plan based on the actual monthly usage.\(^4\) 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.\(^5\)

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. 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. 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. Another study showed only 44% of consumers think the value they’re getting in exchange for sharing their data is worthwhile.

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 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.10

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.11 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.12

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.13

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 pandemic14 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 aircraft15 and Google’s network of stratospheric balloons16 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.17

Further, CSPs could create new initiatives encouraging digital havees 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.18

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.19

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

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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