

# CONNECT FOR ENHANCED EXPERIENCES



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# INTRODUCTION

The way that we view productivity in the workplace is continuously evolving. It is now measured very differently today than it was pre-pandemic, with many people now trusted to work more independently and away from their offices and teams. While this was initially met with both apprehension and hesitation, the new Working From Anywhere (WFA) model has been embraced and teams can manage their own productivity, while still achieving the results their business and customers expect.

These last two years have redefined how we work, leading decision-makers and Technology Channel leaders around the world to review their procedures and strategies. However, these new ways of working should not change the customer experience, so the overall treatment of people needs to prioritise respect and well-being to assist in building a strong team culture. Without the dedicated work of its employees, a business' success can be severely impeded.

Today, enhancing experiences means just that. Withstanding change and ensuring channel leaders find new ways to strongarm their businesses comes from using their biggest assets, their people, to not only survive but thrive in the future.

In this 'CONNECT for Enhanced Experiences' report, you will be connected to the advice, lessons learned, and insights from key decision-makers across the UK Technology Channel exploring the transformation of employee and customer experiences. The report will discuss how changing business models, expanding propositions and deploying people-first models can help channel firms to improve internal and external experiences, building resilience for the future.



## CONNECT: VOICE OF THE CHANNEL

This 'CONNECT for Enhanced Experiences' guide is the final instalment of this three-part series of 'How-to' reports, brought to you by the Agilitas channel insights campaign, 'CONNECT: Voice of the Channel'. In April 2021, Agilitas launched its latest in the Channel Confidence Index: New Horizons. This research came at a pivotal moment for the channel industry and the wider world as we embarked on a new state of normal.



To reflect on change and look ahead, we measured the global Technology Channel's attitudes and curated trends, predictions, forecasts and commentary about the current channel outlook and the actions leaders are taking to future-proof it for tomorrow.

Despite such a challenging year, the Channel's confidence stayed strong, standing at an impressive 7.4 out of 10, just a fraction lower than the previous index in 2019 (7.6).



During this time, customer experience and productivity remained a core focus of our market research, and this report will take a deep dive into the insights that bind the two areas together. The research discussed in this report was conducted in February 2021 in partnership with respected research firm Opinion Matters. As in previous years, we surveyed 250 Technology Channel decision-makers working in UK-headquartered businesses with an annual turnover of more than £5 million.

### AGILITAS SAYS

It is extremely encouraging to see so many companies within the Technology Channel prioritising customer-centricity. Following a customer-centric approach will allow businesses to anticipate what channel partners want, creating not only services and offerings that suit the current needs, but ones that are designed to help partners as well.

Working productively also goes hand in hand with enhancing these experiences in a more competitive landscape, and those putting people first are best placed to create motivated teams that succeed and deliver. In today's workplace, teams are shaping cultures. The adage that 'people buy from people' has never been more crucial and it is essential that employees treat partners as customers, rather than a transactional sales number. Developing a relationship with each and every partner will bring significant benefits to a business and will establish a strong foundation for more successful leads.



## PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

In Channel Confidence Index 2021: New Horizons, we explored topics that matter the most to those at the heart of future growth and innovation across the UK Technology Channel. Nothing has impacted the world of work in recent years like the COVID-19 pandemic, and while for some it caused irrevocable disruption, it presented others with the chance to review how their employees and customers see businesses and make necessary changes.

Many companies were faced with changes overnight and were forced to shift their strategies in order to keep everyday operations running. Years of under investment in digital transformation suddenly needed putting in place, and the industry's people became their most valuable asset as businesses tried to navigate their way through uncharted waters.

For the Technology Channel, there is no doubt that this change has made leaders double down on how they think about business continuity, not only in the sense of how the organisation will survive, but how to do its best for its end-users and team members.

Customers are what make a business, so creating a functioning business continuity plan (BCP) impacts their experience, especially in times of disruption. This was highlighted in our research, and when asked: 'How much has the customer experience changed in the Technology Channel since COVID-19', 81% ranked between 7 to 10 (where 10 was 'significantly'). Of this number, 18% scored the maximum 10.

This was followed by how confident those in the industry felt about the improvements of customer experience in response to recent challenges. This saw optimism amongst 83% of respondents who ranked between 7 and 10. Of this number, 22% scored the maximum 10.

### AGILITAS SAYS

Whether you're a small business or a large enterprise, business continuity planning will help the Technology Channel industry to respond faster when disruption arises and therefore minimise the negative impact on a business and its customers. This can be anything from extreme weather conditions to a cyber attack, or to use a current example, a global pandemic.

A strong plan involves being comprehensive, realistic, efficient and adaptable so customers and staff can remain confident in the company's ability to function well in a crisis. In the long term, business continuity helps maintain resiliency, saves money, time and company reputation. Without a strategy, experiencing an extended outage risks financial, personal and reputational loss.



## EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

Channel partners also highlighted the significance of remaining productive - an area which has a crucial impact on the delivery of service-level agreements. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, this was hardly a surprise, but during recent times it has become a key performance indicator and centre focus for the coming years.

This became particularly prevalent when 75% of respondents placed overall productivity high up on their agendas, scoring 7 or above out of a possible 10 for importance. Naturally, this rose to 79% when factoring in the disruption of the pandemic.

In addition to recognising the need for productivity in the future of their own business, Technology Channel decision-makers generally showed significant awareness and understanding of the challenges that are most likely to hinder efficiency. When asked, 36% stated reluctance to change as the biggest obstacle in their workplaces, followed by lack of planning (30%) and unsuitable software and systems (33%).

When asked how much of a positive impact it has had on productivity, 74% of businesses scored remote working 7 or higher.



It's clear that business leaders are now, at the very least, thinking of ways to make their businesses more productive, and have already cited the challenges within their workplaces that needed to be rectified. Then, when asked how they could encourage productivity, the majority of respondents, (who were encouraged to select all the responses that they felt important), highlighted people changes as the most necessary. Top responses included:

42%



Allowing employees to make their own decisions

39%



Investing in the workforce

39%



Recognising team members' ideas through implementation

The introduction of remote working was also a big factor, with 74% scoring 7 or higher when asked if remote working has had a positive impact on their productivity, once their teams were provided with the necessary digital tools.

It is important to note that this survey was conducted during the height of the pandemic in the UK, during a time that took unpredictability to the next level for people and businesses. Many Technology Channel leaders used this time to embrace working from home and addressed the areas that would improve the experience for their customers and staff. Following the success of the WFA model, many businesses have adopted a more permanent hybrid model after seeing that productivity has increased among the majority of remote employees but identify the importance of face-to-face interaction.

Many businesses were initially unprepared for such drastic and accelerated change pre-pandemic, which left them on the back foot when it came to pivoting business models and adopting new ways of working. Despite that, optimism and confidence in productivity was high, standing at an impressive 7.7 out of 10, a finding that can be attributed to the continued dedication and hard work of employees across the ecosystem.

## THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The customer experience has always been a vital part of any business, but when faced with massive disruption, the Channel industry had to ensure the end-user was still receiving the best possible service. This meant revisiting current policies and reviewing how important customer experience is within a business.

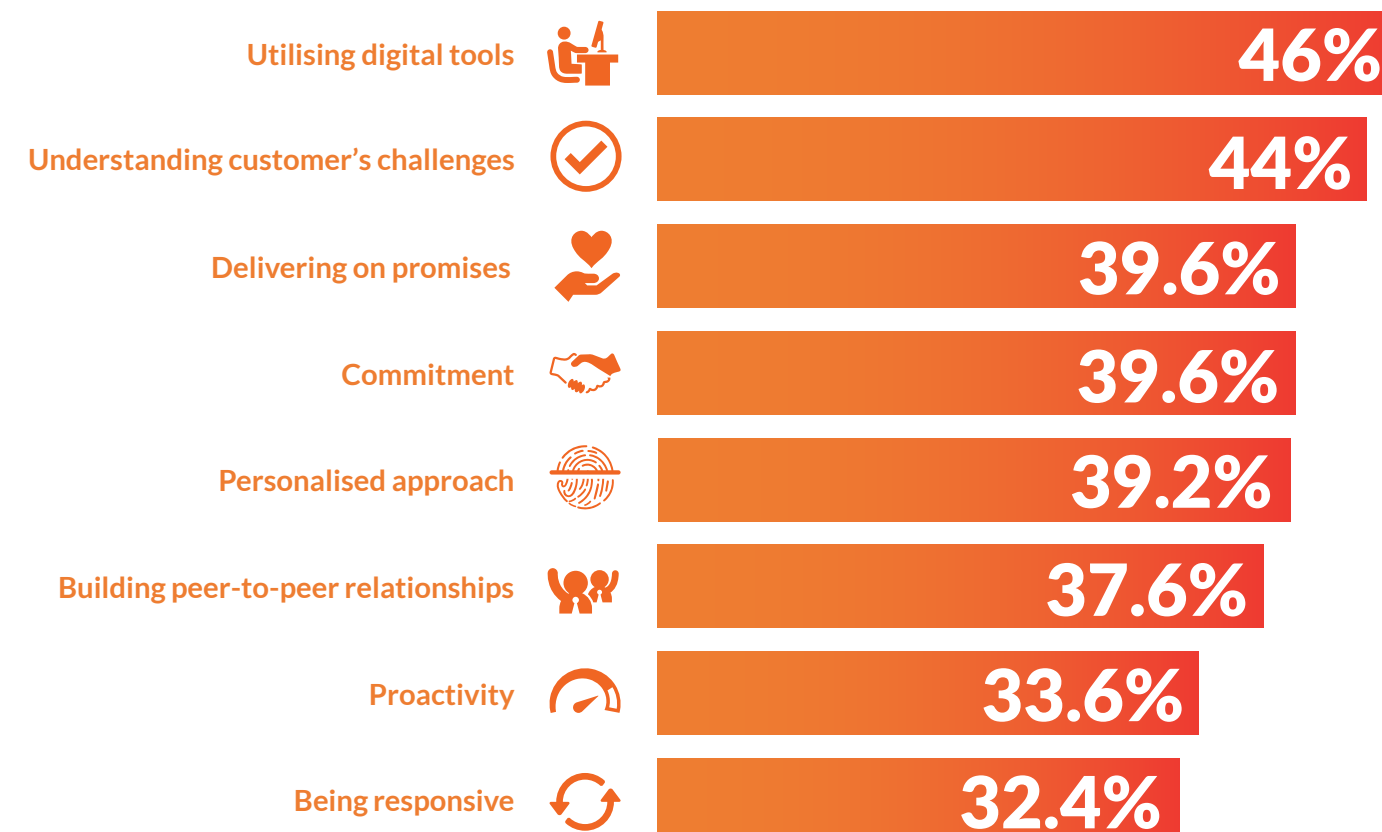
More than 74% of those asked ranked 8 or higher out of a possible 10 for customer experience importance within their organisation. This resulted in an impressive 7.4 out of 10. While this figure may seem high on the surface, it also reveals that over a quarter of respondents did not consider the customer experience a high priority compared to other areas of their business.

This leads to many questions about how business leaders view their operating models and the reasons why they might be putting less focus on customer experience. Does the organisation know how to identify required changes and how to implement them? Are they too vendor-led or disconnected from their customer-facing team members? Whatever the reason, we can certainly predict that the more agile companies which rated customer experience between 9 and 10 have an opportunity to be more successful as the customer needs and expectations evolve. Yet as we know, the real difference is delivered when Technology Channel businesses put words into action.

### + Positive

When it comes to integrating measures that can help improve the customer experience, respondents were asked to identify as many areas as they wanted in order to provide a clear picture of what needs to be implemented. This drew some clear parallels between productivity and customer experience in a more digital world.

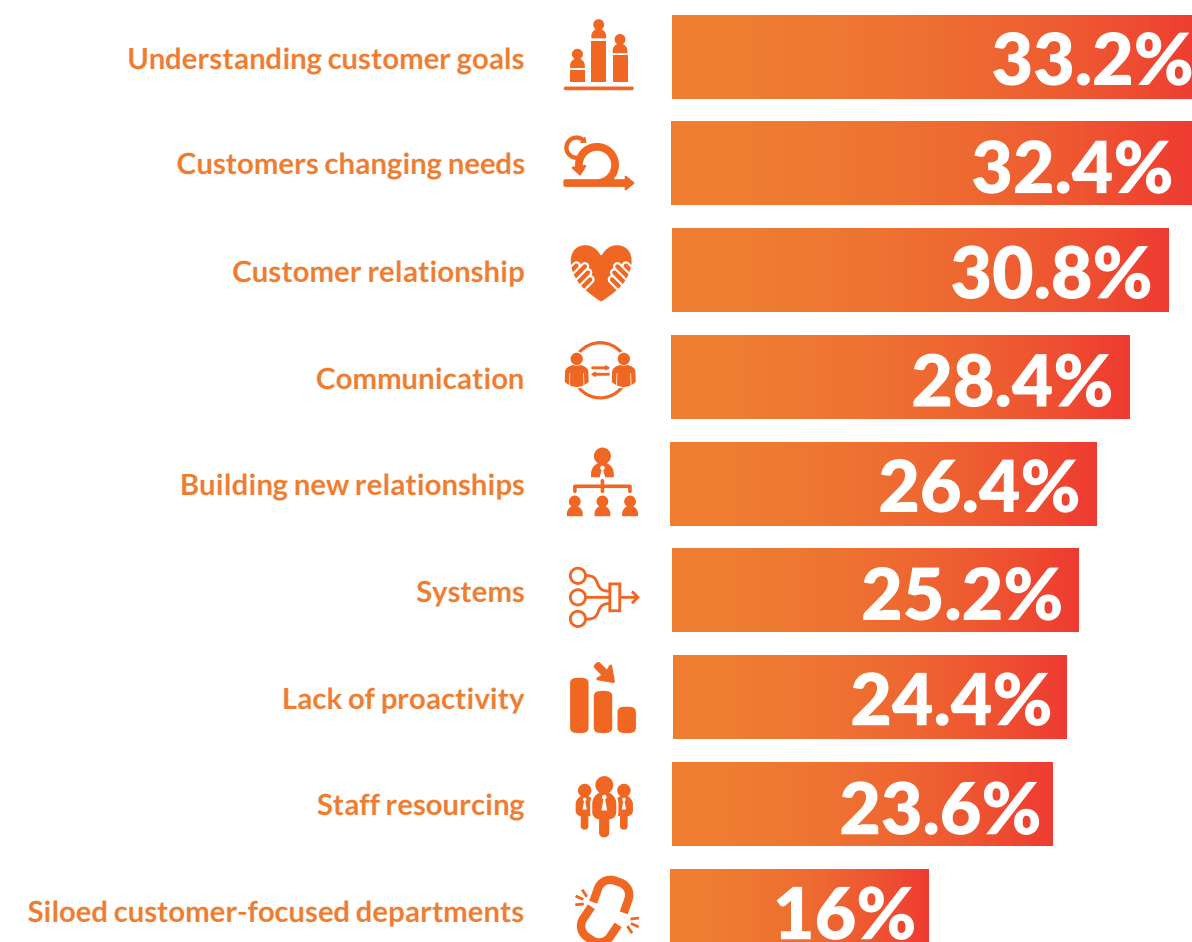
These included:



### - Negative

What was evident in these results was the fact that none of the options above were unveiled as a standout measure that respondents were drawn to. This reveals that there is no quick fix for improving the customer experience. It is a moving target that must be met with a clear cultural and technological vision, and successful companies will need to adopt a blend of measures across the organisation to make a noticeable difference.

What is just as important when looking to create a better customer experience is eliminating the factors that impede it. These are:





## THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

An interesting finding from this part of the survey was that despite recruitment being a major factor in the news, Channel businesses have identified other challenges as more significant to staff resourcing. Instead, there is a clear focus on gaining a better understanding of customers. If Channel firms can align their businesses to their customers' needs and goals by creating stronger relationships, they should experience greater customer satisfaction.



### AGILITAS SAYS

To be resilient in the Technology Channel, forward thinking is key. Businesses must be agile, flexible and certainly open to change. By establishing and strengthening innovative strategies, those in the Technology Channel will be able to react effectively to disruption.

Inevitably, different business types across the Technology Channel will have their own approaches to resilience planning. However, all must be aware that infrequent planning can leave people unequipped to deal with unexpected change. We need to learn lessons from COVID-19 and work together to become more resilient and sustainable now to prosper in the future.

This feeds back into our earlier result, where Technology Channel leaders highlighted a reluctance to change as an obstacle within their organisations. To meet customers' changing needs, businesses will need to evolve, and as seen in this report, there are multiple areas that need addressing. Without committing to change - and doing so at speed - providing a good customer experience is hampered, and more adaptable businesses that focus on their customers could come out on top.



## ACTION FOR THE FUTURE

Prioritising productivity and the customer experience in businesses provides organisations with an opportunity to find new ways to improve current strategies and create a better working model for both employees and customers. New ways of working have been embraced largely for the better, with WFA and improving the customer experience still high on many Channel businesses' agendas despite them having to adapt to new challenges and working in different ways. New approaches in delivering customer expectations are working, and the results show that those who are still struggling know what they need to do.

With optimism and confidence clearly shown by our respondents, many know that they need to plan now to withstand future change and create a strategy that explores and enhances productivity and overall customer experience. For those already in the process of making changes, 2022 will be a fresh start to improve their business continuity, move forward utilising the lessons learned over the last two years and use technology to grow now and in years to come. With the ability to face challenges head on now a necessity, those who implement change today will be best placed to drive the Channel towards a more efficient future.



Automation and digital transformation have a key role to play in streamlining supply chains, increasing efficiency and ultimately contributing to a greener, more stable successful, purpose-driven ecosystem for our people, planet and partners. However, it won't be achieved overnight and will need businesses to commit to their people in order to build a more successful future.

As we reach two years of life with COVID-19, it will be interesting to see how Technology Channel businesses embrace their futures based on the optimism we have seen in our results. This combines what productivity and customer experience measures they adopt, and how technology can continue to help businesses persevere.

Looking ahead, we're already seeing a shift amongst channel partners to adopt more environment-first practices - a new benchmark that we predict will have a significant effect on decision making and partner and employee relations in years to come.

With an ongoing drive to become more sustainable, Agilitas has also recently unveiled its eVentory Charter to mark the latest step in our ongoing commitment to providing sustainable inventory management services that meet evolving customer requirements across the Technology Channel.

The Charter coincides with the launch of Agilitas' Sustainability Pledge where we have committed to 'Act with Impact' to create a circular economy that supports a more sustainable and healthy future. This pledge is built around three core pillars - Planet, People and Partners - that drives us to place the planet at our heart, build a sustainable culture and support partners with solutions and services that reduce their environmental impact.

With this report concluding the 'CONNECT Voice of the Channel' series, in our next research we will explore how Planet, People and Partner values are impacting the Channel industry. As we move into our next series, 'EVOLVE - Voice of the Channel', we will delve into the responsibility of the Technology Channel to act with impact and continue to map the key themes and trends that are shaping the future in our industry.



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Stay tuned to our website and social media channels, following the #ChannelConfidenceIndex hashtag for further sustainability news, views and insights from across the UK IT Channel.

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