Technology For Success

2021 & BEYOND

THE SW TECH INSIGHT REPORT

Uncovering how SW SMEs have responded to the pandemic

After a tumultuous year how are South West SMEs using technology? What's working, what's not and where are the opportunities to use technology to drive business forward?



timewade
success through technology

tech4success@timewade.com

CONTENTS

2 Introduction

3 About Technology for success

4 Systems and Software

6 Productivity

8 Achieving Growth

10 Business Strategy

12 Big Tech Trends

14 Start you Tech Strategy

Introduction

With the pandemic and lockdown restrictions impacting millions of businesses, never have companies been so acutely aware of the ability of technology to support and enhance what they do.



Equally, never have so many companies been hindered by lack of investment and integration of technology across their business in the years leading up to the pandemic. Truly, we are living in a rapidly evolving, global 'digital age' where there are winners and losers in business because of their ability to effectively use technology.

This report is a snapshot of how businesses in the South West are coping with these changing events and how they are using technology to support and achieve both their immediate needs and growth plans.

The report reveals some of the challenges and opportunities and provides insight into how SMEs view the months ahead.

No one was prepared for the disruption caused by Covid-19. But it is clear that those businesses which had a technology strategy in place - that is, an 'up and running' approach to assessing and adopting the use of technology across their business - were better placed to ride the wave into lockdown which, for many, involved companies shifting to remote working.

Looking ahead, having a long-term technology strategy will be crucial to the successful recovery of businesses in the South West.

Thank you to everyone who took the survey and contributed to discussions on social media. Thanks also to all those who have joined the free Technology for Success group run by Timewade. It provides an open platform for discussions around the use of technology, business strategy and economic recovery.

If you're committed to using technology to support and enhance your business, do join the Technology for Success Group and do talk with Timewade about our work, harnessing IT and technology for success for ambitious growth companies.

Julian Wills
Managing Director, Timewade
Co-founder, Technology for Success



About Technology for Success

Technology for Success is a free programme offering insight, expertise and events to help SMEs get the best use of technology for productivity, opportunity and growth.

Founded by Timewade, Technology for Success is delivered in partnership with Astley Media, Stephens Scown LLP, Bishop Fleming, Minerva Lifelong Learning, Commissioning HR and Insight6. Each provides expertise in their respective field through the programme, and focus on the key role of technology.

Join for free to receive learnings, insight and invitations to T4S events. Then, when you are ready, start to develop your own technology strategy to propel your business forward.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The report has been collated using feedback and data from a range of businesses across the South West. While the focus is on SMEs with over eleven employees, the information will prove useful to anyone looking to better understand the current working landscape and implement more efficient technology solutions into their workflows.

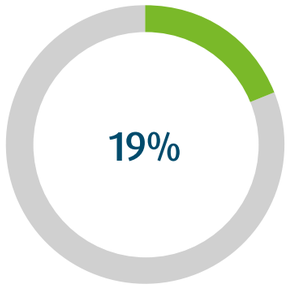
Systems and Software

When it comes to delivering a truly stand out customer-centric experience, you must choose customer-focused technology which is supported by your people, to make it a truly human experience."

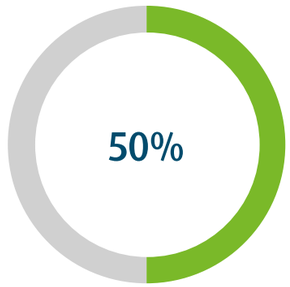
Rhian Huxtable,
Customer Experience Partner
at Insight6



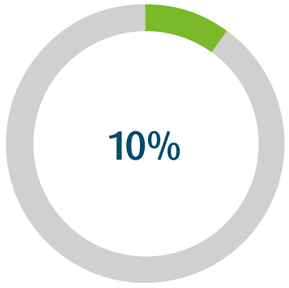
Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns forced most businesses and individuals to adopt new ways of working and communicating. The change was rapid. For some, technology enabled a smooth transition. For some, productivity gains have been achieved. But for others, there have been challenges with technology, both in the initial shift to more dispersed workforces, and in the ongoing work processes adopted and supported by technology.



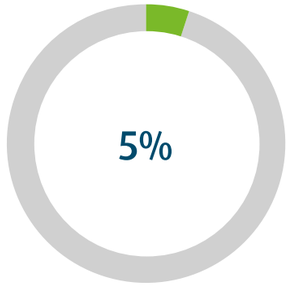
Moved to complete remote working



Moved to partial remote working



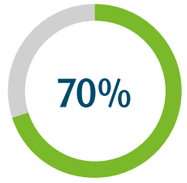
Temporarily closed



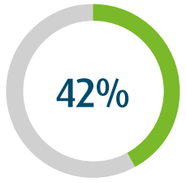
Continued as before

The survey found that during lockdown conditions, communication tools (e.g. Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype), cyber security and employees' broadband were the three technology areas ranked as the most critical by SMEs, these technologies enabled staff to stay in touch securely and effectively.

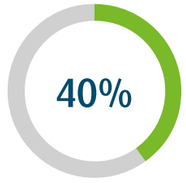
Most important technologies during the crisis:



Communication tools



Cyber security



Employee broadband

During the pandemic there has been a marked increase in cyber-attacks, including online and email scams and these threats will continue as businesses continue to work remotely. Some companies have put secure systems in place. Others have not.

It is good to see that cyber security was ranked as a very high (42%) or high (26%) priority for most respondents during the crisis and that many SMEs are working to ensure that their files and data are secure.

Business priorities during lockdown:

Cyber-security



Employee broadband connection



Protecting data and other key information



Communication tools (e.g. Zoom. Microsoft Teams, Skype)



Line of Business Applications



We are hearing from many businesses that short-term changes to working practices are set to become embedded over the long-term, with continued remote working or a hybrid approach likely to become more common after the pandemic. Having effective cyber security, employee broadband connection and communication tools will be vital for continued business success, so it is good to see that our survey respondents rated these as high priorities. Technology will play a key role in supporting SMEs to take full advantage of long-term remote working, while retaining the benefits of effective communication and bringing staff together.

Business leaders must consider the best technology systems and software for their organisation going forward. Technology must be used to support staff, enable safe and productive working and be 'customer-centric', enabling customers to access products and services in new and innovative ways.



TECH4SUCCESS TIP

Most companies have realised the need for robust cyber security. Prioritising cyber security alongside remote working and adoption of Cloud computing will give businesses the best chance of tackling the challenges ahead, and mean technology solutions within your organisation are not looked at without considering the cyber risks. A joined up approach to systems and software which considers all stakeholders is the most robust approach.

Productivity

Technology played a significant role in the success of switching to remote working. As businesses start planning for the future, look at your core activities to see how technology can be used to automate or lighten the load. Technology should be an enabler, to support your teams to succeed in these changeable times."

Vikram Kamerkar,
Partner at Minerva Lifelong Learning



Covid-19 restrictions saw organisations placing new and unprecedented demands on their technology systems. It is therefore unsurprising that respondents reported access to equipment and broadband connectivity as their biggest challenges.

Biggest IT & Tech challenges when switching to remote working:

Access to equipment

55%

People's home broadband connection

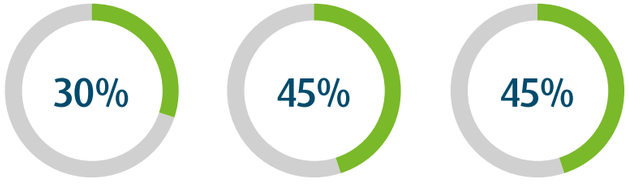
55%

Training staff on new technologies and processes were the biggest challenges.

40%

The business areas most negatively impacted in 2020 were those that were typically conducted face-to-face such as service delivery, business development and customer services.

Business areas most negatively impacted during the lockdown:



Customer services | Business Development | Service delivery

With teams and departments dispersed, and fewer in-person meetings, we saw new ways of working, adoption of new technology and the ramp up of platforms never or rarely used before, all take place in a matter of weeks.

The results which reveal how well businesses' IT systems and technology coped with changes due to the lockdown are striking, and clearly reveal that the SMEs with a long-term technology strategy already in place across all areas of the business adapted more successfully.

57% of these businesses reported that they transitioned seamlessly compared to 100% of businesses without a comprehensive tech strategy who had some problems. Furthermore, the extent to which business areas were impacted varied depending on how comprehensive their technology strategy. 100% of businesses where the technology strategy only covered the IT function saw their customer service impacted and 50% saw marketing, business development and sales, production, service delivery, admin and distribution impacted.

Businesses with a technology strategy across all areas of the business were less negatively impacted with 43% reporting customer service and service delivery impacted and just 29% seeing finance, marketing and business development and sales impacted.

Having the right technology in place for your business is only half of the story. You also need your staff to be comfortable using those systems for your organisation to get the most out of them.

Interestingly, SMEs with a Technology Strategy covering every aspect of the business, or a range of business functions, found staff adapted much more effectively. 71% of businesses with a Technology Strategy across all areas reported that staff transitioned to remote working very well. This dropped to 0% where technology is only the covered in the IT function.

How well staff transition to remote working:

Businesses whose tech strategy only covered the IT function		Businesses with a tech strategy across a range of business areas		Businesses with a tech strategy across all areas of the business	
0%	Very well	55%	Very well	71%	Very well
0%	Well	45%	Well	14%	Well
100%	Moderately	0%	Moderately	14%	Moderately

Putting training into place midway through a crisis is not ideal. The full benefits of technology in a business will only be realised if employees are supported to use it.

It is important to build in sufficient time in any technology project to allow people to familiarise themselves with new systems, platforms and ways of working. Tutorials, demo videos and training sessions allow the workforce to ask questions, practice and learn. Time spent doing this will result in more efficient working across a dispersed workforce, because people will be using the technology more effectively.

Measuring the success and outcomes of training and support is vital to ensure you are using the best approaches and to ensure that learning becomes embedded in work practices which boost productivity.



TECH4SUCCESS TIP

For technology to be impactful, it must be adopted by your teams. With any new or updated technology, get your staff on-boarded early. Communicate regularly about technology roll-outs and consult with them to find the best tech solutions for your business needs.

Achieving Growth

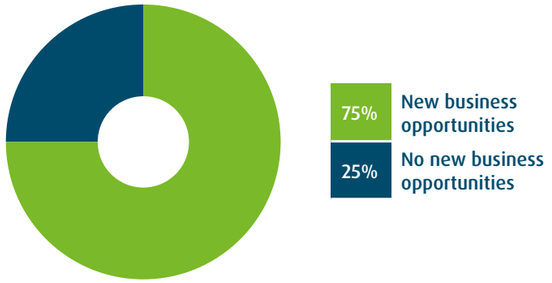
Technology should be used to improve the quality and speed of outcomes for clients. At Stephens Scown, we view technology as a key driver for growth and encourage other SMEs to consider how technology can be used to drive innovation and support their business development strategy."

Ben Travers,
Legal Partner at Stephens Scown



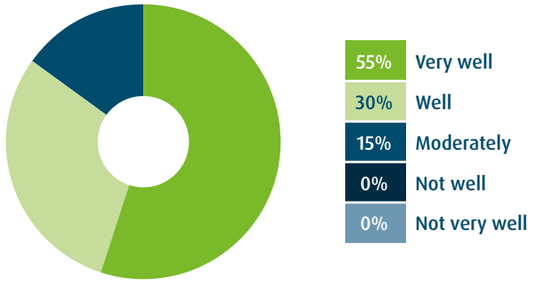
Encouragingly, 75% of firms have discovered new business opportunities.

Discovered business opportunities in response to Covid-19:



On the whole business leaders say staff have adopted new technology and ways of working very well.

How well employees used technology in their work during lockdown:

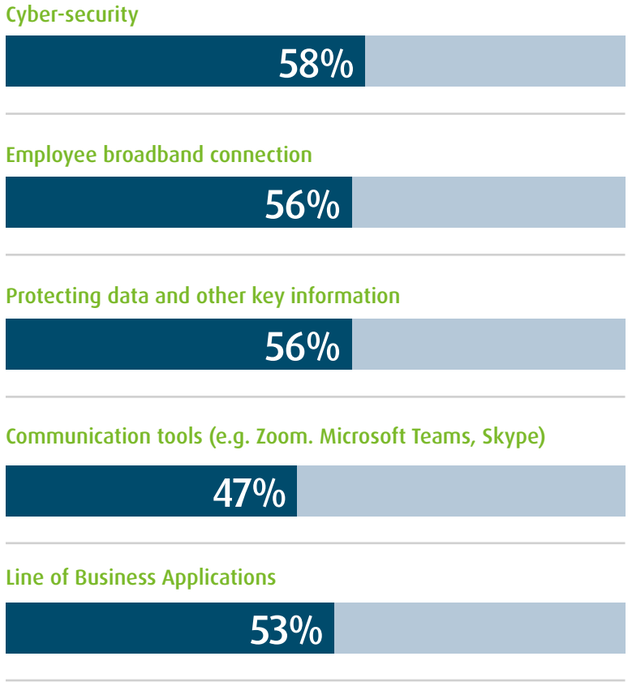


Small businesses can be resistant to change. With time and resources limited, adopting new systems or ways of working can seem counterproductive to getting things done. The pandemic has shown that this is not so.

Encouragingly, most respondents (85%) said their staff adopted new ways of working well or very well during the pandemic. Not a single respondent reported their staff performing not well or badly. It is rarely the case that employees hold back the integration of new technology. It is more often how well a project is managed and the lack of communication with employees at every stage that causes problems.

Short-term decisions made to help keep businesses operating through the pandemic should be reviewed. Rapid technology changes could have left weaknesses in a company's cyber security and the protection and handling of data. Such 'loose arrangements' risk exposing a business and can lead to greater time and money spent putting things right further down the line.

Most important technology changes going forward:



When asked which technology changes would be the most important going forward, SMEs are currently focused on maintaining and improving remote working: cyber security, protecting data and other key information, business broadband connection, line of business applications and communication tools.

Investment in these technologies involves making choices and considering the long-term benefit to support long-term business growth. Failing to update or replace ageing systems means the competitive gap between your business and others will grow. When it comes to growth, there were some positive signs in the survey, with 75% of respondents discovering new business opportunities in 2020.

It will be important to measure the impact long-term remote working has on your teams. Whilst, productivity and business growth should be measured, so also should other key elements of a successful workforce such as well-being, happiness and cohesion.

The lockdown and subsequent acceptance of working from home has helped the Board see that there are some real benefits of remote working, including efficiencies in staff productivity. The rapid advancement of meeting technology during the pandemic has enabled cross-departmental teams to collaborate quickly and effectively."

Damion Norcombe, CIO,
at Axminster Tools



TECH4SUCCESS TIP

Stay ahead of the curve. The Technology for Success business group is one way for SMEs to deepen and share their learnings in a constructive, collaborative environment. Get involved and keep abreast of the latest workplace technology trends and boost your business growth.

Business Strategy

Whatever sector you are in, prioritising technology and thinking strategically will be vital to business recovery. Whilst no-one could have been fully prepared for 2020, the leaders who are preparing business and technology strategies for 2021 will see the greatest success."

Pippa Clarke, Head of Technology, Innovation and Growth Sector at Bishop Fleming



Our previous Technology for Success survey found that 91% of respondents considered it extremely or very important to have a long-term strategy for improving their IT systems and technology.

However, just 35% of respondents to this most recent survey which included the use of technology across all business functions.

It is this gap between awareness and action which impacts productivity. The findings suggest that too many companies are still not making the best use of technology across their business.

PRE LOCKDOWN

Businesses with a strategy which includes technology:



10%	Only IT function
55%	A range of business functions
35%	Across all aspects of the business

On a positive note, the pandemic has encouraged many SMEs to review their use of technology across all business functions.

The survey found that 90% of businesses will be reviewing their business strategy to integrate the use of technology across all or a range of business functions.

90%

Timewade would of course advocate for 100% of businesses to be integrating technology across every aspect of the business, to support maximum business growth.

POST LOCKDOWN

Businesses reviewing their strategy to include technology:



50%	Reviewing business strategy across a range of business functions
40%	Reviewing business strategy across all aspects of the business
10%	Reviewing business strategy for more than 1 business area

It is also positive to see that business leaders are recognising the importance of technology. Nearly two thirds are increasing investment in technology in the short term and 50% expect to increase the size of their investment in technology for the long term, beyond the next 12 months.

The pandemic, for all its terrible impacts, is leading to more companies focusing time and investment on improving their use of technology for the long term. This approach is good for employees, customers and overall business growth.

Beyond the next 12 months half (50%) will continue to increase investment in technology.

50%

In the short-term nearly two thirds (63%) of companies are increasing investment in technology.

63%





TECH4SUCCESS TIP

Review how you are using technology and what changes were made in 2020. Not every quick fix should become a permanent solution. Longer term, develop a comprehensive Technology Strategy across all business areas. Align it with your business goals, review your current use of technology, survey your employees on what does and doesn't work, prioritise, do research, set up an initial project and then begin. Focus on specific areas that will bring the most benefits.

Big Tech Trends

The pandemic has changed not only the way we work, but the way we interact with our colleagues and clients. Technology should be used to support staff working remotely and to encourage socialising to avoid social isolation. There are some great solutions out there, so ask your teams what works for them."

Alison Lambert,
Director at Commissioning HR

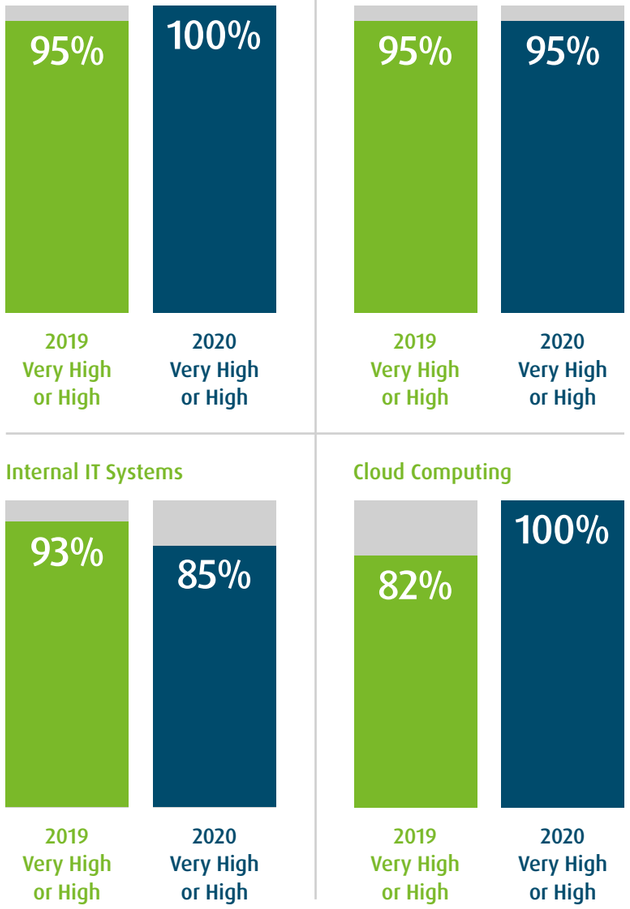


The top four most important tech trends for the next 12 months indicate an ongoing focus on maintaining and strengthening the ability to operate with a dispersed workforce: remote working, boosting cyber security, strengthening internal IT systems, and continuing to shift towards Cloud computing.

But whilst so much has changed during the past twelve months, these trends were actually already established. These exact four options came out on top in the 2019 Technology for Success survey carried out by Timewade.

The big difference is the pace of change, and the number of businesses who have shifted to new ways of working, supported by technology.

Top 4 tech trends for the next 12 months (rated as high or very high)



There is no doubt that the pandemic has changed the way we are working, how we manage people and teams, interact and work with colleagues and those outside our own organisation.

The 'digital shove' of 2020 was fast and dramatic, but it is important to remember that it was not actually radical change. Rather, it was a rapid acceleration of existing trends. Many companies have progressed in their use of technology in a matter of weeks and months, rather than years.

What has been revealed through this shift is the importance of staying abreast of new and emerging technologies to facilitate flexible and dynamic working solutions. Updates to Microsoft Teams, the Google suite of tools, Zoom and the array of other platforms and tools available continue apace. And new entrants will continue to appear, be it new online learning, internal communications tools, project or new software.

Making sure you are regularly reviewing and getting the best use out of your technology is vital. As is having an overall Technology Strategy, where you have defined what you are trying to achieve and why, and how technology can support that. Done well, and regularly reviewed, your Technology Strategy will be a vital roadmap in a fast-changing digital world.

Looking at the survey results, those companies who had already put the time and money into developing effective technology strategies were far better able to react and adjust to fast-moving developments this year.

With economic uncertainty likely to continue well into 2021 and beyond, it's more crucial than ever to ensure that your SME is fully tech-enabled and ready to embrace new developments and opportunities.

Embracing technology enables businesses to connect with customers and clients in new and innovative ways. Technology can enhance communication messages and deliver targeted and authentic comms which ultimately support business growth."

Dan Pritchard, Managing Director at Astley Media



TECH4SUCCESS TIP

To paraphrase a common maxim, the best time to implement a Technology Strategy was yesterday. The second best time is now.

Go to www.technologyforsuccess.co.uk for more guidance on developing a Technology Strategy for your business.

Start your tech strategy

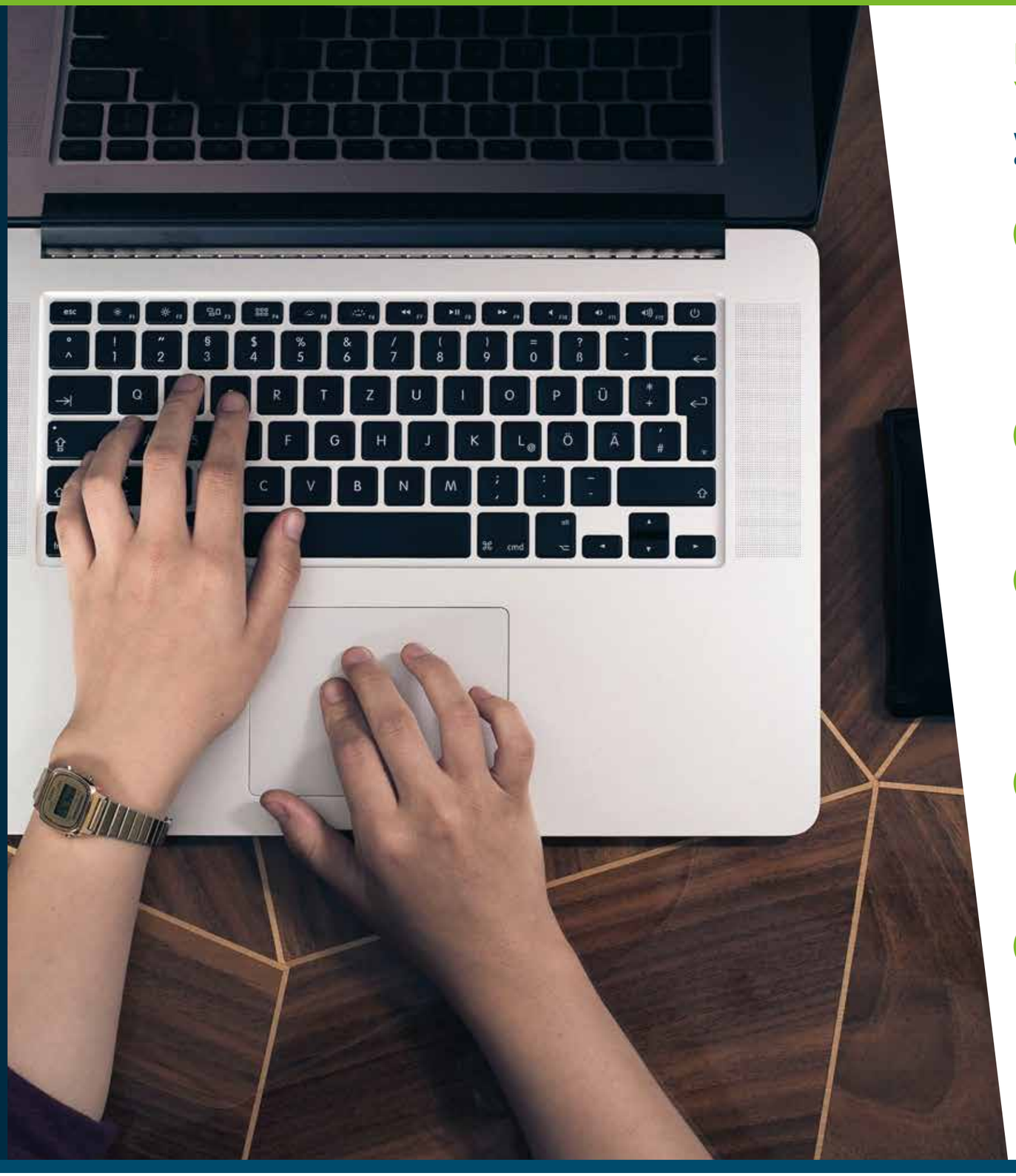


Julian Wills,
Managing Director, Timewade
Co-founder, Technology for Success

"The past twelve months have been a incredibly tough period, which has seen companies, whether they were ready for it or not, rapidly adopt new technologies and new ways of working.

As business leaders reflect on the lessons learnt over the past 12 months, the adoption of technology must become a part of everyday business, not just a response to crisis.

I am certain that the businesses which consistently achieve a strategic and focused approach to their use of technology across all areas of their business, will fare better in challenging economic times in 2021 and beyond."



HERE ARE FIVE STEPS TO REFRESHING YOUR APPROACH TO TECHNOLOGY.

Visit www.technologyforsuccess.co.uk for more guidance on developing a Technology Strategy for your business.

1 Review

Review the current use of technology across your organisation including processes, systems and tools adopted in the pandemic. What is operating and being used at 100% efficiency, and what isn't? Are there common themes that emerge - e.g. problems with internal processes, systems 'patched together', employees not adopting new methods etc.

2 Start

Create a simple Technology Strategy - what are your business priorities? Are you aware of technology solutions that can help you achieve them? Could you set up an initial Tech Project to investigate options?

3 Ask

Survey your employees - what is and isn't working well across your full range of IT and technology? Ask what would help them in their work and aid the wider business. Ideally, this should be part of a wider Technology Strategy. But even as a one off or annual exercise, it will provide invaluable insight into how well (or not) your technology is performing and where the problems lie.

4 Learn

Combine employee insight with external research. This can include support from a trusted IT and Tech partner, to help develop your strategy and the first projects to initiate. Join the Technology for Success group as part of your commitment to learning!

5 Action

Define those first projects and begin. Clear parameters including outcomes, budget, roles and responsibilities, timescale and communication and engagement with employees, are all vital to success. Learn from initial projects to feed back into your Technology Strategy to ensure continuous improvement, an approach that Timewade considers essential.

ABOUT TIMEWADE

Many technology companies focus on fixing problems. At Timewade we provide strategy and support combined in one framework, to prevent issues and create opportunities for success.

Our aim with all our clients is to provide the complete Technology Strategy and IT support framework for their business to be brilliant.

Helping organisations use technology to boost performance and deliver brilliant results

TIMEWADE STRATEGY



IDENTIFYING AND SOLVING BUSINESS RISKS

Ensuring nothing takes away your focus or resources from your day to day business.

MAXIMISING BUSINESS BENEFITS

Increasing your productivity through your Technology for Success roadmap, combining our technology expertise with real-time insight into your business planning and strategy.





CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Understanding the goals of your business. We are rigorous learners and that never stops. Combined with a thorough understanding of business technology trends, we make sure you get the very best guidance from your trusted technology partner.

TIMEWADE SUPPORT

BEST PRACTICE ALWAYS

Our Timewade 6 best practice approach ensures we continually update and assess all our clients against the very highest industry standards and our own expertise, reducing risk, creating opportunities and taking advantage of efficiencies.





CONSTANT MONITORING

Spotting risks and opportunities before you even know about them, feeding into the service desk and the Timewade 6 best practice approach, ensuring swift responses and solutions to give you peace of mind.

SERVICE DESK

Industry-leading support as we sort out your IT and technology problems, giving you back time to focus on your business priorities.



THANK YOU

Many organisations and individuals helped us with the Technology for Success survey and report. Thank you to everyone who contributed to its development.

The Technology for Success initiative, including business group, website resource and webinars, is supported by six partner organisations: Stephens Scown, Bishop Fleming, Astley Media, Commissioning HR, Minerva Lifelong Learning and Insight6. Many of the free resources developed during lockdown were facilitated by Cornelle Comms.

GET INVOLVED

Discover more and join Technology for Success technologyforsuccess.co.uk

Talk to Timewade 01392 367676

julian.wills@timewade.com

jordan.westcott@timewade.com

timewade

success through technology