

OVERCOMING TECH & DEVICE OBSTACLES

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OVERCOMING TECH & DEVICE OBSTACLES

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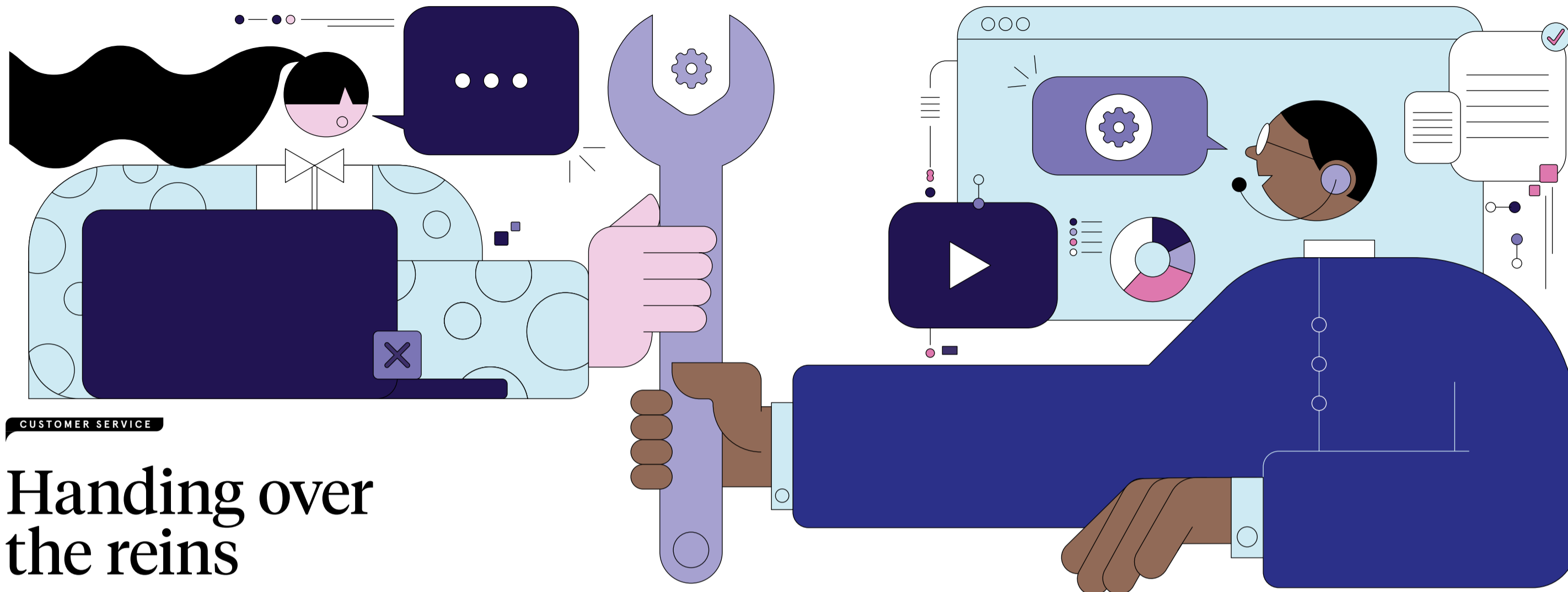
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CUSTOMER SERVICE

Handing over the reins

The temptation with customer service is to assume everyone wants to speak to a representative but sometimes giving customers the tools to fix a problem on their own is the best solution

Morag Cuddeford-Jones

One of the more bizarre consumer trends to emerge on social media is the rise of 'unboxing'. Some videos of this phenomenon, where viewers tune in to watch an influencer unpack their latest purchase, have reached upwards of 105 million views.

Part of the reason for their popularity is that these videos tap into that moment of anticipation as we rip open the packaging on something we've been looking forward to opening. If the experience, and what's inside, doesn't meet our expectations, we can be left feeling very disappointed.

Why does this matter? Well, businesses tend to focus their investment in customer experience on the journey to conversion. But all too often it is post-sale where the loyalty battle is really won. In PwC's Global Consumer Insights Pulse survey, reliability was most likely to secure brand loyalty, cited by 46% of consumers questioned, ahead of product availability on 31%. Exceptional customer service was the third highest criteria, at 26%.

This data suggests reliability and customer service clearly go hand in hand. This is especially the case for today's electronic devices, which

may be manufactured to the highest specification but are also becoming increasingly complex.

This device complexity can leave customers unsure how best to set up or use their devices. And if that information cannot be easily found as part of the set-up experience or online, it can lead to a deluge of calls and emails to the manufacturer's contact centre. That makes it imperative to ensure customers have the right information, making consumer education the first line of defence in customer care, while online is the battleground.

WiFi networking company TP-Link is one company that has been addressing this area of customer service. Its UK managing director, Will Liu, explains how the company aims to minimise unnecessary support calls by providing an intuitive set-up experience that invites users to download an app to guide them through the process.

"To help customers get the right set up for their home or office we've developed apps for complex products like routers and wireless access points. Apps are second nature to consumers, even 'Boomers' [those aged 57 to 75]. Familiarity with the app ecosystem means we can use

our technical knowhow to guide the least tech-savvy consumers through the network configuration process," he says.

Designing a comprehensive 'out of the box' experience is so important because of the impact it can have on customer experience and subsequent brand reputation. Liu says the number of support calls it receives about setting up its routers has dropped by more than 6% since introducing the app, while reviews on Amazon and Reevoo are now more positive.

For mobile phone retailer and operator Three, making the most of all of its communications channels to stay in close contact with customers during the critical early days and weeks of their device usage is key. It also offers customers an app, while also pointing people to digital content on its website that can help with setup and usage.

"In the first few weeks we are very attentive to make sure customers get support and we offer an ongoing programme of communications with tips and tricks," Three's digital director Jon Davies reveals. "If they do have problems they can talk via chat, pick up the phone or go in-store. We'll continue to make that more

sophisticated as we understand more about customers' device usage."

Encouraging customers to self-serve information is a critical pillar of customer care. Not only does it have the potential to be more efficient and satisfying for the customer, but it reduces cost-to-serve for the company and allows customer care teams to focus on more complex needs. But for this to be effective, organisations have to make sure their systems are up to the task.

"There are many use cases, particularly if the customer is swapping devices or operating systems, where we are investing in improving search capability to allow them to find information more easily. A big

cohort of customers will use Google as the first point of contact so we have to optimise our pages to make sure they're visible there," Davies explains. "The service side is just as important to make sure those pages are visible and optimised."

One thing companies are increasingly conscious of is the need to be available in the same channels as customers. Some people will always want to speak to someone at a contact centre however sophisticated the self-service channels might be. This means companies must ensure support options are easily accessible whenever relevant.

"There is typically a triage approach. Here is the content if you

want to do it yourself but we will promote chat and have a chatbot that will also do its best to support the customer. If it can't solve the issue, it will hand them off [to an agent]. It's becoming increasingly context-sensitive to know what the right time is to push them in that direction," Davies says.

While being available in the right channel is key, so too is understanding the query and the level of help that might be needed. Some customers may simply be getting in contact to find out when their bill is due. Others may want answers to much more complicated questions.

For this reason, TP-Link offers several avenues for customer support,

while its customer service staff are trained to deal with calls both from those with few technical skills who want the personal touch and those who are extremely technical and therefore cannot find an answer to their query via another means.

"Because one-to-one support is at the two opposing ends of the spectrum, our support team are all highly skilled networking engineers who understand the implications of other environmental factors and the potential knock-on effect to the customer's experience," he explains.

To be able to provide optimal customer service, agents need to be able to access the latest information and, critically, have the technology to do that quickly. According to data from Call Centre Helper, the telecommunications industry standard average handle time – the time it takes to deal with a query – is eight minutes and 48 seconds. First call resolution is deemed to be the gold standard of customer service because it avoids the need to call the customer back or hand them over to a more experienced member of staff.

This level of customer support is often the reason customers seek out specialist retailers. Which? Magazine named Richer Sounds the best place to buy technology products, partly due to price but also for its reputation, customer service and warranty. Its customers cite "quality products with very good honest information [and] knowledgeable, helpful staff" as reasons why they score it highly.

Nathan Kennaugh, HR director at the retailer, explains that one of the reasons why it does not open its stores to the public until midday is because between 9am and noon its staff are on Zoom calls receiving training on specialist technologies from manufacturers. It also has a database of training documents and links to videos from manufacturers so staff can keep their knowledge up-to-date.

"Training is a huge part of what we do; we want our colleagues to have the knowledge and be specialists," he says. "We place a lot of emphasis on training and technical contact, and our colleagues have access to training resource sites and eportals. That's a resource that covers the day

“Quite simply, we are striving to provide the customer with the capability to execute as much as possible themselves. It's what they've told us they want to do

to day queries we might receive but we still need the technical contacts for the weird and wonderful things that pop up once in a blue moon. We never want to keep a customer waiting to get a resolution."

Kennaugh admits the company draws heavily on the fact that its customers are more tech-savvy than the average consumer and are more willing to work in partnership with store staff to resolve a problem, rather than expecting an instant resolution. He also notes that the company is not yet looking to adopt automated customer service solutions wholesale.

"We've explored chatbots but from the customer service side, we're pretty old school. With chatbots, we question if it could really understand the ins and outs of a nuanced problem and we don't want to cause further frustration with a customer that's already upset," he says.

For specialist retailers and manufacturers, the direct route to human customer service operatives who are enabled and augmented by technology may still be the most effective option. But for large consumer technology companies, and particularly for manufacturers that rely on third-party resellers, the issue of managing brand reputation through customer service is one that is galvanising some into action.

For TP-Link, this means working with retailers such as Currys PC world or Amazon to provide their staff with the technical knowledge to sell and offer basic customer support, as well as taking advantage of their customer relationship management processes. But it also clearly signposts its own support options on packaging and offers quick installation guides.

Three's Davies believes there is ever more scope to use technology to enable both the company's support staff and improved self-serve options. For example, its app allows customers to triage themselves if, say, the screen or battery is not working. A customer service agent can then pick that up and feed the issue to the logistics team.

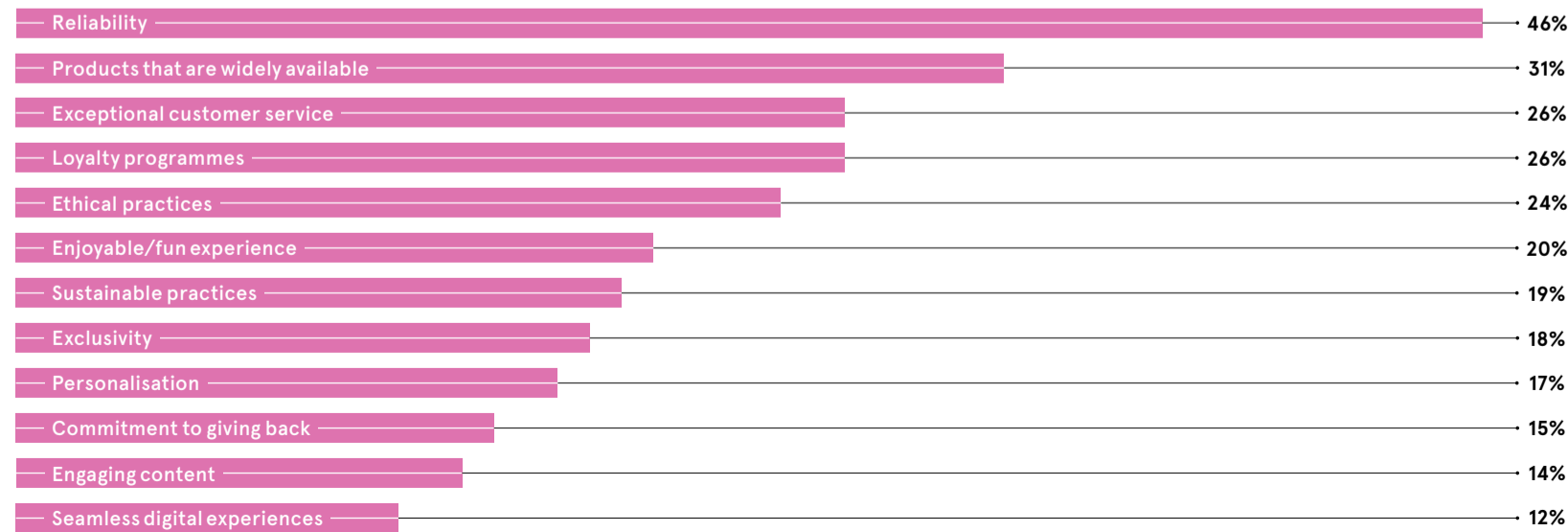
"We're in pretty good shape with a knowledge management capability that straddles both human and digital channels," he says.

"Quite simply, we are striving to provide the customer with the capability to execute as much as possible themselves. It's what they've told us they want to do."

CONSUMER LOYALTY IS MOST INFLUENCED BY RELIABILITY

Percentage of customers who ranked the following among their top three influences

PwC, 2021



6m 30s

The average time it takes a customer service agent in a call centre to handle a call across industries

8m 48s

The average time it takes a customer service agent in a call centre to handle a call in the telecoms industry

Call Centre Helper, 2020

Consumers' complex tech lives require outstanding support from brands

People's reliance on devices in their work and personal lives is stronger than ever, meaning any tech problem causes serious disruption. Advanced end-to-end support for continuous connectivity is now paramount for brand loyalty

Levels of reliance on technology have been rising consistently in a mobile-first world and as people's homes fill with internet-connected devices. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated that process dramatically: connectivity has become so integral to consumers' lives, including their work, that any downtime causes significant pain.

Yet downtime is ever more common, with consumers increasingly needing to repair or replace their devices, finding they cannot make products work as expected, or that devices and apps from different providers will not integrate well. Consumers' need for uninterrupted connectivity means that for any company selling technology, there is a growing need to provide complete and rapid insurance, repair and replacement propositions in order to protect user satisfaction and, ultimately, loyalty.

"Technology has fundamentally transformed the way everyone lives, works and interacts," explains Rod Millar, chief executive at Likewize, the end-to-end device support company for manufacturers, network operators, banks and some of the world's largest brands. "With devices mattering this much, it's no surprise that when things go wrong, people feel pain and need it fixed quickly."

Every day, consumers make a number of urgent functionality, connectivity and upgrade support requests to businesses providing technology; that is aside from any need to replace devices following breakage, loss or theft. But typical support experiences can be extremely slow and frustrating. Too

often, the websites of device manufacturers or retailers, which are consumers' first port of call, are not up to the task, with FAQ pages that fail to answer common queries, while search engines can produce unhelpful results unless people enter exactly the right terminology.

Many brands are turning to outsourced support so they can address customer problems quickly and efficiently, leaving them to focus on core strategic aims. "It's a natural step for technology businesses to work with specialist third-party service providers to keep their customers connected. This is similar to how car companies offer branded breakdown services that are ultimately provided by dedicated roadside assistance firms," Millar says.

Likewize, formerly known as Brightstar, aims to create "a life uninterrupted" for consumers and is focused on "taking this pain away, by delivering effortless customer care across all possible problem areas", adds Millar.

A core part of the support experience transformation is the Likewize knowledge centre, which is used by cutting-edge businesses and provides real language search. It does this by using artificial intelligence to interpret user questions and provide the right answers with a much greater degree of clarity and precision. Additionally, its AI systems quickly identify trending searches around new tech problems so that important new queries can be answered, presenting an opportunity for significant competitive edge.

Using Likewize services, 98% of consumers' support queries are solved instantly, automatically and



“With devices mattering this much, it's no surprise that when things go wrong, people feel pain and need it fixed quickly

with little expense or human interaction required by brands. Major device manufacturers, phone network operators, and online and in-store retailers all use Likewize services to provide customer support online, by phone, in store or at customers' homes, when required.

"We help brands offer their customers complete solutions for fixing technology. We believe we should be wherever a customer wants us to be, so we offer solutions across all communication channels including online self-serve, chatbots, live chat or call centre staff. It is like an IT helpdesk that's readily available for customers on behalf of the manufacturer or retailer. Technology providers can choose all or just specific aspects of Likewize services; with the end-to-end service, even if customers begin a query online they can seamlessly continue the process in store or by phone, and vice versa.

Providing such services has only become possible because Likewize has evolved from its origins as a mobile device distributor by embarking on major technology investments and acquisitions to provide complete end-to-end problem resolution services. "We could see that a home connectivity and remote working revolution was happening even prior to the pandemic, and that there was going to be more

Likewize offers expertise from live chat agents to help establish the root of the issue in a consumer's home setup. In the case of products being damaged, new devices are sent out on behalf of the manufacturer or retailer. Technology providers can choose all or just specific aspects of Likewize services; with the end-to-end service, even if customers begin a query online they can seamlessly continue the process in store or by phone, and vice versa.

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demand for tech protection, quick repairs or replacements and premium tech support from home," explains Millar. "Those trends have been accelerated by the Covid-19 crisis and our tech is now more crucial than ever. Working with us, brands can ensure they solve all customer pain points quickly and efficiently."

The range of technology companies already working with Likewize goes from Apple and Samsung, to Telefonica and Vodafone, to Tesco and EE and beyond. Among clients, the impact on customer support has been significant. One major retailer has been able to implement a powerful online helpdesk that has reduced the demand on call centres. Elsewhere, a manufacturer has been able to outsource repair and warranty services, while dramatically reducing posted returns through online resolution.

"Companies around the world rely on Likewize to increase customer satisfaction and grow loyalty while reducing costs. As we like to say, we enable them to 'love their customers for less'," Millar concludes. "Given the massive demands businesses face to provide excellent problem resolution affordably, now is the time to step ahead of their competitors by offering powerful end-to-end customer support."

To find out more about how to solve customers' technology problems rapidly and efficiently, visit likewize.com

likewize.

Q&A

Unrivalled support gives competitive edge

Rod Millar, chief executive at Likewize (formerly Brightstar), explains how many technology companies are urgently transforming customer support



Q For any company making or selling technology, what is the main reason to transform customer support?

A Even the best technology can go wrong or have problems. Today's consumers are hugely reliant on their devices, from their mobile phones and laptops to home automation systems and entertainment technology. The proliferation of Internet of Things devices that need to work together has massively heightened the requirement for exceptional customer support. And now, with so many people working from home, there is reliance on continuously functioning products. When consumers have a device issue, it is the most likely moment they will leave a provider and switch to the competition. A good support experience removes that risk and can deepen brand loyalty.

Q How do consumers normally try to solve technical problems and what service do they receive?

A Typically, consumers will visit the websites of the retailer, operator or manufacturer, or start searching around online. When they cannot get a simple answer to their query, they'll call the companies involved or visit the store. However, the complexity and array of different products they use means they often still do not get the right answers. If they can't get the product to work as expected, they'll return it. So, it's a frustrating process for consumers of not finding answers, spending ages on the phone or having to go back into a shop. By contrast, we can solve 98% of queries online, then help other users by phone or in-person to fix any lingering problems. We quickly increase satisfaction rates and prevent costly returns.

Q Why should a company bring in Likewize instead of building its own end-to-end support?

A We ensure brands can efficiently protect, support, repair and renew their consumers' devices. Our entire business focus is creating excellent, seamless support and removing any barriers to it, satisfying the massive and continually growing need from consumers to get their devices working again and remain connected. Whether a device is lost, stolen, damaged, malfunctioning, in need of an upgrade, or the user does not know how to do something, Likewize provides a solution. Brands want to avert negative experiences for consumers but doing so from end-to-end can be hugely complex and expensive. With our technology-backed intelligent service and product experts readily available, we are able to quickly solve all user eventualities for companies, so they focus on what is core to them, such as developing or selling products.

Q What is the reason for your company name change to Likewize?

A We have evolved considerably over many years. Early on, we recognised the growing complexity and reliance people had on their technology in personal and remote work contexts.

“When consumers have a device issue, it is the most likely moment they will leave a provider and switch to the competition

We have expanded to offer a complete after-sales service to address every customer device eventuality: lost, stolen, damaged, malfunctioning, user error or needing upgrade. However, research showed it was not always known that we did this, people still thought of us as a distributor instead of the full-service tech protection and support company we've become.

The company has been on a huge transformation, so we felt the brand needed to change so people reassess us and understand why we make the world a better place. We chose the name Likewize because it means we are all alike, aligned with our customers on the need for uninterrupted connectivity for their consumers. We recognise that we all cannot live happily or function productively without our devices. The name also reflects our aim of ensuring that users like the experience we provide and trust us to offer intelligent solutions.

Q How can companies establish a clear competitive edge in customer support?

A The only answer is by quickly meeting consumers' expectations. The world is impatient and people have complete dependence on their technology: they need their laptop for work Zoom calls, their mobile phone to switch off their burglar alarm, payment technology to use at the supermarket, or a home automation system that keeps life running smoothly.

But the key advantage is not in simply understanding consumers' pain points but in being able to solve them quickly. By using our smart services, problems can be resolved quickly and cost effectively. Likewize end-to-end support ensures any business providing technology can innovatively provide the best possible resolutions and in doing so grow relationships with highly satisfied consumers.

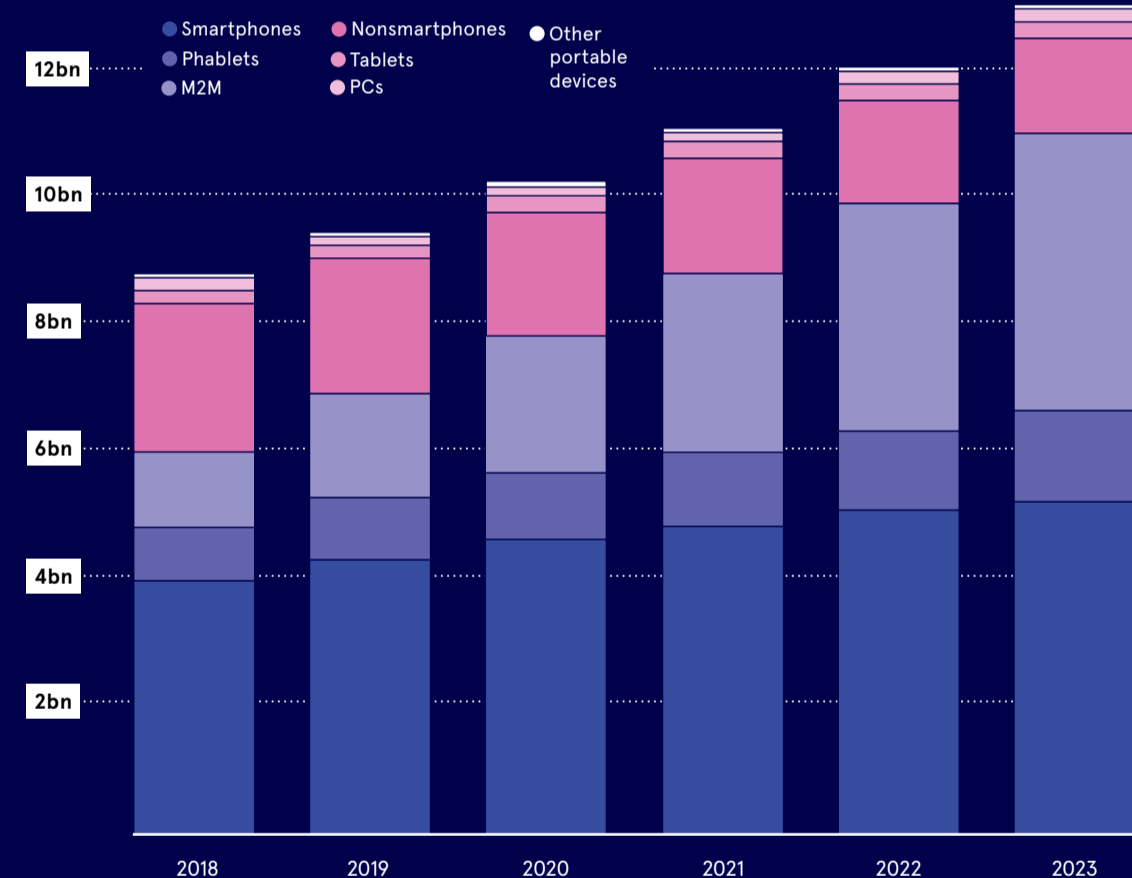
UNDERSTANDING E-WASTE

As our reliance on devices grows, so too does the amount of e-waste we create. Despite increasing legislation around e-waste, the vast majority is not being recycled in the right way. And, with many of us replacing our devices more often than necessary, the mountain of e-waste looks set to pile higher unless consumers commit to recycling their used devices

THE NUMBER OF DEVICES WE OWN IS GROWING

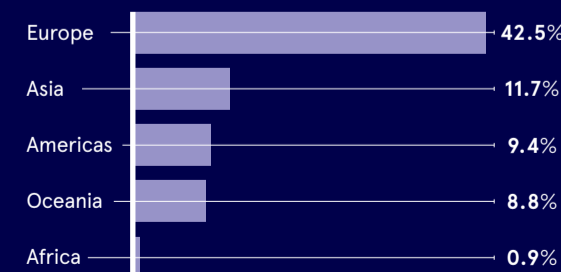
Global mobile device and connection growth

Cisco, 2020



EUROPE IS LEADING THE WAY IN E-WASTE RECYCLING

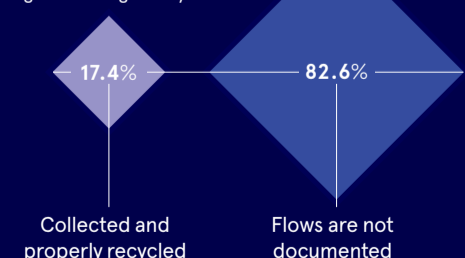
Collected and recycling rates of e-waste by region



United Nations University and World Economic Forum, 2020

THE VAST MAJORITY OF E-WASTE IS NOT RECYCLED

Fate of e-waste generated globally

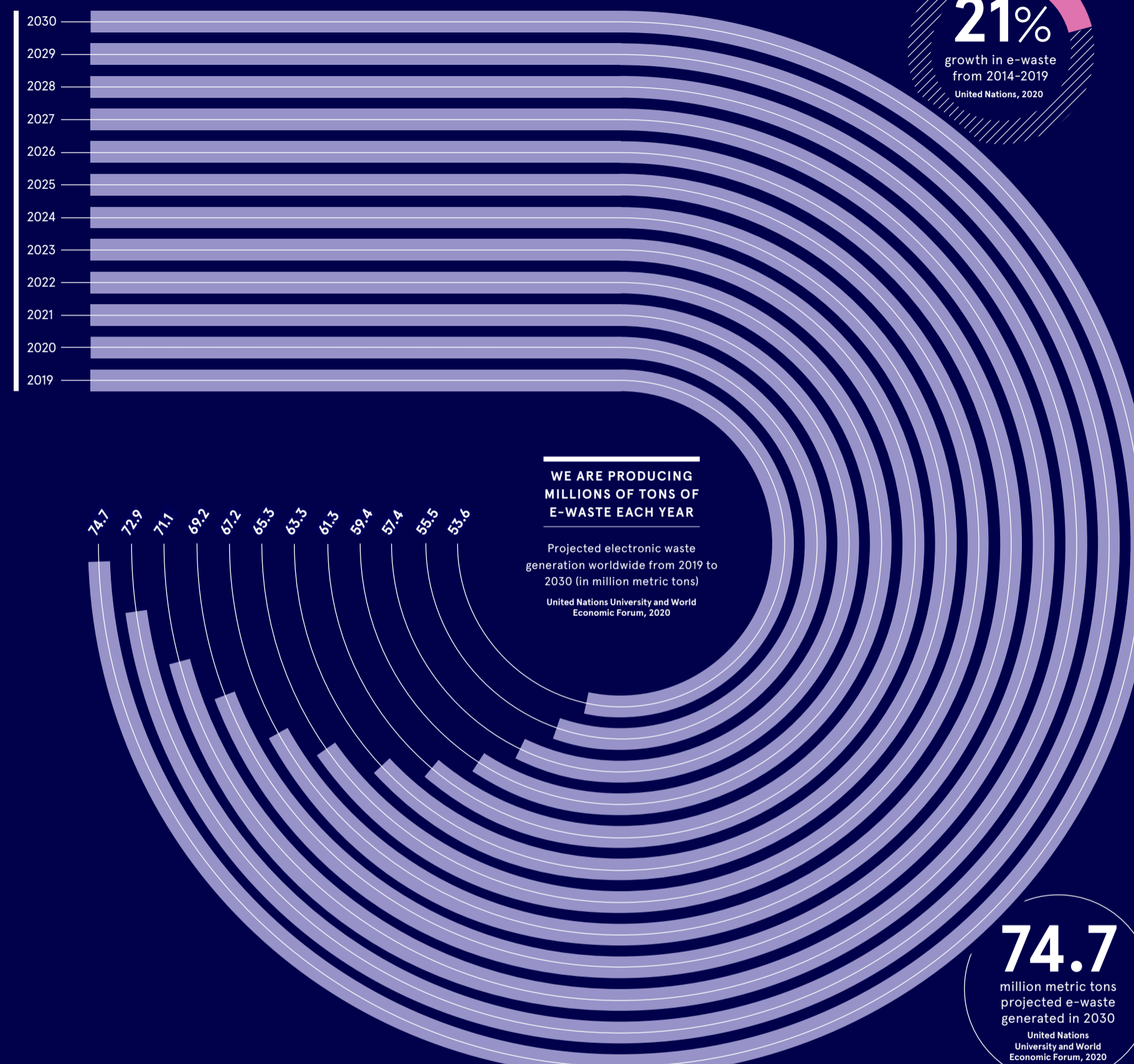
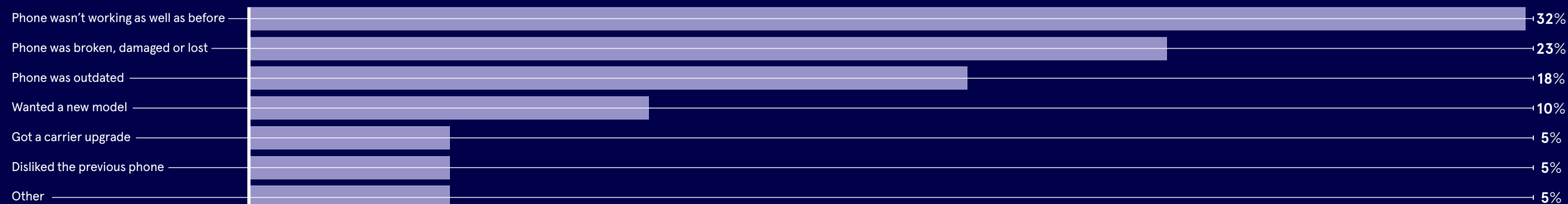


United Nations University and World Economic Forum, 2020

LACK OF PERFORMANCE AND BREAKAGE ARE AMONG THE TOP REASONS USERS CHANGE THEIR PHONE

Reasons users upgrade their phone

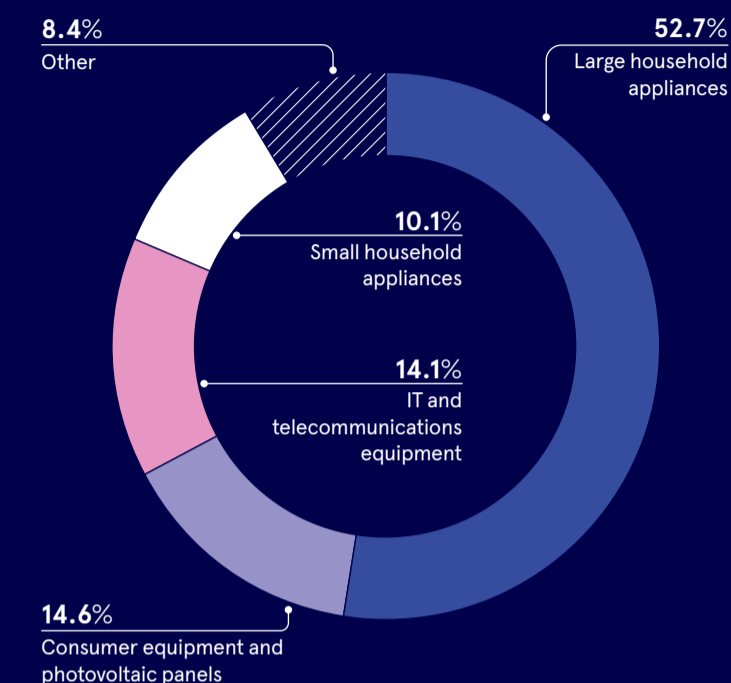
Ting, 2019



CONSUMER AND IT EQUIPMENT ACCOUNT FOR A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF E-WASTE

Types of e-waste in the EU

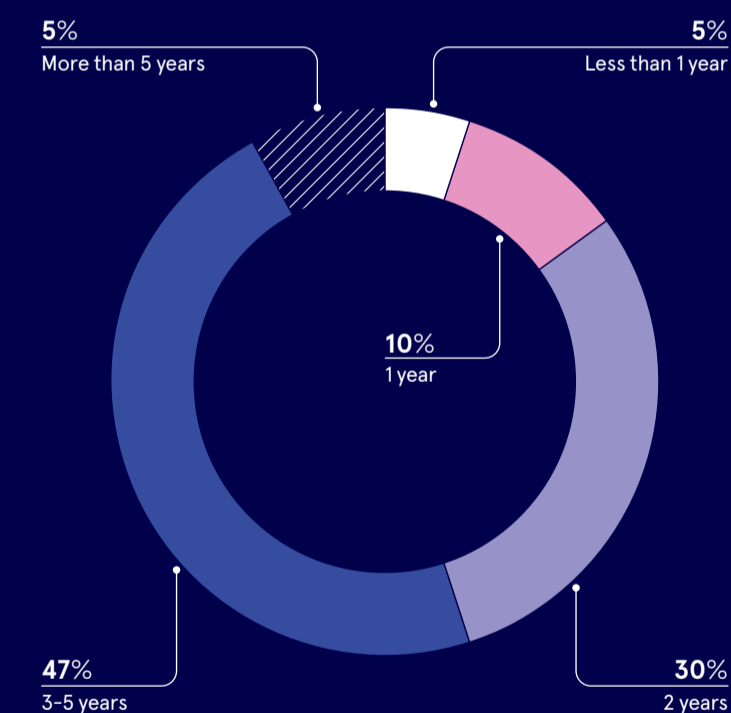
Eurostat, 2020



MANY USERS CHANGE DEVICES OFTEN

Length of time users kept their last phone

Ting, 2019



DEVICES

Rethinking hardware strategies

New models of working mean companies will need to provide tech support to staff wherever and whenever they're logged on

Rich McEachran

As Covid restrictions ease in the UK, businesses and staff are turning their thoughts to how the world of work will look going forward.

As we know, many office workers have been fully remote since the pandemic hit and are not keen to go back to pre-Covid ways of working. Employees increasingly want flexibility with regard to when they are required to be in the office, with more than 60% of UK workers surveyed by O2 Business earlier this year believing remote working should be the default.

But are businesses really ready for this remote working future? The same survey shows 65% of workers are confident their employers are prepared

for the future of work, but this suggests there are still around a third of businesses that may struggle.

Companies ranging from NatWest to GiffGaff and EY are planning for more flexible working policies going forward, with some even mandating some remote working as they cut back on office space. But this move towards flexibility requires more than just packing staff off with a laptop and wireless mouse, as happened at the start of the pandemic.

While software and connectivity are important, businesses will also have to rethink their technology strategies, requiring hardware vendors, service providers and users to be aligned. Here are some post-pandemic technology considerations.

1 Wireless connectivity that can cope with telecommunication

A major pain point for workers in the office prior to the pandemic was slow internet connection. The need for fast and reliable WiFi, especially for smooth communication with remote employees, will force businesses to boost their wireless connectivity, according to Brett Green, general manager at cybersecurity company Exclusive Networks.

"Office wireless networks are usually designed to cater for densely populated areas, centred around banks of tightly packed desks or meeting rooms. [Networks] are tuned to provide enough performance for good internet and email experiences," explains Green.

"Now, we're less focused on the density, due to the reduced footfall and more interested in providing flexible working spaces around more open layout environments that can deliver high-performing connectivity that supports video collaboration."

2 Remote patching regardless of location

Workers operating from multiple locations means IT departments don't have the visibility over devices - who's using them and how - that they did pre-pandemic. Companies have also become more susceptible to attacks from

Corporate resources are no longer restricted within a physical perimeter that IT departments can monitor and secure

cybercriminals, with the number of cyber security threats faced by businesses up 20% in 2020, compared with 2019, according to data from specialist internet service provider Beaming, in part caused by the shift to remote working.

"Corporate resources are no longer restricted within a physical perimeter that IT departments can monitor and secure," says Nigel Seddon, vice-president of EMEA West at IT asset and service management solutions firm Ivanti. "As more employees use personal devices and networks to access business applications, the line between business and personal data becomes blurred."

Businesses can educate employees on how to secure their devices to mitigate cyberattacks when accessing the office network remotely, but this won't eliminate cybersecurity risk altogether. They will also need to invest in the right tools to offer remote support, such as remote patching, which allows patches and updates to be installed on any application, software or device operating on a network.

3 Real-time monitoring of devices to improve worker experience

For remote hardware maintenance, Green is expecting to see a shift in investment towards real-time monitoring of user computing. This will enable businesses to access information, such as battery health, processor efficiency and how the memory is being used, on a worker's laptop. The data can be collated and analysed to provide a user experience score for each remote employee.

"Instead of relying on remote workers to report their problems, the IT service desk becomes a more proactive function, identifying those with poor user experience scores and using remote tools to identify the problems," explains Green.

The IT department can inform the user of the problem and provide them with a solution. But in the situation when there's no quick fix, businesses could alert field service technicians in the area to carry out maintenance, rather than send

someone out from the office, reducing IT downtime.

A big advantage of using a combination of real-time monitoring and remote patching is that workers won't have to send away their devices and wait for them to be repaired and returned to them. Instead, they will be able to work from the office or at home seamlessly and, hopefully, without much of a drop in productivity.

4 Leasing devices to reduce e-waste

The pandemic has nudged many businesses to accelerate their digital transformation ambitions and to embrace the Internet of Things. A downside of wider adoption of wireless and connected technologies, though, is that there are more devices both in and outside the office. This means more toxic electronic waste.

One solution to the problem is dematerialisation, argues Andy Tomkins, sustainability engagement manager at Canon EMEA. In an ideal scenario, a business would lease electronic equipment and devices then, at the end of the lease, the hardware provider would recall the products to be repaired, recycled or remanufactured.

"When a lease comes to an end, the manufacturer takes back the used device and refurbishes it as new for the next customer. By re-designing products in this way, [hardware] manufacturers can re-use parts from old devices to build new machines," says Tomkins.

Leasing technology is not suitable for every company, with its use depending on a particular business's technical requirements. But bumping sustainable practices, including electronic waste policies, to the top of the business agenda makes commercial sense and helps reduce carbon footprints.

In order for this to work, however, hardware manufacturers will have to be on board, stresses Tomkins: "All the products available under this model will need to be designed with maximum recovery of raw materials in mind."



When the pandemic hit, the charity started receiving requests from the UK. Over the past year, it has been providing computers for UK students, primarily during lockdown although its work is continuing. This was facilitated by the shift to working from home, which resulted in many companies owning desktop computers they no longer needed.

This was the situation investment company Rathbones found itself in. "As we adapted to the remote working environment at the onset of the pandemic, we found we had a large number of desktop computers across our 15 offices that were surplus to requirements," recalls Andy Brodie, chief operating officer. As a result, it donated just under 1,000 desktop computers, many of which were just a year old.

"The whole process was very straightforward and The Turing Trust handled everything from collection of the equipment to distribution," he adds.

The charity accepts donations of laptops, desktops, tablets and phones from both businesses and individuals. Devices that might be a bit old and slow for high-powered lawyers can still work reasonably well if they are given to a school or household instead but typically, the devices should be less than six years old.

"That way we can be fairly sure we're going to get at least three, if not five or more years of life out of it," says Turing.

Once they receive the devices, the data is wiped by volunteers. And while some volunteers are purely there to help, others get involved because it provides an opportunity to gain hardware IT skills. "Most people are a bit worried about breaking computers, if they're trying to learn for the first time, which is not something we're excessively concerned about," says Turing. Discovering this motivation among their volunteers allowed the charity to set up training courses in conjunction with job centres for people in long-term unemployment to gain hardware IT skills.

"The digital divide is a three-part problem," notes Ross Cockburn, the founder of the charity Reusing IT. "It's the device, it's the connectivity and then it's the education to use the kit." He explains that donating a computer may not be very helpful if the parents of a child do not have the confidence to

It still baffles me that many organisations seem to think the only way to destroy the data is to destroy the hard drive, or actually physically destroy the computer

navigate it or if the family is cut off from the internet.

When companies consider whether to donate their devices, a key question is who is going to take ownership of the removal of the data. "It still baffles me that many organisations seem to think the only way to destroy the data [on a device] is to destroy the hard drive or physically destroy the computer," says Cockburn.

The UK is currently the second-largest producer of e-waste in the world, with every person binning 23.9kg of gadgets and appliances a year on average, according to the Global E-Waste Monitor. In July, the UK introduced the 'right to repair' law to force manufacturers to make longer-lasting appliances but commerce continues to play a major role in tackling e-waste.

The charity Reusing IT works with computer donors including the University of Aberdeen, the University of St Andrews and NHS Lothian. The charity receives about 1,500 computers from NHS Lothian a year, with hard drives removed by NHS teams beforehand.

"We have a fantastic relationship with them," says Cockburn. "It's great for their internal morale," as staff members appreciate that a computer that might be worthless and redundant for the NHS can be transformed into a new computer for a child in Africa to get an education. Reflecting on recommerce, he says it's no different to asking: why do we have food banks and yet we destroy so much food? "We just destroy too many computers for the wrong reasons."

CSR

Bridging the digital divide

The UK produces tonnes of unnecessary e-waste every year. It is time for old devices to have a second life and empower disadvantaged communities

Marina Gerner

Over the course of the pandemic the issue of digital exclusion has been thrust into the spotlight as people who live in digital poverty have been increasingly left out in a world where everything from work and school, to doctors' appointments and socialising has become digital-first.

According to data from Ofcom, 6% of UK households were described as "offline" in March 2021, with its research finding that digital exclusion is "more disempowering than ever". Across the UK, 14.9 million adults have a 'low' digital engagement score - meaning they do not use email or online banking,

according to Lloyds Bank's 2021 Consumer Digital Index. Among people who claim Universal Credit, including for disability, this proportion rises to 35%, while there is also a geographic split with 33% put in the 'low' category in Wales but only 20% in London.

It is clear that getting everyone online is becoming more critical than ever. And as societies turn towards more circular economies, re-commerce, which is the process of reselling or repurposing second-hand goods, has become a driving force in bridging the digital divide.

With the option to wipe and refresh used computers, and mobile

phones, and pass them on so that they can have a second life, both businesses and households can help those who are excluded from the digital world.

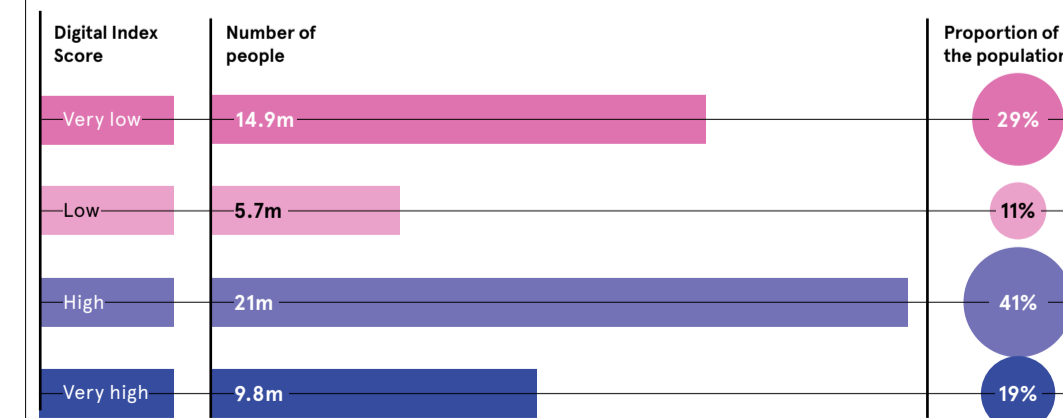
One charity focusing on this issue is The Turing Trust, which was set up by James Turing to honour the legacy of his great uncle Alan Turing. It refurbishes donated IT equipment and sends it to schools, primarily, over the past decade, in Ghana and Malawi.

"For most of the students we're working with in Malawi, it will be their first time ever touching a computer with their own hands," says Turing. "The fact that [the device] is a bit slow is irrelevant as long as it's still functional and, most importantly, has a few years of life left in it."

MANY PEOPLE ARE STILL STRUGGLING TO ENGAGE WITH KEY SERVICES ONLINE

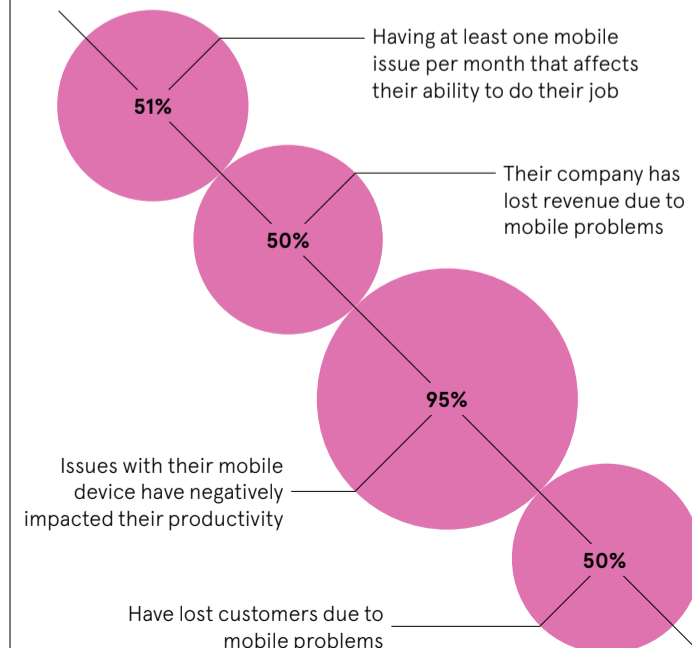
A measure of digital engagement among UK consumers where 'very low' is does not use email or online for banking and 'very high' is frequently uses internet banking and spends at least 60% of money online

Lloyds Bank, 2021



THE IMPACT OF DEVICES ISSUES

Percentage of enterprise tech users who report the following B2M, 2019



PRODUCTIVITY

Building engagement in a remote world

Hybrid working models look set to become the norm for many, which means businesses need to build technology ecosystems that promote productive, connected and engaged workforces

Magda Ibrahim

It is clear that hybrid working models are here to stay for many, particularly office workers. NatWest's chair Howard Davies is the latest executive to suggest cultural changes caused by the pandemic are here to stay, telling Bloomberg that the days of staff doing "five long days in the office" are gone. That shift is demanding the construction of technology ecosystems that promote productive, connected and engaged workforces. Connected technology is vital to employee engagement in this new way of working, equipping colleagues with the right devices and hardware reflecting the consumer technology experience.

Yet research from Ricoh shows around a third of employees often feel unmotivated while working remotely due to technology and communication issues. "For a long time, we have assumed technology is an IT problem, but it's not, it is a human problem," points out Jacob Morgan, author of The Future Leader and The Employee Experience Advantage. "When your technology doesn't work you get a very human reaction of being upset and frustrated. Similarly, when technology works well, you feel more engaged and connected. Giving employees the right tools helps with workplace flexibility, productivity, overall engagement,

communication and collaboration." The danger as business shifts from remote to hybrid working models is ensuring a level playing field for all employees. Proximity bias still poses a threat. While the pandemic has swept away many misconceptions about the need to be physically located in a specific workplace, the challenge remains to ensure employees working remotely aren't disadvantaged in a hybrid model. High-spec technology plays a major role in democratising the employee experience and maintaining engagement for all, allowing everyone the same experience and access to projects and connections regardless of their age, location, or seniority. For Victoria Usher, chief executive of the communications agency GingerMay, investment in technology can dismantle feelings there is "a primary group and a secondary group, as psychologically that is putting people at a disadvantage which can be very demoralising".

Especially where younger workers, who may be based in a house share or working from a bedroom in the family home, are concerned, it is essential they are equipped with the tools to carry out their jobs professionally and successfully to maintain their confidence. "Some people have great set-ups, but where they don't have the facilities, additional microphones and lights ensure a level playing field in how they are seen by clients and by other staff as well," she explains. "The home working environment must be 100% because it's a real block if you can't get things to work properly." One of the key tenets of engagement is allowing employees a voice that is genuinely heard. Whereas pre-pandemic, the role of employees in the technology strategy is likely to have been limited, it is increasingly recognised that meaningful dialogue and consultation is a significant driver for success. Closer collaboration between HR professionals and technology

leaders makes sense, while listening to employee feedback on what is working and what is not can improve the investment journey and engender trust. Yet in its report Workplace Technology: The Employee Experience, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development found only 35% of employees were consulted on the implementation of new technology. Involving employees in the technology process means fostering a sense of ownership over what is needed, moving away from a top-down approach. Consultation has been a priority for information management company Iron Mountain, which is currently working on a technology refresh programme that "addresses parity", explains chief technology officer Kimberly Anstett. "We have been working across the company to capture the voice of our employees, empowering them to be a part of driving their experience," says Anstett. "The investment in new, secure hardware has proven to benefit our



Luis Alvarez via Getty Image

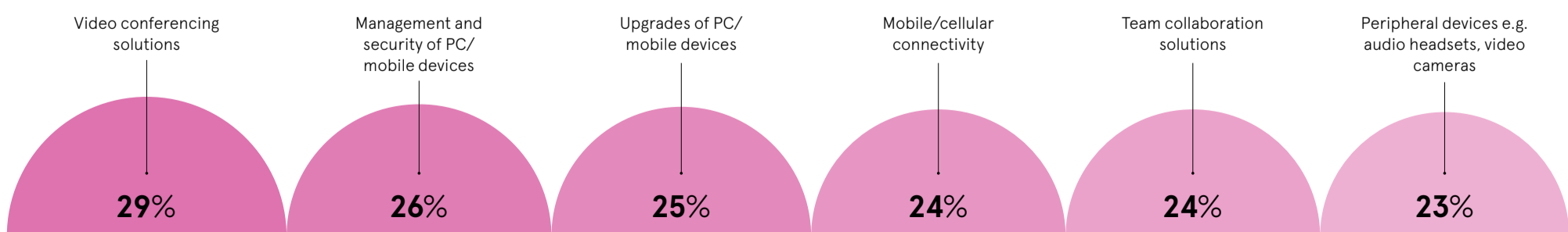
ensuring employees know it is ultimately the company held accountable for the tech experience has been crucial in developing a culture of trust. As the business moved to remote working, its mainly younger call centre workers found themselves in an environment apart from their familiar face-to-face collaborative workspaces. "For a lot of the call centre workers, it was the first time they have been given a laptop and other equipment, which is a responsibility for them," explains Pert. "But as a company we are responsible for our people and technology so, if we want them to work remotely on our behalf, it wouldn't be fair to make them feel wholly accountable for it." The business also allowed call centre employees access to messenger tools previously not encouraged, with a positive effect on employee engagement; in January 2021 its employee engagement survey recorded the highest score ever. "Everyone has been forced to make an investment in trust, with great effect," he adds. "Transparency comes through as one of the biggest builders of trust, it is almost about over-communicating. We went out of our way to make sure people felt they could ask anything, so they weren't sitting at home on their own having a problem." Where technology and employee engagement are concerned, there is no one size fits all solution. Frustration with devices or technology can be an issue at every level of a business and managing different seniority is a key consideration. For executives, the ability to take control of their own technology destiny is equally as important as providing IT support and levelling the playing field for more junior workers. With the shift from the office being the place with the most advanced technology, to the home or other remote locations, there is an expectation from employees that work devices mirror the seamless nature of consumer devices. This can be a change in mindset for IT professionals, who need to fully understand what employees need to be productive, engaged and excited to do their jobs. Following a merger in September last year, wealth management and professional services group Tilney Smith & Williamson needed to ensure all its employees remained engaged. It is a priority that "anyone, anywhere is able to contribute effectively within their team", says the company's chief technology officer Mayank Prakash. He adds: "Software tools like Teams and Zoom have become synonymous with both home-based and hybrid working but it is just as important to have the right devices to give employees the end-to-end digital experience they receive as consumers at home and rightly expect as employees at work." As work becomes more flexible, employees need the right devices and tools to stay connected, be productive, and to promote engagement and creativity. A strategic approach joining technology and people professionals, with a focus on meaningful consultation and support, will underpin enhanced employee engagement as hybrid working becomes embedded in business life.

“For a long time we have assumed technology is an IT problem, but it's not, it is a human problem”

workforce greatly as we grow and maintain a hybrid of remote, office and frontline employees." A new report from IDC found 62% of organisations committed to digital transformation are investing in peripherals such as headsets and cameras this year to enable technology parity for all employees. On average, at least a third of businesses across Europe, North America and Asia Pacific are planning upgrades to PC or mobile devices, showing a commitment to making technology work for all. Defining the right technology for the job is paramount as employees become increasingly independent from a single physical location. Making assumptions about employees' technology capabilities can quickly lead to digital isolation, which is where consultation and taking an individual approach to workers can make a huge difference. For Josh Pert, chief technology officer at Virgin Experience Days,

THE TOP INVESTMENTS FOR TECHNOLOGY PARITY IN A HYBRID WORKFORCE

Percentage of European companies who say they are investing in the following



IDC, 2020



Why customers want effortless engagement

Dealing with customer problems at the first go can have huge benefits both for the customer and for the business


It is well known in business that the better the customer service, the greater the customer loyalty and the healthier the bottom line. A massive 91% of customers claim they would buy again based on a good experience, according to a survey by Salesforce last year. And since 75% of new customers have been trying out different brands during the pandemic, according to McKinsey, companies have to pull out all the stops to secure their loyalty. At a time when customers have been glued to devices of every shape and form, making sure they are getting the most from their technology is paramount. In many cases, the pandemic has been the catalyst companies needed to make the leap towards a more tech-driven customer support framework. But the pressure to make this change has been there for some time. "Fundamentally, the cost of serving customers is going up. Consumer technology is now more complicated and there is a lot of pressure on channels. The pandemic simply accelerated that transition," insists Matt Dyson, general manager of LucidCX, a Likerwise company.

“Fundamentally, you have to understand the voice of the customer. Once you do that the effects are profound”

While many companies have implemented chatbots and added 'how to' videos to their websites, the approach to truly great customer support should be more deeply integrated and is more complicated than simply adding another tool. It begins with a strategic shift that happens from the point of sale. "A lot of companies assume customer care has to be reactive, but there's a huge opportunity to create higher customer satisfaction through proactive education when they first buy a product. The vast majority of issues - 76% - are down to education rather than physical issues with their device," Dyson says. With customer onboarding the first line of defence, companies must strike a balance. "When a customer buys a device, they're not going to have a 45-minute call about it. That's terminally sad," Dyson admits. However, interactive videos where users can skip the more obvious - to them - parts and proactive emails that flag certain functionalities immediately improve the customer's relationship with their new device and head problems off at the pass. Customer education certainly has the potential to remove a great deal of initial frustration. But when there is a real issue, it is vital it's dealt with swiftly, capably and effectively. In many instances, this can still be achieved through a technology-only solution. Critical to maintaining the customer relationship is helping them find a solution via one of the brand's own channels, rather than forcing them to resort to searching elsewhere. But this is something that is often easier said than done. Dyson says: "The ability to execute a digital-first strategy is so important but it's so much more than putting the

knowledge base online. It needs to have an effective, natural language-based search engine. Every problem should be dealt with in one interaction and the best solution offered first time." Should customers end up with a call centre representative, it should still be a one call, one agent interaction, whatever the problem. Using technology such as Likerwise WizeView to create 'instant experts', putting a single source of truth at their fingertips - from device diagnostics and problem-solving guidelines to customer data - there is no more need for the customer to be passed from pillar to post in search of a solution. With the potential to train an agent from scratch in as little as nine minutes, agents can now handle queries that would almost always require a second line of support. In some cases, this has meant companies have been able to halve their call centre volumes. The numbers certainly speak for themselves. With first-call resolution as a result of instant experts and digital call deflection, companies can take large volumes of customer support calls and move them into self-service, in many cases migrating 40% of a hugely complicated triage journey online. Technology may be the enabler, but at its heart it is a customer experience philosophy that drives success. "Fundamentally, you have to understand the voice of the customer," Dyson concludes. "Once you do that the effects are profound." For more information please visit [likewise.com](https://www.likewise.com)

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We protect, support, repair and renew – whenever, wherever.

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More businesses are turning to Likewise for their complete range of after sale support services.

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