CIO
FROM IDG

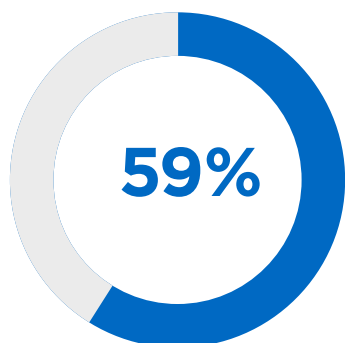# IT LEADERS RESPOND DURING THE PANDEMIC

Addressing remote work policies, security, network upgrades and automation

Spectrum
ENTERPRISE

With the first rush to adapt to the disruption of the pandemic behind them, companies now need to address the myriad challenges of supporting a workforce that is likely to remain predominantly remote for some time to come.

A recent Spectrum Enterprise-IDG survey of IT leaders at U.S. companies indicates that they continue to prioritize network modernization, collaboration, security, and business resiliency. Moreover, they believe that the steps they took in those areas to maintain operations in a crisis are the foundation for delivering strategic advantages in the long term. The COVID-19 pandemic has stress-tested many organizations, but companies that shift their response from reactive to proactive will be better able to stake out a competitive advantage in a business environment that seems increasingly likely to be the new normal. According to IDG's CIO Pandemic Business Impact Survey, 2020, **CEOs' top priority for IT continues to be leading digital business/digital transformation initiatives, and 59% of respondents agree that the effects of the pandemic are accelerating their digital transformation efforts.** Organizations that can move past the response phase to seize the opportunity to continue that acceleration will widen the gap between themselves and less agile competitors.

IDG research indicates a correlation between a strategic role for IT and a proactive approach to IT priorities. For example, CIOs who are proactively identifying business needs and opportunities, and making recommendations on technologies and vendors, are seen as more strategic by their LOB peers.[1] Even as the pandemic gained momentum, CIOs told IDG they were focused on leading digital transformation efforts.[2]

From cybersecurity to customer service to business process reengineering, shifting from reacting to the pandemic to a proactive approach has proven to help IT leaders sustain digital momentum and build innovative products and services that create a competitive advantage.

The impact of remote work

Although 9% of IT leaders say they never adopted remote work, the survey shows most companies are currently mixing onsite and remote work to varying degrees. In fact, the majority expect at least some of their workforce will still be working remotely in June 2021. This is having significant impact on investment plans, as IT leaders look at bolstering infrastructure from security to networks to collaboration technologies. That's why **85% said a helping of new technology or services to support remote work is on the menu.**
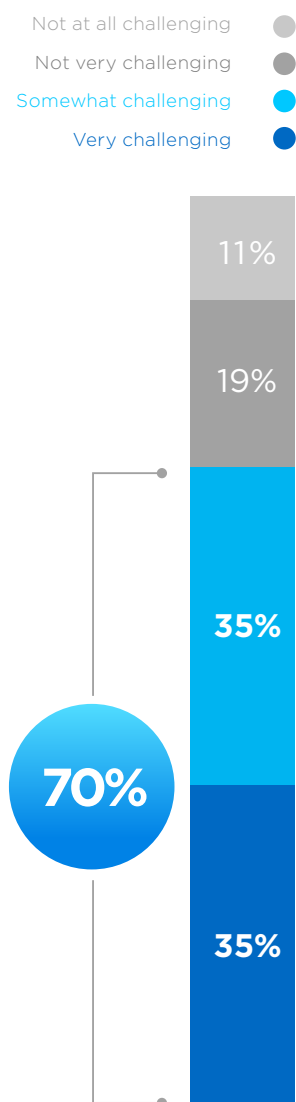
Regardless of company size, 17% of respondents say all of their employees will return to the office by June 2021. However, most predict that a quarter, half or a full three-quarters of their employees will continue to work remotely after that. In addition, 7% of respondents say all of their employees are currently working remotely and that they have no plans to change that.

Interestingly, more enterprises than small and midsize businesses (SMBs) expect to see employees returning to office locations. However, this may not mean that larger companies have a greater need for employees to be physically present. It's equally likely that larger enterprises may have the resources to help maintain a regulatory compliant working environment. Additionally, they may be better able to allow employees to work at a safe distance because they may have numerous offices that are more spacious to work in.

59%

of respondents claim that effects of the pandemic are accelerating their digital transformation efforts.

Spectrum▸
ENTERPRISE

Given how many organizations expect a significant percentage of their employees to continue working remotely for a year or more, it's not surprising that ensuring a more flexible work environment for some time to come is one of IT leaders' pressing concerns. More than a third (35%) of survey respondents say it's currently "very challenging" to provide alternatives to face-to-face communications and to support remote work, and another 35% say it's "somewhat challenging." In addition. 70% call their current network infrastructure a specific barrier to providing long-term alternatives to in-person interactions.

Investing in the new workscape

The sudden disruption of the pandemic made respondents acutely aware of how unprepared their organizations were to pivot to and maintain a distributed workforce. They feel they lack sufficient investment in multiple critical areas, including:

- **Security** (46%).
- **Emerging technologies** like AI, machine learning, and augmented/virtual reality (40%).
- **Business process automation** (38%).
- **Enhanced networking** such as SD-WAN and edge computing (36%).
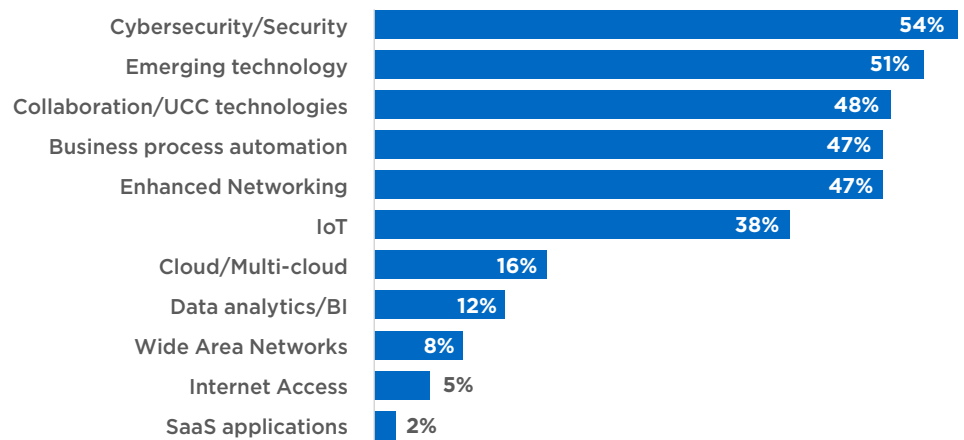- **Collaboration/UCC technologies** (34%).

Current business needs differ slightly by company size, but all cite security as a top priority. Respondents at larger companies are more likely to say their organization lacks the necessary level of investment to meet those needs. Looking at respondents by size:

- **Enterprises with 1000+ employees** say they need to increase their investment in security, emerging technology, collaboration/UCC technology, business process automation, and enhanced networking.
- **Midsize companies with 400-999 employees** likewise have similar priorities, saying they need to spend more on security, business process automation, emerging technology, and enhanced networking.
- **Small companies with fewer than 400 employees** say they don't spend enough on security, cloud/multi-cloud, emerging technology, and WANs.

"Many companies haven't done network contingency planning to the extent they probably should have, so the pandemic has helped highlight those weak points in their plans," says Bob Schroeder, Vice President, Data Product Management, Spectrum Enterprise. "It's heightened the awareness that you need a plan and you need to ensure it's fully implemented."

As leaders identify where they feel their IT investments fall short of current needs, they're taking this opportunity to evaluate their current budgets, and they plan to reallocate their investments to better suit the "new normal." In particular, companies of all sizes said they feel they aren't investing enough in security. That's why **half of all IT leaders surveyed say they expect to increase their cybersecurity spending over the next 12 months.** In addition, more than one-third expect to increase spending on data analytics (38%) and enhanced networking (37%).

Percentage of IT leaders who see their current network infrastructure as a barrier to providing long-term alternatives to in-person interactions.

Not at all challenging ⬤
Not very challenging ⬤
Somewhat challenging ⬤
Very challenging ⬤

11%

19%

35%

70%

35%

Source: IDG Communications

Spectrum
ENTERPRISE

Top investment priorities for enterprises with 1,000 or more employees

|	
Cybersecurity/Security	54%
Emerging technology	51%
Collaboration/UCC technologies	48%
Business process automation	47%
Enhanced Networking	47%
IoT	38%
Cloud/Multi-cloud	16%
Data analytics/BI	12%
Wide Area Networks	8%
Internet Access	5%
SaaS applications	2%

Source: IDG Communications

Other spending priorities vary somewhat by company size. Enterprises are significantly more likely than smaller companies to plan to invest more in IoT and SaaS technologies. Small and midsize businesses, by contrast, are more likely to plan increased investments in data analytics and emerging technologies.

However, in an acknowledgement that a remote-oriented work dynamic is likely here to stay, nearly a quarter of survey respondents expect equal or greater investment in *any* area of IT. In fact, **a large majority—85%—say their organization is very likely to acquire new technology and/or services to support remote work**—76% of enterprises, 85% of midsize companies, and 93% of small companies.

Likelihood of acquiring new technology to address current work dynamic.
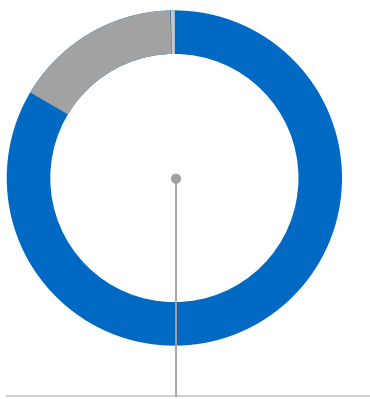
85% Very likely

0% Somewhat likely

15% Not very likely

1% Not at all likely

Source: IDG Communications

Digital collaboration challenges

The most dramatic and noticeable change in the current business environment has been the abrupt and near-total elimination of in-person interactions among employees as well as between employees and customers. More than four-fifths of respondents say these interactions have historically been critical or somewhat important to their organization's success; the smaller the company, the more important respondents report that face-to-face connections have historically been. It's therefore no surprise that most IT leaders (73%) report that using technology to enable digital interactions became significantly or somewhat more important between April and June 2020—that is, the first three months of the U.S. response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Because it's become vital to their organization's continued success, IT leaders are figuring out ways to overcome multiple obstacles to support remote interaction and collaboration. Just over a third of IT leaders in the survey say they're dealing with a lack of necessary connectivity for employees, incomplete rollouts of new technology, and lower IT productivity due to the demands of network administration.

In addition, as more employees interact with each other and customers remotely, security and compliance are more important—and more difficult—than ever.

Spectrum►
ENTERPRISE

A full 75% of IT leaders say their existing security measures are challenged to keep up with the surge in remote work and customer interactions. A third of them also say they're concerned about their ability to protect data in the cloud and at remote locations.

"Given that BYOD [bring your own device] is inevitable with remote workers, security and support are a big challenge," says Schroeder of Spectrum Enterprise. "In an environment where many people aren't in the office, companies need to think about security, access, and bandwidth. What applications and clouds do users need to perform their job functions effectively? How easy are their tools to use? How do they train and support users when there are a variety of devices in the environment and in-person support isn't possible?"

Organizations need to ensure that short-term adaptations evolve into wise long-term strategic choices.

Conclusion: Focus on infrastructure and networks

Companies may have been forced into either making unplanned changes or accelerating scheduled upgrades to address the IT needs of an unexpected shift to remote work. IT staffs have been under enormous pressure to keep the business moving forward and employees productive. What began as urgent measures to stay operational have transformed into strategic best practices and priorities for investment. In the process, IT is learning to shift from being reactive to proactive. IT leaders now expect long-term benefits from the changes they're making—particularly enhanced productivity and improved security.

Organizations need to ensure that short-term adaptations evolve into wise long-term strategic choices. It's about having the right infrastructure and partnering with a nationwide network service provider that can provide the full range of internet solutions that organizations need, along with the expertise and support to help plan, design, implement, and operate the right solutions.

It's clear from the survey that IT leaders see the need to focus on infrastructure—network architecture, tools and applications for communication and collaboration, and virtual private networks. A solid infrastructure will ensure a resilient foundation is in place to support workers wherever they're located.

"The need for companies to have effective remote work policies exploded literally overnight, so a network service provider who can quickly deliver high-performing network, security and communications solutions cost-effectively is absolutely essential to helping companies sustain and maintain their momentum," says Schroeder.

To learn more about the technologies to help you stay connected in the new normal, visit our website.

About Spectrum Enterprise
Spectrum Enterprise, a part of Charter Communications, Inc., is a national provider of scalable, fiber technology solutions serving America's largest businesses and communications service providers. The broad Spectrum Enterprise portfolio includes networking and managed services solutions: Internet access, Ethernet access and networks, Voice and TV solutions. Spectrum Enterprise's industry-leading team of experts works closely with clients to achieve greater business success by providing solutions designed to meet their evolving needs. More information about Spectrum Enterprise can be found at enterprise.spectrum.com

Spectrum►
ENTERPRISE