



Telstra Business Intelligence | 

Advancing small business in a new economy.

Insights and advice to help your business thrive in a changing world.

Welcome to Telstra Business Intelligence – a series of insight reports exploring how digital technology is changing the landscape for Australia's small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) and how to take advantage of the opportunities this creates.

The Telstra Business Intelligence Study saw us survey 1,000 small business employees and 450 SMBs (businesses with fewer than 100 employees) to understand how business owners and employees are using digital technology in 2021.

So far in this series, we've covered Digital Marketing, the online Customer Experience and Managing Risks Online. This report's focus is on how technology can help you become more productive, encourage new ways of working, and build the capacity and skills of you and your people.

When COVID-19 transformed how we work, the use of digital technologies reached a new tipping point. But the pace of change isn't slowing down. And while many SMBs see the benefits of technology, our latest research shows that the next steps aren't always so clear.

To help you on this journey, we've gathered insights and advice from industry experts and interviewed SMBs who've used digital technologies to gain a competitive edge. We hope the information in this report helps you keep adapting so you can thrive, whatever the future brings.

Anne Da Cunha, Small Business Executive, Telstra.

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4.0 THRIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE
Introduction

Staying ahead
of the curve in
today's changing
landscape.

It's the right time for new thinking.

When living and working conditions changed almost overnight in response to COVID-19, the pace of digital adoption accelerated to keep up. If you relied on technology to meet the challenges of this shift, you weren't alone. Our research confirms the vast majority of SMBs felt digital tools helped them stay connected with customers, keep their business running and adapt how they work.

Whether your business had to change to meet new expectations or experienced a downturn in (or even excess) demand, it's likely technology helped you through.

But this is just the beginning. And, looking forward, while our survey suggests the SMB community is optimistic about what the future holds, people realise things will be different than before.



“Even before COVID, it would have been naive to think technology wasn’t going to continue to drive changes in our lives and workplaces. The real issue, then, is how we respond and prepare ourselves for the future.

The ‘new normal’ for work will be flexible and geographically dispersed. It will offer a hybrid choice of digital and physical tools and spaces tailored to your role and tech needs, preferences and expectations. Work will be something you do, not somewhere you go.”

Andy Penn, CEO, Telstra

77%

of small businesses surveyed are optimistic about the outlook for their business in 2021.



70%

of small businesses surveyed agree that they need to continue to adapt how they do business in 2021 – it won't be the same as before.

Technology may be on your mind much more than before.

Despite the uncertainty COVID-19 caused, our survey shows the top concerns of Australian SMBs – finding and serving customers, managing revenue and cash flow, and having the time and capacity to get everything done – remained stable year on year. But what has changed is the increase in concerns related to technology.

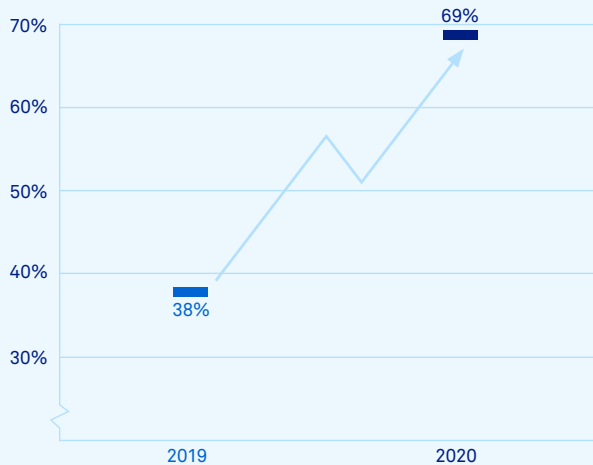
In fact, 69% of SMBs placed technology-related topics in their top 10 concerns in 2020 – up from 38% in 2019, suggesting technology might be taking up more of your time and thinking than before. These concerns range from staying secure from cyber threats to improving existing technology infrastructure.



“More than ever, COVID has pushed us into looking into online technologies, websites and ordering. We now want to have a cloud-based stocktake database and ordering system.”

Small business owner, food service, 10–19 employees

The increase in technology-related concerns from 2019 to 2020.



- ↑ Secure from cyber security threats
- ↑ A more effective digital presence (including website)
- ↑ Modernising the business with new technology
- ↑ Optimising our existing technology infrastructure

Source: Telstra Business Intelligence Insights Study December 2020. Question: Which of these would you say are the biggest concerns in your business right now? Please select your top 5 concerns.

What’s more, your competitors may be adopting technology at a faster rate. More than 3 in 5 SMBs we surveyed agree they will prioritise using technology to become more efficient in 2021, while 2 in 5 are worried they need to catch up to their competitors in this area.

64%

of SMBs surveyed agree it’s a priority for them to use digital technologies better so they can become more efficient in 2021.



40%

of SMBs surveyed agree they are worried their business needs to catch up to competitors when it comes to technology.

The opportunities of digital technology.

'Digital technology' is a broad term: it refers to electronic tools, systems, devices and resources that generate, store or process information and data. These days, that's many things. But while it might be a catch-all term, in business it's used to describe solutions that can help you compete, streamline processes and improve how you work. This is also known as 'digitising'.

Digitising has two parts to it, both of which are ripe with opportunity.



Customer-facing tools

You can use digital tools to improve the customer-facing parts of your business, like eCommerce, digital marketing and customer relationship management (CRM) software.



Internal processes

Inside of your business, you can use technology to collaborate, automate laborious tasks (like payments and invoicing, scheduling and HR processes), and help manage your logistics and supply chain.

Change is worthwhile, even if it's not always easy.

For all of technology's benefits, understanding and implementing it in your business can be challenging. And with almost limitless solutions and possibilities on the market, it can be a process to figure out which ones are right for you. A lack of time and knowledge can also pose problems. That's why it can be tempting to stick with what you know – especially if it's working well enough right now.

But as customers' and employees' expectations evolve, the old ways of doing things are becoming outdated. That's why the best approach is to focus on the advantages of these new technologies instead of the challenges.



“Technology can help my business by connecting customers to us, employees to each other, and helping make cyber security better.”

*Small business owner,
electricity, gas and water,
5–9 employees*

70%

of small businesses surveyed agree that technology is now about much more than efficient working – it's become part of how they compete.



“Technology is changing so fast, it's hard to make relevant decisions of where to invest in new/updated systems.”

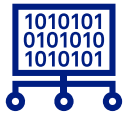
*Small business owner,
transport and storage,
sole trader*

Are you ready to take advantage in the new economy?

The pandemic forced businesses to embrace technology. But to stay competitive in this new environment, you'll need to keep up the momentum. You can do that by taking an ongoing interest in technology and being more proactive and strategic in how you implement it.

Having the right advice from technology suppliers is also essential. Our research found that around half of employees surveyed say they want more support from providers to help them use technology more productively. With this in mind, our aim in this report is to offer some of that support through insights and expert advice.

In the sections ahead, we explore the opportunities of digital technology for SMBs, including:



Working more efficiently by digitising your processes.



Boosting performance, building capabilities and bridging any digital skills gaps in your business.

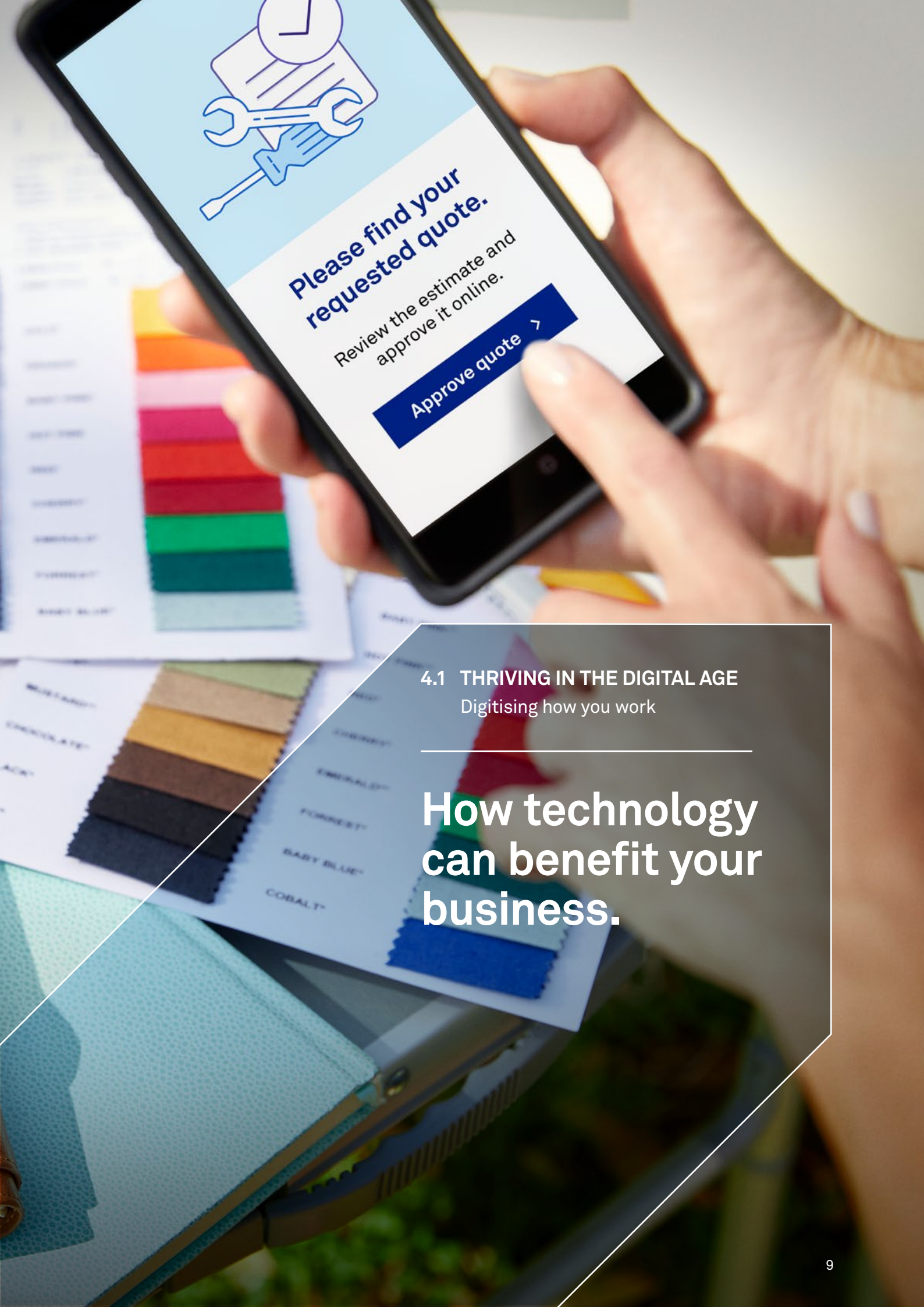


Enabling remote work so you and your people can work from anywhere.



Staying up to date with the changing tech space and the opportunities on the horizon.

Keep reading to find out how your business can thrive in the digital age.



4.1 THRIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE
Digitising how you work

How technology
can benefit your
business.

Save time and achieve more with technology.

Digital technology can deliver concrete benefits to many areas of your business and help you stay competitive. This section will outline why SMBs may be well placed to adopt new ways of working; the areas of your business that could benefit from technology; and some of the key tools that can help your business collaborate, become more efficient and improve your supply chain management.

Small businesses are well-placed to adapt quickly.

Being a small business carries some significant advantages when introducing new technologies that give you an edge.

For starters, it's easier to be agile, flexible and embrace change when you're in a small team. And your business may not have invested as much in older technologies as a larger company, making it easier to shift to a pay-as-you-go model for newer software.

But technology adoption isn't a one-and-done project – it's a process. So, ask yourself: do you have all the right things in place or is something missing? Can your business automate even more processes to set itself up for future success?



“We are considering implementing a number of tech tools. The trick is how to integrate them and get them all to work together when they're designed separately for different purposes.”

*Small business employee,
finance and insurance,
2 employees*

67%

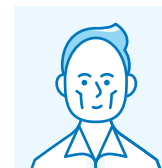
of SMBs surveyed want to improve how they use digital technologies to connect with new customers and deliver a great customer experience in 2021.



58%

of employees surveyed agree they could use a wider range of digital tools to deliver a better experience for customers.

Streamline your day-to-day operations with technology.



“[Technology] could free up time in day-to-day management tasks, and this would allow me to devote more time to business development and expansion.”

Small business owner, transport and storage, 2 employees

Technology can profoundly improve your business’s processes. Think about your top concerns – there are probably already technological solutions that can solve them.

Want a quick win? Take a look at the tasks and processes under each of the below business areas – many digital tools already exist today that can help you fulfil these functions, depending on your needs.



Collaboration

- Share visibility of support tickets.
- Manage shifts and rosters.
- Collaborate on ideas using virtual whiteboards and sticky notes.



Finance and accounting

- Capture all expenses via a mobile app.
- Automate payroll.
- Run performance analytics.



Marketing

- Be found by customers online.
- Have an up-to-date website with the information customers need.
- Leverage reviews and social media.



Customer experience

- Communicate with customers.
- Meet transaction and delivery expectations.
- Create customer loyalty.
- Protect customer data.



HR and people

- Onboard new employees.
- Manage leave and rosters.
- Manage timesheets.
- Manage compliance and safety standards.



Supply and logistics

- Track outgoing deliveries.
- Manage inventory and incoming supplies.
- Use online marketplaces for sourcing stock, components or supplies.

Find more insights, strategies and tips in our other [Telstra Business Intelligence insights reports](#), which cover [Digital Marketing](#), [Customer Experience](#) and [Managing Risks Online](#).

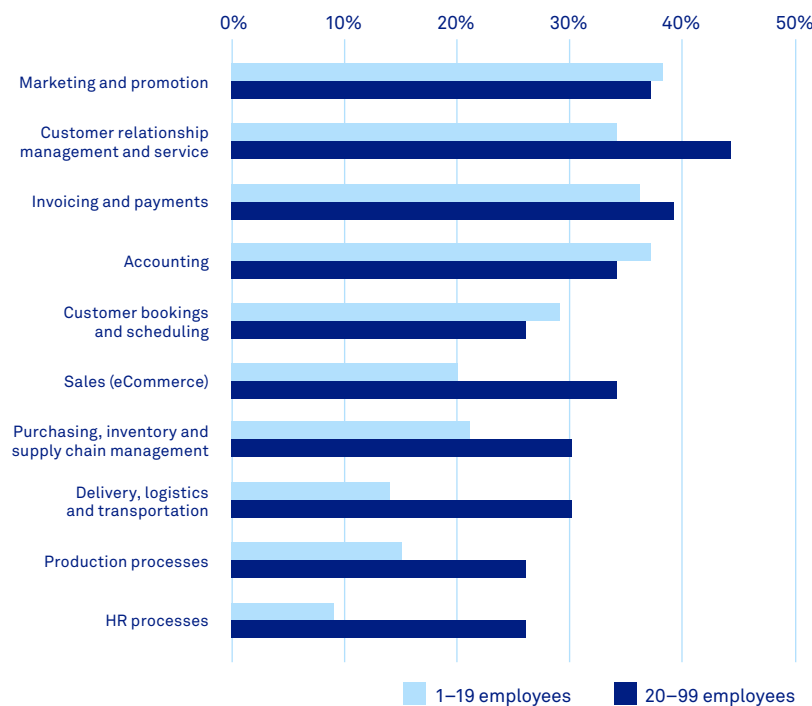
Opportunities exist across all areas of your business.

On the whole, our research shows that SMBs are seeing the opportunities and benefits of adopting new technology. In fact, 4 in 5 businesses with under 20 employees and 9 in 10 businesses with over 20 employees recognise at least one area of their business that could benefit from greater use of digital technology in the next two years.

Many SMBs are considering using more technology to interact with customers, including marketing and promotion, customer relationship management, sales and customer bookings or scheduling. Our Telstra Business Intelligence report on [Customer Experience](#) further explores how consumers increasingly expect to connect with businesses online.

But customer-facing technology is only half the picture. You can digitise your internal operations too, which can deliver benefits for your work-life balance, your productivity and, ultimately, your customers.

Digital services and tools where SMBs see greater benefit.



Source: Telstra Business Intelligence Insights Study December 2020. Question: In the next two years, which of these areas of your business do you think could benefit from greater use of digital technologies?

For internal processes (like HR and production) and logistical tasks (like delivery, transportation, purchasing, inventory and supply chain management), our survey shows that larger SMBs are seeing opportunities for digitising that smaller businesses may be overlooking.

If you're looking to grow, it's worth considering where these bigger businesses are seeing value in adopting new technology and if there are any opportunities you may be missing.

Solve new business problems with technology.

All SMBs will have different purposes for technology. Some will use it to improve current processes while others will seek to create entirely new business opportunities.

Take the recent example of the pandemic: some SMBs adapted quickly and implemented technology to allow new ways of working as an immediate survival strategy; others took time out to work behind the scenes, emerging with a new or stronger business.

Keep in mind that business conditions and technology evolve, so it's worth regularly reviewing your tech to make sure you have the best solutions in place.

Improve teamwork through technology.

Whether you're a sole trader or part of a small, medium or growing team, many SMBs are trying to solve similar challenges when it comes to collaborating within a business or with customers and suppliers. These include:



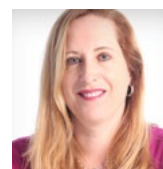
- The need to get work done from anywhere with anyone.
- Change in team culture and how people interact.
- Maintaining employee efficiency and morale.
- Using solutions that don't always work well together.
- Lack of unified experience with meetings and calls.
- Phone systems that weren't designed to be used remotely.

With the right mix of digital technology, you can simplify your meetings and calling experience and make work tasks and files visible across teams, all while maintaining an enterprise-grade secure environment.

Samantha Zammit, the SMB Modern Workplace Lead at Microsoft, explains how remote, flexible working can foster collaboration anywhere, anytime, and shares some strategies to make it work.

"SMBs all around the world are quickly pivoting in a few key areas," she says. "They are making new work arrangements for their employees and customers. They are adopting new tools and ways to remain connected through online meetings and video conferencing."

In the past, there were huge costs involved to get the best-in-class server-based collaboration solutions. With cloud technology, tools that enable teamwork are widely available on a pay-as-you-go basis. "This is all productive use of technology that once was out of reach for small businesses," Samantha says.



"[SMBs] are adopting new tools and ways to remain connected through online meetings and video conferencing."

*Samantha Zammit,
SMB Modern Workplace Lead,
Microsoft*

Cloud technology tools can save you time and money.

Digital cloud tools automate time-consuming tasks, reducing errors and freeing up your time for higher value work.

Jon Manning, an economist at Australian accounting software heavyweight MYOB, explains how digital tools help make your workflow more efficient. “There is a digital footprint or trail that you can follow up on, easily keeping track of any payments due and received, and allowing accounting partners access to the data they need,” he says. Cloud software can even automate reconciliation with online bank feeds, and it can chase invoice payments on your behalf.

Another advantage of cloud-based digital tools is they can be used anytime on any device, ensuring you and your employees are working with the most up-to-date information, no matter the task.



“Using digital solutions for accounting, invoicing and payments can save you time and money while improving accuracy.”

Jon Manning, Economist, MYOB

“There is remote accessibility, which is great for SMBs on the go and teams working at different locations.”

Jon Manning, Economist, MYOB

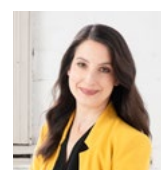
Security threats – a pre-pandemic issue that has only escalated with increased remote work – can potentially create significant downtime. Cloud security features, like secure storage and two-factor authentication, can reduce the risk of a breach and provide peace of mind to business owners. The Telstra Business Intelligence report on [Managing Risks Online](#) covers how to keep your business secure in detail.

Technology can make your supply chain sourcing smoother.

When it comes to sourcing stock and supplies, many SMBs rely on email, phone calls and meetings. But technology can make this process easier, more akin to the retail experience than the traditional wholesale one.

Imagine a ‘shopping cart’-style supply chain experience with better details, analytics and the ability to source Australian-made products as needed.

Einat Sukenik, co-founder and CEO of TradeSquare, an Australian supply chain start-up, explains where the SMB benefit comes in. “Online marketplaces open up new opportunities for both vendors and buyers by removing the time-consuming processes of opening new accounts, credit and reference checks, and general onboarding.”



“Online marketplaces can bring a high degree of automation to the process, allowing businesses to access suppliers’ inventory 24/7 and seamlessly order online.”

Einat Sukenik, Co-founder and CEO, TradeSquare

Check your technology fundamentals.

There's value in investing in digital apps and cloud services, but if you want to get the most out of your tools, you need the right enablers in place. The fundamentals include:



Devices

Can you complete tasks on the go and support cloud-based applications on your desktop? Replacing old devices with the latest smartphones, tablets or computers can create efficiencies and allow you to work from anywhere.



Support

Great digital tools and reliable support go hand in hand. That way, you and your team will be able to use the tools properly and resolve the problems that crop up from time to time. Strategic planning is essential to ensure you're ahead of both problems and opportunities.



Connectivity

Not all connections are created equal. Standard broadband may not meet all your business needs, and you may get better bandwidth, speed or performance by switching connections or exploring enhanced and premium connectivity options. Your business could also benefit from 5G back-up, a modem-based solution that kicks in if there's a fixed internet outage.

Find out more about [Telstra's small business internet solutions](#).



Security

The shift to digital has brought plenty of opportunities for SMBs, but it's also increased the risk of a cyber incident, the impacts of which can be severe. Online security can help you build customer trust, protect your bottom line and maintain business continuity.

Read our Telstra Business Intelligence report on [Managing Risks Online](#) to learn more about how to keep your business secure.

Find out more about how [Telstra Business Tech Services](#) can support your hardware, software and networks.

How they do it: Employment Hero.

Employment Hero helps businesses manage HR, payroll and employee engagement through a cloud platform.



Founded: 2014



Number of employees: 250 (growing rapidly from a two-person business)



The team at Employment Hero are enthusiastic when it comes to adopting new cloud software solutions. Alex Hattingh, their Chief People Officer, shares how they use technology to boost internal productivity.

Employment Hero has grown rapidly thanks to demand for its cloud-based HR product. It's the kind of platform their team knows an increasingly digitised workforce needs. But they still have the flexibility of a small business, one that both runs on cloud apps for their day-to-day work and maintains the agility to integrate new technology.

The team of early adopters uses cloud software solutions for many parts of their fast-growing business, including project management, marketing, CRM, finance and security, as well as their HR product, which automates people management tasks.

They make a habit of regularly identifying and assessing new tools for their business. It's a process that involves due diligence, and is "about being open to change, and accepting that there may be better software tools out there than what you currently use," says Alex.

"Introducing new technology involves short-term pain for long-term gain. We're mindful that changing software solutions can introduce teething problems, but the benefits far outweigh the cons."

Alex recommends factoring in training and expert help when rolling out a new technology solution. "When we've implemented changes to our digital tools or processes, we've definitely utilised professional agencies or freelance consultants to assist with internal rollout and to provide the training our team needed."

"Our aim has been to learn fast when it comes to adopting new tech tools. It's all in the attitude."

Alex Hattingh, Chief People Officer, Employment Hero

Your checklist for digitising how you work.

Start with your business objectives.

- Identify and prioritise your key business objectives, like increasing work efficiency to save time, improving your customer service or using data to support decision making. This can help you know what to look at first, next and later.

Think of yourself, your team and your customers.

- Review the major internal and customer-facing areas of your workflow (like team collaboration, customer interactions, supply chain and more) to identify where things could improve.
- Take stock of where you or your employees are spending time, especially on manual data entry, paper-based record keeping and repetitive tasks.

Prioritise your focus as you explore, but remember the full picture.

- Explore the available digital technologies that can help you meet your objectives. For example, [MYOB](#) for accounting, [Microsoft 365](#) for collaborating or the range of apps on the [Telstra Apps Marketplace](#).
- Consider prioritising your focus by investigating one area at a time, and asking key things along the way:
 - Does this area need a specific 'best of breed' digital tool or is there something you use already that offers the service you need?
 - How will any new solutions need to be set up or integrated with your existing technology?

Make sure you have the fundamentals sorted.

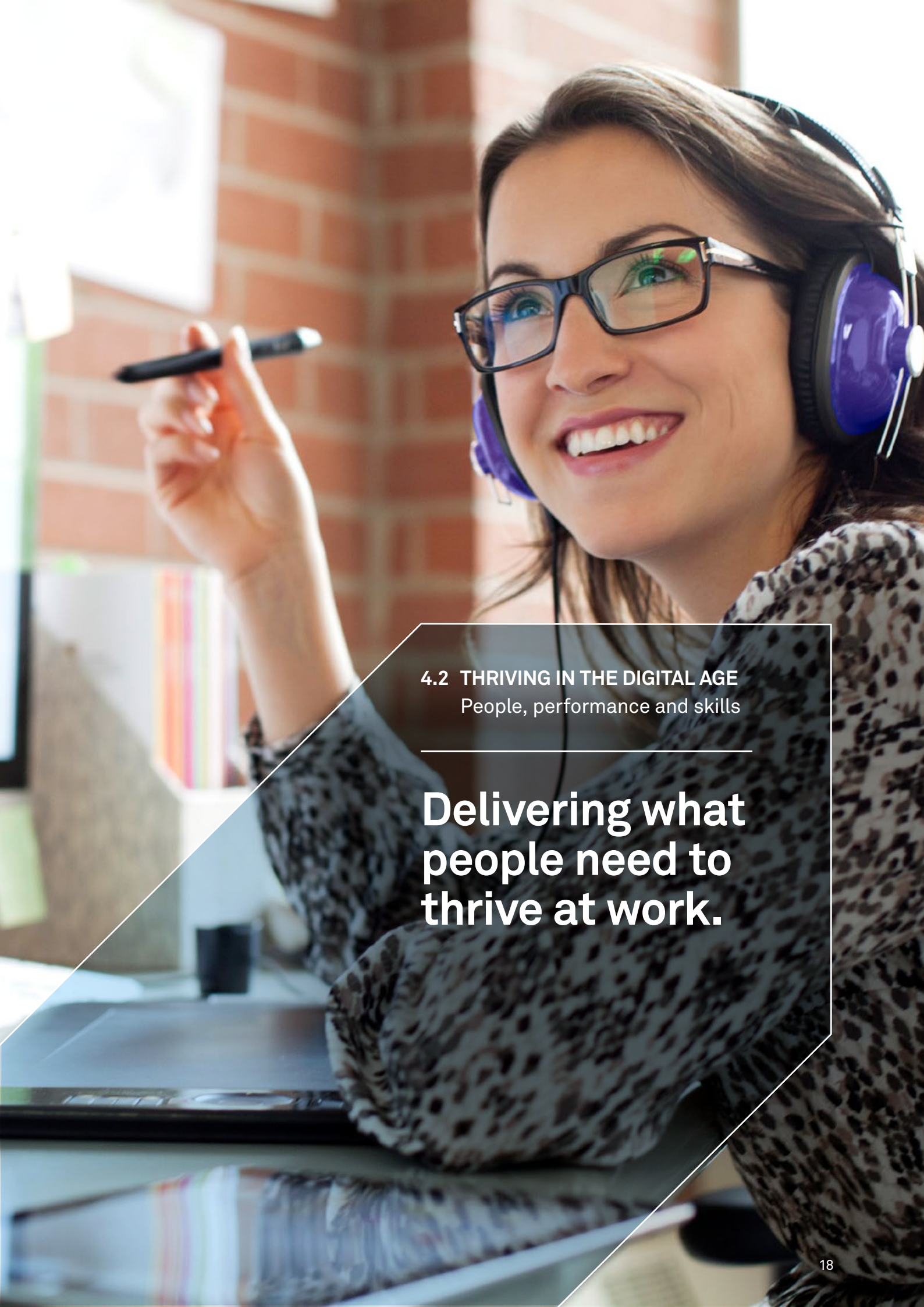
- Get the most out of your investment by having the right enablers in place.
 - Do you need different types of connected devices?
 - What support exists for you or your team to set up and learn how to use new solutions?
 - Are there security considerations?
 - Do you have the best fixed broadband or mobile connectivity to support the new solution?

Need help digitising your business?

Get a one-on-one consult with a Telstra small business expert and a tailored roadmap to help you thrive online.

Book your free Telstra Business [Go Digital Consult](#) now.

*Free Go Digital Consult available to all small businesses less than 100FTE. Offer ends 31 December 2021.



4.2 THRIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE
People, performance and skills

**Delivering what
people need to
thrive at work.**

Investing in your most important assets: yourself and your people.

The pace of change brought about by the pandemic means it's never been more essential to boost performance, build capabilities and access digital skills that are missing in your business. This section looks at the increasing demand for tech-related skills, what it takes to be an employer of choice, how the wellbeing of your workforce can drive productivity, and how you can fill any skills gaps through hiring, upskilling and outsourcing.

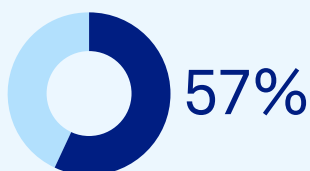
Do your people have the digital literacy they need?

No longer just the domain of IT specialists, technology is now central to the way businesses operate. In fact, 60% of employees we surveyed said their technology use has increased since COVID-19. However, many employees agree they could be using a more comprehensive range of tools, and SMBs need to consider whether everyone within their business has the training and skills to confidently adopt digital technologies.

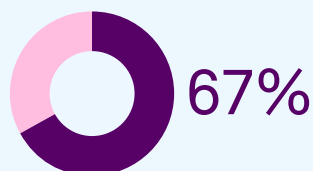
3 in 5

employees surveyed have been using technology more in their business as a result of the impacts of the pandemic.

Our research found:



of small businesses surveyed agreed, "I want more support to help us use digital technologies more effectively."



of employees surveyed agreed, "I think the use of technology at work will create new opportunities for people."

To keep yourself and your staff up to speed and fulfilled, consider what skills are needed to operate new technologies. What can you do to improve everyone's digital literacy – including your own?

The demand for tech skills is increasing.

Gemma Lloyd, co-founder and CEO of WORK180, understands the employment landscape has fundamentally changed. “It’s different from before. Nearly every company is looking for workers with tech skills, and they are offering the world, so you need to differentiate yourself as an employer,” she says.

Among hiring businesses, Gemma sees tremendous demand for tech skills that can help drive a company’s online presence and digitised internal operations. While they may be in demand, skills aren’t always easy to find during the hiring process. In March 2021, more than 4 in 5 of the business leaders surveyed by ACA Research in the COVID-19 SME Sentiment Tracker said a lack of skilled candidates was a top reason the hiring process was so hard.

One way to differentiate and become the kind of employer that attracts skilled talent, as WORK180 has done, is to offer flexible policies that let employees have more control over when and where they work. These could include a nine-day fortnight, a compressed week, job share or flexibility in the choice of work hours.

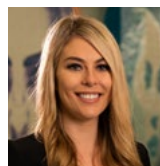
“The common pushback we hear from businesses is that they can’t afford these types of [flexible] policies, but perhaps the real question is can you afford not to?”

Gemma Lloyd, Co-founder and CEO, WORK180

84%

of business decision-makers surveyed feel it is difficult to fill roles for vacant positions.*

*ACA Research COVID-19 SME Sentiment Tracker March 2021



“Skilled workers have plenty of choices, so you need to create a place where people really want to work.”

*Gemma Lloyd,
Co-founder and CEO,
WORK180*

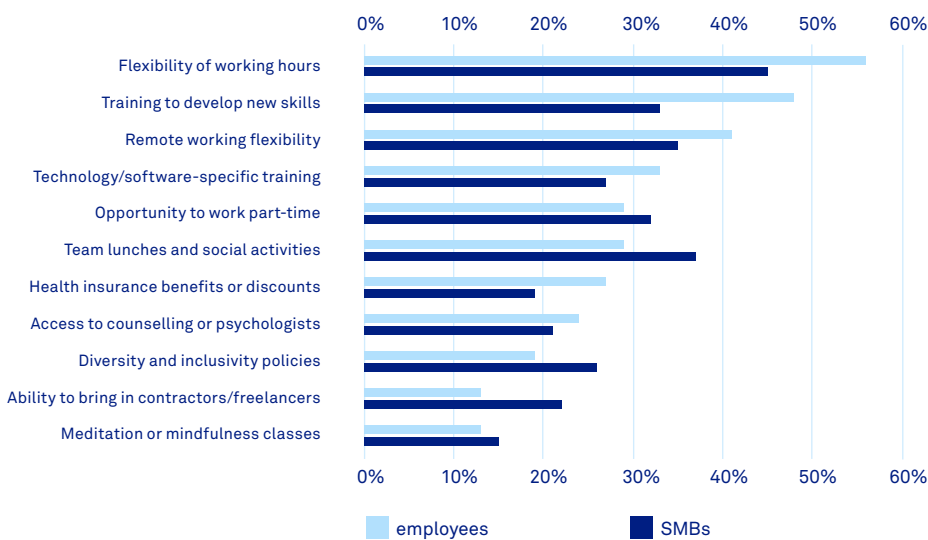
What employees need to be productive.

Working through the pandemic has created mental health challenges for business owners, managers and employees alike, so it's important for everyone to feel supported and encouraged to perform and grow at work.

How to be an employer of choice.

While many SMBs have measures to support the productivity and wellbeing of their staff, our research highlights the gaps between benefits sought by employees and benefits offered by employers.

What employees want vs what they're getting.



Source: Telstra Business Intelligence Insights Study December 2020. Question (employees): For you to have great personal wellbeing and productivity at work, which of these do you feel a small or medium employer (companies with up to 99 employees) should offer their employees or promote at work? Please choose up to 5 which are most important to you. Question (SMBs): Which of the benefits below does your company currently offer to your staff in order to promote personal wellbeing and productivity?

The top four items on this list – flexibility of hours, skills training, remote working and tech training – are the places where SMBs can make big strides by helping employees upskill and gain confidence, and offering them the flexible working options that suit their lifestyle and contribute to a better work-life balance. The good news is technology can help in all of these areas.



Flexibility of working hours



Training to develop new skills



Remote working flexibility



Technology or software-specific training

Other wellbeing benefits – like health insurance benefits or discounts, exercise classes and access to counselling or psychologists – were also disproportionately sought by employees, whereas employers were potentially over-focusing their efforts on benefits like social activities, diversity and inclusion policies, part-time work options and offering freelancer support. That’s not to say these things aren’t valuable – just that they might not ensure the level of productivity and wellbeing employers believe they do.

There are opportunities to attract and retain staff using some of the desired benefits listed above. It may take time to balance priorities around needs, cost, risk and availability but it’s worth it, because ignoring these benefits employees are looking for can lead to reduced performance and staff turnover. This can hurt your bottom line too – and not just in the money spent hiring and training new employees. An unhappy employee can create customer-facing problems, which affect revenue.

Your workforce needs may be influenced by life-stage.

Every employee is unique, but our research indicates that the demographic profile of your workforce may influence what is needed to support people’s wellbeing.



Parents may wish to arrange their working day around care responsibilities.



Younger workforces may want more social activities.



Workers aged **35–44** may want training to develop new skills.



Workers aged **45+** may want more technology- or software-specific training.

Driving productivity through wellbeing.

We know that keeping up with technology updates or new ways of working can be stressful for you and your employees. It takes time, energy and plenty of support to do it right. But focusing on workplace wellbeing is not just the right thing to do – it's also profitable.

That's the advice from Sean Hall, CEO of Energx and Chair of Workplace Mental Health Summit. Energx is a human performance company working in the fields of mental wellbeing, inclusion, innovation and self-led productivity. They've worked with global companies like Amazon, Facebook and Unilever and observed time and again that workers need new skills to manage the extraordinary amount of change and uncertainty that has become normal these days.

Looking after yourself can improve business outcomes.

Whether you're a sole trader or employ many staff, the quality of your customer experience and your ability to deliver on your customer promises are determined by human effort and energy. In fact, Energx research found businesses could be losing up to 41 days of productivity per employee each year due to burnout. It's essential to consider everyone's wellbeing and how supported they are, especially during periods of change.

Hall recommends business leaders focus in three areas: role-modelling the self-care behaviours you want your team to adopt, learning how to coach self-care behaviours in your team and creating a shared vision with collective wellbeing goals. If you're a sole trader, it's especially important to set up boundaries to create a sense of balance and ensure you're not draining the emotional energy of the people you care most about.

"If you're a sole trader, it's vital to look after your wellbeing for long-term success. After all, you can only achieve what you have energy for."

Sean Hall, CEO of Energx and Chair of Workplace Mental Health Summit

Wellbeing isn't just for the office.

As our work and personal lives become increasingly blurred due to hybrid working, it may be necessary to create policies that protect employees' and your own wellbeing. After all, the energy levels of your people drive your capacity as a business.

When introducing new technology, it's important to factor in the time and energy it might take people to build their skills and adapt to new software. And as we spend less time face-to-face, consider how you continue to nurture personal connections, maintain a sense of team camaraderie and combat burnout.

For example, encourage breaks between calls and during long meetings, ensure people can 'turn off' outside of work hours and find time during the day to get away from your screens and re-energise.

46%

of employees surveyed† find it stressful to manage new technology they're not familiar with.

† Telstra Business Intelligence Study 2019



"Leading companies know employee wellbeing is much more than a nice-to-have. It is, in fact, a key driver of business performance and competitive advantage."

Sean Hall, CEO of Energx and Chair of Workplace Mental Health Summit

Lighten the load through upskilling, hiring and outsourcing.

Technology can help you achieve your business goals, but even the greatest tech can struggle to make a difference if the person using it doesn't know how to get the most out of it.

If you've noticed a shortage of skills to meet a specific business need, you have a range of options: hire new staff, train existing staff, use freelancers, ask existing providers for more support or turn to specialist suppliers.

Boosting efficiency and morale through upskilling.

Just as you want to expand the scope of what your business can do, your employees are likely to want opportunities to learn and grow. As outlined earlier in this section, our research suggests many SMBs may be underestimating the importance of skills and technology-specific training when it comes to helping their people be more productive.

In fact, even before COVID-19, our research found most (75%) SMBs felt employees needed support and training with new technology – and most employees (72%) agreed.

Adam Gregory, a senior director at LinkedIn, advises online learning can help SMBs who often need targeted training on a budget. "Skills are quickly changing," he says. "Tools like online learning help companies develop relevant skills to fill skills gaps of new, existing or promoted employees."



“As the need to use more complex software and systems increases, so should the training budget so we can use and make the most of them.”

Small business employee, non-profit organisation, 10–19 employees



“The shift from instructor-led training to online learning helps optimise budgets and scale learning to support all employees.”

Adam Gregory, Senior Director, ANZ Talent & Learning Solutions, LinkedIn

Extending your capabilities through outsourcing.

With fewer resources, small businesses – particularly sole traders – may not have the in-house skills needed to do every task required to run a competitive business. Outsourcing may make sense when skilled employees are hard to find, hiring specialist staff does not make financial sense or you need to take things off your or your team's plate.

Outsourcing and collaborating with suppliers can also let you get new capabilities up and running in your business quickly, make your work arrangements more flexible, and provide reliable, expert support in areas you may not have time to master. It also means employees can engage, get help and learn on the go, especially in the changing technology space.

What can you outsource these days?




- Website and app development
- Marketing support and strategy
- Social media
- Graphic design
- IT tech support
- Cyber security
- Accounting support and bookkeeping
- Insights and reporting
- Logistics
- Service
- Administration
- Recruitment

Outsourcing expertise doesn't just save you time; it also lets you operate in a more cost-effective way with a smaller workforce while still accessing the high-calibre business services and proven approaches to help you compete.

How they do it: Kuluin Mufflers.

Kuluin Mufflers is a family-owned custom exhaust specialist on the Sunshine Coast.

 Founded: 2016

 Number of employees: 5



Angie Mansey can manage her business from anywhere via her laptop and realises the benefits of a flexible work approach in a highly skilled manufacturing environment.

When Angie and her partner bought Kuluin Mufflers, the young family knew having a flexible working policy would benefit not just their own wellbeing, but their staff's as well. "We extend this to our team so that they can be the parents or part-time students that they want to be," Angie says. "Our workshop can function after-hours, which allows flexibility."

On top of providing the freedom for Angie and her team to work in ways that suit them, technology is at the core of their marketing, retail and approach to upskilling.

"We use photo-editing technology and video apps, and we have a good YouTube following in our industry. We also sell our products online, which is really important to us."

Each time the team gets to work on a new car, their phone is never far away. Sharing photos on Instagram and videos – which capture the sound of the engine – on YouTube of the end result is both a showcase of the craft and skill involved and a marketing exercise. "Ninety per cent of our customer base comes through social media channels," Angie estimates.

With her laptop and mobile, Angie can still be productive even if she can't be in the shop. For a small, family-run business, doing things a different way can become a point of difference, and technology enables everything from sales to payroll to get done anywhere. "It's instantaneous. We don't miss a beat, and it allows us to have the flexibility and lifestyle that we need."

"We chose to put flexibility at the heart of our business. It's part of who we are."

*Angie Mansey,
Managing Director,
Kuluin Mufflers*

Your people, performance and skills checklist.

Consider how you can become an employer of choice.

- You may be able to differentiate yourself as an employer by offering training and flexible working arrangements, as these can make your business an attractive place to work.
- Create a robust flexible working policy that meets both your business's and employees' needs.

Have a proactive wellbeing strategy in place.

- Consider setting up a wellbeing program that meets the unique needs of your workforce.
- Establish meeting-free times and encourage technology breaks to combat video fatigue.
- Look after your own wellbeing and model wellbeing behaviours.

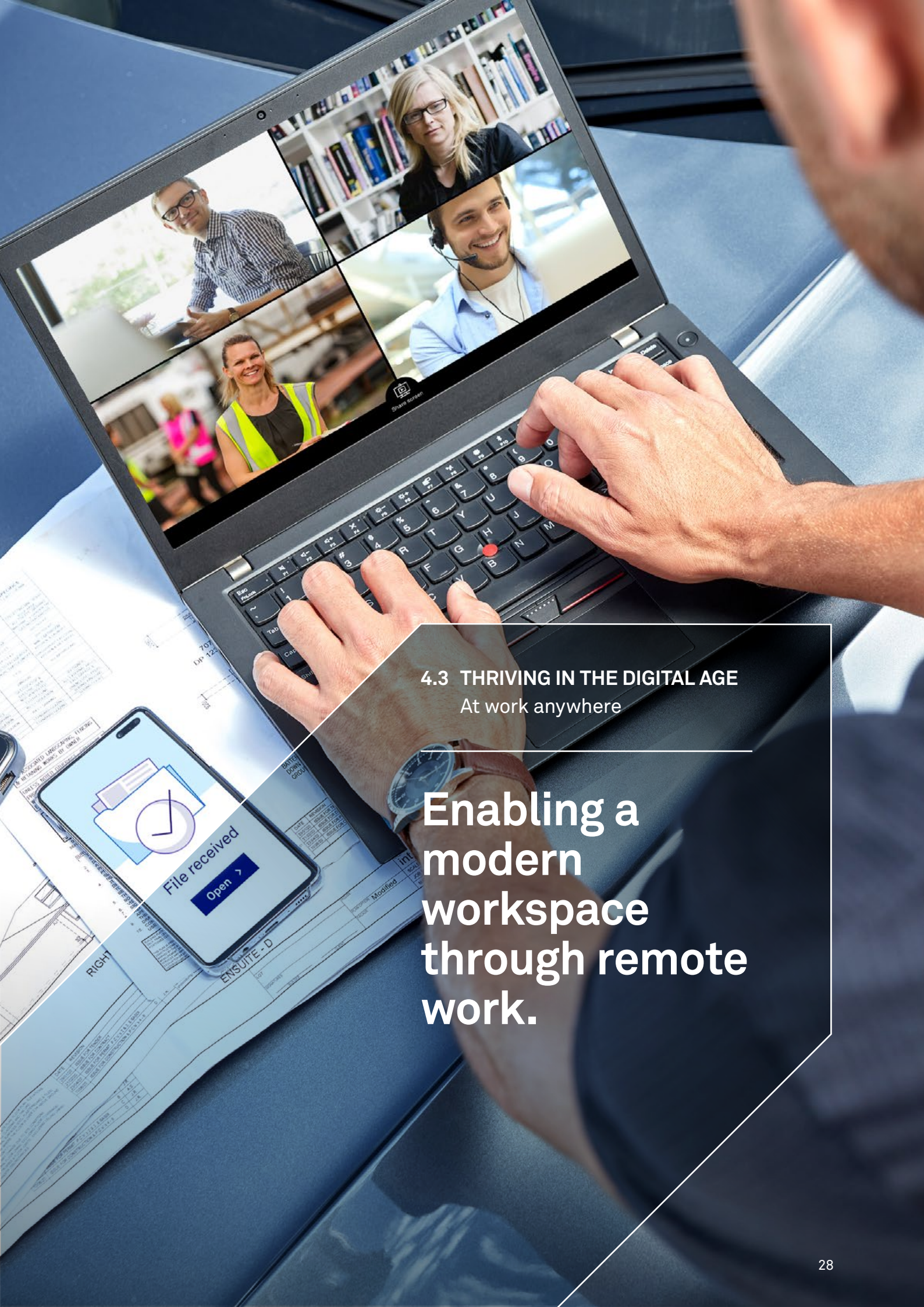
Assess your skills gaps.

- Identify any skills missing from your business that may be impacting your efficiency and productivity.
- Consider if your business can develop or access these missing skills through hiring, upskilling or outsourcing.
- If you do choose to outsource expertise, consider holistic solutions as opposed to piecemeal ones that could incur unpredicted costs.

Need help filling a digital skills gap?

Telstra Business Services can help you identify and implement tailored tech, cyber security and digital marketing solutions to help your business thrive online.

[Outsource the expertise you need.](#)



4.3 THRIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE
At work anywhere

**Enabling a
modern
workspace
through remote
work.**

Work is something you do, not a place you go.

As more people choose to work from home and on the go, businesses have the opportunity to maintain and even maximise productivity, regardless of where work is happening. This section looks at different work location models, how technology can help enable remote work, and the solutions and support that allow for seamless connectivity.

Do you need a new policy for flexible working?

As discussed in the previous section, employees believe flexible and remote working options support their productivity and wellbeing at work. Offering remote work means you can both support your existing team and also tap into a diverse, skilled workforce, regardless of their location.

Of course, working remotely doesn't suit all types of jobs, but as technology evolves, it's becoming an option for more businesses. For example, call centre staff can now work remotely thanks to cloud-based telephone and contact centre solutions. Consider if it's time to loosen your grip on working hours and office attendance. Finding the right mix of policies, systems and solutions may take trial and error, but it could result in a more satisfied and productive workforce.

Remote work is here to stay.

With digital technologies making it easier to communicate, collaborate and conduct transactions at a distance, we can start thinking of 'work' as something we do rather than a place we go.

For many SMBs, work can be done anywhere, anytime. SMBs have a variety of working arrangements, ranging from dedicated premises to home, on the road or in the field, or operating a location-agnostic business (often referred to as 'distributed work'). And following the remote working requirements of COVID-19, our survey found that 54% of SMBs expect remote work to become more common.

The same research shows that almost 4 in 5 employees would like the option of remote work. There are many reasons workers prefer the option to work from home, including mental wellbeing. In fact, 41% of employees agree they would consider moving to a different area (e.g. a regional area) to work and live, in order to achieve better work-life balance.

78%

of employees surveyed would like the option to work remotely in future when possible, regardless of what happens with COVID-19.



54%

of small businesses surveyed expect the amount of remote working going forward to be higher than pre-COVID-19.

Work location models: Where does your business sit?

See if you can identify where your business sits in the spectrum below. Then ask: are you supporting this scenario so that it is as productive as it can be?

69%

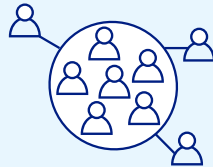
of small businesses surveyed want to make better use of technology to create greater flexibility in how and where they work in 2021.

The different work location models.



Centralised

Everyone in the office at least most of the time.



Partially distributed or hybrid

There is a central workplace but some people may work remotely sometimes or regularly.



Fully distributed

People work from a range of places and only come together rarely.

Most SMBs want to make better use of technology to enable remote work.

As we reshape what work looks like after the pandemic, it's time for businesses to think about how they can keep the benefits of distributed work while fixing any problems that revealed themselves in 2020.

That might mean proactively creating an approach that suits your business, or exploring digital technologies to help your team engage with customers and suppliers, whether working in the office or remotely. The rapid transition to remote work might have seen you rely on stop-gap digital solutions, whereas now you may want to take the time to optimise your technologies in a way that sets your business up for future success.

How do we create ideal working conditions, regardless of location?

Employers and employees may think differently about remote working.

Employees generally believe they are just as productive while working remotely – even though employers are not always convinced. What everyone can agree on is that remote work is different. There are fewer casual interactions, more video meetings and a perceived pressure to be constantly online. At the same time, employees report they have more spare time and can focus better.

Adopting new technology to support a different work environment requires effort: new technology brings a new set of habits and way of working, there are costs involved, and it can be hard to identify solutions when you don't know where to look.

Support your tech and devices, no matter who owns them.

Many modern workplaces involve a mix of company-owned and employee-owned devices and connections (like home, office and mobile internet). As a result, support needs can quickly blur.

76%

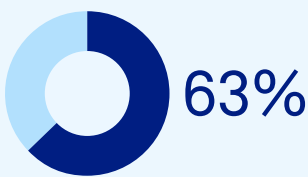
of employees surveyed agree that they're as productive working remotely as they are when working in the office.



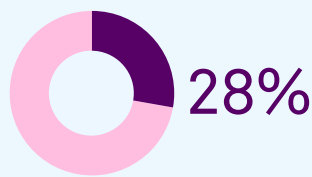
40%

of small businesses surveyed don't agree that their staff are as productive working remotely as they are when working in the office.

We found



of employees use the same phone for work and personal business.



of employees are reimbursed by their employer for making tech purchases.

One way to help employees could be through a 'tech allowance' to spend on the connectivity, devices and tools that would help them work most effectively. Another way might be to help them make their personal technology appropriate for work, given many employees use the same devices for personal and work purposes. In both cases, it pays to consider how devices and network connections are supported.

Tech challenges can go unnoticed.

Our research found around half of SMBs experienced at least two IT issues a month, with some experiencing weekly issues. This significantly reduces productivity, yet many SMBs are unaware of the potential solutions in the market.

Many IT issues stay hidden because employees attempt self-fixes or get help from colleagues. But as work goes increasingly remote, it will become even more important to offer consistent, reliable support to employees.

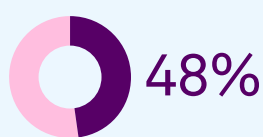
23%

of employees surveyed experience technology issues at least once a week.

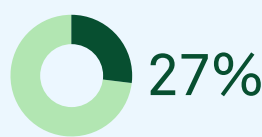
When it comes to employees seeking tech support, we found:



used self-help.



used an IT help desk or support service.



asked other colleagues.

The support you might need to enable remote work.

Earlier in this section, we highlighted some of the different productivity expectations SMBs and employees have. Employees in our research told us a key element of their productivity challenge is the need for more support, while SMB owners are aware of more big-picture challenges.

63%

of small businesses surveyed agree that technology suppliers should help them identify which digital technologies are most useful for their business.

Technology scenarios where you may need more support.

In our survey, we asked SMBs to rate IT-related issues that impact their business's productivity. The top five were:

- Reliability or speed of network connection
- Cyber security issues
- Issues with syncing (e.g. emails) across multiple devices
- Complexity of the business software/systems
- Introduction of new technology without adequate training or support

Source: Telstra Business Intelligence Insights Study December 2020. Question: How much of an impact do the IT issues below have on your business productivity?

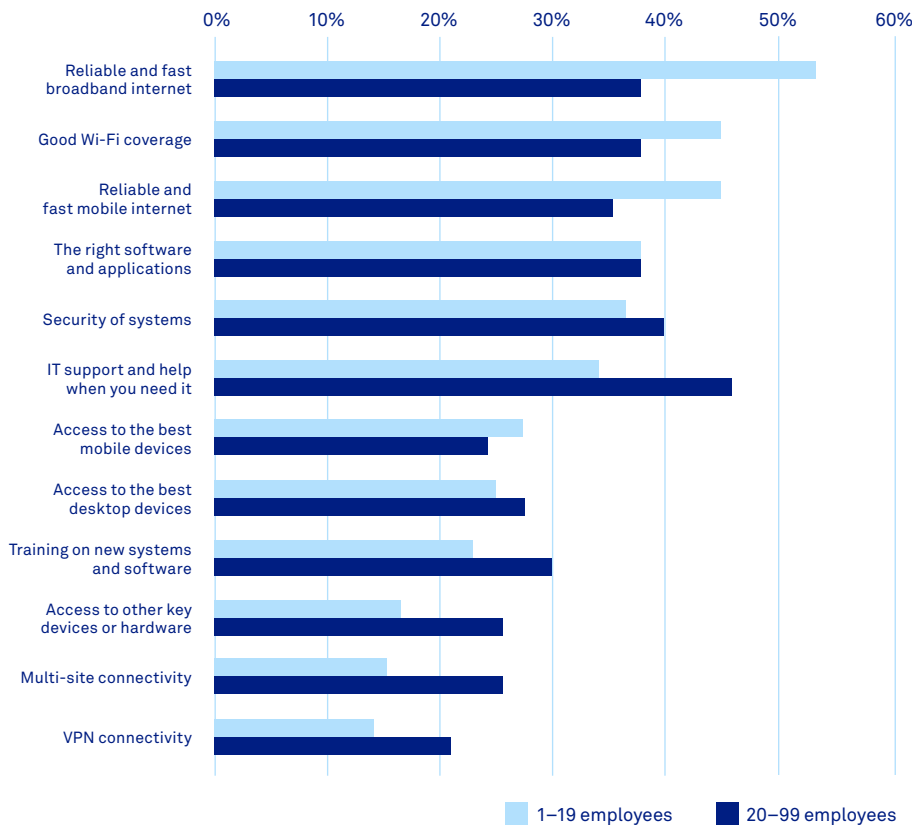
Businesses can have different productivity challenges when it comes to IT based on their work location model and their size. Employees working from home are more likely to require systems security, virtual private network (VPN) connectivity and access to the best desktop devices, while bigger businesses may have more chances for human error when it comes to cyber security.

Getting the most out of your tech.

Having the right underlying technology environment is essential to ensuring your business’s digital tools are as effective as possible.

Our research shows many SMBs are looking to enhance their network connections, IT support and devices. Smaller businesses see more benefits in connectivity, including fast and reliable broadband and mobile internet and good Wi-Fi coverage. IT support, system and software training, and more complex needs (like multi-site connectivity, VPNs, and access to key devices outside of desktops and mobiles) become particularly important for SMBs with more than 20 employees.

Top digital tool enablers for SMBs.



Source: Telstra Business Intelligence Insights Study December 2020. Question: In which of the following areas do you think enhancements would provide benefits in how you can get the most from digital tools you use in your business?

The good news is you have a range of options if you’re not currently using the best connectivity and digital solutions for your business.

What connectivity options are available?

Whether your team is working on-premises or remotely, you need reliable coverage to keep things running. Previously, connectivity was solely about speeds and feeds. These days, though, connectivity also depends on the nature of your business, your people and the applications you use. Situational factors can also influence the type of connection you need.

Connectivity needs to consider.

- How many people are connecting to your network at any one time? And will this change over time?
- Where is your business located? And do you and any staff connect from one location or multiple?
- What kinds of files do you send and receive? And how large are they?
- Do you use online video or voice calling?
- Are there any specific apps you use now or expect to use, like CRM software or Microsoft 365?
- If you're offering remote work options, do your technology solutions support this?
- Are employees supported when they work on the go?

Meeting bandwidth demands.

With more and more businesses using cloud computing, it's important to consider whether your connectivity solution can support real-time file transfer and reliable voice and video calling.

Today, SMBs have a range of fixed connectivity options beyond a standard internet connection, so it's worth reassessing your needs to ensure you're maximising your tech investments.



Standard connectivity is typically accessed through the nbn™, with options for fast speeds and voice prioritisation. These connections are shared with other internet users, so your connection could get congested during busy times.

Good for: Businesses that need access to fast speeds and use the internet for downloading and voice calls.



Enhanced options give your business access to symmetrical (equal) download and upload speeds. They allow video calls and fast, reliable transfer and sharing of files.

Good for: Businesses that rely on specific apps, video and data to work internally or serve customers.







Premium connectivity options are uncontended (or private) connections used only by your business. They offer balanced upload and download speeds for maximum reliability.

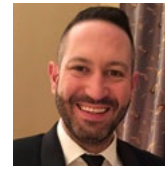
Good for: Businesses that use business-critical apps, have high-volume voice and data needs, and rely heavily on access to business information in real time.

Beyond fixed broadband: More connectivity options.

Depending on where and how you work, you may need to consider connectivity options or extensions beyond a standard fixed connection.

Choosing the right connectivity solutions and support can make you and your team more effective on-site, at home or on the go.

 Mobile back-up	 Wi-Fi boosters	 SIM-enabled tablets and laptops	 5G mobile broadband
Mobile back-up modems switch networks if there's a disruption to your nbn™ service.	Wi-Fi boosters can help to extend coverage across an entire work environment.	Fast, secure mobile connectivity built into your devices means you can easily work anywhere.	Mobile broadband offers flexible connectivity across a wide range of settings.



“More businesses are using smarter technology to improve their customer experience and operational efficiency. It’s important to review how your connectivity needs are also going to evolve, so you’re ready to support your growing business.”

Mike Forde, Product Owner for SMB Broadband, Telstra

Mobile internet is faster and more reliable than ever.

Businesses that rely on mobile internet for their phones, tablets and other devices will benefit from the rollout of the enhanced 5G network. 5G stands for the fifth generation of mobile network technology, and it’s a leap forward that has the potential to make our lives more efficient. Think a faster data experience: seamless streaming, real-time responses and downloads that take seconds, not minutes.

We cover some of the ways 5G can benefit your business in the next section of this report.

Security must be a priority, not an afterthought.

Our previous Telstra Business Intelligence report on [Managing Risks Online](#) highlighted the importance of cyber security to protect your customer data, employee data and reputation. With more people working remotely and bringing personally owned devices into the mix, recommendations around cyber security have renewed urgency.

Luke Power, Director of Partner Organisation and Small Business at Cisco, believes that with many competing priorities for business owners and IT managers, security can’t be an afterthought – it is behind the success of any digitisation effort. “How we show up, how we collaborate, how we access various assets is going to be determined through technology like collaboration, cloud and networking underpinned by security,” says Luke.




“For businesses to enable people to work securely from anywhere, anytime, and on any device, cyber security should be the foundation of every IT investment.”

Luke Power, Director, Partner Organisation & Small Business, Cisco Australia & New Zealand

How they do it: STEM Punks.

STEM Punks provides education programs to inspire people to learn about STEM in a fun, interactive environment.

 Founded: 2017

 Number of employees: 7



Technology helped STEM Punks rapidly transition their in-person programs to an educational broadcast and live stream offering, supported by reliable broadband upload speeds.

Before COVID-19, STEM Punks provided an educational offering in-person at schools around the country.

When that became unfeasible, Michael Holmstrom and his team took the opportunity to re-think their approach. The short-term benefit of still being able to inspire an interest in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) also brought about a re-orientation for the business, which is now equipped to scale globally with an educational broadcast product.

Team culture would be critical as STEM Punks applied their passion and curiosity to a whole new set of broadcast-oriented tools and skills. As Michael puts it, the STEM Punks were prepared to “turn up to work knowing how to do 10% of what needed to be done, and learn the rest”.

It was all a beneficial learning experience. They made their first broadcast efforts available for free while they quickly learnt on the job. As a result, they can now turn around high-quality content very quickly.

The newly transformed business now relies even more on technology, including key connectivity enablers, to support their business operations. “Upload speeds provided by our broadband connection are critical to us being able to stream live,” Michael says.

For other businesses making a similar pivot, Michael advises, “It’s important to always think of the opportunity, then do something. And remember it may not be perfect on day one.”

“The business conditions of the pandemic prompted us to launch a transformation to deliver learning outcomes on a much larger scale.”

*Michael Holmstrom,
CEO, STEM Punks Ventures*

Your checklist to support productivity anywhere.

Provide the right tools of the trade.

- Ensure employees have the tools, software, connectivity and devices they need.
- Consider your policy for procuring technology – will you purchase centrally or provide allowances so employees can source for their own needs?

Get the most out of technology with the right connectivity.

- Review your connectivity solution to make sure it's up to the job, whether that's having enough bandwidth to support real-time file transfers, reliable video calling or situational factors such as a distributed workforce.
- Consider connectivity options beyond fixed broadband, including Wi-Fi boosters, mobile broadband and mobile back-up.

Secure your setup.

- Enable multi-factor security to protect your cloud platforms.
- Consider employee training to help them identify security risks like phishing scams.
- Check out our in-depth Telstra Business Intelligence report on [Managing Risks Online](#).

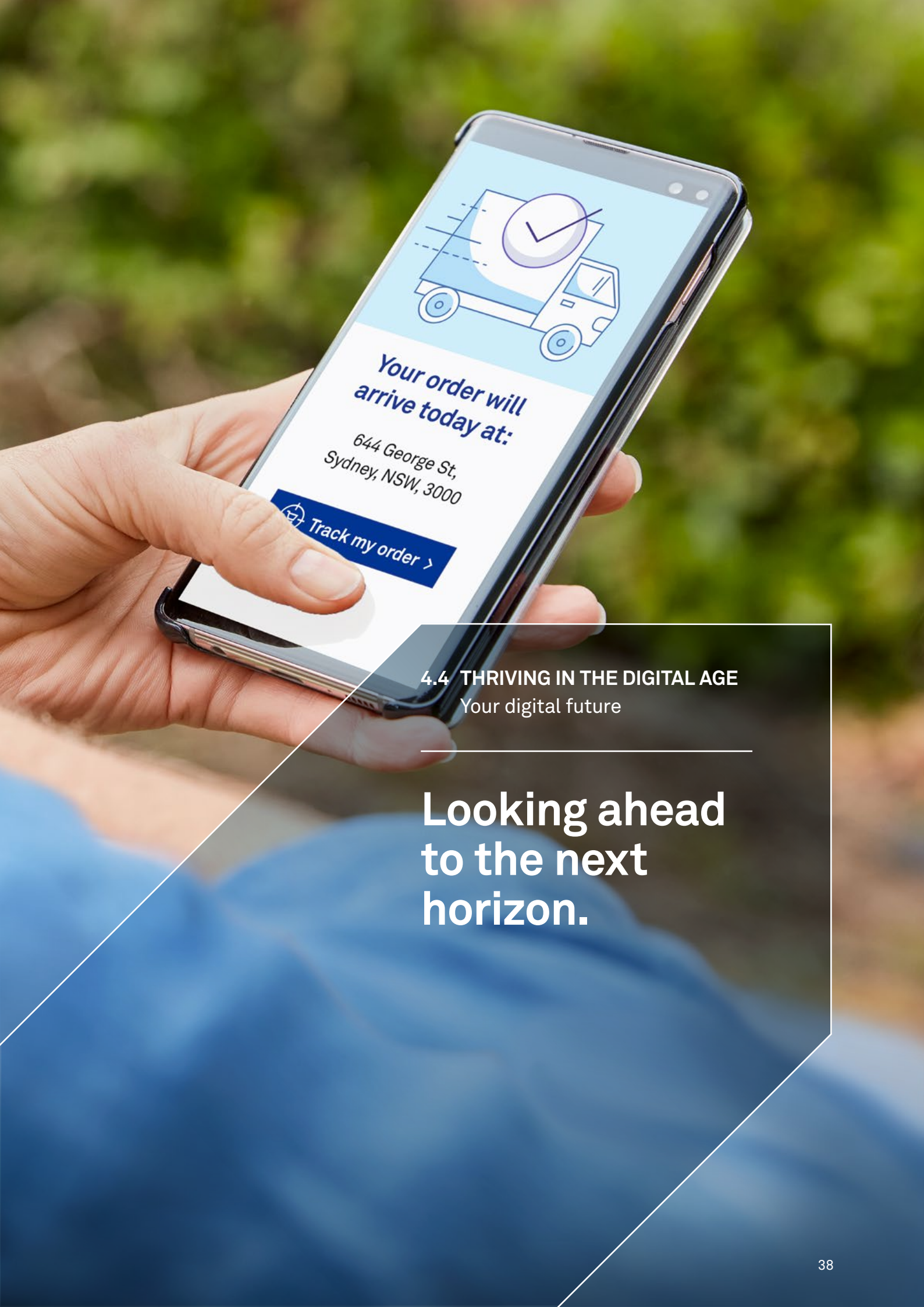
Take support needs seriously.

- Find the right technology partner. Many SMBs wing it when it comes to new technology – they try to figure it out themselves or phone a friend. Generally, a better approach would be finding an external partner that can provide ongoing support, grow with the organisation and match its culture. That way, your business can reap maximum benefits from hybrid work.

Need help finding the right tech?

Telstra Business Tech Services can help with 24/7 hardware, software and network support so you and your people can work effectively from anywhere.

[Get the most from your tech.](#)



4.4 THRIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE
Your digital future

**Looking ahead
to the next
horizon.**

The world is changing. Is your business keeping up?

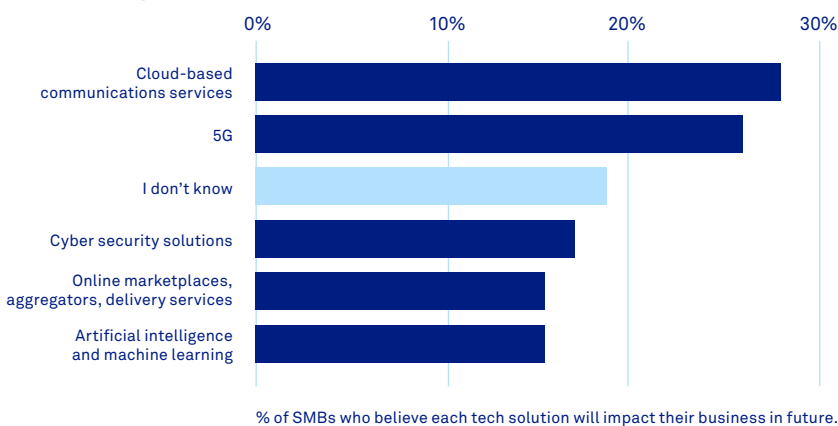
Technology continues to evolve. This can be both exciting and overwhelming.

When we asked SMBs in our survey about the technologies they think will impact them in the future, ‘cloud’ (28%) and ‘5G’ (26%) were seen as immediately relevant, taking out the top two spots. But the third most prevalent answer – at 19% – was ‘I don’t know’. This suggests many SMBs may not have the capacity or confidence to consider emerging technologies and how they apply to their business.

1 in 5

small businesses surveyed aren’t sure how technology will impact their business in the future.

Technologies that SMBs expect will impact their businesses in future.



Source: Telstra Business Intelligence Insights Study December 2020. Question: Which of these do you think will have an impact on how your business operates in the next few years?

The research also found larger SMBs (20–99 employees) have a clearer vision for the future and are more likely to be considering the impacts of emerging technologies. Smaller businesses looking to compete or grow may want to engage with the technology space to make sure they’re keeping up.

Staying ahead of the digital curve.

It can be hard to stay on top of evolving technology between the day-to-day pressures of running a business. But a range of advances are predicted to improve many fundamental tasks in the near future, including how we work and communicate.

By fostering a genuine interest and being proactive in the tech space, you’ll be better placed to spot new opportunities as they arise instead of trying to catch up later. It helps to think about the different ways emerging technologies could be applied to create efficiencies in the way you work, meet customers’ changing expectations and compete against other businesses, big and small.

Cloud and 5G are top of mind today.

As the use of cloud-based communication tools continues to grow in line with remote work, so does the need for the right connectivity to support these solutions, which we covered in section 3 of this report.

5G offers ultra-fast and reliable mobile networking and, in the future, will play a vital role in giving businesses the advanced, flexible connectivity they need to operate.

5G currently allows team members to access faster speeds on the go than they would generally be able to get in a traditional fixed-office environment. Regional businesses and industries with frequently mobile employees or that work remotely should see vast improvements as the network rollout expands, and it will enable more companies to operate on the go.

Using 5G to grow and transform your business.

We're currently at the tip of the iceberg in terms of realising the full potential of 5G. Whether it's through innovation or bolstering the services you already offer, there are plenty of opportunities to carve a niche in the business landscape with the new capabilities of 5G as a launching pad.



“5G is not just another G. It has the potential to revolutionise our lives and how we do business. 5G coverage, devices and network capabilities will allow for a new ecosystem of use cases and improved business models.”

Mel Taouk, 5G Product Owner, Telstra



Deliver immersive experiences for your customers, from richer web content to augmented reality product demonstrations.



Stream and broadcast high-resolution live footage or move files quickly with faster upload speeds.



More processing power in the cloud can pave the way for lighter devices, like 5G laptops and tablets, to better support working on the go.



Provide more fast, reliable connectivity options for your home or work premises to support remote working.

Is machine learning the trend of tomorrow?

Our research shows that very few SMBs think new technologies like AI and machine learning will impact how their business operates in the next few years. While terms like ‘machine learning’ may feel futuristic to some, the reality is many SMBs already use this technology every day through things like online advertising and search.

Melinda Petrunoff, Director of Small and Medium Business (Australia and New Zealand) at Facebook, believes machine learning is something that SMBs can use to efficiently and cost-effectively accelerate growth. Facebook already enables businesses to use tools to anticipate customer needs and matches products with the people most likely to love them. It combines a business’s customer insights with real-time consumer behaviours to make predictions about future behaviour, which is effectively a form of machine learning.



“AI is becoming embedded in how SMBs do business today.

If you’re using online advertising and search, you are most likely using machine learning to find your target audience.”

Melinda Petrunoff, Director of Small and Medium Business (Australia & New Zealand), Facebook

You control the future of your business.


Technology will continue to improve. Innovations will continue to find new ways to solve old problems or more accessible ways to achieve otherwise tricky tasks. Just look at the impact of inventions we take for granted, like the car, internet and smartphones. And while not every new technology or device will change the world, there will be opportunities for you to introduce new products and services, change the way you run your business or perhaps launch an entirely new business.

Even incremental change can either improve or erode a competitive advantage over time. It’s up to you which of those will happen to your business.

How they do it: Liminal VR.

Liminal VR specialises in developing virtual reality applications.

 Founded: 2015

 Number of employees: 14



Nick Busietta's journey to build a business around virtual reality technology has opened up its potential beyond just entertainment.

Liminal VR is a multi-award-winning virtual reality company focused on creating emotionally impactful experiences using neuroscience and psychological design principles.

In 2015, when Nick set out to create a business that would specialise in VR experience design and methods, the technology was transformative and exciting, but not nearly as evolved as it is today. Operating on what Nick describes as “the bleeding edge” required Liminal VR to be nimble and pursue a wide range of opportunities in the field.

VR has a profound impact on a person's emotional state, Nick says, and today there are very tangible applications where the technology is in demand, particularly for training and events. “The fact that VR creates such a strong sense of presence makes it an ideal training tool where participants can realistically role-play real-life scenarios,” he says.

This means SMBs can expect to see more interactive training exercises that allow for skill development in real-world simulations. When it comes to marketing, VR is being used to give businesses an edge at events and in retail environments. The technology can not only draw a crowd but also create memorable experiences for customers.

“When we started out, we knew that we weren't building for now. We were building for when the wave comes.”

*Nick Busietta,
Managing Director,
Liminal VR*

Your checklist to prepare for the future.

Engage with the technology space.

- Read technology resources like [Telstra Smarter Business](#) and the tech section of the ABC.

Start with the end in mind.

- Review your business plan and what you want to achieve – and keep an open mind to any new opportunities or changing business directions that may arise as technology evolves.
- Identify where you want to improve customer experience, brand awareness and employee productivity – and then invest in technology that will help you do these things.

Think like a customer.

- Analyse what your customers expect when it comes to service and product delivery. Investigate what they receive from other companies and any competitors.
- Study whether your customers enjoy dealing with you and how those interactions can be improved.

Plan for the short-term and long-term future.

- Review the short-term, medium-term and long-term opportunities for your business so you can decide which emerging technologies would be most suitable.

Get expert help.

- Specialists can help you choose the most suitable technologies and then implement them.

Need help staying ahead of the digital curve?

The Smarter Business hub can help you keep on top of changing and evolving technology with access to the latest insights, inspiration and actionable advice so you can future-proof your business.

[Stay tuned to emerging tech.](#)

Digital Age resources.

Need help digitising your business?

Get a one-on-one consult with a Telstra small business expert and a tailored roadmap to help you thrive online.

[Book your free Telstra Business Go Digital Consult now.](#)

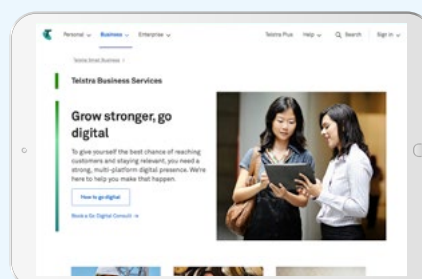
*Free Go Digital Consult available to all small businesses less than 100FTE. Offer ends 31 December 2021.



Get expert support to help your business thrive.

Our suite of business services, covering cyber security, digital marketing and tech, are tailored to meet the needs of small businesses – just like yours – in an evolving landscape.

[Learn more about Telstra Business Services.](#)



Access the latest small business insights.

Discover small business news, success stories and expert advice to help your business get – and stay – on the front foot of emerging trends, technology and more.

[Explore the Smarter Business hub.](#)



Appendix.

Who is this report series for?

Telstra Business Intelligence is for all businesses with under 100 employees – from qualified tradies and entrepreneurial sole traders to businesses with multiple staff. It's even for larger SMBs that operate from multiple premises, manage remote employees or have teams of people out on the road.

While businesses differ, their customers have more in common – particularly when it comes to how technology is changing their behaviours and expectations.

This report series is especially for businesses that may be holding back on investing in technology due to limited resources or because they're not aware of what their customers want. It's also for those businesses that want to make the most of the opportunities that technology presents to increase productivity or grow their business.

Methodology.

This Telstra Business Intelligence report draws on both quantitative and qualitative research.

- **The core quantitative research** – Telstra Business Intelligence Study – was commissioned by Telstra and undertaken by independent research agency Potentiate via online surveys with a sample of 1,000 employees of small businesses (aged 18 years and over) and 450 businesses with <100 employees. Quotas were used to ensure the sample was representative of the market. Fieldwork was conducted from December 2020 to January 2021.
- This report also makes comparisons to the 2019 edition of this study, which followed the same survey methodology and was conducted from November to December 2019.
- **Qualitative research** took place with a range of small business owners, industry experts and consumers from January 2021 to May 2021.

Definitions.

In the context of our research and this report:

- A 'small business' is defined as having 1–19 employees. A 'medium business' is defined as having 20–99 employees. 'SMB' groups together small and medium businesses per the above definitions.
- Technology encompasses everything from the internet and telephone to hardware devices (including mobiles and desktops) and software. In the context of the Telstra Business Intelligence report series, we place emphasis on technology that is used to connect people – be it businesses, customers or employees.
- 'Employee' is used to describe an employee of a small or medium business in line with the definition above.

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- Angie Mansey is the Managing Director of Kuluin Mufflers, a custom exhaust specialist on the Sunshine Coast.
- Michael Holmstrom is the CEO of STEM Punks Ventures, an educational content producer in Brisbane.
- Alex Hattingh is the Chief People Officer at Employment Hero, a HR software provider in Sydney.
- Nick Busietta is the Managing Director of Liminal VR, a business developing virtual reality applications in Melbourne.

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- Adam Gregory is Senior Director, ANZ Talent & Learning Solutions at LinkedIn.
- Sean Hall is the CEO of Energx and Chair of Workplace Mental Health Summit.
- Gemma Lloyd is the co-founder and CEO of WORK180.

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- Matt Howley and Raymond Lo from Picnic Customer Intelligence, a research consultancy dedicated to helping businesses make the smartest, 'most right' decisions. Picnic CI was the research partner engaged to co-author this report.
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Thank you for reading the fourth report in the Telstra Business Intelligence series. We hope it's been valuable. Head to our [hub page](#) for more insights, expert advice and best-in-class case studies from this series.

