

Emerging from the shadows into the light

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We wrote about ‘things never being the same’ (1) and the fact that COVID-19 was in so many ways an accelerant for digital developments (2) both at home and across the planet. The developments have been significant – even in my small world. We further talked about the notion of the digital nomad travelling the globe (3) and staff working from anywhere (4) – literally.

The impact of COVID-19 has been significant and our reaction to it has been equally significant. Our response has been to utilise a whole range of new resources that were emerging, but appear to accelerate given the circumstances. This is *the new reality*. (5)

We have become cashless (now plastic)

I remain surprised with the number of non-cash users – and the outlets that clearly would prefer for the customer to ‘tap and go’ – rather than exchange metal or paper currency. I found this to be the case in the UK, Asia and Europe in recent times. Not surprisingly – but nevertheless a change from the usual (pre-COVID) practice.

We bank online

Most, if not all, transactions are now conducted online. In fact I cannot remember when I last actually went into a bank. On reflection essentially all transactions – both debit and credit – are conducted efficiently and effectively online with ample opportunity to check balances, make payments, and transfer monies from one account to another and for that matter from one bank to another.

We purchase travel tickets on line and use QR codes

The entire travel process has changed dramatically. Domestic travel has essentially become paperless – with the exception of a luggage tag – which by the way is not needed if you have an account with the airlines. The purchase process is online, the check in process is electronic – even the seat allocation is now APP based – and there is no longer a need for a boarding pass. The international process is similar – airlines still print boarding passes for some reason – though not actually needed.

We now use APPS for just about everything

A recent change over of phone (update) highlighted just how many APPs I currently have and use quite regularly. I currently have an APP for – weather, time, date, mail, maps, calculation, superannuation, travel, banking, health, telecommunications, institution, accommodation, services, transport – and in reality I am not a particularly heavy user of APPs, but I have become heavily reliant on the technology. For me a new phenomenon – purchasing tickets on line, choosing my seat and using a QR code to enter the venue. Attending shows in both the UK and Australia meant a heavy reliance on the APP technology and I personally witnessed the speed and efficiency of the system.

We read paperless newspapers and magazines

I currently do not purchase or read hard copy materials – especially newspapers that appear to be a thing of the past. Occasionally available in cafes, the trend is now to read focussed, customised news on my iPhone – hard to believe. The convenience alone is to be applauded.

We teach online with hybrid options

Hybrid delivery is certainly the consideration at the moment. The notion of online learning (not a particularly new concept) was adopted on mass as a consequence of lockdowns associated with COVID-19. The reluctance to return to face to face delivery – a consequence of concerns that it is neither safe nor practical to do so – has encouraged a notion of choice for students not unlike the concept of the hybrid car. It is my view that this hybrid approach to teaching and learning will endure – and I am not alone. (6)

We buy our coffee with an APP

I stood in a queue at *Starbucks* the other day and noticed I was the only one in the line that actually paid with a credit card – and I thought I was advanced not using coin or paper. What surprised me even more was the realisation that many had actually pre-ordered using their APP and the pick-up was efficient and smooth. These customers are the new reality personified.

We drive silent cars that have hybrid options – in fact some are even driver less

The number of silent vehicles – battery operated – has flourished. I now live in a street where my vehicle is just about the only one heard. The shift has been rapid. My closest neighbour confided that her preference would be for hybrid because she remains concerned about battery life despite having her own charging facility. I have not yet personally experienced the driver less vehicle – though friends have them and use them – mainly for the entertainment (or otherwise) of passengers. The truth is the technologies are here to stay and will become quite commonplace.

We can have our groceries delivered

Though still a weekly visitor to the local supermarket – I note that deliveries abound and the ‘click and collect’ option is alive and well. I can see considerable advantage for those unable to move freely – but I concede a range of busy people are using the option available.

We shop extensively online

My online purchasing has essentially replaced the in store option. I still enjoy browsing face to face whenever the opportunity arises – but I have essentially moved online for purchase purposes. The speed, diversity, options and convenience are overwhelming and I suspect I would never have moved online if it were not for COVID-19 and the associated restrictions.

We avoid conversation at the dinner table in preference to using our phones

As much as I attempt to avoid it the temptation to check emails, send messages, consider the news, get my head around the weather and investigate stock developments have become common place. Sitting in a restaurant the other night I observed a table of four interfacing with their phones – and essentially holding a dual focus with their companions – at least they are being inclusive.

We use our phones to navigate our way through cities and countries

The very notion of going anywhere - locally, nationally or internationally – without the use of GPS and in my case specifically google maps is inconceivable. The product has taken the stress out of going places – I often set it for home on my return despite knowing the way essentially for comfort and certainty.

We play our music on our phones

A pair of wireless headphones – blue toothed to the hilt – and my range of ‘you tube’ music options is boundless. I am of course behind the game but the convenience of my option is astounding.

We email constantly – from our phones

I often reflect on the fact that I am able to manage my business operation using my phone – the computer is my best option for writing lengthy email and papers of course. The bulk of my email though can be viewed and in many cases responded to using my phone. In truth I have several email options available to me – all available conveniently no matter where I happen to be. The availability of WIFI on flights further endorses the convenience – generally arriving up to date and with matters under control – this has been a remarkable development.

We SMS and WhatsApp profusely

In so many ways text messaging has replaced phone calls. The bulk of my conversations do not require voice interface. In the case of more personalised conversations – phones are used – but a great deal of communication is managed via SMS and products such as WhatsApp.

We choose our partners online

Whilst this may not be my personal modus operandi I have been surprised by the number of people around me that have met their partners online. The younger generation use online dating or matching APPs as a convenient tool to weed out time wasters and find genuine connections. The sceptical me – has bowed to the wisdom of the notion. Many have highlighted the security and safety issues associated.

If we lose our phone we can track down on line

The very notion of being without my iPhone is unnerving given my dependence. The notion of readily locating the device using a built in program is profoundly reassuring.

We can rent international apartments on line and with an APP

Being a greying digital nomad the convenience of renting hotels and apartments anywhere in the world either on line or using my APPs is extremely valued. The option of interfacing with the owner or hotelier is highly convenient and usually establishes a rapport before even arriving – not to mention a range of deals that would otherwise be lost to me.

These things were on the horizon in 2019 and in some cases were already in place – but the pandemic did in fact accelerate many of the developments. No doubt we would have reached the current points – but it seems to me we have made leaps and bounds in a relatively short period of time – and the pandemic was a player – essentially an important player in the grand scheme of things.

In my case I have become a digital nomad – albeit a greying one.

I am not sure I would like to experience a second pandemic in my lifetime but I do acknowledge the impact and accelerating nature of what has happened around me largely endorsed by hygiene and health demands.

References

- 1 Whateley (2021) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/3263/things-will-never-be-the-same.pdf>
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- 3 Whateley (2022) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/articles/2022/july/travelling-with-a-greying-digital-nomad/>
- 4 Whateley and Bofinger (2022) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/articles/2022/april/working-from-anywhere-enter-the-digital-nomad/>
- 5 Whateley (2022) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/4227/the-new-reality.pdf>
- 6 Xi (2022) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/3708/hybrid-learning-for-post-pandemic.pdf>

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