

Jan 25, 2021, 08:30am EST | 10,208 views

# The 'New Normal' And The Future Of Technology After The Covid-19 Pandemic



**Saeed Elnaj** Forbes Councils Member

**Forbes Technology Council** COUNCIL POST | Membership (Fee-Based)

Innovation

*CIO for the [National Council on Aging](#). IT executive, thought leader and contributing writer with a passion for innovative technologies.*



GETTY

Vladimir Lenin is often quoted as [saying](#), “There are decades where nothing happens, and there are weeks where decades happen.” But this phrase is probably inaccurate when it comes to what happened in technology,

economy and politics in the last decade alone. Yet, the gist of the quote is quite powerful when we look at the first weeks and the past 10 months of the coronavirus pandemic. A lot has happened in technology and technology adoption in an incredibly compressed time and at a fast pace.

It has been a long, sad and painful time since the pandemic started, but with advanced technologies, we are able to endure many of the ills brought about by this pandemic, and technology seems to be the way out of it. There is light at the end of this long coronavirus tunnel, and vaccines are on the way to get us out of this pandemic.

One of the great questions that is constantly being asked is what the “new normal” will look like after the pandemic. In his new book *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*, Fareed Zakaria sums it up by saying that life after the pandemic “is going to be, in many aspects, a sped-up version of the world we knew.” And this is also applicable to technology and its role at the onset of the pandemic. The pandemic accelerated the adoption and implementation of many technologies that would have taken years, if not decades, to become mainstream. We have seen how we switched from our high-touch, highly analog daily interactions at work, school and entertainment venues to the exact opposite in a span of few weeks. Clearly, the pandemic accelerated the dominance of technology in our lives and made us more digital creatures, with all the advantages and drawbacks therein.

It is possible to imagine the impact of technology in our “new normal” lives and the general trends that are already emerging by looking back at previous pandemics and analyzing what is already happening now. Prior crises accelerated the adoption of technologies, such as [the quick adoption of e-commerce in China after the SARS epidemic in 2005](#). Also, the 1918 pandemic invigorated [research and innovation in microbiology, clinical infectious diseases and public health](#).

---

MORE FROM [FORBES ADVISOR](#)

## Best Travel Insurance Companies

By **Amy Danise** Editor

## Best Covid-19 Travel Insurance Plans

By **Amy Danise** Editor

---

Clearly, there will be an even faster acceleration of digitalization and automation across the board. We have seen numerous in-person activities switch quickly and successfully to being delivered online. From virtual work from home to telehealth, distance learning, online shopping, entertainment, journalism and virtual physical activities such as yoga and fitness training, many activities managed to switch to online delivery.

Work from home for knowledge workers seems to have been rather successful, with some [productivity gains](#). But the big question is how it will look like after the pandemic. [According to a Gartner survey](#), 82% of employers will allow employees to work remotely some of the time, and 47% say that they will do it all the time. The future of work, or at least where it will be done, will be highly virtual.

We are already seeing video chat software such as Zoom, Teams and Slack playing a critical role in connecting employees to their jobs and connecting families and friends. Many of these technologies have been around for some time, but they started to play a far more prominent role and will continue even after Covid-19.

Two major technology trends will accelerate in the post-Covid-19 world: touchless technologies and highly automated robots that augment human tasks. It is likely that we will see [additional robotic automation](#) and AI in supply chains, customer service and beyond. With robots, the IoT and the increasing availability of 5G technologies, we will see an array of touchless technologies take off, such as [robots that make your food or drinks](#). New devices and technologies will be designed with touchless-first or minimal-

human-intervention principles. We already see examples of the acceleration in touchless technology and AI-driven automation adoption in [airports with self-service](#) check-in, where passengers create a digital token on their smartphone that can verify their identity.

But the winner of all accelerated technological categories is biotechnology. Biotechnology made it possible to have vaccines that are safe with over 90% efficacy in the span of 10 months instead of the [10 years](#) it used to take. With the publishing of the virus sequence in [January 2020](#), the race began for a vaccine, and various technologies, such as mRNA, which I've worked with in the past, enabled the development of proteins that would bind to the spikes of the virus, preventing it from binding to human cells and rendering the virus harmless. Essentially, this revolutionary mRNA technology instructs the human body to make the vaccine itself. Even more impressive is the fact that mRNA technology could be capable of [“changing medicine and the pharmaceutical industry as we know it.”](#) It is [being studied](#) to treat heart diseases, cancer and other infectious diseases. While transformative, mRNA technology has been in the making for over 20 years, but it took a pandemic to be adopted successfully.

With advanced computer simulation and sequencing tools, it took the biotech company Moderna just [two days](#) to design synthetic mRNA and a [month and a half](#) to ship its first batch of vaccines for clinical trials. This pandemic has indeed been the great accelerator of many technologies and innovations, and it made decades happen in few weeks. How will your organization embrace these new innovations as quickly as they evolved?

---

[Forbes Technology Council](#) is an invitation-only community for world-class CIOs, CTOs and technology executives. *[Do I qualify?](#)*

---

*Follow me on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#). Check out my [website](#).*



**Saeed Elnaj**

CTO at [HealthKey Technologies](#). IT executive, thought leader and contributing writer with a passion for innovative technologies. [Read Saeed Elnaj's full executive profile here.](#)

Reprints & Permissions

---