

How To Use Technology To Make Your Business More Human



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Introduction

Looking at the business technology unveiled at tech expo CES 2020,¹ you'll notice they all have one thing in common. And it's not what you might think.

Far from showcasing tech that replaces people with machines – a dystopian idea that some scaremongers would have you believe – all of the latest innovations were, in actual fact, designed to help humans in their work.

Devices that make video meetings better; portable projectors that connect people to business content and presentations; smart desks that improve posture; a game that improves team collaboration by turning any screen into a collaborative workspace; and even a self-heating lunch box were the top players presented at CES. These simple yet smart concepts all help people focus on their tasks and working relationships by removing the hurdles and time wasters.

And this, in a nutshell, is what workplace tech should be about: helping people do what they do best without the distraction of mundane or repetitive tasks, or glitchy, unintuitive software. But getting that balance right – between technology and people power – will continue to keep us all busy as we move into Industry 4.0.

It needn't be a cause for alarm, though. With new tech comes new possibilities and new ways of working. In this guide, we'll look at how you can employ tech to make your business more human, explore how automation can get the best out of your staff, and debunk a few automation myths along the way.

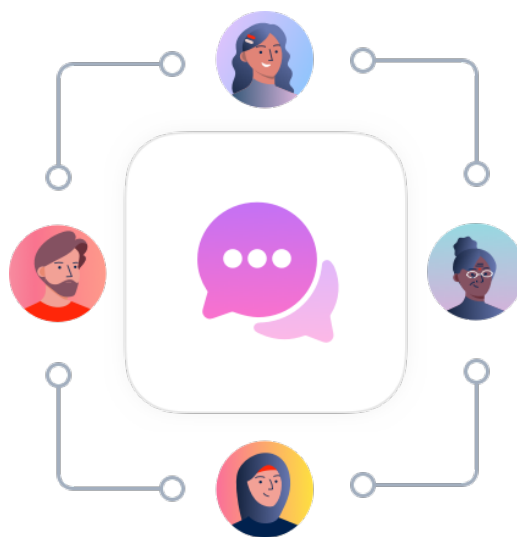
¹ <https://www.techrepublic.com/pictures/photos-the-10-best-smart-office-products-from-ces-2020/10/>

How technology and humans can work in harmony

The fear that robots are set to replace us is not a new one. During the Industrial Revolution, people were worried that the new technology would lead to mass unemployment. Hindsight is a great thing, and of course we know that this wasn't the case. Instead, new jobs and new industries were born.

But “automation” can be a scary word to some, especially when the ONS reports² that 1.5 million jobs are at “high risk” of being completed by robots instead of humans. Curiously, it also found that the percentage of jobs at risk fell from 8.1% in 2011 to 7.4% in 2017 – without providing any real explanation why. We're also not seeing mass unemployment in areas that are already tech-heavy, such as healthcare. Nor are we anywhere near to becoming the robot-worker-filled world that's portrayed in films like *I, Robot* (set, incidentally, just 15 years from now).

In reality, automation and Industry 4.0 look at ways to free us from the mundane, repetitive, or error-prone tasks that generally stop us from working on something more meaningful. Science Focus Magazine³ uses the example of a radiologist. Whilst a computer may examine a CAT scan for signs of cancer, it's the trained radiologist who will mastermind and instigate the treatment plan, and provide empathy and care to their patient.



Tech allows people to do what they do best – be creative, insightful, and innovative. And as you'll discover in this guide, businesses can make the most of this in a variety of ways.

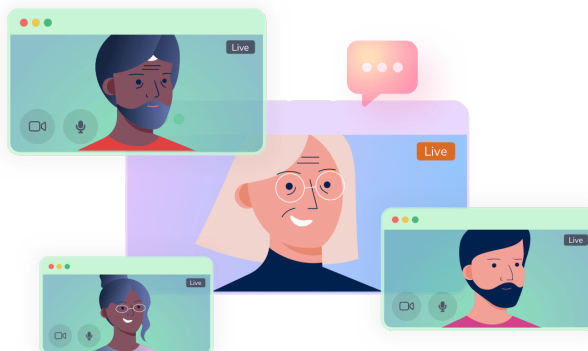
² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nigeldavies/2019/03/27/1-5m-jobs-are-at-high-risk-of-automation-but-theres-no-reason-to-panic/#48d596209bdc>

³ <https://www.sciencefocus.com/future-technology/automation-the-next-industrial-revolution>

Make remote working a reality with digital workplace tech

Remote working is a prime example of how technology has helped many businesses become more empathetic to their employees' needs. Improved Wi-Fi coverage and digital workplace technology have made it possible for people to work anywhere and at any time. No longer constrained to the office from 9 to 5, some employees now have the autonomy to control their working hours and location to fit their lifestyles. The early birds can start work when the sun rises and they are most productive, whilst the night owls can work into the evening when they're feeling most creative.

Far from being a passing trend, remote working may no longer be an optional employee benefit for companies and sectors that struggle to recruit. A recent report by Zapier⁴ found that 95% of people want to work remotely, with 74% willing to hand in their notice to join a company that lets them work from anywhere. Yet 31% say their employers don't allow it. Part of the problem is the misconception that staff can't be trusted to work productively without a manager's watchful eye.⁵



Remote working is known to improve employee wellbeing, engagement, work-life balance, and productivity. But it also opens doors for people who may not otherwise be able to work within the constraints of the traditional workplace setup.⁶ With strict working hours and commute removed, those with family commitments, health issues, or disabilities can get their job done in a way that's best for them and their needs. All they need is Wi-Fi and the right tech.

⁴ <https://zapier.com/blog/remote-work-report-by-zapier/>

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/abdullahimammed/2018/11/22/5-biggest-misconceptions-about-remote-work-among-employers-and-employees/#6ff938a9f821>

⁶ <https://www.claromentis.com/intranet-advice/why-your-business-needs-to-be-remote-work-ready-how-to-do-it/>

Remote working can help shrink the gender pay gap too, especially for those with children. Many mothers are forced to work below their pay grades and skillset, reduce their hours, or even give up work altogether in order to balance work and caring responsibilities, according to research by BITC.⁷ A report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission advises that remote working is the best way to combat this inequality.⁸ Being able to control working schedules and location around family emergencies, last minute trips to the doctor, or the school run, is invaluable for mothers looking to balance their careers with childcare.

Thanks to the growth of digital workplace tech, the opportunities available to people who don't fit the traditional 9 to 5 mould – and let's be honest, that's most of us – multiply. Businesses that embrace the technology that make remote working possible – and actually provide this flexibility to their staff – will show their hand as putting employee wellbeing first.

Connect teams with digital communication channels

The advances in video calls, instant messaging, and internal social media have relegated email to the corner in many businesses. Whilst there is a time and place for a well-worded and considered email, the days of using it as your main communication method with colleagues are long gone.

It's said that only 7% of human communication is verbal, with the rest coming from body language and tone of voice.⁹ Whilst those figures have been debated over the years, what's clear is that people take most meaning from non-verbal communication cues, such as a raised voice, folded arms, or rolling eyes. Trying to emulate these accurately over email is clunky at best (think ALL CAPS or copious exclamation marks to signify tone of voice) and hostile at worst. A hastily typed email sent in a fit of anger to a client or coworker will do nothing for strengthening those human connections.

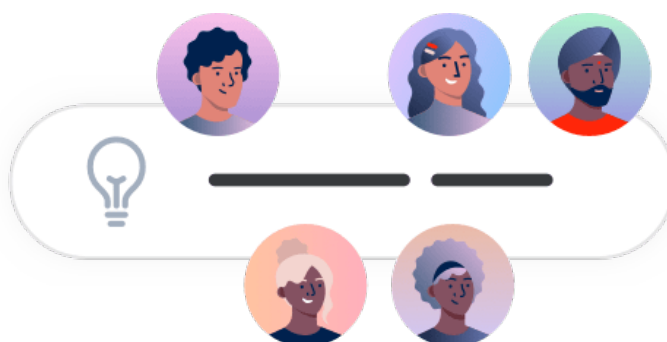
⁷ <https://www.bitc.org.uk/report/equal-lives-parenthood-and-caring-in-the-workplace/>

⁸ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/closing-the-gender-pay-gap.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/239831>

Now there are more tools for improving human connection than ever, each one nuanced to suit different types of conversation. Instant messaging apps that are built for business collaboration are best for asking quick-fire questions to groups of colleagues and getting immediate responses. Laden with emojis and GIF integration, these tools make it easy to add context to messages and allow people's personalities to shine through their words.

Internal social media feeds, mainstays of the business intranet homepage, are great for sharing company news, welcoming new hires, or giving kudos to colleagues. Posting updates here will encourage more interaction than your typical email, which doesn't inspire likes and engagements in the same way as social media feeds. You can @mention people too, which comes in useful when you want to recognise specific team members for their achievements.



And then there's video conferencing. Whilst this isn't new – it gained widespread attention in the 1980's – its capabilities and usage have grown exponentially. A study by Owl Labs, which surveyed over 1,000 U.S. professionals about their video conferencing habits, found that 83% have video conferencing facilities in at least half of their meeting rooms, 96% find it effective for staying connected with their remote coworkers, and it's the preferred communication method after face-to-face.¹⁰ A report by Transparency Market Research forecasts that the global video conferencing market is set to grow, and will be worth an estimated \$8.9 million by 2025.¹¹

Investing in communication tech that goes beyond email allows your staff to communicate and collaborate using tools that are up to the task. Organisations are fast realising that sending an email is rarely the best way to communicate. It certainly doesn't build rapport in the same way as instant messaging or video conferencing do, and neither does it inspire engagement like internal

¹⁰ <https://www.owl-labs.com/state-of-video-conferencing/2019>

¹¹ <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/worldwide-video-conferencing-market-rising-trend-of-business-operations-at-multiple-locations-catalyzes-growth-says-tmr-637871533.html>

social media. Giving your staff the freedom to choose how they communicate with their coworkers speaks volumes in how much you trust them and value their decisions.

Support the environmental cause with virtual offices

Businesses without a bricks and mortar HQ are no longer an anomaly. Staff in 100% remote companies work virtually from home, co-working spaces, cafés, libraries, even caravans. This is only possible thanks to Wi-Fi and digital workplace tools. Without these, virtual offices would simply not exist.

The benefit of virtual offices is more than 'just' empowering people to work according to their personality, family commitments, and health. There is a real impact on the environment too.

Virtual workforces are paving the way for a world where the commute – and the associated carbon footprint – is no longer a significant part of working life. Sara Sutton, founder of FlexJobs, has calculated that her business saves the environment from 438 tonnes of emissions a year - the equivalent of taking 75 cars off the road.¹² Imagine if every business did the same?

Office space provider Regus investigated that very idea, and found that by 2030, U.S. workers could reduce their carbon footprint by 100 million tonnes, and UK workers by 7.8 million tonnes, if they abandoned the commute and worked from home instead.¹³

Millennials and those about to enter the workplace are increasingly looking for businesses that are generating more than just profit. Simply put, they don't want to work for companies that don't value the same things they do. According to a report by Deloitte,¹⁴ 27% of millennials think

¹² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nigeldavies/2019/12/17/the-perks-of-being-a-100-remote-ceo-cycling-yoga--gardening/#6efcb65f7961>

¹³ <https://www.regus.co.uk/work-uk/hidden-benefits-canning-commute/>

¹⁴ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/deloitte-2019-millennial-survey.pdf>

businesses should improve and protect the environment, but only 12% believe they actually do. And 38% would reduce their relationship with a business if their products or services had a negative impact on the environment. The report ends by recommending that business leaders should “balance profit with protecting the planet” to inspire loyalty and engage younger workers. Ditching the physical office and, by extension, the commute, and adopting a digital workplace instead, could be a good start.

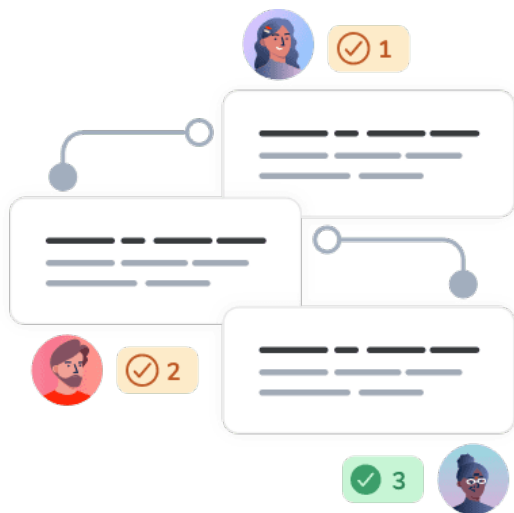
Improve the human experience at work with automation

It may sound counter-intuitive, but the more that companies invest in automation, the more “human” their workplace becomes. This is the key takeaway from a study conducted by Goldsmiths, University of London and Automation Anywhere, which interviewed business leaders from around the world and reviewed academic literature to assess the impact of automation on the workplace.¹⁵

The research found that staff in augmented workplaces were 38% more engaged than their non-augmented counterparts, 70% saw an improvement in employee wellbeing, and 78% said that automation freed them from repetitive work. Ultimately, staff were happier because automation allowed them to focus on creative and strategic work - in other words, the parts of their jobs they like best.

However, the report warns that businesses adopting automation technology must make a conscious effort to invest in their people at the same time, in order to reap the benefits. It's only when businesses placed value on staff happiness and used automation to deliberately enhance their employees' skills that they saw a positive outcome.

¹⁵ <https://www.automationanywhere.com/company/press-room/automation-is-making-work-more-human-global-research-reveals>



In the case of HR, automation puts the human back into resources. E-forms and workflows software can obliterate paperwork, digitising HR processes such as job applications, expense claims, and appraisal feedback. Self-service holiday planner apps make light work of managing leave requests, providing staff with the autonomy to handle it themselves. Take away these manual processes, and HRs are free to focus on tasks that are more fulfilling, meaningful, and require that truly human trait – empathy.¹⁶ Without

automation, HRs risk being too buried under paperwork to deal with that member of staff who is struggling with their health and needs long-term leave, or to mediate between conflicting coworkers.

Tailor your recruitment and retention processes with AI

Talent acquisition is so much more than just CV screening, yet recruiters spend up to 23 hours reviewing resumé for a single hire – and 88% of these are from candidates who are unqualified.¹⁷

AI aims to turn this around, releasing recruiters from the mundane and allowing them to focus their time on sourcing the best candidates for the right role. A case in point: Unilever used AI to screen all entry-level candidates for a year, and it was such a success, they plan to use it indefinitely.¹⁸ Thanks to AI tech such as neuroscience-based games that determined a candidate's profile match, to video technology that analysed keywords, intonation, and body language during

¹⁶ <https://www.digitalbullet.in/thoughtleaders/technology/2018/november/automation-in-hr/automation-in-hr-will-make-human-work-more-meaningful/>

¹⁷ <https://ideal.com/resume-screening/>

¹⁸ <https://www.businessinsider.com/unilever-artificial-intelligence-hiring-process-2017-6?r=US&IR=T>

a preset interview, Unilever saw a significant increase in diversity, achieved gender parity, and reduced the hiring process from four months to four weeks. Recruiters spent 75% less time on CV screening, job offers increased from 63% to 80%, and offer acceptance rates jumped from 64% to 82%.

AI is making waves in keeping hold of current staff too. AI created by IBM can predict which staff members will leave their jobs with 95% accuracy.¹⁹ Once an employee is predicted to be at risk of handing in their notice, managers are alerted and given actions to re-engage with them, such as by providing opportunities for re-training.²⁰ This has saved IBM nearly \$300 million in retention costs.

Summary

The business tech revolution is happening now. Whether it's digital workplace software that empowers staff to work from anywhere and reduces the carbon footprint, communication tools that make connections more meaningful, AI that improves diversity in recruitment, or automation that liberates people from thankless and repetitive tasks - business tech has the blueprint to make the workplace more human.

What's vital is that businesses get the balance right between humans and tech, and champion the unique skills they each bring to the table so that they can co-exist for maximum productivity. Investing in automation to aid employee wellbeing, autonomy, and innovation is the key to unlocking its true benefits.

¹⁹ <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/03/ibm-ai-can-predict-with-95-percent-accuracy-which-employees-will-quit.html>

²⁰ <https://www.hrdive.com/news/from-buzzkill-to-benefit-how-ibm-rebranded-its-hr-department/551162/>



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Kerensa is a true believer in the power of the written word, dedicating her time at Claromentis to producing a content strategy that connects people to engaging and informative content, with a particular focus on brand voice.

*Outside of the office, Kerensa enjoys **good** coffee, spending time with her cat, and learning to play piano.*

The Claromentis Mission

Our mission is to provide an integrated digital workplace that helps your company share information, work smarter, and engage with people to reach your goals.

As an intranet software provider, our customers range from the largest global brands such as Virgin Care and Golden State Warriors, to ambitious and driven SMEs, as well as charities, financial organisations, and educational institutions.

We deliver beautifully designed and technologically sound digital workplaces that are accessible to companies of all sizes, locations, and industries, constantly growing and changing to meet our customers' evolving business needs.

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