IDG COMMUNICATIONS INC.

ORGANIZATIONS SEEK A SILVER LINING IN FORCED CHANGE

Top IT priorities as recovery gains momentum

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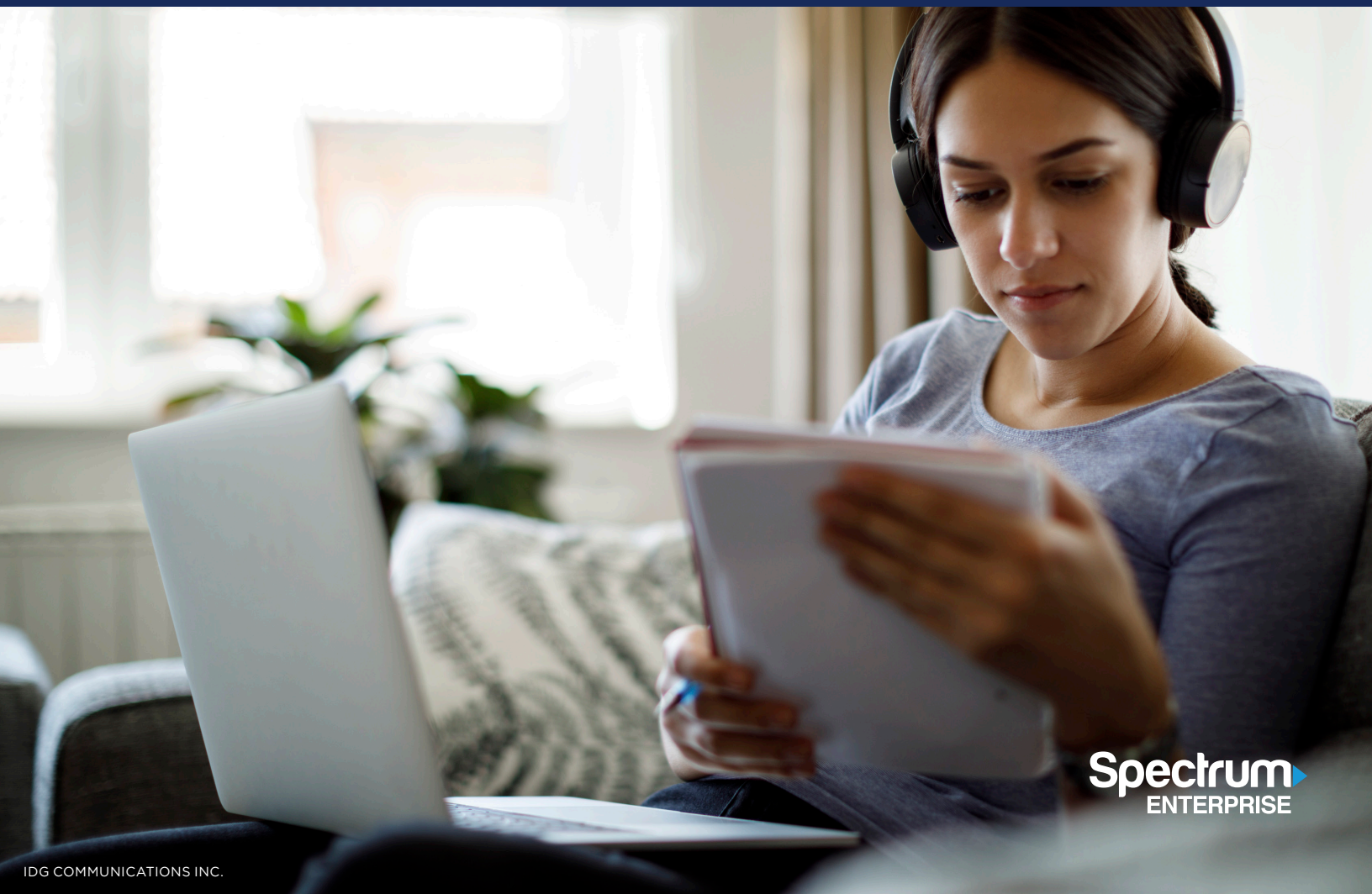
When COVID-19 forced workers out of the office, organizations had to make significant changes to their IT infrastructure and management to support an almost completely remote workforce—and do so rapidly, with little time for planning. Although many companies struggled at first with this abrupt disruption, a recent survey by IDG indicates that IT leaders also saw it as a way to drive needed technology improvements. This white paper looks at how the pandemic response has shifted IT priorities and has revealed some challenges and opportunities that can accelerate the move to digital business.

Technology planning

Survey respondents unsurprisingly say their priorities for the next three months are enhancing security, improving network reliability, and upgrading infrastructure. The pandemic has put companies in the position of needing to make changes on a radically shortened timeline just to keep the lights on.
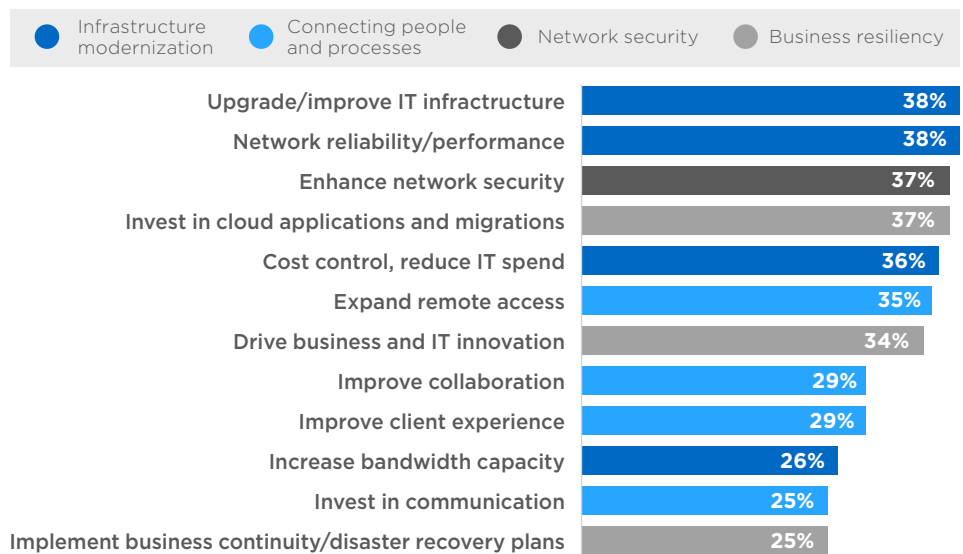
IT leaders report that their list of priorities for the medium- and long-term is both comprehensive and ambitious—suggesting that they're looking at the current environment as an opportunity to accelerate changes they already wanted to make.

Four broad categories of focus

Top priorities fell into four categories: Infrastructure modernization, connecting people and processes, network security, and business resiliency. Within each, respondents showed they're interested in an array of IT upgrades and initiatives, including business continuity, infrastructure upgrades, and driving innovation. In fact, when asked to select from a list of priorities for the next 12 months, 25% or more of respondents said that each item was a priority.

For **infrastructure modernization**, IT leaders want to concentrate on upgrading infrastructure (38%), boosting network reliability and performance (38%), and increasing bandwidth capacity (26%), all while controlling or reducing IT spending (36%).

Top medium- and long-term priorities for IT leaders:

- **Infrastructure modernization.**
- **Connecting people and processes.**
- **Network security.**
- **Ensuring business resiliency.**

Immediate IT priorities, next three months

Legend: ● Infrastructure modernization ● Connecting people and processes ● Network security ● Business resiliency

Priority	%
Upgrade/improve IT infractructure	38%
Network reliability/performance	38%
Enhance network security	37%
Invest in cloud applications and migrations	37%
Cost control, reduce IT spend	36%
Expand remote access	35%
Drive business and IT innovation	34%
Improve collaboration	29%
Improve client experience	29%
Increase bandwidth capacity	26%
Invest in communication	25%
Implement business continuity/disaster recovery plans	25%

Source: IDG Communications

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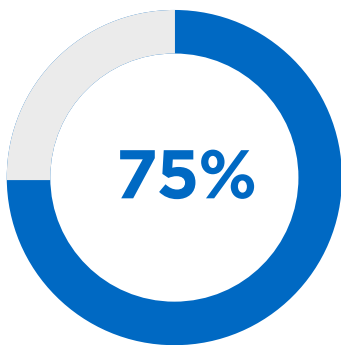
For **connecting people and processes**, they want to expand remote access (35%), improve collaboration (29%), improve client experience through contact centers, client portals, and ecommerce (29%), and invest in communications technologies (25%).

More than a third (37%) of survey respondents intend to prioritize better **network security**. The decision-makers face security challenges keeping up with the surge in remote work and customer interactions. Half of them expect increased investments in cybersecurity over the next 12 months. They plan to target inconsistent software and firmware updates, unprotected endpoints accessing company data, a lack of security training for employees, inadequate identity and access management processes, and out-of-date or inadequate virtual private network (VPN) technology.

IT decision-makers and business leaders need a security infrastructure that enables remote workers to safely access the IT resources they need, but without significantly disrupting their workflows or reducing performance. After all, if security gets in the way of doing the job, employees will find ways to work around security systems, which makes everyone more vulnerable to attack.

And to **ensure business resiliency**, they say they'll increase their emphasis on cloud applications and cloud migration (37%), business and IT innovation (34%), and business continuity and disaster recovery plans and solutions (25%). The common theme of finding and filling technology gaps persists across companies of all sizes. However, SMBs are far more likely to prioritize upgrading their IT infrastructure, while larger enterprises are much more interested in improving business continuity and security. What a company needs to do to keep operating depends on what it has already done.

Technology investments for a new business paradigm

Health concerns combined with the resulting reduction in overhead costs have forced many employers to keep their offices shut or minimally staffed for some time to come, and maybe even permanently. Indeed, 75% of IT leaders say they expect at least some of their workforce to still be working remotely in June 2021. With this shift, it's imperative to plan for an extended period in which most or all interactions with clients and employees can also take place remotely.

Respondents are deeply concerned about their ability to connect with employees and customers. With new social distancing guidelines in place, which limit most in-person interactions, 73% of IT leaders report that using technology to facilitate interactions has become more important, and 39% call the change significant. The smaller the company, the more likely they are to consider it critical: twice as many companies with fewer than 500 employees (51%) as those with more than 1,000 employees (26%) say using technology to enable digital interactions has become significantly more important in the last three months.

75%

of IT leaders say they expect at least some of their workforce to still be working remotely in June 2021.

Source: IDG Communications

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Change in importance of technology to enable digital client/employee interactions during the past 3 months.
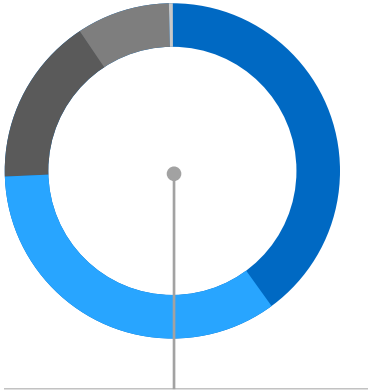
39% **Increased significantly**

34% **Increased somewhat**

15% **No change**

11% **Decreased somewhat**

1% **Decreased significantly**

Source: IDG Communications

Deploying those digital technologies may not be easy for many because of their existing infrastructure. Seventy percent of IT leaders believe that it will be a challenge to provide long-term digital alternatives to face-to-face communication via their current infrastructure.

While IT addresses the top pressing issues—enhancing security, expanding remote access, and improving network reliability—they will also need to look at their fourth priority of upgrading infrastructure.

Conclusion: Adapting to the new normal

"Unexpected challenges, thrust upon businesses of all sizes, have heightened the importance of network capabilities and accelerated timetables for deploying a reliable, high-performing, secure and flexible network," says Satya Parimi, group vice president, data products, Spectrum Enterprise.

Supporting distributed workforces with convenient and reliable collaboration tools is a high priority for organizations. Such tools help retain the benefits of formal face-to-face meetings, impromptu watercooler conversations, and other in-person experiences while everyone is in distributed work environments. Technology choices to alleviate these network challenges matter, but how organizations implement those technologies matters equally, if not more. Organizations should look to partner with a trusted network service provider, such as Spectrum Enterprise, that brings a wide range of networking, security, communications and collaboration solutions—and the deep expertise to help implement and support those solutions. Doing so can help organizations implement the right network advancements to meet these new requirements—all with a single partner.

To learn more about the technologies to help you stay connected in the new normal, click here.

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

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