

COMVIVA

The Telco Industry Boom

The telco industry has taken an unusual trajectory over the past year — while most verticals have been hit hard, telcos have shown unprecedented growth. Manoranjan Mohapatra, CEO at Comviva, tells the industry's story.

As you head into the office at the beginning of 2021, what are your top 3 priorities for the year?

Last year, gripped by a global pandemic, was an epic test of character and determination of organizations across the globe. As an organization, we did reasonably well to negotiate the unexpected challenges and partner with our customers. The key priorities for the year 2021 will be:

1. Leadership & Talent Development:

As an organization, we strongly invest in people and capability development. Not only because it's the 'right' thing to do, but because it is the only way we know how to enable an environment where team spirit prospers, working is fun, and innovation thrives. This year would be the opportune moment to review, re-evaluate, and redesign how we plan for and manage the talent and capability the organization needs.

2. New solution development & Innovation. The crisis is a tipping point of historic proportions and organizations that recognize and respond to this trend will experience many opportunities on their journey to transformation. Innovation shall be the driving force of the post COVID recovery. Prioritizing innovation this year shall be the key to unlocking post crisis growth.

3. Driving Growth through strong Execution & Customer Centricity.

Growth is a high priority for most organizations today. At an organizational level, we believe that strong execution and customer engagement is of utmost priority. New products or services, new business models, pursuing innovation as a long-term strategy, geographic expansion, and deepening ecosystems will also lead us to growth.

What were some of the biggest lessons of 2020?

The biggest lesson of 2020 is being flexible and getting used to dealing with uncertainty. In order to succeed, you must execute on the activities that are within your control. We have seen and learned how effective and efficient our people can be in a remote work environment, to deliver critical solutions and services with excellence and quality.

We have learned to embrace disruption and the opportunity to pivot at a pace that would typically take years but is now only taking months. Another key lesson has been the importance of acting fast.

What are your broad technology predictions for 2021?

Although we continue to work in a challenging environment today, it



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is because of our investment in our people and our technology that we remain resilient.

During the pandemic, consumers have moved swiftly toward digital channels, and organizations have positively responded in turn. Customer interactions have now become predominantly digital first. This year, cashless transactions have taken on a new significance. With 5G network rollouts gaining momentum, we can expect to see profitable, new use cases ramping up; we also expect to see an acceleration of private 5G networks. This trend will begin to expand with advancement of 5G technology offering greater availability, more bandwidth, lower latency and, most importantly, 5G-enabled devices.

Today, organizations are using big data, smart devices, AI, and augmented reality to understand customer behavior at an unprecedented level. As businesses

work to humanize the virtual experience in 2021, we'll see major developments in edge AI working with cloud-based AI ecosystems to deliver deeper virtual collaboration experiences.

How has your workplace transformed over 2020?

2020 has been the year of exceptions and we discovered several new facets of remote working. We had to keep our people's safety and health at the core yet maintain business continuity.

Working from home has become the new normal. While we have been working remotely, we have taken extra measures to ensure that we are integrated with teams and ensure that the personal touch and connect with our people is maintained. Since the lockdown, we introduced various forums like monthly CEO Chats, Open Houses to connect with the leadership teams. We made

sure to call up all employees living away from homes to check for any assistance and gave personalized attention wherever required. We shared productivity hacks, expert advice on WFH and other topics.

One big switch was partnering with our customers across 95+ countries. We deployed path-breaking solutions for our customers with zero travel, something that seemed impossible in the past. We realized the power of digital and collaborating remotely to create innovative solutions for customers and care for our teams.

Companies are at a crossroads, those that capitalize on post-COVID opportunities will find themselves in a good position to retain talent and attract people when the situation stabilizes.

What will the "new normal" look like for your industry?

Some telecom companies have been strengthened by the spike in data traffic, increased use of broadband services. Traffic growth has, in fact, demonstrated increased reliance on connectivity and digital services.

The telecom sector has remained "mission-critical" to keep economies moving under the lockdown by providing business-critical connectivity and resiliency, facilitating work-from-home arrangements and keeping individuals and societies connected and informed, with access to medical, financial, commercial, and other essential services to manage the crisis. The business has not been affected much as people have increasingly consumed telecom value added services to stay connected and work remotely, and this is reflected through growing revenues of the telcos.

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Following the social distancing norm, people now prefer to do payments digitally i.e. via UPI apps, cards or Internet banking. Telecom operators are forming partnerships with OTT video players to provide personalized digital content through mobile-based entertainment and infotainment services. Operators are also partnering with technology providers like us to understand customer behavior using technologies like AI/ML and data analytics.■