

The Technologies Driving Growth

(Even During the Most Challenging Times)





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Introduction

It's been a challenging year to say the least. The COVID-19 crisis upended everyone's plans, from entrepreneurs who were in the midst of gangbuster growth to small business owners who were hoping to make their first hire. Markets tanked and the economy struggled, while most people put their focus on their families and their health.

Even before the coronavirus pandemic engulfed the globe, businesses were being challenged. Wildfires in Australia laid bare the impact of climate change, the U.S.-China trade war put enormous pressure on the world's supply chains, Brexit caused confusion for businesses that deal with Europe, while Hurricane Dorian caused a reported \$6 billion in damage across the Bahamas, the U.S., and in Canada.

However, as difficult as the past several months have been, many companies across all sectors survived and even thrived, in part because their technology allowed them to act quickly and nimbly. They were able to continue servicing customers throughout all of these disruptions.

Even before 2020, many businesses understood that up-to-date and sophisticated software, from customer relationship management (CRM) programs to human capital management (HCM) platforms, and everything in between could help them do things faster and more efficiently. The COVID-19 crisis, though, crystalized that fact for many people and made the entrepreneurs who did not have updated software realize they have left themselves particularly vulnerable.

Entrepreneurs who have already adopted newer technologies are no doubt thankful that most of that software is running in the cloud, with programs accessed over the internet. These programs and the data that they collect are kept on third-party servers and can be used on any computer or device no matter where that employee resides. That certainly comes into play when a disaster forces a company's employees to work from home.

Crises or not, the cloud computing market has exploded over the past few years. According to Kenneth Research, the public cloud market is expected to top \$623 billion in 2023, up from \$272 billion in 2018, with Flexera finding that 78 percent of small to midsize companies already run some of their operations in the cloud.

If you want your company to continue growing—in good times and bad—you will need to adopt some sort of cloud-based software. But what should you buy, and is your business even properly positioned to take advantage of new technology?

Throughout this e-book, you'll learn more about the cloud, what programs can help your business expand, and how to determine what technology is right for your company—now and for when the economy recovers. If any good comes out of all this disruption, it's that you'll be better set up for success the next time some wild event happens that's beyond your control.

**CHAPTER I:**

Ask the Right Questions

There comes a time in every company's life where pushing a boulder up a mountain seems like an easier task to accomplish than squeezing out more growth. Your company may still be increasing revenues, but profits are suddenly harder to come by. You may be spending more—ramping up headcount and expanding to new markets—but the bottom line isn't moving forward. Depending on what sector you're in, these issues can become even more acute in a crisis.

When disease and natural disasters hit, business owners find themselves dealing with a host of new, hard-to-handle issues. By way of example, employee turnover is likely to pick up as more demands get put on your staff's time. Sales teams may be losing track of clients as their workloads increase. Important company data, such as lead times and consumer feedback, may be harder to calculate with so much in flux. A remote and dispersed workforce can also complicate business to the point where the excel spreadsheets you've been using up until now just don't cut it. It's before these pain points arise and start impacting the business that you'll want to consider adopting new cloud-based technology.

WHAT ARE YOUR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES?

When considering what technology to buy, it's important to stay focused on the long-term. Crises

come and go but ensuring that you're able to grow—and able to handle that growth—in any market condition is most important.

Many companies make the mistake of purchasing a one-size-fits-all program, while others look for the cheapest option. Executives are often swayed by the technology itself—the bells and whistles, the sleekness of the interface—without thinking about how these technologies impact the day-to-day life of the business.

The only way to figure out which technology is right for your company is to think carefully about your business objectives. Think about the pain points you want to fix today and what new pain points will arise when you grow to the size you are pointing to. Then consider using technology that improves your most important objectives. Too many people acquire technologies they have absolutely no use for. If your business doesn't require a complex supply chain, then do you need a program that provides state-of-the-art supply chain management?

What you need to do is take a step back and answer these three questions:

1. What do you care about?
2. Is improving the customer experience on the top of your list?
3. Is keeping staff happy and satisfied most important?

Each of these priorities requires technologies specific to the challenges they present.

What you need to do is take a step back and answer these three questions: What do you care about? Is improving the customer experience on the top of your list? Is keeping staff happy and satisfied most important? Each of these priorities requires technologies specific to the challenges they present.

Work with your leadership team or, if your company is larger, create a task force with people from all levels and divisions to help you determine your objectives. Come up with three areas of your business you want to mature, and then tackle those first. The rest can come as your business evolves.

SOFTWARE IN A TIME OF CRISIS—AND RECOVERY

Improving growth and efficiency should be top of mind when determining your business objectives, but you'll also want to think carefully about how you can keep your business operating in challenging environments.

The first place to start is to create a crisis management plan, which should outline everything from how to communicate with your employees, how to continue meeting payroll, and how to deploy a remote workforce. It should also list all of the software you're using, who has access to what programs, and how your employees might use your company's tech tools from home.

Fortunately, because these programs are in the cloud, acting quickly in an emergency is easy to do. Your work-from-home staff will be able to access your software through their web browser or mobile device. For instance, sales teams can easily log in to their CRM software and send out emails, perhaps pre-written by marketing, to clients telling them how your business is continuing to serve them. Many of the human resource-related software options will let you quickly and easily send out messages to staff—since communication in a crisis is a must—and design new employee engagement programs on the fly.

With the right tools in place—and that may also include finance, supply chain, and collaboration software—there's no reason you can't keep operating, even thriving, when your physical doors are closed and when they reopen again.



CHAPTER 2

Managing Money when the Unexpected Hits

When a crisis hits, cash flow becomes that much more critical than usual (of course, it's always important). You may need to tighten the purse strings a bit or find ways to become more efficient and more productive. It's entirely possible that you'll see a major increase in demand for your product or service, and so you may need to grow rapidly in a short amount of time. This is where cloud-based software shines: numerous studies have shown that cloud tech is cheaper to use and maintain than on-premises programs. It can help increase productivity, too.

According to Tech Aisle's 2020 U.S. SMB and Midmarket Cloud Adoption survey:

65 percent of SMBs believe that cloud technology improves their ability to grow and scale their business

47 percent say that the cloud helps them stay agile

41 percent say that the cloud helps them launch new products and services more quickly

40 percent say that cloud-based tools improve business productivity

CONTROL YOUR CASH FLOW

For the uninitiated, cloud-based programs can run on servers that are housed at an individual company's office (called a private cloud) or on third-party servers (the public cloud). In some cases, a business will put some parts of a program on a private cloud and some on a public cloud (called a hybrid cloud). For instance, a financial company might feel more comfortable storing sensitive client information on their own server but may be OK with accessing other parts of their business through the public cloud. Programs accessed in a public cloud are the cheapest to use, but even a private cloud is less expensive to maintain than traditional on-premises servers.

One big benefit to cloud computing is pricing. Companies are usually charged a monthly per-user rate—if you have 50 employees right now, you only pay for those 50 staffers. If you add to your headcount, you pay

incrementally for your new users. If you are in a crisis situation where health issues or natural disasters take a toll on your cash flow, you can reduce costs by deleting users and discontinue paying for their licenses. In some cases, you can do that in real time; in others, it's when you renew your contract.

You also don't have to pay maintenance fees or for software upgrades, which can cost companies that run their programs in house a lot in money and time. If there's a problem, the software vendor is responsible for fixing the issue. If a server stops working, the third-party cloud provider is the one that gets it running again.

When new features get added—which happens often—it gets rolled out to everyone who uses the software, typically in the background and without any interruption. This is especially useful for those who follow tax and regulatory issues. Anytime there's an important change, it's the software vendor who's responsible for upgrading the program to reflect new rules.

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With a third-party overseeing these programs, companies end up saving money and, most important, have more predictable cash flows. The monthly fee becomes a line item on an operating budget rather than a charge to a capital expenditure program. According to [Orbits Research](#), the cloud can save companies more than 35 percent in annual operating costs.

SUPPLY CHAIN TRANSPARENCY

Another advantage to the cloud is that it can give you far more insight into your supply chain. With cloud software and virtual servers, you can collect and store copious amounts of data, which can then be used to generate business insights in real time. As you think about your data (and which data you're looking to analyze), insights should tie back to your business objectives. This data analysis should provide a much clearer look at your expenses, revenues, returns on investment, and how your supply chain is functioning.

Many cloud-based programs come with detailed analytical tools that can drill down into various parts of a business, such as supply chain optimization and sales team effectiveness. Depending on how you build your cloud infrastructure, your various programs might also talk to each other and share data, which will then make your business much more transparent. For instance, SAP's supply chain planning software can help you forecast demand, easily share production details with suppliers, and troubleshoot problems in real time with a collaboration dashboard that connects your business to your supplier.

This data allows you to be able to see any supply chain disruptions as they occur. You can then recognize disruptions and deal with them quickly and effectively.

**CHAPTER III:**

Selling in Challenging Times

Most companies have some sort of CRM system whether they realize it or not. A small business might have an Excel sheet that lists the names of clients and the last time each one was called. A business owner might have a notebook that lists a client's favorite restaurants or the time of the day they prefer to be contacted. Businesses may have a newsletter they send out to clients and prospects in a monthly email. Maybe they just keep their important client information in their mind.

In any case, while business owners know a lot about their customers, customer information is often stored and recalled in unorganized and inefficient ways. It's hard to share a notebook with staff, while an Excel spreadsheet can get unruly if multiple people are adding data to it.

As the name suggests, CRM software helps companies manage their customer relationships. These programs collect all kinds of client-related data including personal customer information, demographic details, notes from service calls, purchasing habits, their social media posts, and more. If there's some piece of client information you want to keep an eye on, chances are your CRM program can track it. These platforms are designed to give you a full, 360-degree view of your customers.

CRMs do more than just take in data—they also let you take those insights and use them to send out better marketing messages or provide the insights allowing you to be better equipped for your sales calls. For instance, SAP's sales CRM can help staff develop individualized quotes based on that customer's specific needs; its marketing CRM can be used to send robust newsletters, while giving marketers detailed insights on whether their campaigns are generating return on investment (ROI); its e-commerce CRM makes it easy to build a consistent online shopping experience across all digital platforms.



An increasing number of CRMs are omni-channel, which means they offer a variety of programs in one easy-to-access platform. While you may be able to pick and choose a CRM's features, (e.g., you may not need e-commerce capabilities if you don't have an online store) you can at least get everything in one place. A central dashboard will give you access to your CRM, while integrated data from marketing, sales, and e-commerce will give you even greater insights.

EASILY SHIFT SALES TACTICS

CRM technology can be especially effective in times of crisis. If your business and your customers are sideswiped by a pandemic or natural disaster, it helps to know exactly who you're working with (which can be easy to forget if you have a large client base) and their main points of contact. You'll want to quickly send out communications to those companies to let them know how you're handling the crisis, how you can help, or even just to check in to see how they're doing personally.

These programs also make it easy to shift gears in times of crisis. Email marketing campaigns that are no longer relevant or appropriate can be quickly shut down with a press of a button, and new emails, targeted to the new reality, can be substituted. You may have some customers who you think could use your services, and if you're tracking the right data, you can easily figure out who to call and who to leave alone for the time

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being. It's important to be humble in tough times, and think more about how you can help your customers get through their challenges and less about how much you can sell to them. Use of your tech tools can help you craft better messaging, reach the right people, and adjust to new sales cycles.

CREATE A BETTER EXPERIENCE

Selling is all about understanding how customers feel on a deeper level about your brand, your pricing, your products, and your customer service. This is especially important in difficult situations.

Some cloud-based software providers, like SAP, are now collecting data on the client experience. For instance, rather than sending a survey to a customer asking them if they liked the experience of shopping in your store, you can now personally ask them how they liked the experience. How did the interaction with the sales staff make them feel? How important was the store layout to their decision making? How did they react to pricing? This brings behavioral science into the data analytics process and, ultimately, the sales process.

This more experiential-focused approach is made easier by artificial intelligence and machine learning. These technologies, which can analyze millions of data points in seconds, will deliver far better, actionable client insights. Using predictive analytics, AI might let you know, perhaps even before your customer knows, who might need your product or whether sentiment around its usefulness may be changing. It will shine a light on new customer behaviors with every new piece of data it receives.

As soon as you start using a CRM system, you'll realize that it is a game-changer. With so much data to mine, and an endless amount of client information you can track, you'll learn more about your company and your clients than ever before.

**CHAPTER IV:**

Management and HR in Times of Crisis and Recovery from Crises

It wasn't long ago that human resources involved hiring and firing and not much more. These days, HR has taken on a much more important role in the organization. It's now also about helping employees achieve peak performance, developing and maintaining company cultures, overseeing benefits packages, and managing employees both in the office and those who are working remotely.

Companies big and small have realized that bottom lines and employee satisfaction are intertwined. According to Deloitte, 77 percent of executives believe that people analytics is a priority, while 44 percent of companies use workforce data to predict performance. If your staff is happy, they'll work harder. If they can more easily manage their workflow or not have to stress about benefits, they'll be more focused on their work. This is important at any time, but ensuring your staff are productive and happy is even more difficult to do in a crisis, when a majority of employees may need to work from home.

Managing so many of these HR-related functions would be a nightmare if it weren't for HCM software. There are a host of HR-related programs on the market, some of which only help with a single task, while others have much broader capabilities. What you'll use will, again, depend on your objectives and your company's current situation.

Managing Remote Workers

Because HCM can be fully deployed in the cloud, employees always have access to whatever HR support they require. This makes it much easier to enable a work-from-home arrangement in a crisis, or to deploy one on a regular basis—and many companies do have a portion of their staff working from home at all times.

In crisis times, deploying online training—around business processes that people may need to do from home, or even as a way to keep staff engaged and learning—may take on new importance. Automating routine HR functions, such as entering payroll data, is also key in disaster scenarios. If you automate manual tasks, then your HR staff can be freed up to other things, such as managing the mental well-being of your staff or improving your company's culture.

As with CRM, HCM software vendors are also starting to focus more on experience. If you can understand what your employees are thinking, feeling, and going through, then you can provide a better work experience. It's important to remember that you're not just managing team members—you're managing human beings while also trying to improve your business at the same time.

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With these programs, employees can track their time, provide progress updates, and indicate when tasks are completed. Its analytical capabilities can determine how productive someone is being or whether the output they're generating is resulting in a return on investment. HR staff are able to monitor employee performance even if they're not evaluating people in person.

HCM software can also make the hiring process much more seamless, which is especially important if you need to quickly staff up during a crisis. SAP's software can help companies source talent across the globe. If people are working from home, then you can tap into a truly global workforce while it's paperless onboarding system can get new staff up and running in minutes. As soon as they're in the system, they can start reviewing onboarding documents or videos, which will all be housed online.

STAY PRODUCTIVE

Whether you're in a crisis or not, boosting—or at least maintaining—productivity is important. Fortunately, it's not hard to see immediate improvements soon after you implement an HCM system. If your old program made payroll errors and the new one doesn't, then you've greatly improved efficiency. If the software lets you automatically set up payments for 30 days after receiving an invoice versus making payments at random times, then you'll be better able to manage your cash flows.

Providing employee support, whether through increased internal communications, allowing them to easily check their health benefits, or providing educational opportunities, will hopefully keep employee morale up, which should then lead to more productivity, and, in turn, a healthy bottom line. Employees matter all the time, but they're the ones who will help you stay afloat in a crisis. Make sure you're treating them well and using the right technology to give them the support they need.



CHAPTER V:

The Case for the Single-Vendor

Now that you know more about the cloud and how different kinds of software can help your business through good times and bad, it's time to see what's out there. There is no shortage of options, and what you buy will depend on your objectives, the size of your business, the current market situation, and how fast you expect to grow.

A lot of companies will likely come across individual programs—a stand-alone marketing CRM or an HR-specific solution—options that can be useful, especially if you know you need help in one particular area. You may want to consider working with a vendor who offers a full suite of software. Why? Because using one provider makes it that much easier to scale up, integrate data across departments, and troubleshoot issues as they arise.

A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH

Over the past few years, thinking around software procurement has changed. At one time, you bought a program for a specific business process. Now, the focus is more on the customer and, as mentioned in previous chapters, the client experience. One of the problems with having a disparate collection of programs is that each one only fixes one particular problem or gives you insights into one area of your business. You don't get a holistic look at the customer experience.



If you want to be successful today—especially when things go awry—you need to have a constant feedback loop with your customers and incorporate that feedback into your processes as fast as you can. If you're only getting information from one program, or if you're receiving various kinds of data from incompatible software, then you're not getting a complete look at your company or your customers.

With a single vendor, you know your CRM program is informing your finance software, which is connected to your HR platforms and so on. That integration makes it easier for businesses to generate key insights that can bolster every part of the business. It also allows you to be more agile and creative. Make a tweak to something on the HR side, and if it works, it should show up in the sales data. In addition, any upgrade a vendor makes to its system, (e.g., adding a new AI functionality) would go across the full spectrum of programs.

Naturally, cost is always an issue, and the more you use, the more expensive it gets. But remember that you don't have to purchase everything at once. If your main business objective is to improve your sales capabilities, then start with sales-focused CRM. But given that most entrepreneurs want to grow their companies, at some point you may need more. Your two-person operation could become 10, or your 100-employee business could climb to 500.

In the case of crisis, you may need to adopt a piece of technology you didn't think you needed. The last thing you want is to suddenly be caught without the right tech in place. With a single vendor, if you need to hire more people or revamp the way you manage your clients, then you can quickly purchase whatever software you require and integrate it with your existing programs.

FIND A PARTNER

As great as single-vendor sounds, many smaller companies buy their software piecemeal. In many cases, they download some free software and then continue using it because they've already imported their data into that system. It's only when they grow and see that their various programs don't provide the holistic insights they need that they realize they may have made a mistake.

Fortunately, it's not hard to switch providers and integrate all of your data into a new, more connected system. To do that, though, you need two kinds of businesses: the software vendor that supplies the programs and an implementation partner that will come into your office and install everything on all of your devices. Depending on the size of your company, that implementation partner could be a company like KPMG or Deloitte or another large accounting firm – they're often working with companies on a variety of business strategies, including technology upgrades – or a smaller business in your area, one who understands your market and your more local needs. They might work with a specific software vendor on new cloud-based implementations.

Whoever you use, that company can transfer the data you have in the cloud into your new systems. If staff are working from home, they can walk employees through the set-up process. It may take some time, but they'll manage the process and work with your IT department to ensure a smooth transition.

This relationship doesn't end after the installation, either. Both the implementation and single vendor partner will be there for you when you want to add and integrate new programs, develop technology strategies, or if you need advice during a crisis. When looking for a vendor to work with, find a partner, not a software provider. Work with someone who cares about your goals and wants to help you grow.



Conclusion: Choosing SAP

While a lot of companies produce cloud-based software, there aren't many that have decades of experience and a client list of most of the world's most recognizable companies. SAP's cloud-based solutions are also some of the most comprehensive on the market. Its SuccessFactors platform helps HR departments manage the human experience, while its CRM solution consolidates data from across a number of functions, including marketing, sales, and e-commerce. It has many other programs too, like enterprise resource planning software and cybersecurity applications that you can consider as you expand.

Because of SAP's vast technological and business strategy knowledge, it can be the partner that small and midsize operations need for the long term. When they work with a client, they make sure that whatever technology they're implementing fits into that company's strategy and that whatever is implemented enhances the rest of the business. They take the time to understand a client's business objectives, and they're not afraid to help business owners think differently or try new things.

They can also get you set up quickly and with little disruption. You'll need that speed in difficult moments, as you may not have much time to pivot your business to a new reality. Fortunately, SAP has been through it all, whether it's business-disrupting natural disasters, market downturns, financial crises, and so on. If need be, the company can tap into its global network of technologists and strategists for new ideas or insights. With SAP you're getting the full weight of the business, even if your operation has a handful of employees.

Having that kind of partner is key. Whether you're dealing with an unexpected issue or you're just trying to grow, you'll encounter a variety of pain points and problems that you'll need help solving. Technology can help you break through those barriers at every step of the way. What you use today may be different from what you implement tomorrow, but being able to act quickly and stay focused on your business objectives will allow you to weather whatever storms may come your way.