

WHAT'S NEXT?

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TECHNOLOGY COMMUNICATIONS AND THE RACE TO RECOVERY

What's in store for brands? Increased demand, higher expectations and a craving for innovative simplicity

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America's **jumping into recovery** as quickly as the pandemic hit

As summer kicks off, the CDC has loosened mask mandates, Americans are returning to restaurants, airports and gatherings, and brands are feeling the whiplash. Tech came to our rescue when we were at our most vulnerable — we worked remotely, shepherded our kids through virtual learning, and connected with friends and family on video calls. Now that the recovery is here, what role does technology play?

WE partnered with YouGov to understand what Americans want and expect from tech-fueled innovation in this crucial moment. What did we find? Surprisingly, **Americans don't want to disconnect**, even after a year of living virtually. Now that tech has regained their trust, **their expectations are higher than ever** and **they want innovation to guide them** in our new world.

15%

want to disconnect — the vast majority want to use tech more than ever.

58%

of Americans say their expectations of technology increased as a result of using more of it during the pandemic.

70%

expect companies to continue to innovate during the recovery phase.

The **recovery** mindset

WE and YouGov reached out to a demographically representative group of survey respondents to understand what Americans think about technology during the recovery. Here's what we found.

Americans are feeling warmer and fuzzier about technology and tech brands

Going into COVID, headlines warned of a coming “techlash.” A year and a half later, the pendulum has swung in the other direction. Although Americans still have concerns over how companies are using their personal data and keeping them safe, the pandemic illustrated the importance of technology during crises.



The majority of Americans were surprised by how tech improved their lives during the pandemic in unexpected ways — despite already sky-high expectations.

Only **15%** of Americans say they are “ready to disconnect.”

64%

of Americans said the pandemic demonstrated **how tech can help us through difficult circumstances.**

Americans intend to stay connected — at least for now

Though virtual meeting fatigue is real, our increased reliance on technology won't change as the country opens back up.

88% of Americans say they plan to use technology during the recovery phase as much as or more than they did during the pandemic.



Expectations are higher than ever

The pandemic raised our already lofty expectations for brands. Companies must realize the pressure they're now under in the recovery phase: Tech-led innovation helped us through our most vulnerable time — a letdown now will hurt more than ever. Americans' sky-high expectations, if not met, could launch a new and different kind of “techlash.”

Nearly 60% of Americans say their expectations of technology increased as a result of using more of it during the pandemic.

62%

expect all companies, regardless of industry, to **use technology to better meet their needs** after the pandemic.

70%

expect companies to **continue to innovate** as we move through the **recovery phase**.

The pandemic has swung opinion about technology away from techlash and questioning the industry's ethics back to viewing technology as an indispensable part of daily life.

Harnessing this goodwill is a huge opportunity for every brand with a technology story to tell.

What we want from tech right now

65% of Americans want technology that can simplify their lives even more than it did during the pandemic.

As we leave our homes and rejoin the world, we want technology that plugs seamlessly into our lives. No speeds and feeds during the recovery — just tech that makes our lives better and brands that understand what is most important to us right now.

Top five parts of pandemic life Americans want to keep:



More focus on **home-centered activities**



Shopping online with **in-store or curbside pickup**



Spending **more time outside** during the workday



Working from **anywhere**



Fewer days **commuting**

Many white collar workers enjoyed the flexibility of remote work during the pandemic, but remember: The work-from-anywhere revolution isn't a possibility for everyone.

Only **35%** of Americans agree that the increase in remote work has caused them to reconsider where they live and work.

After more than a year of pandemic stress, Americans want technology to help lighten their mental burden. As we recover, Americans will only entertain solutions that simplify their lives and don't add to their cognitive load. But these expectations can be hard to meet — the competition between platforms and ecosystems is heating up and forcing many smaller players to choose sides and join walled gardens, often to the frustration of their customers.

How do brands meet these evolving needs and deliver innovations that simplify our lives as we re-enter the world? According to our recent research, "[Rethinking the Purpose and Meaning of Leadership](#)," **69%** of surveyed leaders believe learning from their employees, customers and communities is critical in the coming year, and that begins with listening to employees, like Microsoft did before sharing guidance on hybrid work.



CASE STUDY: MICROSOFT OFFERS GUIDANCE FOR NAVIGATING THE RETURN TO WORK

One of the biggest transitions in the recovery phase will be the re-imagining of physical office spaces. Employers must react to new expectations from employees and determine the right rhythm of how and where employees work in this new world. Towards that end, Microsoft recently published a playbook sharing some of what they've learned to date from conversations with customers, partners, and employees, including data, research, and best practices designed to help organizations navigate these evolving work norms.

Microsoft shared this information in the context of their own hybrid return-to-work strategy across multiple channels — including [a post](#) on CEO Satya Nadella's LinkedIn and [a public playbook](#) featuring a message from Chief People Officer Kathleen Hogan — to educate customers on the Microsoft tools available to them. The announcement also outlined how the company's employee experience cloud, Microsoft Viva, and Return to Workplace solution, can benefit companies evolving their return-to-work strategies. It's a great example of a forward-looking narrative that will help the company's customers navigate the recovery phase.

Technology is at the heart of the recovery — and that's an opportunity

How important is technology to America's pandemic recovery? Very. This may be the most important historical moment for tech since internet usage exploded in the early 2000s.

In fact, **50%** of Americans say technology is the most important tool we have as we navigate a reimagined world.



Brands have a tremendous opportunity to take the lead during the recovery.

60% of Americans want to hear how companies are making their lives better in a reimagined world.

Americans see governments as most likely to lead societal change as the U.S. emerges from the pandemic, but **more than one-fifth** of Americans say for-profit companies will lead major societal change in the future.

Americans want technology to make their lives easier and better, but the relationship with tech is still complicated.

64% say the pandemic has made them more worried about privacy and cybercrime.

Americans want innovation that eases their mental stress, simplifies their lives and helps them adjust to our ever-changing world. We need brands to guide us through the recovery, and that begins with [purposeful communications from brand leadership](#).

Guiding principles for communicating in the race to recovery

01

Help guide the way forward.

Your stakeholders are looking for help in navigating a post-pandemic world. Don't tell them what you did during the pandemic, let them know how you are leading the way through recovery.

02

Find the intersections between your story and what the world needs.

They won't be the same as they were during the pandemic. Ongoing, thoughtful listening to your audiences is key to understanding where your story is most needed now.

03

Resist the urge to return to pre-pandemic communication strategies.

The world has changed. Americans appreciated the way companies used technology to help them through the pandemic. Lean into that emotional connection and demonstrate how your brand is helping through the recovery phase.

04

Remember that the pendulum can (and will) swing back.

Innovating and addressing fears around privacy and security will be a balancing act. This must be part of the narrative for any brand using technology to deliver products and services.

05

Plan for the next phase.

The euphoria of easing COVID restrictions won't last forever. Create an advance team to reimagine future communications motions.

WE | Brands in ***Motion***

The world,
your brand
and your stories
are in motion.

WE helps you find
your Momentum.

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