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**Behind the
bylines**

**Media perspectives
on the post-
pandemic world**

Introduction

Working in the communications industry puts us in the privileged position of forming close relationships with journalists, those whose job it is to make sure they always have the inside track.

They're across the breaking stories, but they wouldn't be doing their job if they weren't also attuned to the bigger shifts and trends yet to take effect. We decided to ask a select group of reporters for their take on what the future holds post-pandemic. We wanted their 'behind the bylines' insight on what lies ahead – both in the sectors they cover, from technology and the environment, to law and health; and in the world of journalism itself.

What we heard was fascinating, and inspiring. Taken together, our contributors tell a story of our endless ability to adapt, despite immense challenges. Of how this darkest of times has been a catalyst for positive change.

They observe the truth that these last 12 months have demonstrated that collectivism works, that when as a nation, or even as a global community, we choose to bend our ingenuity to a common goal, incredible things are possible.

Looking ahead, they observed that there will be no return to business as usual, and neither should there be. Given the cost at which they have come, we must hold tight to the lessons we have learned.

Think, for example, what we could achieve on climate change if we applied the same common purpose we have found in fighting Covid.

Or the difference we can make we continue to use technology in imaginative ways to open up access, as we have for court proceedings and health appointments.

In terms of the media itself, we heard how the pandemic has reshaped the newsroom, demonstrating that journalists really can work from anywhere, and that many have found virtual face time has given them more, rather than less access to those in the seats of power.

We're grateful to our friends in the media for their contributions, which offer valuable insight to businesses, including our clients, engaged in planning how they will adapt and grow through 2021.

We hope you enjoy the insights we've gathered. To discuss how we can help with your communication challenges, call us on +44 (0)20 7415 7154 or find out more at www.farrerkanec.com

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| 01

The UK's post-vaccine economy



Post-Covid, all eyes will be on climate and business

NICK EASEN

Nick is a leading specialist in the tech, telecoms and sustainability space and a regular contributor to Special Reports in the Times published by Raconteur, as well as a consultant for the World Economic Forum and the International Telecommunications Union. His scope extends from views on the future of the City, to the future of the individual and everything in between.

It's easy to think that when the pandemic subsides it'll be business as usual again, it won't. The C-word will be replaced by another - climate. This year will be a defining moment, not just for global climate policy, but how businesses, economies and many nation's body politic are aligned with the race to net zero; crystallised when the UK hosts the landmark UN COP26 climate summit in November.

The word from the recent World Economic Forum's virtual Davos event this year is that there's increasing momentum building when it comes to tackling our ailing planet. There are hopes that the same single-minded determination, money and collaboration that has driven humanity to tackle Covid-19 will be metered out on addressing climate change.

The new Biden administration rejoining the Paris Climate Accord is a shot in the arm for this movement. But more importantly there's a growing realisation that there must be a hard push to slash emissions in the next decade, not extend timelines to 2050.

What's changed recently, which has implications for corporations, innovation and economies across the globe is that the money men are now in on the act from the City of London to Wall Street. ESG - environmental, social and corporate governance issues are now centre stage, not just a nice addendum on a quarterly earnings report.

"The climate transition presents a historic investment opportunity," were the words in Larry Fink's recent annual letter. The CEO of Blackrock, with trillions of dollars under management, is putting his weight behind the global sustainability movement.

He goes on to write, *"there is no company whose business model won't be profoundly affected by the transition to a net zero economy."*

Demands for change aren't just coming from Greta Thunberg, Extinction Rebellion or teenagers marching on Whitehall, but from shareholders, investors and fund managers. Climate change may be an existential or moral threat, but when it hits the bottom line of business or causes investments to dry up, then the shift will be quick, just ask the fossil fuel energy giants.

"It's easy to think that when the pandemic subsides it'll be business as usual again, it won't."

The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, sees the writing on the wall. He wants the UK and the City to be a leader in green finance in a post Brexit, global Britain.

Why? Because this is where the global money is piling up. And by pushing the economy towards net zero emissions quicker than most economies, the influx of potential investments moving into domestic UK initiatives could be huge. The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson gets it too. Listen to his language on build back better and greener.

So, for most economic sectors, many businesses, and a sizeable cohort of executives, ESG is likely to muscle in big on the c-suite agenda this year. Companies may look to aim for net-zero, or they'll look to tackle emissions, their supply chains and their business models. Already over 1,500 companies, representing £8.6 trillion in revenue have. Every innovation, investment and action counts, not just as a PR exercise to make consumers feel good, because doing nothing won't be an option in 2021.

Time to reboot and drive meaningful change

OLIVER PICKUP

Oliver is a multi-award-winning journalist, ghostwriter, media consultant and editor based in London. He specialises in technology, business, sport and culture, has been by-lined in every English newspaper and regularly contributes to Raconteur, The Daily Telegraph, The Times and the Guardian, among other publications.

For the future of humanity, society must grasp this opportunity to evolve, rethink broken systems, remove corrosive business cultures, and right deep inequalities, argues Oliver Pickup. While it is distressing and lamentable that the chaos spread by the coronavirus pandemic has squeezed the life out of countless businesses across the gamut of industry and restricted liberties we all previously took for granted, I am optimistic that society will be reborn for the better. The darkest days will prove the catalyst to drive meaningful change for a brighter future, I sincerely hope.

Despite – or perhaps because of – being locked down, minds have been set free. Concepts that were considered radical at the start of 2020, such as universal basic income, have gained tremendous momentum. It has been liberating to discuss how to solve some of humanity’s most significant challenges, together.

But the time for talking is over: we now need to act on the promises to improve life for more people and repair the planet. The events of 2020 have exposed that society is gravely poorly, traditional systems are broken, and inequality in all its forms is growing.

If the COVID-19 fallout has accelerated various trends and catapulted businesses into the digital era, now we need to reboot the world.

“The coronavirus pandemic has taken an X-ray of society and shown us where we are sick,” an Australia-based chief executive told me recently.

“It’s also like a time machine and has taken us forward to where problems that were latent are now acute, whether that’s the glaring reality that to be successful businesses need to be as good at generating clicks as they are at bricks, or deep-rooted social inequality.”

It was galling to learn, via an [Oxfam report published at the end of January](#), that the world’s ten wealthiest people according to Forbes – all men, bar one (Alice Walton, the only daughter of Walmart founder Sam Walton) – have seen their fortunes grow by \$540 billion since mid-March 2020, when the pandemic took hold.

However, I sense there is a genuine groundswell to rebalance inequality, in all its forms. It won’t happen overnight, but there will be an inexorable and seismic shift to the point where it is no longer morally acceptable to turn a blind eye to, for instance, racism and gender disparity. The same goes for environmental issues.

One of the few pleasing long-term consequences of the pandemic is the proof of concept of collectivism: if we act together, we can achieve remarkable things.

Millennials and younger generations weaned on social media have always considered themselves part of a global community.

If we can apply that drive and discipline to matters like the environment, sustainability and equality, we can deliver colossal change. We must begin thinking beyond ourselves, where we live, to create the sort of future that we all need.

Whatever happens, if we go back to how things used to be and forget the tragedy – as with happened after the September 11 attacks – would be a huge failure. As a society, we must grasp this unique opportunity to take stock, look at what’s worked and what hasn’t, and move forward to address some of the most expansive cracks.

“Despite – or perhaps because of – being locked down, minds have been set free.”

Big Tech. The reckoning is coming

ROBIN PAGNAMENTA

Robin leads the Technology team at The Daily Telegraph as Head of Technology Intelligence. Covering everything from big tech and cyber security to start-ups and electric vehicles, he oversees editorial coverage of the tech sector for both London and San Francisco.

Amid skyrocketing valuations and blowout profits, the giants of Silicon Valley have enjoyed an astonishing year. The pandemic has been an enormous human tragedy, of course. It has also forced billions of people to embrace their services - e-commerce, cloud computing and remote working tools - in a way that has never been witnessed before.

The trend has sent their share prices soaring. Two companies alone - Apple and Amazon - are now worth a combined total of more than \$4 trillion, up from \$2.2 trillion at the start of 2020.

For comparison, that is roughly equivalent to the combined market capitalisation of all the companies on Britain's FTSE 100 and France's CAC-40 put together, at £1.9 trillion (\$2.6 trillion) and €1.25 trillion (\$1.5 trillion) respectively.

How long can the boom continue? On one level, the trend appears unstoppable.

Even when the pandemic eases, it's hard to imagine that many of the changes that have been accelerated by Covid will disappear. Our lives won't go back to how they were pre-pandemic.

For many people and businesses, remote working is here to stay. E-commerce is steadily taking over the world of bricks and mortar retail - as the acquisition of Debenhams and Topshop by Boohoo and Asos amply demonstrates.

Amazon still has huge scope for growth - not only overseas in less mature markets than the US and UK, but in whole new sectors like pharmacy and healthcare, which remain ripe for disruption.

On February 2, the day Jeff Bezos chose to announce his departure as chief executive, Amazon's fourth quarter sales blew the lights out, hitting a record \$125bn. There is no reason to think that figure could not soon reach \$200bn.

Meanwhile, tech companies are rapidly spreading their tentacles into whole new industries, using their know-how and financial muscle to challenge established players from Disney, Ford and VW to HSBC and Citibank.

Apple aims to crack the electric car market - an industry which is also facing reinvention by tech innovators like Elon Musk. The entertainment industry is also being turned on its head by the rise of streaming giants like Netflix and Spotify.

While Amazon, Google and Facebook - as well as smaller fintech players like Revolut, Starling Bank and Klarna - are all eyeing up financial services as a mouth-watering prize to be wrestled from the hands of the big banks.

Amid all this growth, however, one giant threat does loom large on the horizon. From Brussels and London to Washington, big tech companies are facing a growing antitrust onslaught, as legislators grow increasingly alarmed by their sheer power, wealth and market dominance.

“The backlash against big tech companies may only be just beginning.”

After years of talk, 2021 will be the year that some of these firms finally face concerted action designed to curb their power. Some could even be broken up.

The reckoning won't hit all of them equally however. It is the social media firms, including Facebook and Google, which have the most to worry about, amid growing concerns about their treatment of rivals, their use of sensitive personal data and the role they have played in spreading misinformation.

That pressure is only likely to intensify this year as the Biden administration ratchets up the pressure over the role tech platforms have played in amplifying extremism and poisoning political discourse - a process which reached its zenith in the January 6 storming of the US Capitol.



Although the case against others, such as Apple, is much less clear cut, the backlash against big tech companies may only be just beginning. It could last for years. The industry has another big problem.

Increasingly, it finds itself caught up in an intensifying geopolitical struggle between East and West over cybersecurity and access to cutting edge technology including semiconductors, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

While Biden may cut a different figure to Donald Trump, he remains hawkish on China - and tech companies may have to learn to live with a divided supply chain and strict rules on sales of sensitive technology to Chinese firms like Huawei for the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile, a highly sophisticated recent Russian hack against the US government which exploited network management software developed by US firm Solar Winds has exposed the fragility of our systems - and the urgent need for stronger defences as we become ever more dependent on technology.

The legal sector, transformed by technology, but reassuringly the same

EDUARDO REYES

Eduardo is Features Editor at leading legal title The Law Society Gazette. Eduardo has unparalleled experience on the front line of legal news, covering a broad range of topics from human rights and social issues to politics and business.

When lockdown came last year the legal sector, which has mostly justified reputation for being conservative in its ways, did something extraordinary. The way it did many things changed overnight. True, the right to be tried by a jury of your peers remains a problem with a backlog of cases that challenges the promise made in the Magna Carta that justice shall not be delayed.

But across the rest of the sector, lawyers woke up to a world of Zoom and Teams calls. Managing partners talked of moving from four offices to suddenly having 200, and all talk about finding out a lot more about the home context of their colleagues. Firms with 160 offices, suddenly had 10,000-plus.

Now, however, they can begin to think about life being allowed to go back to 'normal'. As Covid-19 vaccines make it possible to return to court and office, to visit or even entertain clients, it is difficult to imagine going back to the way everything was.

After all, you've seen the managing partner's cat, the head of corporate crime's toddler and glimpsed other people's bad taste in domestic art and bad light fittings – and you can't unsee these things.

Clairvoyance is a high risk game, but I think some of the post-Covid landscape is starting to reveal itself. Here are a few observations.

HONEST WORKING

A big feature of the past year has been, in many cases, greater honesty about what we're juggling with work. I can recall, when my eldest daughter was born, basically lying about where I was to play a full part in family life – stretching declared interview times and locations to pick her up from nursery.

How different the past year has felt. Lawyers have always been competitive. A few years ago on a panel for a women in the law event, I said – if only we could get them (men especially) competing over great and present parenting, balanced with a glittering career, we'd make some progress.

Some of that's happened the last year – hand in hand with the honesty. People have been saying things like 'I can't do that time, I need to do the kids' lunch'.

I don't think the division of caring responsibilities has broken evenly between men and women, but the greater honesty – and acknowledgment of what we all juggle – feels like an opportunity. Let's not miss it. There is a professional informality that, at no great cost, we have accommodated.

“A big feature of the past year has been, in many cases, greater honesty about what we're juggling with work.”

THE OFFICE

There have been interesting surveys about our relationship with the office. Most do not want to be back in an office 9-till-whenever, five days a week. But they do miss the office – its ecosystem, focus and variety.

The preference for most seems to be two or three days a week in the office, provided they have a good working set up at home.

Not long ago, many thought the future looked like a 'WeWork' space. In fact I think the future will feel more like being a student – we'll come together for face-

to-face events like seminars and supervisions.

Lawyers will need the equivalent of 'library time', and building your 'network' (though we never thought of it as such back then) will involve socialising, planned and chance encounters.

TECH WILL BE RELEGATED

Really? Well, obviously, not quite, but for too long a mystique has been built around the use of technology, just like the worst kind of lawyer uses Latin phrases in front of clients to bamboozle them. Overnight the legal sector adopted technical solutions that it was thought would take decades.

But what reassured clients – stressed as anything about their businesses or personal circumstances – was lawyers who conveyed the old trusted advisor role, mediated through the medium of unfamiliar technologies.



Automation and artificial intelligence are going to change law in many ways, but the biggest tech leap I've seen has been that overnight change – and the realisation that, while lawyers rely on and value technology in all this, clients have wanted the tech to deliver something quite old fashioned.

What is interesting is that as tech enters law, law making and the law becomes more complex – to date, increasing the demand for legal advice.

Carbon paper, we might reflect, didn't do away with the need for a PA – their time was freed up to do other things. Things which, in many cases, made better use of their talents – fixer, enabler, administrator. These last are all indispensable things.

DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

This is a complex one. On the one hand, things that were said to boost equality and diversity in the workplace, such as remote and flexible working, and not expecting a hackneyed version of socialising down the pub or club were effected overnight.

Responsibilities have not landed equally though – presenteeism has increased for some. If I am taking a predictive gamble here, it is that the 'honesty', and competition in this regard, is stronger than this. If I'm right, the post-Covid future is a good thing for a more balanced legal profession.

We have all had to think much more closely about what matters during this pandemic. In general, this has brought out the best in the people I know. Can we in the legal sector have the best of who we are without a killer disease?

Yes, I think we can. And there you have the prediction I thought I wouldn't give.

Re-framing our relationship with care and caring roles

SOPHIE WILKINSON

Sophie is a freelance features and investigative journalist who regularly contributes to household titles such as Vice, The Sunday Times and Private Eye. She's a leading voice in the fields of pop culture, women's rights and society.

After society is given the green light to return to something like normal, but before we can build back better, we need to strengthen a fundamental foundation of society: care. It's a poorly paid job, frequently and necessarily undercut by those doing this work for free.

From cradle to grave, care is taken for granted, because raising children, feeding and bathing the unwell and preserving the elderly's dignity, is just what women are expected to do. Historically we shouldered the majority of that burden and now we make up 58% of unpaid carers and do an average of 60% more unpaid work than men in terms of hours.

The result is a lopping off of women's opportunities because we simply don't have the time to pursue them. Once we become mothers, as many of us do, childcare can make full-time work an aspiration rather than an option. In theory, it's great that childcare costs so much, because caring for children is a job that deserves reward.

In practice, women trained to do jobs other than childcare end up providing it for free and on a one-to-one basis, even though both mother and child are social creatures.

It's that, or receiving help from grandparents, if they're not currently looking after their own parents too. One in four older women approaching retirement take on caring duties, compared with one in eight older men. 29% of women carers help multiple types of people, compared to just one in five male carers.

This was life before the pandemic, and now, what sociologist Arlie Hochschild called the second shift for working women (career followed by housework) is joined by its third (teacher). While our government has rightly removed this third shift from care workers, it is obvious but often overlooked that those paid for their care work often go home to do more of it for free.

Care work is so poorly paid because women do it and women are so poorly paid because they care enough to do it for free.

We owe it to those who do £1.24tn worth of free work per year - men and women - to make this industry fair. Reporting the gender pay gap must become mandatory again, and an ethnicity pay gap report needs introduction.

Parental leave must be equally unobtrusive to men and women's career prospects if we're to ever expect men to shoulder their share of care and enjoy its appeal to human emotions they're otherwise encouraged to abandon. If this means fines for companies not offering decent parental leave and effective returnships, so be it.

“Care work is so poorly paid because women do it and women are so poorly paid because they care enough to do it for free.”

Workplace crèches allow mothers to continue breastfeeding should they wish, and all parents to maintain, as they choose, an opportunity to no longer feel as if they're splitting themselves down the middle just to fulfil both work and family commitments.

For homeworkers, occasional or not, localised hubs where employees in similar fields can collaborate, fostering the community feeling we've been in arm's reach of, but not allowed to touch, this past year. Allowing space for retired and older involved to be engaged in this

community will keep them healthier and happier, familiar with the people helping care for them.

Paying care staff more is the least we can do for the work of the last year. And investing into all of our health outcomes - both mental and physical, especially postpartum and early years - will surely help lessen the long-term pressures on carers as the years tick on. We've got a lot of work to put our house in order, and there's no better time than now.

| 02

What the pandemic means for journalism



A year at the mercy of the news gods

ROBIN PAGNAMENTA

Robin leads the Technology team at The Daily Telegraph as Head of Technology Intelligence. Covering everything from big tech and cyber security to start-ups and electric vehicles, he oversees editorial coverage of the tech sector for both London and San Francisco.

Journalists sometimes talk about the news gods and how their fortunes - and their diaries - are often dictated by events outside their control. For those in the news business, the last year has been extraordinary - and a raw lesson that in journalism, there is only so much you can plan for. Ultimately, it is the news gods who are firmly in control.

On one level, the pandemic has been thrilling and the greatest story of my lifetime. It has fuelled an unquenchable demand from readers for more and better quality news and information than ever before. On another, it has been challenging - forcing us to work in new ways under constantly changing circumstances.

Like all professions, the pandemic has transformed journalism in ways both good and bad. Many have appreciated the fewer hours spent commuting to and from the office and the opportunity to work more flexibly. The shift to conducting news meetings via video conference seemed to work well enough.

Producing a newspaper with a team of dispersed editors, reporters, sub-editors, picture editors etc was easier than many had imagined.

Moreover, in some ways access to news-makers - the chief executives and ministers we report on - has also been better than ever. Locked down like everyone else, many have been keen to raise their profile and speak up - particularly about the pandemic. Nor are they so hard to pin down because of complex travel and work commitments.

None of this, however, detracts from the many things we have lost - and which I fear may not be coming back soon. It's not just the constant struggle with glitchy home wifi connections and unreliable equipment.

While long-established journalists with strong networks of existing contacts, built up over years or decades, have been well placed to carry on reporting much as before, for less experienced reporters it has been tougher.

Without the opportunity to attend events and conduct meetings out of the office - or learn from colleagues they sit next to, it has been much harder for them to build up the networks that are essential to report deeply on a specific topic or industry.

It's harder, too, to mentor journalists while we/they are working from home. Video meetings and instant messaging are wonderful - but they tend to be less free-flowing, nuanced and discursive than real-life meetings. The ability to step up to someone's desk and have a discrete two minute chat is difficult to replace.

Then there is the loss of serendipity - bumping into contacts or former colleagues at a party or an event, picking up gossip in a corridor - and the simple, timeless journalistic principle that a contact will never

be as candid with you on the phone or via email as they will in person.

Above all there is the ability to visit the people and places that we write about. If you cover mining, it's hard to truly understand and write about the industry if you have never visited a mine.

I am, of course, well aware that we will never go back to how things were pre-pandemic. But I hope that in the future, journalists do not become desk-bound automatons, unable to get out to report on the real world outside.

“For those in the news business, the last year has been extraordinary – and a raw lesson that in journalism, there is only so much you can plan for.”

Yes, you can produce a national paper from the kitchen table

ROSIE HOPEGOOD

Rosie has headed up editorial teams for some of the UK's leading weekend newspapers and regularly contributes to titles such as The Sunday Telegraph, Al Jazeera, and The Observer. With a focus on features and human interest stories, she also boasts an impressive call-list of interviewees that features refugees, Olympians, and Hollywood stars.

For many years, I worked in a busy, fast-paced newsroom where several national newspapers and Sunday supplements were produced. Day and night, teams of journalists, designers, and even lawyers worked out of that newsroom, preparing the latest edition of the paper or producing online content.

A few years ago, I remember the senior management circulating a form enquiring about our home working set-up, in case some unknown disaster should close the office for a few days. Back then, the idea of working from home was laughable: the majority of journalists didn't have a work laptop, nor home access to essential software such as inDesign, inCopy, or the content management system. It was simply unimaginable that sending a magazine or paper 'off stone' could take place anywhere other than from the newsroom.

Yet here we are, a year into a pandemic, and publications have done exactly that. Week after week, newspapers and magazines are being produced from kitchen tables and sofas, often with just a skeleton team in the newsroom. Although I'm freelance now, I work closely with editors at national titles on a daily basis, and I've been amazed how quickly the industry has adjusted.

From a personal perspective, I've Zoomed a prime minister and a Sex Pistol, I've orchestrated socially-distanced photoshoots on doorsteps, and I've done 'in-house' editing shifts from my own house.

It's impressive just how readily the industry has adapted, particularly when so many publications were in tight financial circumstances prior to the pandemic – meaning the investment in home working systems will have been felt hard.

Now that we've proved that we can create publications from anywhere, I can't imagine newsrooms will be going back at full capacity. Organisations will likely see this as yet another way to cut costs, reducing their real estate footprint in exchange for hotdesking.

I see this as a positive move. A London-centric media industry, coupled with the demise of the local paper, has been a hindrance to junior journalists from beyond the home counties landing their first job. But with home working more widely accepted and the potential of more emphasis on regional hubs, journalists from a wider range of backgrounds could have more of a chance. Flexible work will also be a boost to working mums, a group the industry is notoriously bad at retaining. We can hope that this may lead to more women in senior positions – particularly important, considering that the gender pay gap has actively increased at the majority of newspapers in the last couple of years.

“Journalists and PRs have a symbiotic relationship and I don't see that changing, no matter where we work from.”

So what does this mean for our relationships with PRs? If we suppose that the PR industry will also be working more flexibly, then finding mutually convenient times to meet is likely to be tougher. I know that many of my fellow journalists have found email to be an additional burden during the pandemic, with many 'cold call' press releases going unread.

As ever, a personalised approach whenever possible is always appreciated. When working from home, I've found myself increasingly reliant on platforms such as Response Source, Cision Requests, AskCharity, and Case Study Link for finding experts and interviewees, as well as the ever-useful #journorequests on Twitter, so it's worth keeping an eye on these.

Journalists and PRs have a symbiotic relationship and I don't see that changing, no matter where we work from. It's a question of finding new ways to stay in touch and maintaining those connections, even as we carve out a new way of working.

An existential crisis – but one that’s inspired immense innovation

JAMIE CARPENTER

Jamie is one of the UK’s leading environmental writers, and Editor at renowned carbon, environmental and sustainability title The ENDS Report. Jamie leads their editorial team while also delivering insight on topics that range from environmental law, ecology development, and biodiversity.

Good trade journalism means being deep in your market. But how can you be deep in your market when you can’t leave your house? For nearly a year now, my team has been trying to square this circle – but it feels like much longer than that.

We were given the order to work remotely just before the start of the first national lockdown back in March 2020. Complete chaos soon followed. Not because of the shift to working from home: prior to the pandemic many of us already spent some of the time working remotely. In fact, the chaos arose from the massive disruption Covid-19 was causing to our readers’ professional lives. There was a sudden, unprecedented information need. We responded by innovating and throwing the kitchen sink at meeting it: live blogs, new trackers, the lot. Our website’s traffic went through the roof.

After that first phase of the pandemic, as the chaos subsided, we emerged into an unfamiliar new normal, beginning to grapple with the task of delivering content for our subscribers at a time when the rules of journalism had been turned on their head. Much journalism is about people and places and scoops. In lockdown, you can’t meet people and you can’t visit places. Scoops, inevitably, are more difficult to find.

Planning future print editions became a headache. Profile interviews were more difficult to arrange and when they were, they were carried out online rather than in person. Photography was impossible. The networking with professionals that is the lifeblood of trade journalism became more challenging. Conferences, where you might have the opportunity to exchange business cards with a potential contact, or try to wrangle a few minutes with a minister after a keynote speech, have moved online only. Coffee meetings or after work drinks are off the cards.

But we’ve adjusted and seized the opportunities that have presented themselves. While it can be harder to access senior individuals (lockdown certainly strengthens gatekeepers’ hands) the time you do get may end up being better quality.

A snatched phone call has in some instances been replaced by a 30-minute Zoom. And now that all meetings are remote, geography is no longer a constraint – as a result I’ve had a chance to build new relationships with firms outside of London and the South East.

Remote working, strangely, has brought us closer as a team. While we may – for now – miss the buzz of the newsdesk and lack the rapid exchange of ideas that being in the office together facilitates, we meet more regularly, individually and collectively.

“It has also been a time of immense innovation, agility and creativity.”

So what does the future look like? When normal life returns, some trade titles may emerge with different content models. Under lockdown, some brands moved online only, with justification – why send magazines to empty offices? Whether those titles will return to print after the pandemic is uncertain. The shift away from print may accelerate.

And when restrictions are finally lifted, we’ll want to get back into our markets as soon as possible. This will pose a practical challenge. Since last March, we’ve been chained to our desks

in lockdown, churning out copy. Releasing those shackles could impact output. I’d argue that it’s worth it, but we’ll need to find the right balance.

The pandemic has been credited with causing the biggest “existential crisis” in the history of the press. At times it has felt like that. But it has also been a time of immense innovation, agility and creativity. As life returns to normal, our subscribers’ information needs will surely shift again. What we’ve experienced over the last 12 months means we’re battle-hardened, and more than ready for the challenge.

03

A lockdown in writing. Personal reflections



Remote working suits me, but the office is not finished

JESS HARROLD

Jess is Deputy Legal and Professional Editor at leading property title EG. As well as regularly writing on planning and legal property cases he also hosts their popular weekly podcast 'EG Like Sunday Morning', covering everything topical in the commercial real estate sector.

I miss playing football. I miss going to the cinema. I miss dining out. What I don't miss, is the rigmarole of going to the office. We are fast-approaching the one-year anniversary of my last commute into London and, as the vaccine rollout offers hope of a return to normal life, I do not long to add those extra three hours of travel time back to the 9-5. Working from home, I am better rested, less distracted and more able to devote my time to the tasks that matter. There have been challenges, of course. Regular podcasting is part of my job.

Where once I had access to a professional studio, now the facilities are more limited. However, scheduling a recording over Teams is a lot more straightforward than a studio visit, so what is sacrificed in sound quality may be gained in timeliness and speed of production.

Prior to March 2020, I would spend several days a year in court, reporting on major property cases. Thankfully, our courts and tribunal service reacted quickly, implementing tech innovations that were perhaps a decade overdue. As a result, most worthy hearings are streamed online, and judgments easily obtained electronically.

Our legal system so values tradition that a return towards normality seems inevitable – but one hopes, not just for my convenience, that it will permanently embrace some of the benefits of the digital revolution, in the interests of accessibility and economy.

Beyond these adjustments, my primary work in commissioning and editing articles about property law remains largely unaffected, save for the fact that – such have been the widespread implications of the pandemic – the latest developments in the landlord and tenant sphere are even more vital and interesting than they were before, and certainly more abundant. So, to sum up my professional experience of the pandemic thus far by badly paraphrasing Radiohead: definitely not fitter (though I am working on that) but happier, more productive.

Does that mean I predict the end of the office as we know it? Far from it. Quite simply, I know I am one of the lucky ones. First and foremost, I and those closest to me remain directly untouched by Covid-19, which has caused such unfathomable loss to so many. Meanwhile, from a work perspective, I have been among those best suited to adapt to the challenges that the pandemic has wrought. For a start, journalists in general – particularly in the 21st Century – are well used to treating anywhere they happen to be as a place of work: the train, the coffee shop, wherever you have your phone.

“I know that, when the vaccine allows, people will gladly go back to the office in great numbers, even if not every day.”

I spent many years as a freelancer, and in my current role, I already worked from home for two days a week – as a result, I had both the self-discipline and domestic set-up in place to transition to doing so full-time. Beyond that, I tend towards introversion. Unlike others in what is a very social sector, I don't crave that face-to-face connection – on-screen and email works fine for me.

Crucially, I don't have children – though our cats demand their fair share of attention, mercifully they do not have to be home-schooled.

So, lockdown has shown what I always suspected – that I personally can do my job as well, if not better, without leaving the house. But it has also demonstrated to me that for others, including colleagues and contacts, the experience has not been so rosy. I have spoken to many who miss the facilities, the structure and the personal interaction of office life; and for my more news-focused colleagues, getting out and meeting those-in-the-know is a huge part of the job. So I know that, when the vaccine allows, people will gladly go back to the office in great numbers, even if not every day.

Indeed, whether it is through the necessity of their roles or personal preference, they already are: more people have already returned during this third lockdown than in the first – recent figures suggest 18% as opposed to 8%, despite the surging numbers of Covid-19 cases and the heightened infection risk posed by new, more aggressive strains.



There is clearly a powerful impetus to go back — and that's without even acknowledging how much graduate trainees and other new starters benefit from learning from colleagues in an office environment. The major question mark, of course, is the timeline for doing so safely.

The vaccine rollout seems to be going well, but it is no panacea. How long will it take to give everyone the jab? What will be the impact if the rest of the world lags behind the UK? How quickly will we all need to be re-vaccinated to keep the virus at bay? In the meantime, what do we do about the significant proportion of the population that either cannot or will not be vaccinated?

There are issues relating to data protection and other workplace protections too complicated to go into here that may prevent employers from even asking if staff have had the jab. All of this means a widescale return to the office is far from imminent — and even then, mask-wearing, hand-sanitising and protective screens will be with us for many more months... if not years.

One suspects that the kind of high-density office floorplans we were used to will be a thing of the past, and the wider real estate impacts of the pandemic may bring more profound changes. After all, it seems that the experiences of the last year are making people reassess their priorities in terms of how and where they want to live and work. Though again, I suspect the lure of the City remains strong for most, it seems likely that more localised office hubs could be the answer for those seeking more of a work/life balance.

One hopes that employers will be using this time of uncertainty wisely, emboldened by the experiences of this forced experiment to conclude that agile working can most definitely be a success, and reconfiguring our offices for whatever the future holds. The emphasis should be on making them rewarding places to be — worth the travel time that will take some readjusting to — and maximising collaborative spaces to suit the kind of work that cannot be done as well from home.

The best companies will be those that listen to their employees' changing needs, providing them the best platform to flourish — whether that is predominantly in the office, largely at home or, as seems most likely for the vast majority, a flexible combination of the two.

A fascinating chance to chronicle shifts in society

OLIVER PICKUP

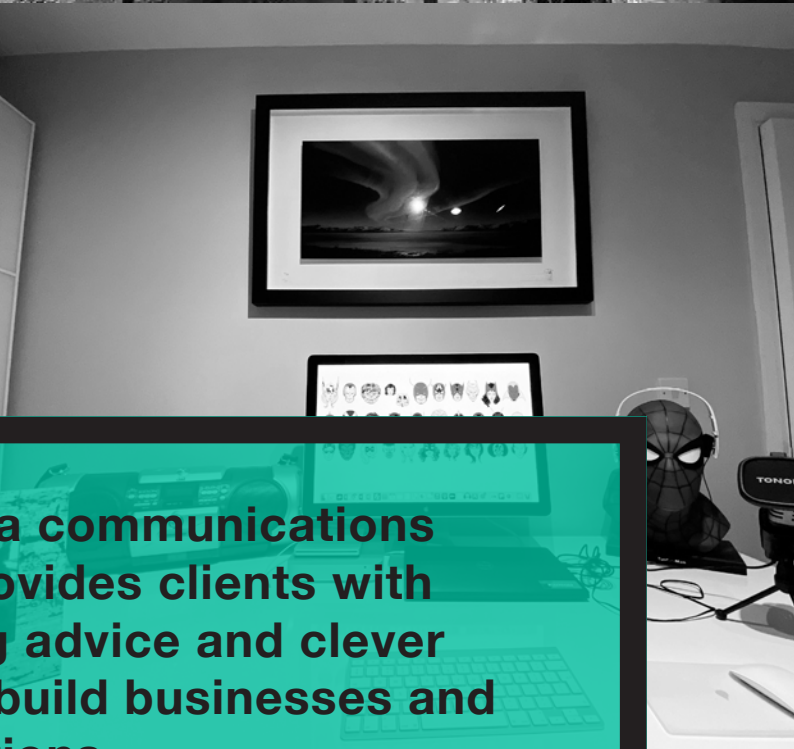
Oliver is a multi-award-winning journalist, ghostwriter, media consultant and editor based in London. He specialises in technology, business, sport and culture, has been by-lined in every English newspaper and regularly contributes to Raconteur, The Daily Telegraph, The Times and the Guardian, among other publications.

As I've typed from home as a freelance journalist since 2014, there were no sweeping changes required when lockdown was enforced, fortunately.

However, one key difference was that my family members were suddenly also around, and in particular my young son required homeschooling (and entertaining). Over the last year, it has been fascinating to chronicle the significant changes society has undergone so far.

I have found, though, that not relying on the black and white of email and speaking to clients and contacts – thus allowing the time and space for nuance and being, well, more human – has greatly benefited both parties and strengthened bonds.





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