

# AI, Bots and RPA: A Lexicon for the ‘New Normal’



Jeff Puritt, President and CEO  
TELUS International

*The physical constraints brought about by COVID-19 have had a profound and persistent impact on every aspect of our lives, from how we shop, to how we work and learn, to how we access healthcare, and everything in between. Although all industries were affected to varying degrees, the need to fully reimagine business models was universal.*

*With companies adopting next-gen technologies, cloud platforms, bots and automation at unprecedented rates, there is no question that the global pandemic has functioned as a time machine, transporting digital transformation at least five years into the future. But, with global economies still reeling and a coronavirus vaccine yet to be discovered, what can we expect the ‘new normal’ to look like as the world takes steps to reopen?*

*As we shift from response to recovery, we took the opportunity to speak with Jeff Puritt, President and CEO of TELUS International - a leading global customer experience and digital solutions provider, to get his thoughts on the role digital transformation will continue to play in the weeks, months and years ahead in a renewed future state.*



As a global organisation with almost 50,000 employees across 50 delivery centres in 20 countries around the world, how significantly was TELUS International affected by COVID-19?

Our team members, like countless others around the world, continue to face the numerous challenges associated with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, including its short and long-term impacts on our business and the communities where they live and raise families. So, first and foremost, I want to share how incredibly proud I am of their tremendous resiliency, ingenuity and compassion throughout this difficult time.

To provide some context, when the first enhanced community quarantine order was announced in the Philippines in mid-March, we did not have a single front-line team member working from home anywhere in the world. And from that point forward, our company experienced a domino effect of site closures across six countries in 11 days. However, within the first 22 days, we had enabled 22,000 of our front-line team members to work from home.

Today, almost 35,000 front-line team members - 92% of that segment of our workforce - is remote work-enabled and actively supports the global brands we serve. More than simply impressive statistics, these figures represent members of our TELUS International family that we have kept healthy, safe and employed during what has been a life-altering event for many around the world.

**That seems like a Herculean task! How were you able to transition so many team members so quickly and effectively?**

The short answer is, we didn't have a choice! And there was most certainly a learning curve as we had to quickly reimagine our workflows, reorient our client relationships and reconsider almost every single aspect of our operations. However, we did have a few key factors working in our favour.

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Firstly, it's not that we didn't have the ability to support a work-from-home(WFH) model, we did have many of the capabilities required, but prior to the pandemic, our clients weren't interested in us serving them in that manner. Secondly, our digital transformation strategy was not conceived over the past few months, but rather a journey we embarked upon years ago. Thirdly, and equally important as the more tangible technology, infrastructure and security components, is our company's inherent agility to adapt to rapidly evolving markets, shifting client needs, and exogenous events.

**How do you see your workforce evolving in the coming years? Will you continue to support remote work?**

Two pivotal elements were amplified for our team and company in the wake of COVID-19 that are driving our approach to our “Back to the Future” mode of operations planning: we must leverage our digital capabilities to be virtually-enabled everywhere and we must be able to bring our culture to life both inside and outside the walls of our brick and mortar sites. This is reflected in our vision to develop a digital native, dynamic, agile, scalable and global team that will ensure

business continuity today and in the years ahead.

As the situation continues to evolve, we are starting to anticipate its next phase as local governments will soon either extend or relax the restrictions and lockdown protocols currently in place. Once it's deemed safe to return to work in our centres, we have a thoughtful, methodical and phased approach to reopening them and welcoming our team members back, which will simultaneously ensure their safety and meet our clients' requirements.

However, until there is sustained recovery and countries have contained community transmission, we do not foresee returning our full team to an in-office environment. Our global operations leaders are instead preparing for a hybrid on-site/remote work model with continuously changing proportions over the longer-term, leveraging a combination of decreased floor densification in our sites and enhanced virtualised work from anywhere capabilities.

**Is it true that your company launched a new cloud contact centre solution at the height of the pandemic?**

That's correct! Given the success of our own

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team's rapid shift from on-site to at-home, we brought our TELUS International Work Anywhere solution to market in April in order to support other businesses facing similar customer delivery challenges.

As part of our existing Cloud Contact Centre portfolio, Work Anywhere is designed for rapid deployment within days through a pure-cloud, omnichannel platform that enables individuals to access the tools and support they would normally have in a brick and mortar setting. Another key component of the solution that has been vital as the world continues to follow strict physical distancing measures has been virtual recruitment.

Impressively, our 100% remote digital recruitment model can move a candidate from application to training within a 125-minute time frame. Throughout the pandemic to date, we have hired over 2,000 new team members using the platform and will continue to leverage it to ensure we have a strong pipeline of ready applicants to deploy onto any given account at a moment's notice.

**How has COVID-19 specifically impacted your client partnerships? How are you working with them today, and how do you see that evolving over time?**

For at least a decade now, my view has been that companies selling what I call “cheap and cheerful” voice-only support, or “your mess for less” outsourced solutions that depend entirely upon wage arbitrage in emerging economies, would become extinct as digital solutions like automation and bots would essentially ‘cannibalise’ their profits as they gained traction in the marketplace.

Their approach is in stark contrast to ours

that is based upon engaging in higher-value, partnership-based relationships in which we can design, build and seamlessly incorporate these types of next-gen, digital solutions as part of our clients' overall customer experience strategies.

Without a doubt, in the current environment when so many companies were compelled to rapidly adapt their business models, the importance of these types of authentic relationships, built on trust, has been dramatically underscored. Especially as they are now stepping back to put more thoughtful, longer-term strategies and plans in place as we begin to settle into the new normal.

**You've consistently highlighted the importance of your culture as a key ingredient of your company's sustainable success. How big a role do you think it has played during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The COVID-19 crisis is unlike anything we've experienced in our lifetimes, and it has served to highlight the interconnectedness of our global community and the critical need to act together, share resources and information and look after one another. This has been the basis of our company's caring culture since our inception more than 15 years ago, and the reason we are successfully navigating this pandemic and primed to undertake the next phase in our company's evolution.

At the end of the day, we are all in this together - nation to nation, city to city, family to family, person to person, and I truly believe our ability to embrace this ethos as one global community will accelerate the discovery of a vaccine, save lives and support widespread economic recovery.

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