

Businesses embrace new way of working in post-Covid world – and there's no going back

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A legacy of the Covid-19 global pandemic for business is likely to be significantly fewer in-person business meetings and a big reduction in long-distance travel.

That's the view of business leaders ahead of Small Business Saturday (SBS) in the United States.

Since 2010, Small Business Saturday has become a multi-billion-dollar annual phenomenon but during the pandemic businesses have had to adapt and find new ways of connecting.

Microsoft founder and billionaire businessman Bill Gates predicts in-person business meetings will no longer be the "gold standard" after Covid, with 50% of business travel being wiped out with a third of office days being re-routed to home.

Businesses now have staff working remotely and video calls have become the norm in 2020.

Chris Rabbitt, co-founder of virtual networking platform meeow, said change had already happened and there was no going back.

"While the pandemic has brought challenging times for many businesses, companies have adapted and found a new way of remote working which we didn't expect," he said.

"Employees have embraced home-working, despite the distractions, and have found they can still meet up with colleagues, clients and contacts and business can continue to be done.

"Everyone has learned how to handle video calls, and the technology is available and affordable. Virtual meetings are quicker, safer and more productive – and without the need to travel, even short distances, people have found they suddenly have more quality time for themselves in their daily lives."

Meeow, a platform which brings together four business people at random for online networking, was set up in the UK in May but is now expanding rapidly across the United States.

Award-winning young entrepreneur Makenzie Stokel, who hosts meeows – hour-long networking meets – in Nashville, Tennessee, said: "The way of doing business in the post-Covid world will change but that change has already happened.

"There is no need to travel any kind of distance now for an in-person meeting when it can all be done virtually.

"Business can still be conducted face-to-face but it is just so much more efficient. Cutting out that non-essential travel and also not having a daily commute to the office will also have a big impact on our carbon footprint."

Marc Gawith, a Washington-based VP of Sales & Marketing for Switcher Studio, and also a meeow host, said another lesson of the pandemic was the desire for small businesses to support each other through the crisis.

"Small and medium-sized businesses have come together like never before and together we are stronger," he said. "We need to make new connections and find new opportunities where everyone benefits.

"There's no reason to go back to the old way of meeting. Business is managed much more efficiently and people find they have more time for their families."

In 2018 the SBS Consumer Insights Survey reported that total spending by consumers on Small Business Saturday with independent retailers and restaurants hit a record \$17.8 billion.

Since 2010 the total spent is well over \$100 billion, but we're unlikely to see the same increase recorded this year.

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