



Building a digitally inclusive society



Optus CEO Kelly Bayer Rosmarin delivered this address at the *Trans-Tasman Business Circle V-vent* on 29 September 2020.

Imagine if COVID-19 had hit us 12 years ago: COVID-07. No mobile broadband, no 4G and no iPhones.

No highspeed fixed broadband. Around 68% did have ADSL 2+ with typical speeds of 256Kb/s or 512Kb/s and a few lucky ones even had Optus Cable.

But there was no streaming; yep, that's right, no Netflix, Stan, Apple TV or Amazon Prime.

Your children may be shocked to learn there was no Fortnite, GTA or Rainbow Six Siege.

Unfortunately, with theatres closed so you would have missed the premiers of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Shrek the Third*, and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.

Of course, there was always Blockbuster video, but chances are the film you really wanted to see was already rented out.

And, of course there were five free to air channels, on which *The Big Bang Theory* aired weekly.

Very few businesses had heard of the cloud, and typical networks were only accessible if you were 'in the office'.

That phrase "sorry I was on mute" had no place in our vernacular.

If COVID-07 had struck, we would have had many fewer options, distractions and ways to do what we all just did.

Look at how far we've come. Digital technology reaches across a broad spectrum of our lives.

Technology has provided us with the life raft that has kept so many aspects of our daily lives afloat during COVID-19, keeping us connected so we can remotely work, study, socialise – even stay fit and healthy.

Widespread adoption has been a product of necessity, with employees, students, and even the elderly wishing to see their grandchildren embracing technology.

While many of our deep-rooted economic and social norms have been challenged, it is abundantly clear that our society's appetite for

advances in technology is stronger now than ever before, and we are willing to embrace digital for even more aspects of our lives.

We now have a social licence to accelerate the digitalisation of our economy and society.

But, we must be aware that not everyone shares the luxury of access. As we advance, we must do so in a way that takes all Australians with us.

Business leaders, Government and policy makers can further optimise our digitalisation, using technologies' benefits to bring everyone along with us.

Data is critical to achieving our potential as it allows us to understand people and our environment, so we can identify and solve issues, anticipate needs, make better decisions, and help bring everyone and every business into our digital future.

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In recent weeks, click throughs to Travel and Weather are down by up to 70%. No surprises there, right? Who cares about the weather if you are working from home? Who cares about cheap trips overseas when we can't travel abroad?

And as you would also expect, the data traffic used by those working from home for secure office connections has more than slightly increased, in fact, uploads over Wi-Fi shot up 40%.

This is all entirely consistent with what we'd expect from our present lifestyles. But Australians are also going online for other needs that would traditionally have been sought in-person:

A growing number of people are obtaining essential services like medical care from health care providers that have pivoted to telehealth services.

Fitness and wellbeing site visits have increased by 30% – with some sites, like healthed.com.au, showing an increase of over 11,000%

Visits to education sites are up by 85%, no doubt driven by parents struggling to teach their kids from home and wanting help.

Uggboots australia was one of the fastest growing sites in traffic.

Naturally, as people seek support with the financial impacts of COVID-19, they can't always visit the offices of their traditional advisors, so many are seeking online advice, with visits to finance sites up by 16%.

And of course, we've seen a huge uptake in the download of collaboration apps, like Zoom, which has seen an increase of more than 1100%.

Simply put: Australians are increasingly turning to technology for aspects of their life that were once non-digital. And in turn, more digital services, products and channels are appearing.

And herein lies an opportunity for governments, corporates and academia to analyse data and patterns to create the avenues that ensure we make life better for everyone!

Let me give you an example.

Using aggregated, de-identified mobility data to solve problems, we can help cities understand traffic and people movements and make better decisions.

When you apply these insights to COVID-19, these decisions can be life-saving.

DSpark – our data arm - is working with governments, health departments and epidemiologists to identify how people – and the germs they may carry – move from place to place, using resident and visiting population metrics and movements. By understanding movement and destinations of devices from a known hotspot, then analysing movements of other devices that could have come in contact with the original group - and so on – you can model the speed of the transmission depending on a hotspot's location! It's been astounding to see the theoretical speed and distances things can spread by harnessing the power of big data.

Epidemiologists describe the tool as ground-breaking for their field, and the knowledge can be used to help the safety for Australians across the country.

By understanding patterns like this, governments can set up lines of defence – like where to test and bolster health services – that can help halt or at least slow the spread of COVID.

Australia's advanced use of data to solve these issues is in the sights of many around the world.

Data helps build the map to other improvements – an area of real potential is the economic impacts and possible roads to recovery for SMBs.

Many SMBs don't have the benefit of in-house technology expertise, like CIOs or CTOs, to navigate what technologies – particularly emerging technologies – can improve their operations and help them bounce back from COVID's economic shock.

Data can be leveraged to identify which SMBs require more support, and where they need that support.

We identified the need for simple solutions for small businesses to be fully mobile and just announced new Business Connect plans that gives SMB's 4 sims with 250GB to share in a simple onboarding experience at affordable rates!

At Optus, we're all about analysing customers trends so we can understand lifestyle shifts, and explore new ways to provide our customers with service and offerings that meet and anticipate their needs, but importantly simplify how they use telecommunications services.

While eSim has been available for a while at Optus, we have just announced a fully digital eSim - which provides consumers with the ability to activate a new service via My Optus App –meaning they no need to go into a store, or wait for a token to arrive in the post – we are making it easy for consumers to switch to eSim, or join Optus on an eSim, quickly and conveniently.

eSim also means customers can make and receive calls from two different mobile numbers on the one device, eliminating the hassle of having to carry around both a work phone and a personal phone. For instance – in the same way that changing banks has become easier – changing telcos is now easier, and as champions of choice, we are thrilled to lead the way here.

This is the type of service shift we make from knowing our customers – and some of the customer usage trends we see are fascinating.

The opportunities for digitalisation are clear and the appetite is there – we have faced a once in a generation crisis, let's take a once in a generation leap forward.

We all have a role to play. And it's a simple statement of fact: our post-COVID world will be even more digital than it was beforehand. We are not going to turn back the clock.

Moving to the digital economy can bring tremendous rewards: improved productivity, investment, jobs, growth, international competitiveness, protection and creation of revenue streams.

We can lead with a "digital-by-design" mindset, where all consumers and businesses, particularly small businesses, are encouraged to, empowered by and rewarded from digital innovation. Government's announcement today of \$800m to encourage businesses to adapt digital services and the acceleration of 5G rollout is welcome – and a great start.

"So, the way forward is clear: we must aggressively push our digital adaption forward."

Economic incentives – whether investment funds or tax breaks – should bias towards technology that can help our entire economy push its technology adoption forward, but without the economic handbrake and the heartache.

Continuing to shift our innovation curve forward is the way to put Australia back on a solid economic footing and capture the full potential of our digital future. Other nations are taking this leap forward – we need to do the same.

So, the way forward is clear: we must aggressively push our digital adaption forward. But we need to do this with care and ensure we don't inadvertently exacerbate the existing digital divide.

In its *Australia's Tech Future Report*, the Australian Government recognises the more socially inclusive that Australia's digital

transformation is, the stronger our economy will be.

The report notes that as connectivity, access and improved inclusion, governments' ability to provide services online and directly into people's homes will increase. This will reduce the cost of services like education and healthcare while also improving rural and remote access.

Disappointingly, recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that 2.5 million Australians are not online because of affordability issues, location or lack of digital literacy.

At Optus we are passionate about repairing this disparity, and so proud that more than 332,000 Optus customers have supported vulnerable members of society through our fantastic Donate Your Data initiative, which we launched in December.

"We now have ten charity partners associated with the program, that allows us to provide internet access to those young people who need it most."

Through Donate Your Data, our customers can go onto their app and donate data to disadvantaged young people, who can then use that connectivity to seize opportunities which lead to brighter futures.

We now have ten charity partners associated with the program, that allows us to provide internet access to those young people who need it most.

Over one million donations have been made, totalling nearly 15.5 million GB of data since December 2019.

Connectivity, data, communication – are critical to all people.

In the NSW Bushfire Review, the service that was most valued by the community was communications – makes sense if you think about it – to call a loved one and check on them, to look up what the latest weather and fire dangers are, to identify what's open, which roads and paths are safe, - it all relies on communication.

As we transition to a more digitally enabled economy, it becomes critical that no-one is left behind. A digitally inclusive society is the responsibility of us all.

Increased digitalisation carries with it the risk of inflaming existing issues and each of us will need all the collective creativity available to find solutions to the challenges ahead: cyber-crime, social isolation, privacy and environmental concerns.

In the same way that organisations have a responsibility to decrease our carbon footprint, we must be equally vigilant in increasing our nations digital footprint.

Every decision, every policy, must ensure that all Australians – particularly our next generation of leaders – are digitally empowered. And we must use data to inform those decisions and policies.

We have our social licence to accelerate into our digital future – let's make sure we do it the right way. If we do, we can achieve so much together.