

Culture shock in the imaging industry

 By [Mohammed Vachiat](#)

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There certainly haven't been any significant disruptive changes in printing technology over the past 18 months - but, what has changed is the processing power and consequently the quality of printing, and connectivity. Most notably, the environments around us have changed. As we look into the future, we see a number of digital transformation trends that will influence the world of imaging for many years to come.



Mohammed Vachiat, head of sales and innovation Konica Minolta SA

Trend 1 - A changed landscape

Society is seeing the single greatest shift in consumer behaviour in recent years, which is affecting the printing and imaging business to a considerable degree, through the shift to widespread working from home.

This has fundamentally changed our printing industry because our strength is not in consumer-based products, but more focussed on the commercial, academic and government verticals. We focus on small and medium-sized enterprises and typically large scale customers in workplace environments. The work-at-home trend hit the printing industry hard as a vast proportion of our customers were simultaneously asking for products and solutions to enable their employees to work from home.

This required an almost overnight pivot by our industry from our core commercial market to the consumer 'customer'. That shift included mobile print, remote access and remote panels to allow companies to turn their multifunctional device into a smart-technology hub that would enable the secure flow of data and insights. These tools were vital to facilitate collaboration across physical spaces such as the office and home, as well as virtual workspaces for employees collaborating across the

country.

People may be working from home but they're not printing from home, although in many cases workers may have already had a small printer at home.

Trend 2 – Adapting and creating a changed offering

With this macro change in our landscape came a swift move towards more cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IoT) with the multi-functional device (MFP) becoming commoditised in the process.

In an instant, we were not only competing with other printer companies but full-service technology companies – as our target audience look more intensely at value-add services.

People are collaborating using virtual tools and applications from Zoom, Microsoft Teams, sharing documents to the cloud and collaborating simultaneously on documents using tools like Office 365, Dropbox, Google Workplace and other information management platforms. These tools assist companies in both managing costs and more flexibly managing their operations.

Trend 3 – legally protecting customers and ensuring the longevity of documents

Many service providers within our group had to ramp up their digital offering and innovation to continue serving this market. We have been successful in this time of uncertainty and proved our agility as a company by taking digital transformation to the level of the average worker. It is one thing to be able to print and copy at home – but what then happens to that document?

Important documents need to be finalised and then stored for later retrieval. It's vital that our industry had to take it further to the digital signature so that the entire lifecycle of a document can be completed digitally. Once a document is downloaded or scanned you can do anything with it and thereafter archive it in a paperless environment. An MFP facilitates the full process of digitisation from beginning to end.

Trend 4 – Anticipating the future

There were stark differences in the ability for different workers to be able to work from home, many were ill-equipped for a sudden move to home offices. As Covid-19 was so 'unplanned for' people were suddenly expected to work from home in environments never intended for work. When it comes to electronic messaging equipment the environment in which it functions is important – including furniture, computer/laptop and access to Wi-Fi.

The trend towards work-from-home is here to stay and Konica Minolta South Africa's research points to the ratio settling at 60/40 work to home. A lot of companies are still finding the hybrid model that suits them. They are regularly assessing it, but with 18 months into social distancing restrictions, it is highly likely to be a permanent feature of the business world.

Looking a little further ahead, we see robotics as an upcoming trend. The component of this which will most affect the imaging industry is 3D professional printing. This will be a game-changing innovation for our industry. This trend is likely to become increasingly more significant as 3D production and the scalable, modular and highspeed digital moulding factory solutions used to deliver it becomes more accessible.

Robots will be behaving like people within the next ten years. We will see baby steps in this direction in 2022, as the IoT will increasingly connect everything in people's personal and business lives.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is arriving, with many manual jobs being taken over by technology, artificial intelligence and computers.

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