



**ALIGNING YOUR
TECHNOLOGY
ROADMAP TO
IMPROVE
CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE**

Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter 1: Setting the foundations	3
Scan your organisation for resources	4
Develop a flexible strategy	4
Chapter 2: Put the customer first	5
Balancing the human touch with digital efficiency	5
Digital Platforms	6
Make customer experiences mobile	6
Predictive analytics	7
Artificial intelligence and machine learning	7
Chapter 3: Innovation is key	8
Chapter 4: The technological edge	9
Cloud services	9
- Affordable options	9
- Remote working	9
- Disaster planning	9
Which technologies will have the biggest impact on improved efficiencies?	10
Technology in practice	10



Introduction

From the rise of artificial intelligence to an increasingly cashless society, the consumer landscape is fundamentally changing – whether your business is ready or not. Spurred by increasing consumer demand for immediacy and smartphone convenience, businesses hoping to remain competitive need to leverage technology to make their offerings smarter, easier and faster.

Those who adopt a digital-first mindset will be well placed to ride this wave of innovation. By streamlining processes, enhancing customer service offerings and embracing cloud-based technologies, businesses can remain competitive and scale from anywhere in the world.

Chapter 1: Setting the foundations

Whether you're moving your business to a completely virtual offering, or using technology to enhance your current physical services, adopting a digital-first business strategy is crucial to future-proofing your operations. Successful digital transformation requires change to be woven into the entire culture of the business from the top-down.

At this stage, having a solid business strategy is essential, but it must be agile enough to respond to an ever-changing, frenetic consumerism model. Responding to change is just as important as following a plan. By establishing core foundations for your digital change, and building on these, you'll have the flexibility to experience, deliver and learn from customer insights and data as you go, without straying from your primary business beliefs.

Scan your organisation for resources

Resourcing is a major issue for many SMEs, but often there's just too much to do and not enough help to do it. Without the resources for consultants and industry experts, rushing to digitally overhaul your business without a clear strategy for change can lead to ineffective customer communication, poor service and organisational disruption.

Managing change can be difficult for SMEs as it requires them to step back from their business as usual operations and make short-term financial sacrifices. Your team is your secret weapon when undertaking digital change – they know your organisation, culture and customers the best. Your team can report on any pain points and inform you how technological solutions can relieve these.

Once you've consulted with employees and decided on how best to undertake digital change, appoint a change manager and equip them with the resources to implement the transformation.

Manage cultural change

Lead the way with a top-down approach that encourages buy-in from your staff during this time of change. It's important to acknowledge that adopting a digital-first mindset may go against existing company culture, and if your organisation is not yet used to online software platforms, this could be a major overhaul for staff. Changing company culture is neither simple nor immediate, and having support from your staff during this process is crucial to implementing a meaningful, lasting change.

Develop a flexible strategy

When devising a digital business strategy, consider the following:

- Be clear about the outcomes you're hoping to achieve from this digital transformation.
- Be frank about the benefits digital change will deliver to all aspects of your business.
- Acknowledge some of the pain points that are likely to occur.
- Ask yourself whether you have the resources needed to implement change.
- Establish guiding foundation principles to make sure change happens in an appropriate way that aligns with your brand values, and not just for the sake of change.
- Remain clear about your goals and focus areas.
- Set weekly goals as a short-term measure of success, but constantly review and adjust these milestones along the way.

Businesses must be prepared to experiment, deliver and learn from customer insights and data during this process. Track the results and adjust as needed until you find what works. Make this a flexible process, and constantly review your goals in line with the capacity of your staff, and the feedback from customers.





Chapter 2: Put the customer first

Good customer service is the cornerstone of any successful small business, yet industries across the board are seeing a decline in customer satisfaction. A 2017 survey about the [state of customer service in Australia](#) found more than one third of customers stopped shopping at a business because of a poor customer service experience. The same survey found 72 per cent of Australian customers believe companies are not placing sufficient importance on providing excellent customer service.

With technology able to drive a more optimised customer experience than ever before, what's to blame for this sub-par service? This decline in customer satisfaction, and its subsequent negative feedback, is often directly linked to a lack of meaningful daily interactions. Often, instead of asking questions face-to-face or over the phone, customers submit questions via services such as a chatbot, or are directed to leave feedback via unwieldy online forms.

Our desires for speed and convenience are met with time-saving technologies, which can come at the cost of what makes shopping at a small business so rewarding – the personal relationships, the human interaction, the care and attention to detail. Ironically, it seems that instead of making customer service more efficient, technology can inadvertently place a barrier between the business and the consumer when deployed incorrectly.

So how do you find the right balance between the efficiencies driven by technology, and the personal touch points your loyal customers crave? The answer lies in leveraging tech solutions that, rather than doing your job for you, empower you to serve the customer better.

Balancing the human touch with digital efficiency

With access to cloud-based platforms, predictive analytics, cashless payments, chatbots and voice assistants, businesses have access to countless ways of creating new value for their customers. Yet many businesses are slow to adopt these new technologies: in fact, according to the [2018 PayPal mCommerce trends report](#), 49 per cent of Australian businesses don't have mobile optimised websites, even though 40 per cent of consumers look for product and store information on their mobiles.

Get ahead of your competition by using technology to offer an optimised customer experience. Businesses on the leading edge of customer service are now experimenting with augmented reality, chatbots and voice assistance. Not only do these new technologies provide powerful tracking, workflow and reporting tools in the backend, but from a customer-facing perspective they help make the consumer experience fun. From gamifying feedback processes to providing in-store incentives, savvy businesses are using tech to directly connect with their customers in store to drive sales, engagement and social shareability.

Social media has proven its value as a cost-effective tool SMEs can use for feedback and direct customer connections, and these new technologies can help SMEs further attract and retain more customers:

Digital Platforms

Consider the last time you searched online, posted a photo or commented on a social media platform. Digital platforms now play a huge role in our daily life and will play a major role in the ways we do business in future.

Social media has led the way for SMEs to reach their audiences, though many SMEs believe they could be doing more to reach customers on these networks, according to a recent [SmartCompany survey](#). Australian businesses should adopt digital platforms and artificial intelligence as soon as possible, according to recent research from AlphaBeta. Those that don't risk being swept away by the tides of change.

Digital platforms allow businesses to connect with their customers on-the-go and on-demand, no matter where in the world they are. Rather than removing the human touchpoints many customers demand when doing business with SMEs, digital platforms like Oracle NetSuite empower business owners to become even more customer-focused.

Australian health food company Emma and Tom's is successfully using a digital platform to enhance their customer service. After deploying JCurve's edition of NetSuite, co-founders Emma Welsh and Tom Griffith found they were spending less time worrying about invoices while on the road, and more time engaging with their customers.

Paying visits to every one of their 3,500 customers is important for Emma & Tom, and they use NetSuite while on the road to manage their distribution and financial operations. For the co-founders, managing their operations in-house was crucial to giving their customers the service they expected.

"We realised to do a really good job and to give customers the service they deserved, we had to do it ourselves – that's why we run our own distribution," Emma said.

"It's not easy but there have been a lot of benefits – we can visit every customer on a weekly basis."

Rather than limiting the personal touchpoints with their customers, NetSuite's cloud-based platform allows Emma and Tom to focus on what they do best – deliver great customer service.

Not content with tackling the Australian market alone, the company plans to leverage NetSuite's OneWorld as they consider global expansion.

Make customer experiences mobile

These days, you can buy a pair of shoes while walking to pick up a coffee you pre-ordered, get food delivered straight to your door, and pay for your parking without leaving the car. Smartphones made this plethora of consumer-friendly technologies possible. Mobile shopping has fundamentally changed the way we consume products and services, and SMEs must adapt to this digital-first landscape.



With 54 per cent of consumers expecting physical retailers to offer a [mobile shopping app](#), SMEs must now engage with consumers in the way consumers prefer – via their smartphones. SMEs can leverage new digital marketing technologies such as in-app experiences to reach the consumer at the crucial point of purchase.

Predictive analytics

Predictive analytics also has a major role to play in creating a more consumer-facing, personalised service experience. Knowing what a customer wants before they want it removes the friction of product discovery and personalises the shopping process.

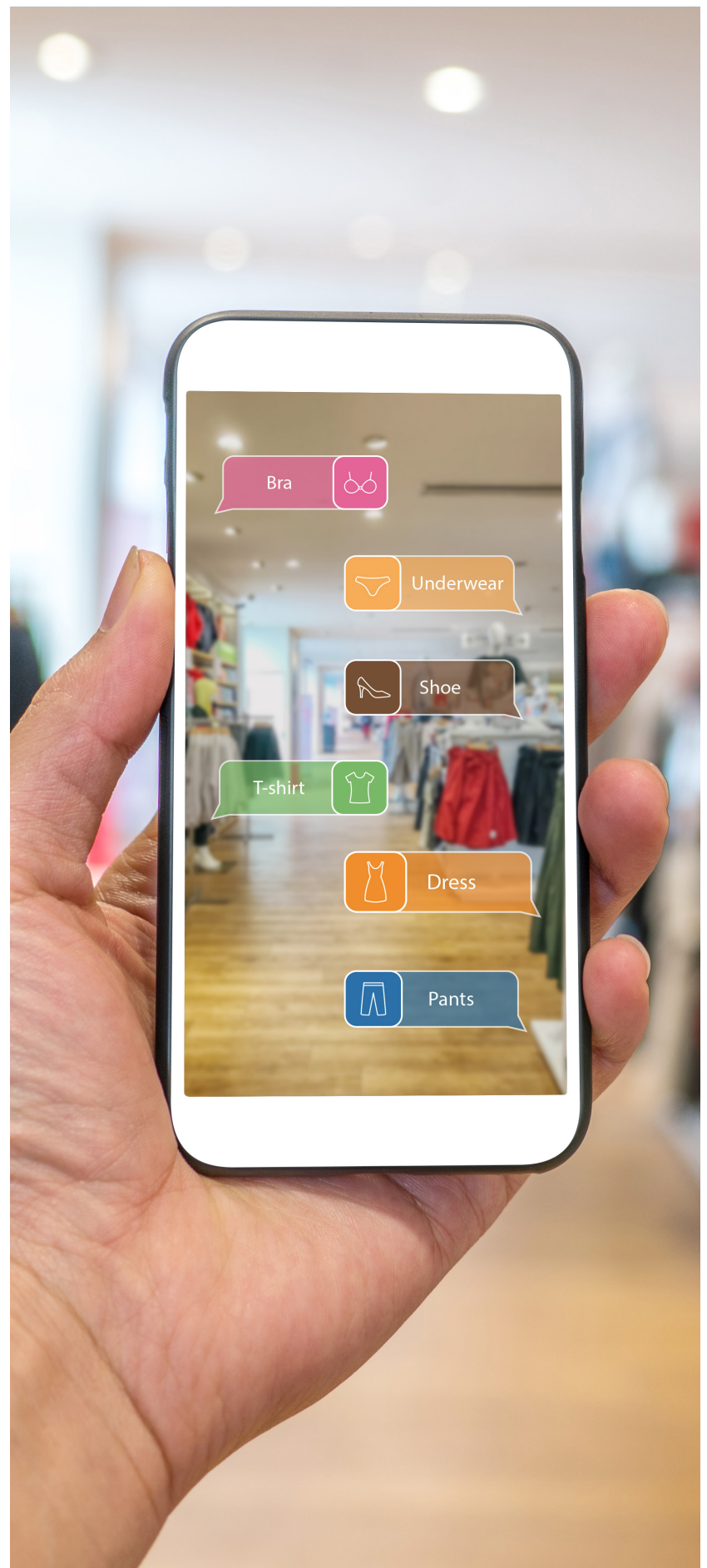
Customers want this focus and convenience. In fact, many customers are willing to share their personal data to make their shopping experience more seamless. They are willing to pay this price for personalised shopping experiences in-store or online, and product recommendations that are tailored to their tastes.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning

Whether we like it or not, artificial intelligence (AI) will impact every industry and job in the future. Innovative businesses will adopt the technology now to ensure their customer service is more intuitive, targeted and personalised. As machines introduce the concept of 'always-on' shopping, retailers will be able to facilitate all day delivery and customer service options. Many businesses are already trialling this 24/7 approach to customer service – using chatbots and voice assistants to increase their client-facing interactions.

Despite the popular opinion that AI will replace customer service workers, it can help service professionals understand a consumer's needs better, recording consumer behaviour and feedback to optimise future interactions.

While technology allows for the customer service experience to be offered anytime from anywhere, customers still crave traditional human interaction. With brick-and-mortar retailers still claiming 90 per cent of all retail revenue, it's evident the traditional shopping experience is still relevant. The balance between the human and the digital touch is a fine one, and the key to achieving this harmony is understanding consumer needs. The companies that will succeed are those that can integrate technology that enhances their brand and responds to how their customers interact with the world around them.





Chapter 3: Innovation is key

Crucial to a business's ability to survive in the new world of work is its ability to innovate. There are industries that are early adopters of new technologies, and those that lag behind, awaiting justification for change. It's not hard to predict which will last and which will get left on the sidelines.

Clearly innovation and agility should be embraced, and businesses should always consider the customer when thinking of new ways to deliver quality service. Now is the time to take a step back and see how technology can be leveraged to drive improvements and respond to change. For many SMEs, this starts at the customer's first point of contact with a business – their website. In a recent *SmartCompany* survey, 65 per cent of SMEs surveyed had updated their website in the past three years, but 59 per cent of these SMEs believe they are not using their sites effectively. Embrace innovation and consider the customer when scrutinising existing systems in place.

Innovation is not just about looking to the future, it's also about looking back at your existing processes to evaluate what's working. Reviewing traditional approaches that are no longer adding value is key to driving meaningful, agile innovation. Hold a magnifying glass to your current approaches, systems and procedures to see which are adding value and which are generating white noise. Do away with any approaches that aren't adding value.

The Startup factor

So how can a business drive innovation from within? Being agile and flexible is the key to innovation. Often, when we think of innovation, mobility or agility we think of startups – small businesses who have rapidly scaled into international markets because of their ability to adapt to changes in the market. Adopting an agile approach means cultivating a constantly questioning mindset. Question every structure and process that exists in your business today. One of the fundamental tenets of an agile approach is valuing individuals and interactions over processes and tools. That means for any new technology you introduce, you should also question its value. In your quest to digitally overhaul your business, it can be easy to lose sight of the fact the customer always comes first. Simple processes that work will be more effective than high-tech integrations that don't add value.



Chapter 4: The technological edge

Cloud services

Cloud services are becoming a must-have tool in any SME's arsenal, with 50 per cent of Australian businesses [surveyed by SmartCompany](#) now using cloud-based products. Leveraging cloud technology allows for affordable security, reliable and flexible scaling options for under-resourced small businesses. Being connected to the cloud may also be necessary to place your business on a level playing field with larger competitors. In fact, cloud software lets you drive the sort of customer relationship management, accounting workflow and service usually associated with enterprise-level businesses than SMEs.

Affordable options

For businesses on a budget, cloud services provide an affordable subscription-based alternative to paying upfront for software packages. The opt-in, opt-out flexibility of cloud software means you'll have the resources you need during busy periods, without paying for what you don't need in quiet times. Updates are also easier to manage – you get access to the latest version of the software without having to pay for costly upgrades.

Remote working

In a globalised economy, mobility is key. Having a flexible workforce that can be deployed on-demand is the cornerstone of a successful modern business. Cloud-based software allows employees to remain productive while away from their desks. Having mobility in your business is not a luxury or an option, but a necessary competitive advantage. Research shows that employee mobility can lead to better processes and a [23 per cent increase in productivity](#).

Disaster planning

Cloud storage also prepares you for when disaster strikes, which is what SunMoon, a global distributor of food products, discovered after their offices were ravaged by fire. While employees weren't able to return to the office for two months, they were able to serve their customers and continue their operations with their data safely and securely stored on Oracle's NetSuite OneWorld platform. With cloud services allowing employees to access crucial information anywhere, and at any time, SunMoon employees could pick up working where they left off. "We did not lose one day of operations because fortunately we were on the NetSuite cloud-based system," said deputy chairman and CEO of SunMoon Food Company Gary Loh. "As a business owner I could not have asked for more."

Which technologies will have the biggest impact on improved efficiencies?

In the future, artificial intelligence will drive unparalleled efficiencies – but it won't necessarily be putting our labour force out of work, as many fear. Instead of replacing traditional roles, AI makes us work smarter: paving the way for people to undertake strategic, meaningful work instead of being tied up with busy processes. As automation reduces routine and manual work, our jobs will likely become safer, more satisfying and more valuable. AI's acceptance is already underway, with companies not already using it, likely to be introducing it by the end of the year.

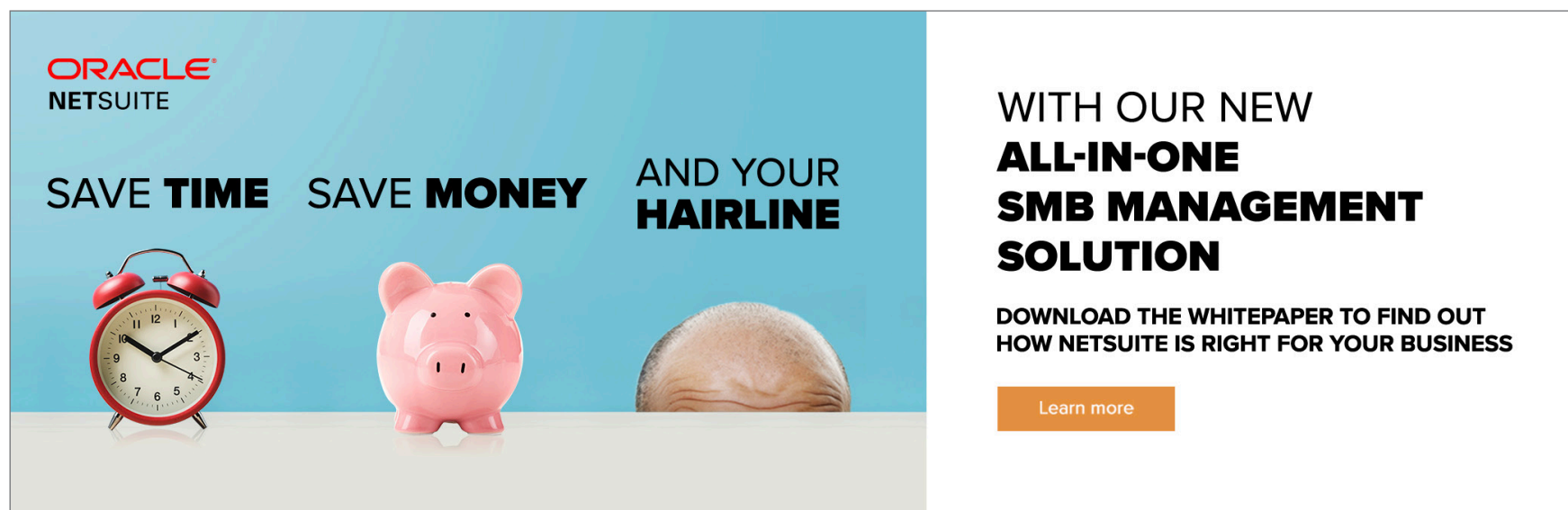
Over the next 15 years, machines will save Australians from two hours of the most tedious paper-pushing and manual repetition per week, and could deliver a productivity boost to the tune of [\\$2.2 million by 2030](#). The efficiencies this drives enables SMEs to do value-added work. In this brave new world of automation and machine learning, it is the uniquely intangible human capabilities like empathy, creativity and intuition that will be of most value.

Cloud-based software and digital platforms also drive industry-leading efficiency. After overhauling and digitising their systems, SunMoon Food Company Ltd saved \$20,000 and over 150 hours of administration in just five months. "The company has to embark on a journey that makes sure we embrace technology," Loh explained. "It's about how we become more efficient to focus on what we can do for our customers."

To drive efficiency internally, SunMoon overhauled their traditional paper-based processes. Previously, employees tracked international logistics and inventory using manual spreadsheets. "We were using a pen and paper system that was never telling me the full story," Loh said. Now able to link operations to finances and track deliveries from farm to consumer, SunMoon's team uses NetSuite OneWorld to see the business in action at a glance. Loh says this efficiency will continue to lead the way for growth in the future. "We see this step towards tech and our transformation as just the beginning: the company will be able to understand our consumer better than we ever imagined it could."

Technology in practice

Despite the efficiency technology can bring, there are also real pain points for SMEs navigating the ever-changing digital landscape with minimal resources. In fact, the SmartCompany survey found SME owners are not in the habit of working remotely and actually aren't accessing a great deal of online or cloud services. Luckily, there are more platforms than ever to help businesses with their accounting, marketing, logistics, inventory tracking and more, no matter their expertise or resourcing level. Small businesses that are willing to embrace technology in their daily practices will quickly surpass their competitors – just as Australian surf hardware company Global Surf Industries (GSI) has done.



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The advertisement banner features the Oracle NetSuite logo at the top left. Below it, the text 'SAVE TIME', 'SAVE MONEY', and 'AND YOUR HAIRLINE' is displayed in bold, black, uppercase letters. Underneath each phrase is a corresponding image: a red alarm clock for 'SAVE TIME', a pink piggy bank for 'SAVE MONEY', and a balding head for 'AND YOUR HAIRLINE'. To the right of these images, the text 'WITH OUR NEW ALL-IN-ONE SMB MANAGEMENT SOLUTION' is written in bold, black, uppercase letters. Below this, the text 'DOWNLOAD THE WHITEPAPER TO FIND OUT HOW NETSUITE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR BUSINESS' is also in bold, black, uppercase letters. At the bottom right, there is an orange button with the text 'Learn more' in white.

GSI leveraged NetSuite's OneWorld platform to scale their business internationally while still keeping a small business mentality. "NetSuite has allowed our team to focus on customers and work towards our main goal – becoming the biggest small company we can possibly be," said GSI chief executive and founder Mark Kelly.

With Kelly working abroad up to six months a year, it was crucial they had a platform that let them work from anywhere in the world. "The whole thing is cloud based and easy to run from wherever you are," Kelly said. "Whether that's an airport, train, boat or surfing in the Maldives, I can be operating NetSuite and running the business."

NetSuite allows all GSI employees to work remotely, managing real-time inventory with distribution partners across Asia, Europe, North and South America and Africa. Kelly says the platform has driven 50 per cent greater efficiency in their finance and operations and allows the business to easily establish and manage subsidiaries in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and the US. With global operations run through one platform, GSI is now in a prime position to scale for growth without limitations. "We don't feel encumbered by anything: there's really nothing we can't do, it's more just what we want to do."

The increasing prevalence of virtual businesses

More and more businesses like GSI are ditching the high rent and maintenance that comes with brick-and-mortar operations in favour of virtual businesses. With the flexibility to work on-the-go and on-demand, and the ability to outsource the best talent from around the globe, virtual businesses are easily scalable and increasingly prevalent. Tools and digital platforms and online accounting software allow 24/7 access to the documents you need, without the limitations of office hours or a tedious commute. Businesses can embrace a virtual future in more ways than just moving their operations online. Virtual assistants and chatbots allow you to always be online, while cutting down the cost of support staff. Lower overhead costs also mean virtual businesses can easily scale and respond to changes in the market with reduced real estate costs.

With the rapidly changing future of work promising a brave new world of automation, disruption and fragmentation, businesses with the ability to respond to these changes are the ones who will come out on top. By ditching paper-based processes and manual data entry for automation, technology allows businesses to work faster, smarter, and be agile and mobile to adjust to whatever the future world of work has in store.



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