

Office of the Future

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We know it's coming. The Office of the Future, that place straight out of science fiction where everything's connected to everything else, heavily automated and full of technology to help small businesses and their employees be more productive and drive new business.

Yet, figuring out which technologies to bank on can be confusing, if not overwhelming. In fact, based on IDC's definition of future readiness, 82 percent of organizations fall short – with only 18 percent believing they're deploying the right technology to drive and support the way most people will work.

What are we talking about? Here are the five technologies you should be thinking about now if you want to get in front of what's coming and avoid the disappointment of seeing your competitors get there first.

1. Convertible Laptops

You've seen them at Costco, Best Buy and the HP store. Those laptops that flip around and suddenly become tablets. Two-in-ones, you might call them. And you've wondered, "do I really need that?"

Trust us, you might. Here's the thing: this is a mobile and connected world. Workforces are increasingly operating outside of traditional offices. Indeed, a 2019 survey by Upwork, the online freelancing hub, found almost 70 percent of younger generation managers already have team members working remotely, and they believe two in five full-time employees will work remotely within the next three years.

Those employees will value lightweight but powerful and flexible technology that lets them do their job anywhere. Creative types like graphic artists or photographers, in particular, will look for tools and capabilities that empower them to imagine and produce their artwork almost anywhere. Salespeople will want one device they can use in almost any setting, whether it's their office, living room or a cold call with a potential client.

Convertibles provide that kind of stamina and flexibility and will be an integral part of many offices of the future.

2. Hardware Security

Most articles about coming technology list cybersecurity last, which suggests

fortifying computers against potential attack is still an afterthought when it should be an early thought.

According to a recent Verizon survey, [43 percent of cyberattacks](#) target small to medium-size businesses (SMBs). Yet a separate study from Keeper Security found [two-in-three senior SMB decision makers](#) don't believe they'll be hit by a cyberattack.

The truth is that just as you would put locks on all your home doors and windows, businesses need to implement safeguards for every potential network access point. This means firewalls, antivirus software, and tools to manage how people log on and what they're allowed to access.

But it should also involve protecting hardware endpoints such as laptops and network printers because they are under attack as never before. Indeed, according to a recent [Ponemon Institute report](#), nearly 65 percent of IT security professionals polled said their organizations experienced one or more endpoint attacks that exposed their data – up a whopping 54 percent from the previous year. The average cost of these breaches was \$7.1 million, the report found.

Many of these attacks could be thwarted by investing in hardware endpoints with [built-in security features](#), such as integrated privacy screens to keep prying eyes away, multi-factor authentication for secure log-on, malware protection that uses machine learning to anticipate and block threats, web browsing “traps” that isolate threats in virtual containers and self-healing capabilities that recover the BIOS from attacks or corruption.

There are so many features now available for hardware, and with more employees online and connected – both in the office and on the road – it's critical to make every endpoint decision a security decision.

3. Flexible Tech-Enabled Workspaces

If you're a Baby Boomer, you've seen workspaces go from boxy offices to cubicles to wide open floorplans and back to cubicles and offices again. The office of the future will break from that pattern.

Why? Because again, more people will be working remotely and because millennials, who make up [more than half the U.S. labor force](#), think [flexible work environments make them more productive](#).

The way this will play out is that there will be more agile workspaces for individual productivity, informal meeting areas for co-creation and collaboration, interactive conference rooms for meetings and collaboration and integrated communal spaces

for socialization and wellness.

Connected technology will function in the background so employees in those physical spaces can easily communicate and collaborate with workers located in other spaces and places around the world.

4. Meeting Room Magic

Within conference rooms themselves, you'll also see a myriad of new technologies emerging to keep meetings on track and more accessible for distributed workforces – increasing overall productivity.

This is actually good news for small businesses in particular because the days of investing hundreds of thousands of dollars in meeting room video systems are **vanishing**. Instead, we'll see newer, more affordable IP-based "**Zoom Room**" video conferencing systems you can pull out of a box and set up quickly and easily.

There could also be new-fangled digital whiteboards that will automatically send anything written on them to any connected PC – even those operated by remote workers – so everyone can view what's happening. For that matter, someone sitting in a Houston hotel room could be drawing on their ink-enabled PC and have those images suddenly show up on that digital whiteboard back at headquarters. As Alex Cho, president of personal systems at HP, says, this is the general direction the Office of the Future technology is going. Laptops and notebooks will become communication hubs with rich capabilities and far better audio and video quality than current conferencing systems are able to offer.

5. Virtual Assistants

You're probably already talking to voice-based virtual assistants like Alexa, Siri and Cortana in your personal life. But there's also talk of these systems playing a much bigger role in the office as well.

Imagine, for example, walking into a meeting room and just saying, "**Alexa, start my budget meeting.**" The video screen turns on, all PCs connected to the conferencing system come to life and you're off-and-running. Now suppose you also wanted someone to listen and take notes on your meeting. With coming innovation, that virtual assistant could do that for you and, using artificial intelligence, even suggest key action items to follow up on to complete projects or meet certain goals. This is a capability already **found in email clients** like Microsoft Outlook. So don't be surprised to see it making its way into the growing world of virtual assistants before long.

The Office of the Future is on its way. Many of the technologies that will enable it are here now, such as endpoint security features, and others are still to come, such as fully automated conference rooms. Some business owners might be tempted to take a wait-and-see approach toward coming innovation, reasoning they'll do something when the time is right.

But that would be a mistake. Companies that do not prepare for the future of work – now – could miss it altogether and wind up seeing time, as well as their competitors, pass them by.