



CONVO AMERICAS 2020

A New World of Possibilities Awaits

Forward-thinking customer experience innovators and technologists share key takeaways in their accelerated path toward digital transformation

Convo Americas 2020 from Vonage was a virtual conference for product leaders looking to build personalized mobile and online experiences. Attendees learned how some of the world's biggest brands use Vonage Communication APIs to create customer experiences that move across social and chat apps, voice, video, SMS, in-app, or out-of-app.

Product teams came to Convo Americas 2020 in droves to gain the latest insights into winning customers in this new era. They heard from thought leaders at Salesforce, Trend Hunter, and Artificial Solutions on innovating the customer experience and uncovering new opportunities—even during times of crisis and chaos. Vonage customers Top Hat, Docusign, and Latch shared how they are using Communications APIs to transform the way they do business and connect with customers.



FROM CX TO DX TO EXPERIENCE INNOVATION:

How Companies Need to Innovate in the Novel Economy

Digital transformation (DX) itself was digitally disrupted when the global pandemic hit. But as businesses and markets begin to find their footing in responding to the crisis, the question now is: Are we heading to a new normal, or are we going to create a new and better future?

BRIAN SOLIS | GLOBAL INNOVATION EVANGELIST | SALESFORCE

On Seeing Opportunity in the Middle of a Difficult Situation

It can be hard to see the positive in times like these, but the people and companies that do so will be the ones to shape the conversation moving forward.

"I am continually learning from all of the changes that are happening in the world to process them, internalize them, more importantly to humanize them, so that we can think differently about how we move forward to be more relevant, to be more innovative, I think maybe to be more meaningful. If anything, this disruption has given us an opportunity to rethink and reimagine the future."

Many Businesses Are Reactive Inside or Out of a Pandemic

Only the most innovative companies and brands manage to stay proactive. Many are stuck in reactive mode.

"Ultimately, we can't just keep reacting, whether it's COVID-19 or whether it's the next Amazon or whether it's the next Uber. There's always something to react to. This is a teaching moment. The pandemic is among many things, an accelerant—an accelerant to the digital change that was already taking place."



On a New Normal in Life and Business

Normal may not be what it once was, and we need to learn how to handle that.

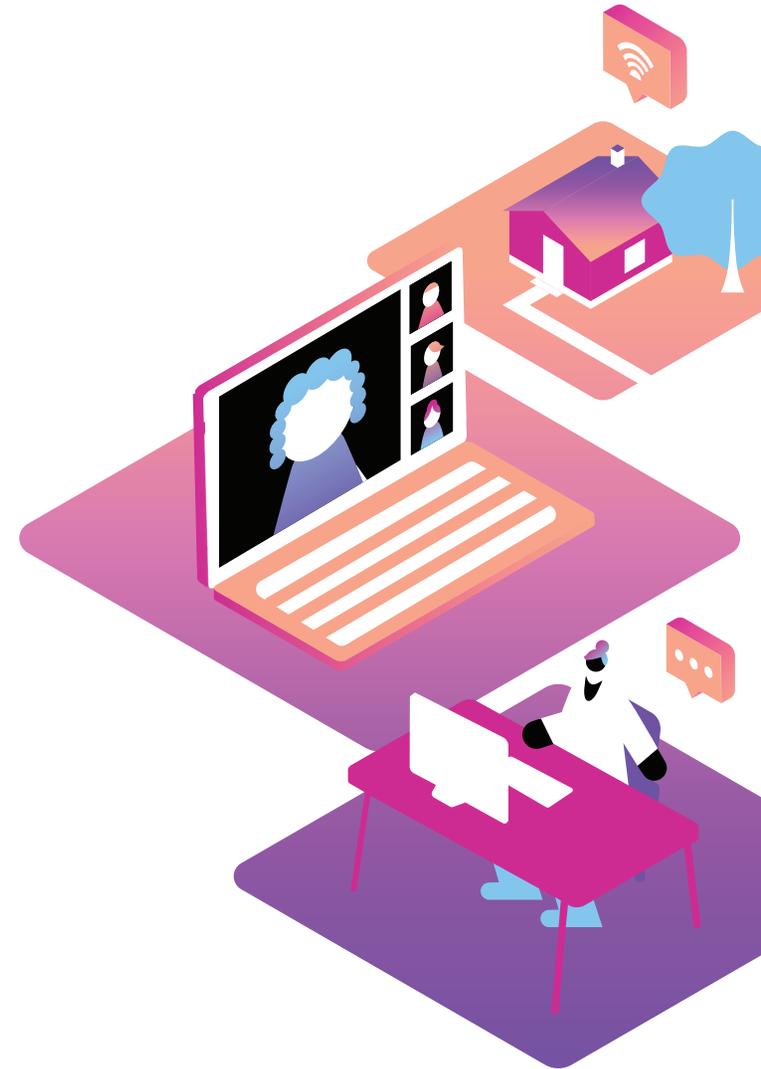
"Even when there's a vaccine, it's going to take time to not just propagate but to get people to feel comfortable again. But even then, we're going to have not just a new normal, but a new opportunity, a blank canvas to design experiences that are going to matter to customers and employees in this new world. The novel economy is true to its namesake. It was inspired by the novel coronavirus—I guess quite literally, in that novel means new and unusual—and like the pandemic, there was no vaccine. There's no business vaccine, there's no disruption vaccine. There's no playbook really for what to do next. There aren't case studies to follow or best practices. We need next practices ... now."

On a Response Strategy

How companies and brands can move forward from reaction to innovation during a pandemic.

"If you think about the Stoic philosophy, they don't believe that you can control life events, but that you can control how you respond to them. So in this case, this is a response strategy. Phase One is where we are stabilizing in reaction to the crisis. It's business continuity, it's building new bridges across all kinds of processes and systems and operations. It's stitching together capabilities for customers to be able to engage with us. But Phase Two is where we're starting to enter. And this is, I believe, why we're here together today. It's the alive phase, where we're starting to realize, wow, we just shifted everyone to working from home. We launched digital-first capabilities. Yes, we just did that. We just accelerated digital transformation plans by 10 years, whether it's automation, AI, API's—all of the things that were on the horizon just got shoved forward. And we've done incredible things that we didn't even know were possible."

"So now, knowing what we know today, what else could we do? What else is possible? Essentially what I'm saying here is that we're going to set the bar higher—we're going to create the standard for what comes next, which is Phase Three, which is the thrive phase. This is creating a culture of innovation, eliminating bureaucracy, accelerating decision making, and bringing people across functions together. There is nothing that says innovation more than human-centered transformation or relationship transformation, as my colleague Henry King and I have developed and still are developing. In fact, before COVID, digital transformation failed, or just went off the path in four out of five cases, it's estimated. So we have to give a sense of purpose to digital transformation, to innovation. And that is relationship transformation."



On What the Consumer Wants

Understanding consumer needs is essential for building successful products in any environment. That's the core of relationship transformation or RTx as Solis claims.

"We want more personal choices. We want things to be immediate, convenient, accurate, more experiential. We want experiences to be integrated, personalized, and we want them to be platform native IE-connected for this screen we're on."

"All of these innovative brands are recognizing the new needs and expectations and behaviors of digital-first customers, and they're delivering new products and services, but also much more connected experiences that guide them through their journey. This is who we compete against, even if we don't compete against them in the market. We're competing with them at an experience design level, and there is no turning back."

On the Path Forward

Empathy coming out of a global pandemic sounds obvious, but it's essential when building products for the people who have endured one.

"I'm starting to call this digital empathy design. It's this idea where we take a much more compassionate, empathetic approach. Not a sympathetic approach, an empathetic approach where we set aside our biases, our own beliefs, our own value systems, and step toward the customer to better understand how they're going through changes in every aspect of their life."

"Then, when we reimagine the journey, it's an opportunity to make things much more integrated. Because we understand how this customer is different. [I've been] playing around with the concept that I'm calling "Infinite DX" or infinite digital transformation, which is the idea that transformation, and innovation, is continuous to compete now and in the future. This also means that we need new leadership and vision to continue the path forward in new directions. Through technology, we have to examine our operations so that we can iterate, make things better with new technology, increase efficiencies, increase scales. We're seeing it, for example, with automation, chatbots, conversational commerce. And then we also have to look at ways for digital business model innovation. This represents new value creation as times, trends, and tastes evolve."



COMMUNICATIONS CHAT:

Human Connections in a Virtual World

Joy Corso, Vonage CMO, and Omar Javaid, Vonage President of the API Platform Group, along with executives from e-signature platform DocuSign and leading active learning platform Top Hat, discussed how APIs are helping to meet critical needs. With Vonage APIs, these industry leaders are embedding interactive, private, and programmable features into their existing platforms to create real-time, personalized human connections, replicating the value of in-person meetings for their users in a safe, virtual setting.

NICK STEIN | CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER | TOP HAT

Top Hat is an all-in-one active learning and courseware platform that's designed specifically for higher education. They seamlessly bring together everything professors need to deliver a really engaging, interactive learning experience for their students, all in one platform.

On the Challenges of E-learning in a Global Pandemic

Listening to the needs of professors and students alike helped Top Hat understand what they needed to focus on amidst the chaos.

"We've done a lot of research with both professors and students over the last few months to really help us understand how the educational experience changed from a faculty perspective and from a student perspective. We asked about 1,000 professors back in April what they were concerned about with this switch to remote online education.

"Nearly 60% of them said they were really concerned about creating an engaging learning experience. More than 80% were concerned about their ability to ensure students stayed motivated. For us, it was about how do we actually ensure that experience can be just as engaging, or even more engaging, than if it was happening live in a physical classroom."



On the Importance of a Seamless User Experience

There are enough things to be frustrated with during a pandemic; the e-learning experience shouldn't be another one.

"One of the things we heard a lot was real frustration on the part of both students and professors about what one of them called the Frankenstein's Monster of different tools that they have to stitch together in order to make learning happen. For us being able to have it happen all in one place, in a seamless way, meant that the educator could just focus on what they're there to do, which is teach, and not have to worry about how to bring these 15 different tools together in a meaningful way that doesn't completely confuse students.

"An interesting data point that we got from our survey of about 3,400 higher-ed students in the U.S. was that 80% said that the ability to connect with video for their classes has created a better online learning environment. So it's how is that video being used to enable and support the educational experience rather than detracting from the educational experience."

On the E-learning Experience Moving Forward

Nearly half of the students surveyed by Top Hat have said they'd like a self-paced learning option even after things begin to go back to normal.

"The ability to actually engage students and give them the flexibility to access courses in different modalities is something that students are definitely open to. In fact, in some of the research that we've done with students, 36% say they actually prefer a blended learning model consisting of both in-person and online instruction. 48% of them actually said they prefer independent, asynchronous online learning, meaning that they're not sitting in a live environment, but they're actually doing a bit more of a self-paced learning online on their own."

On How Vonage APIs Bring Top Hat's Products Alive for Students

EdTech has both needed and seen a lot of innovation during the pandemic.

"One of the things that we've seen a huge uptick in is the use of our chat functionality, which we luckily had started working on pre-COVID but also introduced this fall widely for the first time. And so what we're really seeing is that desire to have a type of community. That can't happen in-person knocking on an office door as it did in the past. But now there's also ways to enable that to happen virtually and to happen through video, which is really exciting."



Signature Solutions in a Changing World

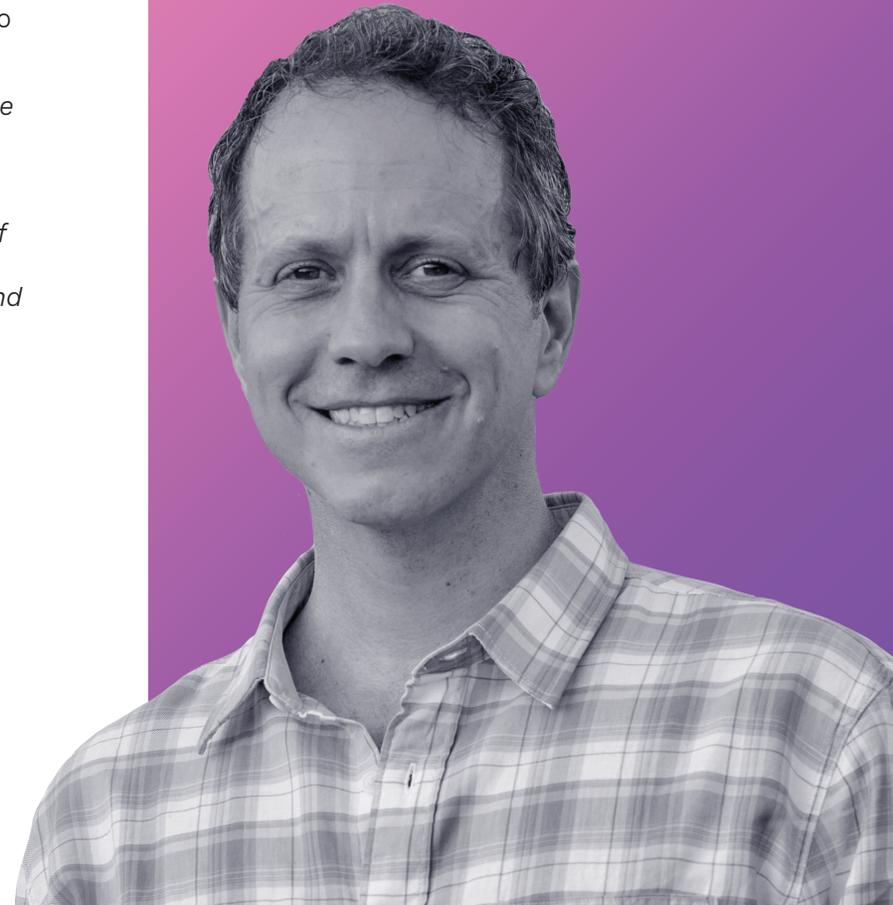
Pete Rung previously was the CTO of Live Oak Technologies based in Austin, Texas. They started in 2015, offering a secure collaboration tool with embedded video for banking and insurance. Live Oak Technologies worked with Vonage for more than five years, taking advantage of Vonage's expertise in audio and video. This July, after the pandemic really hit, video collaboration became a big tool-set of Live Oak Technology's customers. In July, they were purchased by DocuSign to bring a video collaboration and remote notary platform to the market.

PETE RUNG | SENIOR DIRECTOR OF ENGINEERING | DOCUSIGN

On Why API, Versus an Off-the-Shelf Solution, Was the Way to Go

When companies need a new feature or function, the conversation can often be whether to build it or buy it. However, an easy integration solution can be faster and more affordable.

"We were custom built for the banking and insurance world. So, we started off securely. The current video applications at the time weren't cutting it. We needed something that was easy to use, API-driven, browser-based—that's a huge plus—and secure. The number one thing customers asked us about was protecting data or if we're going to give their data to a third party, how are you protecting it. The Vonage Video platform brought a great level of security. [It was] very open, easy to use. We brought this technology to some of the largest financial services in the world. They have extensive audits, extensive security programs, and we passed all those with flying colors."



On How Embedded Video Chat and Video Streaming Enables Customers to Take Advantage of DocuSign's Interactive Platform

In our new, socially distanced existence, the ability to recreate face-to-face interactions has been essential for some products.

"A lot of our customers want to have that real face-to-face conversation. The phone call was great, but for complex conversations about financials or about insurance, having that person on the line be able to look at someone and talk to them is hugely important. So, we talked about adding that human element to a complex financial decision that really helped drive ROI for our customers."

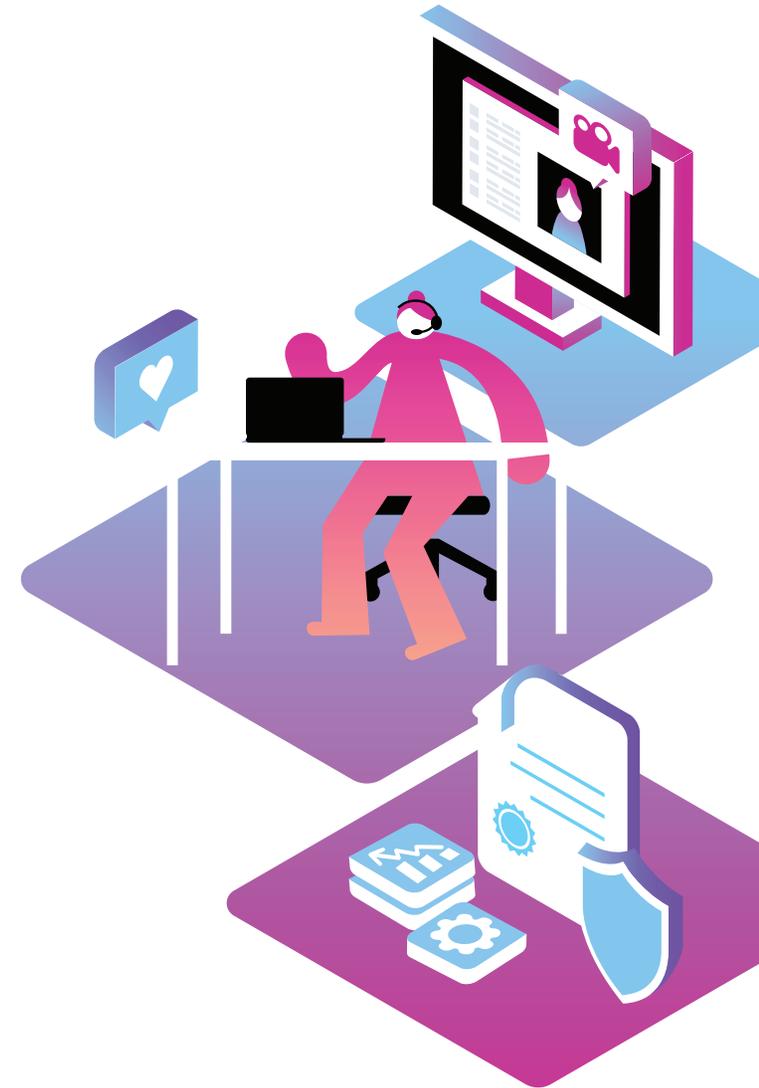
"Some of the interesting ways we've been used now—one that kind of shocked me—was we are now doing remote home inspections. That's a live agent having a customer walk through a house and asking them to hold the phone up and video stream an insurance project that's happening—a rebuild of a kitchen or a flooded area in their house. And they get to do this in real time versus meeting someone out there next week at four o'clock. They simply schedule a live video call. And we're using this embedded video technology to make that really easy to do."

On the Impact of the Pandemic

Many products are finding new use cases due to the coronavirus.

"The overall pandemic is really impacting the production process of several industries. We look at it like it's pushing digital transformation, digital collaboration about five years ahead of the game. Where [before] it was, this is really nice to have and some customers will use it, it's now a must have, it has to be there. Otherwise, business stops."

"Customers are asking us for all kinds of expanded use cases. Most notably, we're really focused on bringing the remote online notary transaction to a larger marketplace through DocuSign. That wasn't feasible unless you had an easy-to-use audio-video secure feed that you can plug in, look at the person, validate that they are who they say they are, and then sign documents together."



APIs, Innovation, and the Unique Needs of Today's Customer

Now more than ever, businesses across all industries around the world are challenged with the fundamental need to stay connected to employees and customers from anywhere and through multiple channels. At the same time, the demand for businesses to build unique experiences and disruptive solutions in their markets has never been greater.

To do this, Vonage customers are embracing programmable API services to integrate multiple communications channels—video, voice, messaging, chat, email, and verification—into their existing applications, products, and workflows. The Vonage Communications Platform brings this power and flexibility to its customers, enabling the type of business continuity, remote work, and remote delivery of services that are now essential.

Latch, a Vonage Enterprise Service Plan customer, discussed how they are implementing APIs in innovative and groundbreaking ways, creating new paradigms in their industries, and accelerating their digital transformation journeys.

SI DHANAK | VP OF PRODUCT | LATCH

DEEPAK BAPAT | DIRECTOR OF SOFTWARE | BASE BUILDING | LATCH

The vision for Latch is to design hardware and software that help people open, manage, and share the space that they care about—and in doing so, to solve the problem of lost or stolen packages, as well as the inability of people to get into a building or a house when you're not there. Over the last six years, Latch has been building a full building-access control system.

On How Latch Puts Vonage APIs to Use

Like most great products, the onboarding and support offered by Vonage has been essential to Latch, according to Bapat.

"One of the beauties of working with the Vonage team is they actually helped us when we were trying to choose the right APIs for the job we were trying to do—which is develop the intercom—and throughout the whole development process. Vonage worked with us on every single feature. Even when we had new feature requests, their team understood how important each of them were to our use case and was always giving us feedback on where our requests and our questions were in terms of being answered or being fixed."



"As we got closer to launch, and even after launch, it's always felt like Vonage has been there whenever we've had an issue. As with any new product, there's always a teething process. [The Vonage team] has been willing to get into the weeds, and it feels like we have a partner in these situations. So, it's been really helpful to be able to iterate quickly and then fix bugs in the field as we've needed it."

On the Partnership Latch Has Formed With Vonage

Relationship building is essential to any partnership, but it's easier when your partners feel as invested in your products as you are.

"Ever since launch, the Vonage team hasn't really let up on communicating with us. Almost immediately after we launched the initial set of products, the Vonage team sat with us and walked through some of the new roadmap and tried to understand what our roadmap was, in order to see what different features and what different products they have that we could actually utilize."

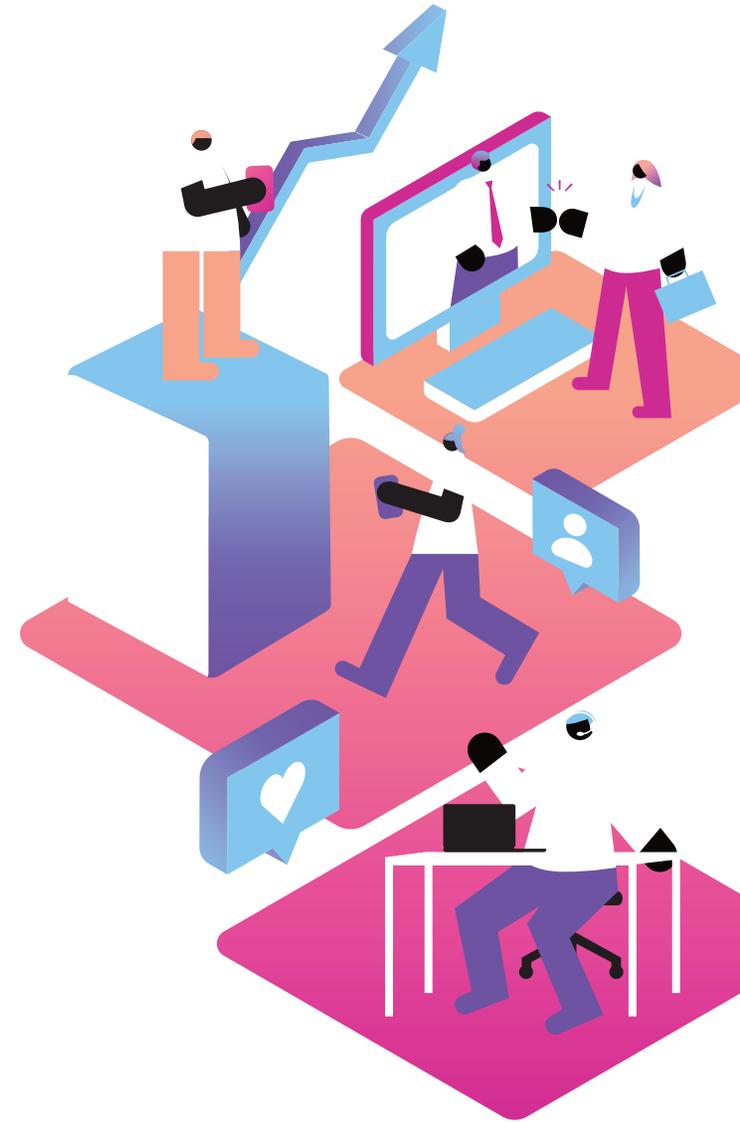
"Our dev team has been able to take their suggestions and build out a full product that we were able to release at launch. One of the things we've found is that, specifically with the Vonage team, they're always interested in what we're doing next. They're just as excited about what we're doing as we are in what they're doing next, which has been really helpful as we've been trying to scale our product and continue to build out new features for our customers."

On Partnerships That Let You Build the Best Products

Customer retention is essential for products to thrive, and Vonage does a good job of keeping customers happy for the long haul, according to Dhanak.

"When you're working in product development, product design, there are two types of vendors or partners. There's one type which is, you just select someone. The second kind of partner is critical infrastructure. Those are partners that we specifically select to provide a piece of infrastructure that we certainly can't build ourselves. And we designate them as the highest status when it comes to financially, legally, and also from privacy policy."

"A good example of a company like that would be Vonage and the Accelerate APIs. Calling is at the heart of this product. So, if you can't connect a visitor at the front of the building to the resident who's inside the apartment or who is traveling, then the part doesn't work. We do not own that sort of infrastructure. So for us, Vonage have been great partners. Whenever we do something new, there are various sorts of challenges. We've worked through it and are very, very happy customers, and I'm sure we will be a future happy customer as well."



INNOVATE THROUGH CHAOS:

Crisis and Recession

Chaos causes organizations to retreat ... but not always. Some of the world's most iconic organizations were founded during periods of chaos, precisely because that's when consumer needs are changing by the minute. Spot those needs, and you can reinvent. So, what potential is so close within your grasp? What are you actually capable of? The question is: Will you reach your next level during these times of chaos? What if you could reach that level sooner?

JEREMY GUTSCHE | CEO | TREND HUNTER

On the Problems With Chaos, Such as a Global Pandemic

Amidst a global pandemic, staying safe is a natural instinct. However, that can also keep us from a better path.

"What opportunity lies so close within your grasp? The reality is that you and I all have paths that we could be on that are different than the ones we're on. And it may mean for you a bigger role, a new product, a new service, or just a different way of doing things. But the simple reality is that we all have a next level. The weird thing, though, is that in this current time period, we don't think about that because we're kind of immersed in the state of chaos, and chaos causes organizations to retreat."

On Opportunity Amid Chaos

We hear the term new normal get thrown around a lot during times of chaos, but the ability to envision what that will be is an opportunity for creative thinkers.

"Chaos creates opportunity. And it does so by reshuffling the deck, switching who's in the lead, and effectively changing the rules. And if you can spot those rule changes, those trends, then you can reinvent."



"In a crisis, there's a lot you can still do. You can prepare, you can create a sense of urgency, you can train, you can learn innovation, tactics, tools, think about how you're creating that culture to harness the trends and ideas within your team. Chaos will probably be most of 2021. It's a stage where suddenly your competitors reemerge, you see what they've been working on. Consumer needs are different. Everyone starts trying things differently. And because of that, we end up on recharging paths by the time we're through it."

On How Success Can Become the Enemy of Innovation

We all want to be successful, but the trick is keeping our success from making us too comfortable.

"When you're good at something, there are things that really stand out. Once you become loyal to what you're good at, you become consistent with best practices and procedures and policies, and you become disciplined. You hone your craft. You want to be the best at what you do. Those are all great things. But at the extreme, loyalty becomes protection, consistency becomes complacency, and discipline becomes repetition."

"These traps are bad. Everyone wants innovation to happen, but most people don't break from the path. So the question to you, what are you going to do to actively counteract the traps of your own success?"

On How to Blaze a Path Toward Innovation

This last bit from Gutsche are words of affirmation we should say to ourselves every day.

"Some of the tactics here include finding ways to be curious, insatiable, willing to destroy the ways of the past—what worked in 2019 won't necessarily work in 2021. Ask outsiders for opinions and simulate what it would be like starting from scratch."

"Find ways to break rules, to push harder, attack sooner, fail faster, and never give up, because you're capable of more than you think. Most people don't break from the path, but you are a disruptive thinker, and you will create the future."

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