

# Southeast Asia Response Guide

## The Best of Business Strategies In The New Normal



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# Foreword

As soon as the pandemic hit, businesses everywhere were busy stabilizing the tools, technologies, and arrangements to absorb the immediate knee-jerk impact. However, with time many short and long-term opportunities emerged and started reshaping the sectors. From adopting innovative and customer-centric operating models to getting ready to build online storefronts and mass usage of data as the primary business catalyst, everyone stepped up to offer creative solutions as their bounce-back strategies. Digital transformation in organizations, the revision of the existing business operating models to evolve both technologically and culturally to create better services and products, enable superior customer experience and at the same time optimize revenue channels.

The intelligence derived from such activities helped businesses formulate plans to combat the unforeseen adversities of the impending crisis and prepare themselves to survive, thrive, and emerge with effective bounce back strategies. This is the essence of this study, where we explore how leading organizations across industries in the Southeast Asian market devise resilient business strategies in the times of Covid-19. And while revisiting the post-pandemic organizations, we discovered interesting and intelligent emerging trends that are reinventing business models, functions, and customer engagements.

I am proud to present you this Southeast Asian response guide on "The Best of Business Strategies In The New Normal" to make your business ready for 2021 and beyond.



**Khushboo Nangalia**

Founder  
**BEYOND99**



# Executive Summary

This eBook titled "The Best of Business Strategies In The New Normal" is produced by Research NXT in association with BEYOND99 & Linkedpreneur, is an outcome of our discussions with business leaders across prominent industries and business functions from the Southeast Asian market over the last couple of months. We learned about the business strategies implemented by these business leaders to address the shift in consumer sentiments and the emerging new normal.

The pandemic had pushed organizations to realign their business functions to reinvent ways to serve the customers, communities, and employees, and thus we also noticed some very interesting industry and functional trends emerge within the business ecosystem. We can unequivocally state that the adoption of innovative and customer-centric operating models for capturing the growing market opportunities in the post-pandemic market is one of the top business strategies to go after in 2021.

This report captures the best of bounce-back strategies for the emerging industries and business functions in the South East Asian region and will be a go-to guide for most businesses in the region in their transformation journey in 2021 and beyond.

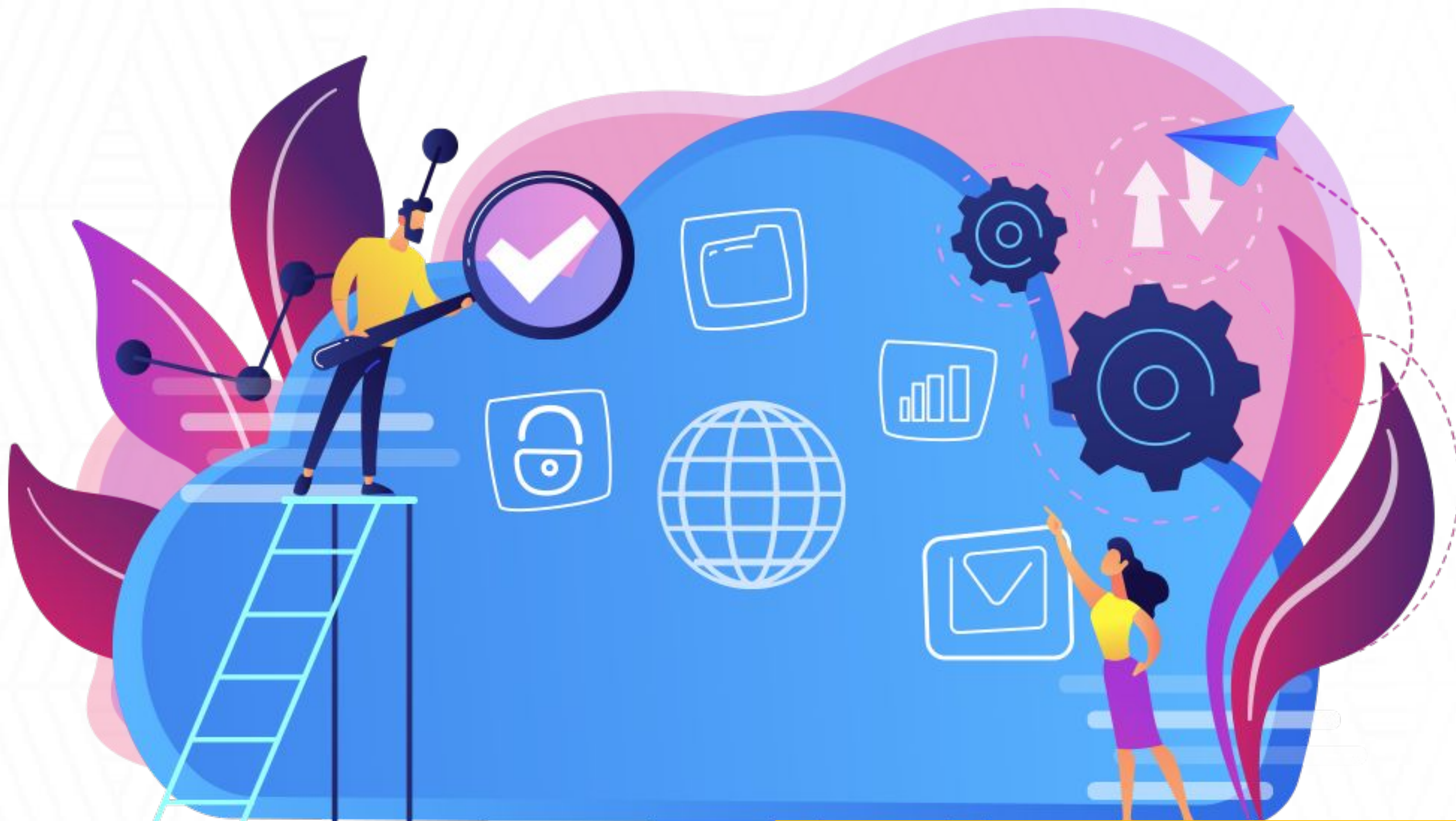


**Santosh Abraham**

**Founder & Lead Analyst  
Research NXT**



# Report Snapshot



## Industry Trends



Focus on the Last-Mile Delivery →



Increase in Ancillary Revenues →



Digital-First Approach →



The upsurge of Audio Platforms →



Rise of Self-service platforms →



## Business Function Trends



Redesigning Supply Chain →



Remote & Virtual Work Force →



AI & Digital transformation →



Service Delivery Innovations →



Data Driven Marketing →



**Key Observations**



**Rebound Strategy**



**Credits and Disclaimer**



# Industry Trends Expedited by the Pandemic

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## **The Best of Resilient Business Strategies**



# Focus on the Last-Mile Delivery

## Industry Trends

- Revised the BCP Plans
- Agile Infrastructure Set-up
- Contactless Operations
- Optimized Tracking & Customer Connects till the last mile.

**“ We are innovating by creating newer digital models to enhance interactions and experiences. And we're looking a lot more on the front-end agility and ensuring the back end can support any customization required at the Front-end.**



**Anil Gautam**

**Managing Director - DHL eCommerce, Malaysia**

## Best of bounce back strategies by DHL eCommerce, Malaysia

With everybody confined to their homes, essential services like DHL continued to operate 24/7. With a sudden spike in demand and a shrinking resource capacity, they had to quickly rebuild a setup to accommodate three times the normal volume.

They adopted an agile approach, which allowed them to innovate the use of existing tech and leverage every possible resource at hand. DHL immediately revised their BCP plans, used their cloud-based portal to onboarding additional carriers, and started training and tracking them through the same application. All of these while maintaining local emergency guidelines. Additionally, they increasingly focused on the communication loops to improve customer experiences, ensuring it remains intact till the last mile.



[Read Full Interview](#)



# Increase in Ancillary Revenues

## Industry Trends

“ *The proudest innovation that we did is that we built a system that identifies a non-performing route voluntarily and automatically launches aligned marketing campaigns without any human intervention and manual analysis.* ”



**Ravi Shankar**

Chief Growth Officer Air Asia

- Innovative Operational Models
- Self-Service Interactions
- Introduction of Ancillary Services for Business Innovation and Continuity

## Best of bounce back strategies by AirAsia

The travel industry was one of the worst-hit sectors by the pandemic, and that meant AirAsia had to transform and focus on developing internal channels for customer retention. The digital team evolved into a cross-functional alliance hub for the tech, commercial, and data organization to create growth products to retain the customers within the ecosystem.

Diversification of business in emergency times helped keep revenue streams intact and ensure optimal usage of existing resources, and empathetic marketing communications lead to brand loyalty.

Unprecedented times accelerates innovation by pushing the limits of the marketing channels. Consistent customer experience required Tech, commercial, and marketing organizations working in tandem. AirAsia also innovatively launched ancillary services like airasia food, airasia shop, and their very own last-mile delivery logistics business with the existing staff to glide through such turbulent times.



[Read Full Interview](#)



# Digital-First Approach

## Industry Trends

- Speed of Access, Ease of Service
- Omni-environment Experience  
(Seamless transition between online and offline)
- Agile business operations

**“ When businesses start to plan, the focus should be on incremental innovation, incremental benefit, and incremental improvement on the current existing product, or is basically switching towards a very new product.**



**Johnny Widodo**

**CEO, OLX Group, Indonesia**

## Best of bounce back strategies by OLX Group, Indonesia

The year 2020 saw a rapid acceleration to digitization among businesses partly prompted by an all-round change in consumer behaviour and the need to innovate and exceed customer expectations.

Consumers have shifted their attitude towards digital-first businesses for the positive, which is good news for such businesses. However, to tap the opportunities, providers will have to be easily accessible, increasingly swift in their services, and incrementally innovative in their consumer experiences.

Digital-first businesses like OLX Group are taking the agile approach in launching products or services. They will have to predict the path and market conditions as everything will be on a higher trajectory as we advance. Process transparency and ease of accessibility are the defining competitive edge for such businesses in post-pandemic time.



[Read Full Interview](#)



# The Upsurge of Audio Platforms

## Industry Trends

**“ If you create sparks and islands of innovation within the company, over a period, that becomes a fire, and then innovation spreads across the company.**



**Ramesh Menon**

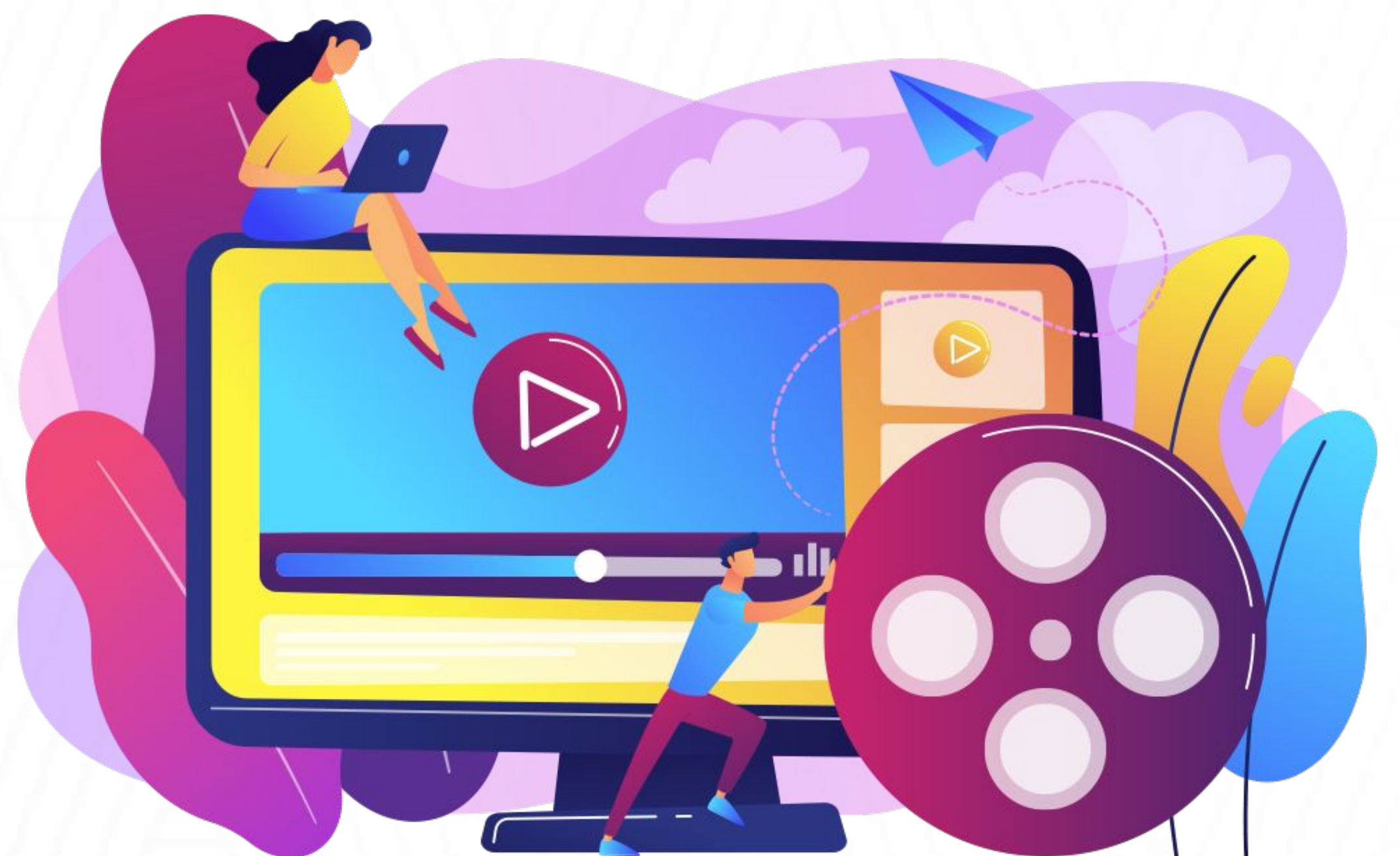
**CEO, Fever FM / Radio One (HT Media Ltd)**

- New-age of Audio Consumption
- Dramatic Rise of OTT
- Broader Acceptance of the Subscription Model

## Best of bounce back strategies By HT Media

As we step ahead into the post-pandemic world, business organizations need to fix the broken ends, get revenues back on track, and make sure that consumers who were with them for a long time have a reason to return. Understanding the shift in consumer sentiments and behaviour based on the new normal and tapping into the niches will give an early mover advantage.

There is much disruption happening in the media space and a huge movement towards the consumption of audio. For most consumers, audio content is non-intrusive, which has led to a surge in new podcast platforms. Innovation is in HT Media's DNA, and they focused on rendering all niches of the growing media space. The impact of the pandemic and the New South Asian diaspora led to innovations like AI-powered non-human news broadcast and helped tap into this opportunity during the pandemic.





# Rise of Self-service platforms

## Industry Trends

- Demand for App-based Products
- Digital-Payments Penetrate deeper
- Optimized Liquidity Options
- Hassle-free Wealth Management

**“ Everything about our service is digital and mobile-first. We found that people had more time to pause and sort out their finances. We also found that people were more responsive to interacting with financial services in a digital way.**



**Walter de Oude**

**Founder of Singlife and Deputy Chairman of Aviva Singlife**

## Best of bounce back strategies by Singlife

A key challenge faced by consumer-facing financial services sectors in the COVID-19 lockdowns was a drastic reduction of face-to-face advice or interaction. However, it was never an issue with Singlife as for them; everything was digital & mobile-first.



A digital-first fintech platform has its fair share of the edge in times of crisis. AI and ML technologies are helping financial advisors in introducing quality advisory-based products and services. Singlife's App business model did incredibly well during the pandemic because they weren't reliant on face-to-face interactions with customers. The Singlife users have a hassle-free wealth management experience to unlock their money's potential. This astute customer experience solving delayed cash payments and optimized liquidity options has made Singlife a net recipient of business during the lockdowns and COVID-19 times.

[Read Full Interview](#)



# Revisiting the Post-Pandemic Organization

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**Emerging Trends set to  
reinvent Business  
Functions**



# Redesigning Supply Chain

## Business Function Trends



### Strengthening of Final-mile Deliveries

Resilient businesses are strategically investing a lot into last-mile delivery. Getting all systems on the cloud and enhancing the ability to cater to custom use cases at a moment's notice, and engaging resources optimally through tech-based assistance are critical factors in strengthening final-mile deliveries.



### Rise of Local-commerce

With the widespread acceptance of eCommerce models, local businesses are either building capabilities or enrolling themselves with one eCommerce platform. Even small sellers can now serve globally as the logistics players have introduced multiple service options catering to these local businesses.



### Emerging Supply Chain Models

Newer models are emerging for deliveries in Southeast Asia. Until last year most companies provided doorstep deliveries. However, post-pandemic, there has been a surge in requests for deliveries into parcel lockers or parcel shops where customers can come and collect their parcels, rather than being left at residences. Another trend is smaller sellers preferring self dropping of consignments at logistic hubs to reduce the cost of deliveries.

**“ It is about removing things that you do not need; it could be just the middleman or the technology to simplify the business operations. It should have happened before COVID, but nobody focused on it until things happened.**



**Aaron Foo**

Head of Product Strategy, iCarAsia

[Read Full Interview](#)



# Remote & Virtual Work Force

## Business Function Trends

### Universal Acceptance of Remote Work



Being resilient is the best option in times of crisis, and thus there is a broader acceptance of remote work in the region. Barring some sectors, everyone stepped up to make it possible, and thus we are in the time of hybrid teams of in-house staff, remote contributors, and now managed virtual workforce.

### Evolved Technology Platforms that aid Remote Work



Organizations in the Southeast Asian region, like everywhere globally, are leveraging the Tech and power of AI-powered evaluation platforms to find, fit, and retain the best of global talent working from remote locations.

### Transformation of Data and Network Security Operations



With remote work being the new normal, security departments have transformed to embed IT training, expand support capabilities, monitor vulnerability, and keep the virtual workforce functioning at all times.

### Rising Demand for Digital-first Roles



There has been a higher demand for digital-first roles like cloud, DevOps, data security and searches in the talent platforms around data analytics, data engineering, analytics, reporting, and business intelligence.

**“ After the wave of remote or work from anywhere trend, the extension of that trend will be many employers also allowing for the ‘BYOD - Bring Your own Device’. And because of this, the whole IT security landscape will evolve.**



**Karunjit Kumar Dhir**

Co-founder, SCIKEY

[Read Full Interview](#)



# AI & Digital Transformation

## Business Function Trends



### Mobile-first, Digital-First & Fast Approach

Businesses are geared to adopt the digital-first approach and at a much faster pace than ever before. There is heavy investment in becoming mobile-enabled, and businesses can render to customer needs in the digital space.



### Mounting Demand for Digital capabilities

The pandemic has further surged the demand for digital capabilities like self-service platforms, Omnichannel experiences, cross-border product availabilities, and more. As with the demand, there is a rise in adoption and innovation using digital technologies.



### AI-powered Consumer Engagements

Self-learning and conversational AI-powered chatbots can now engage and serve consumers for common FAQs at scale continuously anytime and anywhere. Moreover, over time they identify patterns to provide insights on business strategies.

**“ I think the great thing about digital spaces is there is nothing called competition. At the end of the day, you know, whether you are last or first, you can fall behind or catch up fast because technology is moving so fast.**



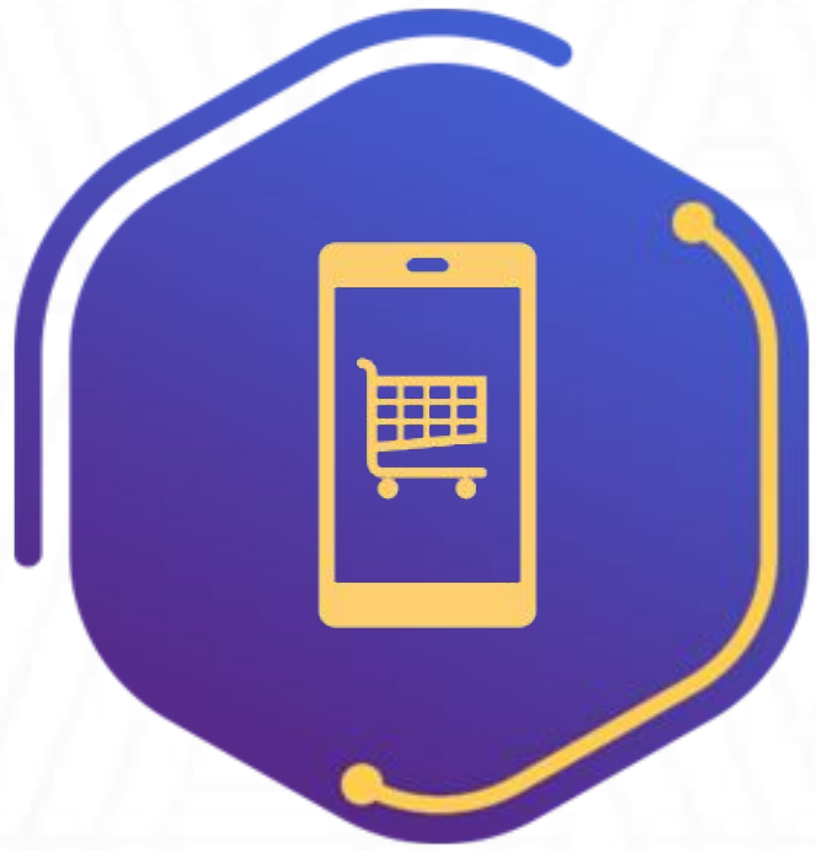
**Ramesh Menon**

CEO - Fever FM / Radio One (HT Media Ltd)



# Service Delivery Innovations

## Business Function Trends



### Transact from Anywhere and across devices

Due to the limited movement and lack of in-person transactions between the businesses and consumers, service providers ensured they overhaul their service delivery options, including contactless transactions, feature-rich self-service portals, and mobile-first business capabilities.



### Portfolio Diversification

Most resilient businesses quickly precipitated, innovated, and introduced various ancillary services to their existing portfolio to pave through such uncertain times. They achieved this by using existing resources and channelizing existing capabilities to provide new offerings. It not just ensured staff and customer retention but also opened newer avenues of revenue for the businesses.



### Product/Service overhaul leveraging Tech

Businesses are, in many cases, prompted to be innovative in their product and service offerings. Things that were otherwise irrelevant and non-primary business offerings like doorstep services, contactless assessments, and products' demos are high in demand. Hence, businesses have been leveraging tech to meet the market demands in all possibilities.

**“ There's no problem starting small; it's okay to start small because it helps you to start quickly, fail quickly, learn quickly, and get started again, quickly, thus building things incrementally.**



**Anil Gautam**

**Managing Director, DHL eCommerce, Malaysia**

[Read Full Interview](#)



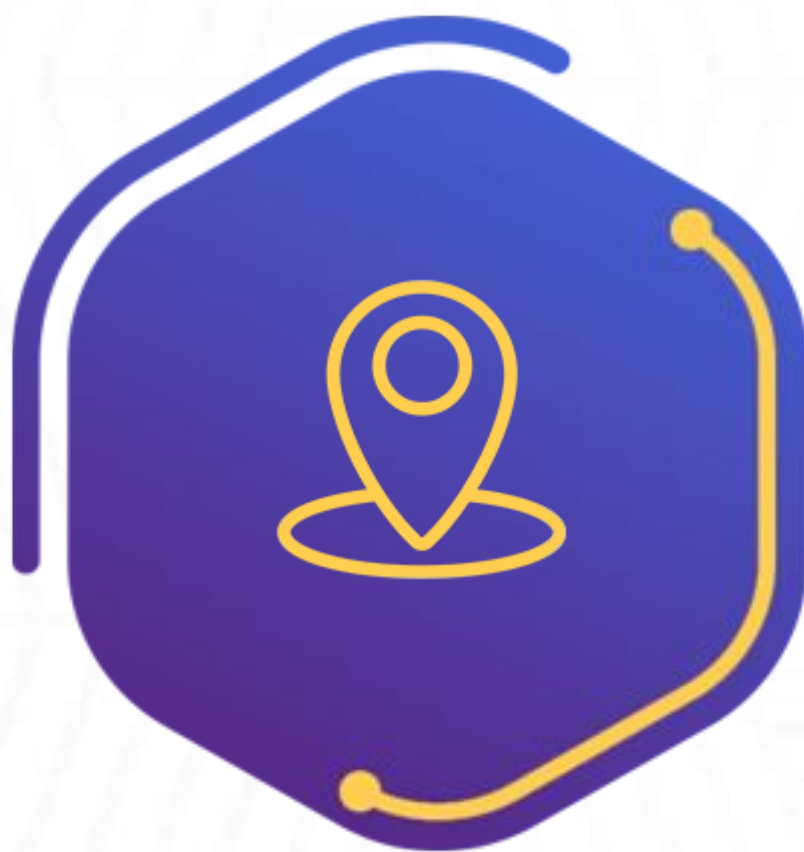
# Data Driven Marketing

## Business Function Trends



### Data-driven understanding of Customer Journeys

Since digital marketing activities and customer interaction were at an all-time high during the pandemic, marketers extracted many valuable insights to run focused engagements across customer journeys. Businesses have a renewed outlook on marketing data's power and how it can contribute to the bottom line.



### Focus on Localized Personalization

The sudden rise of huge local online businesses is an imminent threat to bigger brands. Hence the focus on localized personalization of services and communication will be a defining factor for times to come.



### The level playing field for Small and Local Businesses

Advanced technology created a huge opportunity for small and local businesses and paved the way to get to the top. Even businesses with minimal investments can now focus on user journeys and customer experiences using data-driven insights and digitally-enabled last-mile deliveries.

**“ This lockdown accelerated our innovation, primarily to push the limits of the marketing channels we have.**



**Ravi Shankar**

**Chief Growth & Digital Officer, Air Asia**

[Read Full Interview](#)



# Make your business ready for 2021

## Key Observations

Based on our discussion with business leaders across industries and functions in the Southeast Asian market, we realized that organizations in the region started their realignment initiative amid the pandemic. Of course, they were abiding by the local government regulations; however, that never stopped them from reinventing ways to serve the customers, communities, and employees.

Business leaders from the “***Business Strategy in the New Normal***” Interview Series had more than one story to share. Here are a few observations that inclusively sums up the thoughts.

1

COVID-19 has become the catalyst to trigger changes in customers, businesses, and all other ecosystem elements. It is now imperative that businesses across industries become agile and start their **digital transformation** with baby steps and build it incrementally.

2

With a sudden shift and dramatic rise of online channels to consume any product or services, the heart of growth is in the capabilities and finesse in interactions and experiences. **On-demand customizations of service delivery coupled with transparency of processes** have a much greater significance now if you wish to build your competitive edge.

3

Many completely shut businesses during COVID-19 diversified their portfolio to create ancillary revenue streams; this helped them in business continuity and made them retain and save their customer base, employees, and brand presence for a brighter future.



# Make your business ready for 2021

## The Building Blocks

There has been a progression of trends that the Southeast Asian region has experienced since the pandemic hit. Businesses of all sizes have found innovative ways to accelerate recovery strategies. Though it is a learn as you grow phase, it will be a long-lasting and market-changing growth path. We identified five major business rebound strategies that are beginning an extended growth phase in the region.



Adoption of innovative  
and customer-centric  
operating models



Maintaining an  
equivalent offline and  
online storefront



Overhaul of Network  
security and privacy  
regulation to adapt to the  
new normal



Rise Global  
Talent Accessibility



Data-Driven  
Organizations will have a  
clear edge



# Credits and Disclaimer

## Business Leaders who participated in the interview series

### Anil Gautam

Managing Director  
DHL eCommerce



### Johnny Widodo

CEO  
OLX Group, Indonesia



### Karunjit Kumar Dhir

Co-founder  
Scikey



### Walter de Oude

Founder of Singlife and  
Deputy Chairman of  
Aviva Singlife



### Ravi Shankar

Chief Growth Officer  
Air Asia



### Aaron Foo

Head of Product Strategy  
iCarAsia



### Ramesh Menon

CEO,  
Fever FM / Radio One (HT  
Media Ltd)

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