

With the ongoing mass inoculation drive and reduction in the number of Covid cases reported, things are expected to be back to normal soon and slowly relaxations in lockdown restrictions are coming up in different phases. As the adage 'This too shall pass', reminds us of the ephemerality and how every situation in life changes after a point in time. Similarly, hope sustains, and we move forward.

READY TO BOUNCE-BACK

Every sector is expecting a bounce back and experts say that the way businesses are done is sure to change. Talking about the opening of offices, Harsh Lambah, country manager India, VP sales - South Asia, IWG plc, shares, "Once the economy opens up, we expect businesses will be quick to embrace the new 'hybrid' working practices and it will mark a real step-change for those industries that have historically had a very traditional view of the office. Distributed workforces will be the new normal as businesses seek to reduce risk and benefit from remote working. There is a significant surge in demand for workspaces in suburban areas and small towns in the last few months and that is emerging as a real growth area."

Adding to it, Nitin Sethi, CEO, India & South Asia, Performance, Rewards & Organization Effectiveness, Aon, a multinational professional services firm, says, "As offices start opening, companies will accept diversity on multiple fronts and this will open up new talent segments. There will be cutting-edge investments in tools that enable a better HR experience. Also, what was unique about culture in each company was a lot about how they are at the workplace physically and this will undergo a transition to virtual and hybrid. Firms will have to adapt to building mechanisms that define them as employers in the new reality."



REALTY REVIVAL

One of the major sectors in the country, real estate has transformed a lot during the pandemic times. According to Anuj Puri, chairman, ANAROCK Property Consultants, "The period was an eye-opener for many developers who realised the significance of human capital to their business. Due to this, many developers re-strategized their business policies and unleashed various measures over the year that provided for necessities such as food and shelter for labourers and sanitation facilities. Safety and hygiene of workers and COVID-19-specific protocols such as social distancing was maintained. Regular testing of site workers is also being regularly conducted to mitigate risks while vaccination of the workers is also a top priority. Many are also giving wages to their workers despite temporary lockdowns which inevitably will prevent workers from going back."

Several real estate players leveraged technology to engage with customers. Innovative digital tools were used for showcasing projects and closing deals. "We finalised our dream villa in the city through a virtual property

DIGITAL SAFETY

- 88% of Indian consumers feel they are more digitally connected since the start of Covid-19 via devices, online activities, connected homes, etc.
- 86% have implemented more protection for their digital devices.
- 57% agree that digital hygiene or the lack of it can put themselves and their families at risk.
- 68% of Indians check if the network that they are joining is secure before connecting.
- More than half (53%) feel more vulnerable to risks when someone has visited their home and has connected to their internet.
- Most vulnerable to cyber threats are Wi-Fi networks (57%), someone's home computer (46%), smart home assistants (26%), smart TV (28%), and gaming systems (29%).

Source - '2021 Consumer Security Mindset Survey', by McAfee Corp.

expo. All the interactions happened through mobile and video calls; it was a different experience. We will sign the final document once we reach the city after the travel restrictions are lifted," says Riyaz Ahamed, a marketing professional living in the Middle East.

MOBILITY MATTERS

There is a significant change in the customer preferences and purchase patterns after the onset of the pandemic.

With safety and hygiene becoming a priority many are opting for hassle-free options such as virtual shopping, online ordering, free home delivery, digital payments, curbside pickup, and so on.

From home essentials to clothes and jewellery, home appliances to automobiles, there are options to purchase online.

Most automobile makers and dealers have made a significant presence in the

virtual world including social media platforms. "There is an increase in the number of first-time car buyers now due to the pandemic. Many youngsters who were using two-wheelers are turning to cars. The comfort of driving, safety aspects, and ease of maintenance of the vehicle are key considerations while deciding on a car," says Sushmita Biswas, CEO, of an automobile dealership. "There is a significant shift and surge in demand for used automobiles buying and selling online," says Sandeep Aggarwal, founder and CEO, of an online marketplace to buy and sell used cars. "Factors such as financial volatility, decrease in disposable income, inconvenience with ride-sharing and the comfort of using own vehicle to prevent the spread of infection, are playing a vital role in changing the consumer preference towards used and online vehicle buying and selling," he adds.

SAFE AND SECURE

Experts believe that there could be a shopping spree once things return to normal, as it is happening in other parts of the world. All are prepared with safety norms in place to welcome customers. As Ramesh Kalyanaraman, executive director, a chain of jewellery outlets, explains, "We have heightened the safety and hygiene measures to safeguard the health of our patrons and the community at large. Temperature checks, wearing masks, face shields, and gloves, deep cleaning of showrooms at regular intervals throughout the day, and frequent sanitisation of all high touchpoints such as countertops, doorknobs, etc., have become the new normal. We constantly review the safety and hygiene measures to improve and provide a safe and convenient shopping experience to the customers."