

Consumers and customers—are empowered, educated and spoiled for choice.

With the emergence of digital channels, consumers now take their best experience in any context and apply it as a benchmark in every context.

For example Amazon's commerce platform has taught us, as consumers, to expect the widest range of products, at the best prices, delivered as fast as possible.

For businesses, Amazon has extended the 'as-a-service' mindset to computing infrastructure. Amazon Web Services (AWS) has educated us to expect access to enterprise-grade computing infrastructure quickly and at a cost that works for every business — not just giant enterprises.

The as-a-service mindset has helped create completely new standards in service delivery that have scaled globally in only a matter of years.

Take ride sharing. Uber (and competitors like Lyft and Ola) have taught us that we never have to wait when we want to go from point A to point B. In tourism, AirBnB has shown us we don't have to pay five-star prices for five-star experiences.

Established brands are also transforming their service models to give consumers greater control over their experiences — as anyone who has ordered a Domino's pizza lately can attest. The company has digitised its entire service model in a manner that clearly aligns with the contemporary as-a-service theme of business.

Smart mobility has raised the bar even further. If your customers are mobile, their expectations have been shaped by the fierce and endless competition for attention and utility amongst the millions of apps competing on the Apple and Google app stores.



This reality can feel —— brutal sometimes.

If you are a cash-constrained organisation in the business of asset or service delivery, your customers still expect to get access to the information they need instantly on their phone, and first-time users expect a thoroughly intuitive interface.

Underpinning all of these services is a simple idea based on sophisticated and complex technology. Technology platforms need to be powerful, secure, flexible and ever-evolving — and to deliver almost anything as a service.

This is as true in the business-to-business world as it is in business-to-consumer environments. It is this principle which has seen the emergence of enterprise Software as a Service (SaaS).

Across all the key functions of the enterprise, from sales and marketing to finance, distribution and manufacturing, and logistics, SaaS models have emerged and are replacing traditional on-premise software solutions.

SaaS comes with natural advantages over the traditional approach. SaaS solutions are typically faster to set up, can be funded by operational budgets rather that CapEx budgets, and play to the natural advantages of the vendor and customer alike. Vendors can focus their efforts on product innovation and customer support, while buyers of SaaS can focus on the core business of providing the products and services their customers demand, rather than running the underlying technology.

Business managers are also demonstrating a preference for SaaS models as they increase both speed to market and speed to value. Most importantly, they enable businesses to deliver better services faster. A recent study by IRBS into enterprise software preferences in Australia and New Zealand noted, for instance, that "customer service and field operations have surged ahead in terms of decision-making power for enterprise applications—even surpassing marketing."

The report says this is partly explained by the desire to provide new customer service experiences as quickly as possible. As new digital delivery channels become available — such as cloud-based services — these groups are keen to grab the opportunity to innovate.

However, while SaaS can help companies deliver significant improvements in services to their customers, managers need to understand that the shift can require major changes in the way they work.

In fact, The State of Enterprise Software report warns that change management is complicated with the adoption of modern customer- or social-facing enterprise solutions. That is because these systems not only streamline manual processes — they allow for innovations in service delivery and business processes.

These implications need to be understood and mapped and clearly explained to staff — especially front-line staff.

"Training staff on how to use new enterprise solutions (that is, the user interface) is insufficient." says the report.

"Staff need to be educated into thinking about how these solutions will fundamentally alter staff and customer (or citizen) engagement and change how work is done. This often demands a shift in mindset and vision."

