

How companies can navigate the 'net zero era'. Why digital, consumer empowerment, and purpose are key to leading in a net zero era



Euan Davis, AVP, Cognizant Research

We are at the dawn of a new era: the “net zero era”. For business leaders everywhere, it will be essential to recognise the glimmers of this new era and grasp what’s important and what’s possible.

‘[The Future of Us](#)’, a field guide for the net zero era by Cognizant Research, explores what net zero entails and focusing on the three crucial elements that will shape it: digital transformation, consumer empowerment and purpose.

These will help business leaders see ahead, get ahead and stay ahead as this future takes shape. A tumultuous few years – including the pandemic, social injustice outcries, unprecedented weather events and labour shortages – have left many reflecting on how they can positively impact society and the planet for future generations.

One key area business leaders can have an impact is through meeting environmental, social and governance requirements. Environmental consequences, particularly those stemming from the climate crisis, are no longer concerns for the future, but the immediate present.

Structural change is required and is under way. By 2023, most big UK firms and financial institutions will have to set out detailed public plans for how they will move to a low-carbon future – in line with the UK’s 2050 net-zero target.

With this in mind, ‘The Future of Us’ delves into these essential drivers for forward-thinking businesses to embrace:

- **Digital+:** From processes and systems, to customer and partner interactions and entire value chains, nearly everything can be rethought with digital at the core. Advancing technologies and modernising ways of operating and collaborating across value chains will be critical for building new business models that meet sustainability targets and ensure the health of the planet. We will need data-driven intelligence and visibility to shift supply chains, design and behaviours to low-impact, circular modes of operation.
- **Consumer empowerment:** The old customer relationship is broken. Consumers not only want to be known by the businesses they interact with through personalisation initiatives, they also demand agency over the formulation of the end products they buy, the services they consume, the choices they make and the experiences they choose. Businesses need to provide the transparency, trust and control consumers increasingly demand.
- **Purpose:** Promoting and supporting a sense of purpose and belonging. Shareholders, regulators and consumers are asking institutions to tap into a deep sense of purpose to persevere and thrive in a world redefined by illness and natural calamity but also refreshed by technological advancement and innovation. Attracting the next generation of talent and building closer relationships with customers will depend on developing and acting on a corporate ethos that guarantees workers of all stripes a supportive work environment.

“There are abundant opportunities for businesses with foresight and boldness to find dramatic new ways of working, prioritising healthy environmental and social outcomes,” said Euan Davis, AVP, Cognizant Research. “Time and again, as old worlds fade, new eras dawn, emerging from the old. How the next age unfolds is up to everyone — as businesses, professionals and citizens of a changing planet. The realities of a net zero era are coming rapidly into view, making now the moment to start building the Future of Us.”

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