

that is often credited as a catalyst for the region's e-commerce explosion. "There are going to be more consumers becoming comfortable online," To keep up with this change in demand, retailers are upgrading their online shopping services beyond "add to cart" with technology similar to HERO's. As a conversational commerce app, the British startup gives businesses a way to provide customer service digitally – not with bots, but by connecting real-life sales associates with customers via text and, more recently, video calls. Livestreaming has "totally exploded," says Gregor Pryor, co-chair of law firm Reed Smith's entertainment and media industry group. Facebook Live reported a 50 per cent increase since January, and Twitch viewership increased by 66 per cent in Italy when quarantine began there. "Companies that normally wouldn't think about streaming are having to," says Pryor. "They want to reach their audience now, and it's the most obvious way to do it." Fitness companies, for example, are scheduling live workout sessions. "It's going to change behaviour," says Pryor. "You can see this shift towards livestream becoming mainstream." But will any of these

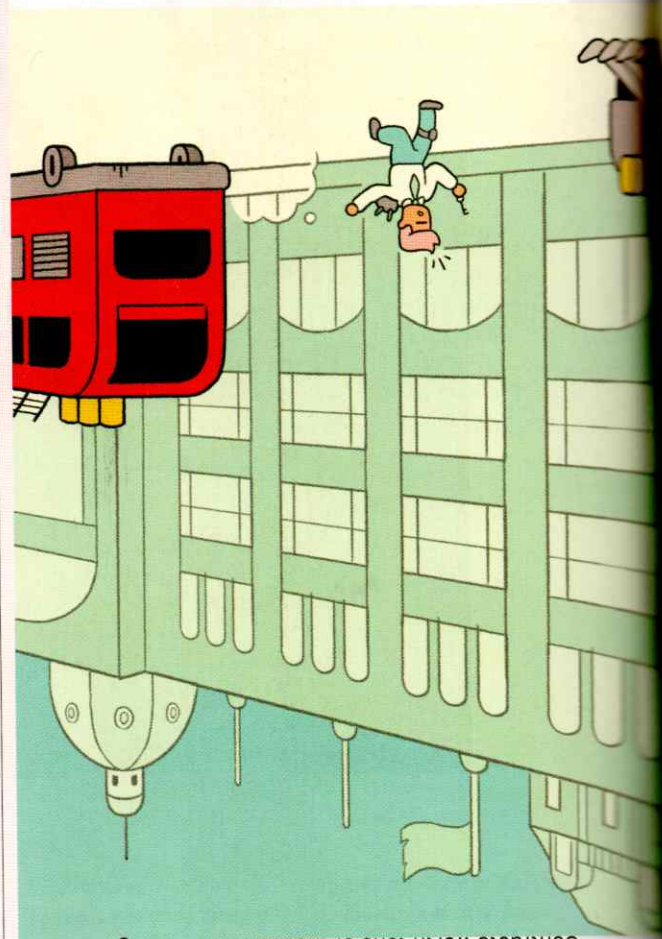
'TO REACH THEIR USUAL AUDIENCES, COMPANIES THAT NORMALLY WOULDN'T THINK ABOUT STREAMING ARE HAVING TO'

technologies stick around? Pryor says it depends on the length of the lockdown: "The longer it continues, the more widespread adoption will be." It will also depend on how the technology is used. "Many businesses are using technology in a way that simply digitises the manual way they did things before," says Lakhani. When the crisis is over, these businesses will likely revert back to their old way of doing things. For some, that might be the goal: keeping customers virtually engaged until things go back to normal. But they could be missing a trick. Companies that find tools that actually transform the way they do business will have a lasting advantage. As Lakhani says: "That's where you'll see efficiency created for some, and potential efficiency lost for others."

Sophia Epstein



You don't get prepped for a worldwide pandemic at business school. Businesses are being forced to innovate in order to survive. Across all sectors, from retail to fitness, organisations have had to adopt technologies that they may never have experimented with otherwise. Where this accelerated adoption is perhaps most stark is education, which has typically been slow to innovate. "It's the second largest sector in the world, but education has pretty much gone from a blackboard to a whiteboard in terms of using technology in the classroom," says Priya Lakhani, founder and CEO of Century Tech. Century is an AI education tool that helps teachers tend to each individual student's needs; very clever, but often too forward-thinking for traditional schools. "Ed tech was never the hottest ticket in town," says Lakhani, but coronavirus has forced schools to reconsider. When her team learned that schools in China were struggling, they decided to offer their technology for free. After China, they released it in Hong Kong, then Italy, then the rest of Europe. "Our business model has been completely ripped up," says Lakhani. Contracts worth tens of thousands are being



offered out for free. Revenue is down, but usage is up, so the virus has identified potential future customers. Schools aren't the only ones missing their regulars – retailers have been pushed online, and many aren't equipped to deal with it. Compared to China, where e-commerce is an experience, not just a transaction, the UK and Europe are lagging behind. Adam Levene, founder of retail startup HERO, thinks that's about to change. "I think that just like we saw in China after the SARS outbreak, it's going to be the same here," he says, referring to the months-long lockdown