

# How to drive efficiencies in the age of COVID-19 WITH REMOTE INTERPRETING

WORD360



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## INTRODUCTION

***“There can be economy only where there is efficiency”***  
*– Benjamin Disraeli*

Traditionally, our economies, the world over, have been reliant on a large degree of physical interaction; meetings, conferences, simply working in the same office. In a matter of weeks, COVID-19 swept this modality aside, and introduced us to a new world. In this new world, not only is it dangerous to rely on physical interaction, it's often impossible.

A new paradigm now exists, where digital is king, working from home is the norm, and our economic realities are shifting, all set against the backdrop of one of the biggest political shifts in the UK's history.

This new paradigm calls for new ways of thinking and doing, in almost every aspect of our day-to-day lives. One of the primary aspects of our work lives, communication, has arguably been one of the most profoundly affected. Finding new ways to communicate has been a global challenge, especially where language barriers are concerned.

However, remote interpretation has provided a lifeline to businesses and organisations who need to forge or maintain relationships across language barriers. The ability to use video and telephone options to interpret often critical conversations has allowed business to continue and for public sector staff, such as the NHS, to save lives as they always have done.

This is possible thanks, in part, to a number of major efficiency improvements provided by these remote solutions. While such efficiencies are nothing new, the pandemic has brought them into the spotlight, and even demonstrated their value post-COVID-19.

Through this white paper, we will explore the notion of COVID-19 as a catalyst for change, how remote interpreting has become an efficient lifeline during the pandemic, and the benefits of remote options post-COVID including how to balance various interpreting methods for maximum efficiency.

## COVID-19: A CATALYST

All major crises bring with them their share of woes, but without exception, they are catalysts for change. COVID-19 has brought us a new paradigm, dependent on a rapid adoption of new digital solutions into nearly every facet of our personal and working lives. These solutions are what have allowed us to keep working, to ensure that business continues to operate, and that the public sector is able to provide the same services under exceptional pressure.

Additionally, both the private and public sector have been hammered by new economic pressures, compounded by [Britain's final exit from the EU](#) on the 31st December 2020.

### DIGITAL IS HERE

By now, the term 'digitisation' shouldn't be meaningless to you. The march of digital was well underway before the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the crisis has resulted in a large-scale acceleration of its adoption.

In order to cope with the distancing necessary to manage COVID-19, digital solutions such as video conferencing have been rapidly adopted and integrated into everyday processes. This allowed huge numbers of people to work from home, and for those that cannot, it has reduced the number of people they must interact with. [By March of 2020 alone](#), Zoom, for example, had added more users than it did throughout the entirety of 2019.

Adoption of these methods of working and for such a long period of time, has undoubtedly resulted in a change in behaviour for staff at all levels of organisations, and a shift in the way they expect to access everyday services.



## AN ECONOMIC SLEDGEHAMMER

Unfortunately, COVID-19 and the restrictive control methods it has necessitated has taken a virus-coated sledgehammer to economies around the world. Budgets and belts have been tightened as a result and consumers are understandably shy about parting with their increasingly hard-earned cash.

In the first quarter of 2020, the [Dow and FTSE saw their biggest drop since 1987](#), somewhat setting the economic tone for the year. Businesses have faced drops in profits and the public sector faced yet more budget squeezes as well as major increases in demand. Economic strife calls for adaptation; adaptation of existing processes to make the most of what you have.

## TIMING IS EVERYTHING: BREXIT AS A BACKDROP –

For the UK, the COVID-19 pandemic couldn't have come at a worse time. 2020 was our year to transition out of the EU, marked by our formal and final exit on the 31st December. Brexit has acted almost as a compounding force in the UK throughout the pandemic to date.

Uncertainty surrounding a deal with the EU was perhaps the source of the gravest harm throughout 2020, leaving businesses almost in limbo and largely unable to prepare for the 1st January this year.

Even with a deal, [new restrictions exist](#) on our relationship with our Continental partners, including trade barriers and travel complications. The end result of all of these is a further economic blow with the worst possible timing.

What our new position does mean for business in particular, however, is that we are now operating in a global arena for the first time since 1973. [90% of the world's forecasted growth](#) is expected to take place outside of the EU, with the UK now sat in this 90% bracket. Our efforts to be part of this growth will be dependent on our ability to cooperate effectively with our new trading partners, as trade deals continue to be signed.



## REMOTE INTERPRETING AND COVID-19

***“Obviously, the highest type of efficiency is that which can utilise existing material to the best advantage ...”***

*– Jawaharlal Nehru*

Whether you're involved in running a business or you're procurement personnel in a public sector organisation, remote interpreting can offer solutions to issues related to nearly all of the issues discussed above.

For the private sector, interpreting has long been a vital tool for operating on an international basis; something that is now more important than ever following our exit from the EU. The public sector, however, must ensure services are accessible to all, which means making interpreters available whenever necessary.

With regards to ensuring continued global operations and accessibility throughout COVID, remote interpreting provides a lifeline to the private and public sector alike.

### WHAT IS REMOTE INTERPRETING?

Interpreting is far from a new skill, and one that has, until now, relied primarily on face-to-face interaction, with an interpreter being physically present in order to interpret a conversation on behalf of two parties who do not speak the same language.

Remote interpreting is the same service, in principle, only conducted via the use of remote video or telephone services. In both these cases, a minimum of a three-way call takes place, with the interpreter acting as an intermediary in a remote conversation.



## SOCIAL DISTANCING

The Merriam-Webster dictionary now [features the phrase “socially distance” as a verb](#). This new inability to interact with people in the way that we have been used to all of our lives is perhaps the single biggest change to our reality that COVID-19 has inflicted.

The simplest and yet most profound advantage that remote interpreting provides is that it is, by definition, remote. Both telephone and video interpreting require absolutely no physical interaction between any of the parties involved and present the safest options for interpreting services in current circumstances.

## COMBATting A SLEDGEHAMMER WITH EFFICIENCY

Part of the solution to the aforementioned virus-coated sledgehammer that the pandemic has unleashed on global economies is efficiency. Making the most of what you already have will allow you to provide the same level of service in a crunch, or even in many cases, a better service.

Remote interpreting is conducted via the use of everyday technology, such as a smartphone or even a landline. Telephone interpreting, in particular, is possible by simply placing a phone call, and requires no infrastructural adaptations. Video interpreting services can be accessed with any internet-capable device which features a camera and a microphone, and you'd be hard pressed to find a modern smartphone or laptop that doesn't tick all of those boxes.

Remote interpreting, even video, is available on-demand and in a fraction of the time of face-to-face, meaning little to no pre-planning and admin is necessary. By the same token, there are no travel times and costs involved in either video or telephone interpreting.

What this amounts to, are dramatic efficiencies in cost and time, ones that could prove vital. For the public sector, ensuring that everyone receives access to services in times of increased pressure is a major challenge. Remote interpreting is available as and when it's needed, with no extra bodies on site to worry about, and in a manner which is much more cost effective.

For the private sector, remote interpreting provides a vital cross-barrier service, allowing for meetings and conferences with non-English speaking parties to continue throughout the pandemic, as well as offering leaps in cost-efficiency in the process. These remote services will likely become ever more crucial as we settle into our post-EU position on the world stage.



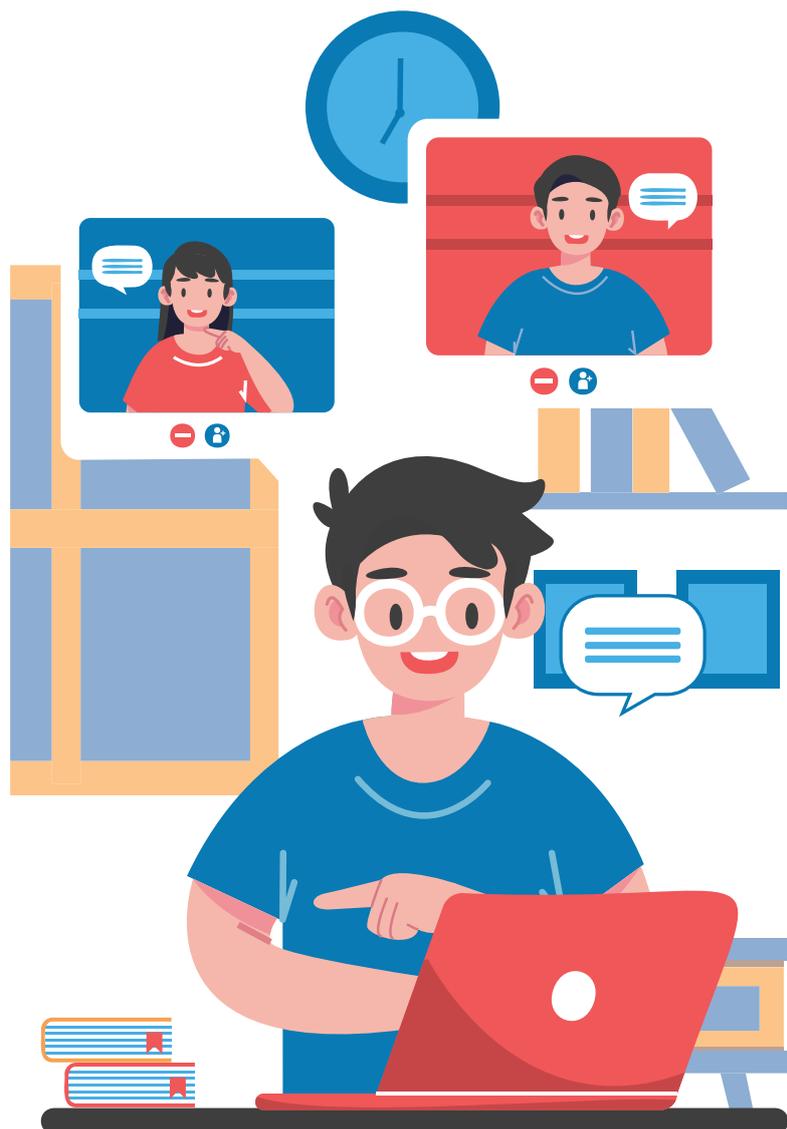
## VIDEO VS. TELEPHONE: A NEEDS EVALUATION

Video and telephone interpreting, while both remote solutions, differ in their ideal applications, and knowing when to apply each service is a core aspect of unlocking their efficiency potential.

Telephone interpreting, for example, is the perfect on-demand service for routine conversations such as simple medical appointments, routine police interactions, or even regular business conversations with a familiar partner. This form of remote interpreting is the most basic and the most efficient, and is something we at Word360 provide via our Wordskii platform on-demand, 24/7.

Much like with telephone interpreting, we utilise our industry leading software solution, Wordskii, to offer remote video interpreting, on-demand with our specialised video conferencing option. Video interpreting is, by its nature, a little more cumbersome than telephone interpreting but offers the additional benefit of being able to physically see all parties involved. This means that body language and facial expressions are visible, making it suitable for more delicate medical conversations for example, or a business interaction with another party whom you've not met before.

It's important to balance your needs across both remote interpreting options to maximise efficiency but also ensure that your interactions don't become devoid of often necessary humanity.



## INTERPRETING AFTER COVID-19

It's impossible to determine when we'll see the back of the COVID-19 crisis, but its long-term impact on interpreting as a service is somewhat predictable. Digitisation is unlikely to come to a halt anytime soon and the economic impact will be felt for some time yet. In order to maximise efficiency while maintaining quality of service, there is a balancing act to be performed with regards to which interpreting options you utilise in the post-COVID landscape.

### THE MARCH OF DIGITISATION –

Digitisation was an ongoing process prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the rapid acceleration that it necessitated. In [a study conducted within the construction industry](#) in 2019, for example, 81% of 200 key decision makers said they planned to implement digital structures.

Crucially, it also found the 54% of those who'd already adopted digital solutions and processes had seen an increase in workforce productivity, 43% said business win rates had improved and 56% had reduced their operating costs.

During the crisis, it has been vital and competitively advantageous to digitise, and with the bar now set higher, it seems unlikely that the digital arms race will come to a close anytime soon, even after the conclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic.



## LONG COVID: THE ECONOMIC HANGOVER –

Studies conducted by Vox EU, based upon existing data and historical studies of previous pandemics such as the 1918 flu outbreak, predict that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a lasting effect on the UK economy.

Because of the economic contraction caused by social distancing measures, our economy has taken a substantial hit, furthermore, recovery will be slow and the Government will be faced with a strenuous balancing act to ensure inflation does not become a runaway concern.

What this means for remote interpreting is that, even after the decline of social distancing measures, these more efficient modes of language barrier removal will likely remain necessary for some time. Economic decline and slow recovery will further press the need for greater financial efficiency well after we see the back of COVID-19.

## WALKING THE LINE –

Maximising efficiency with remote interpreting solutions after the pandemic will involve the use of all three forms of interpreting, including face-to-face. Face-to-face interpreting has long been viewed as the 'gold standard' for interpreting, and arguably rightfully so. The most personable and direct form of interpreting, it allows for the best possible communication.

However, the gold standard is perhaps not necessary at every interaction; as we've discussed, telephone interpreting, for example, is the ideal solution for simple, routine interactions. Some situations such as medical end of life conversations, bereavements, or complex business discussions will always be best conducted with the use of a face-to-face interpreter but making use of remote services where possible will allow for economies to be made, without degrading the service offering.

By understanding and correctly utilising all available options, public and private sector organisations alike will be able to drive efficiencies throughout the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

## CONCLUSION

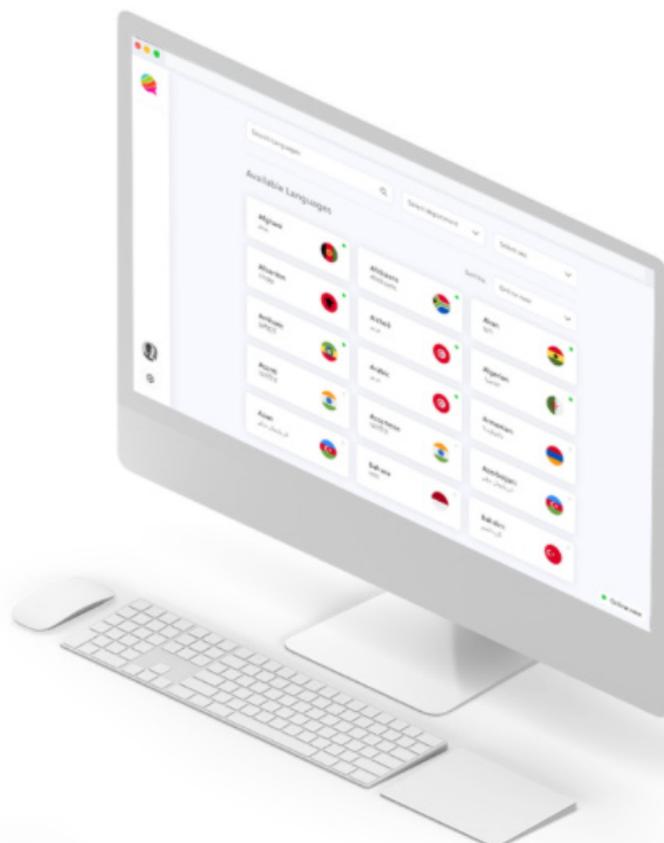
The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing public health crisis, and has changed our way of life almost beyond recognition. It has also wreaked havoc with our businesses and economies, and acted as a catalyst for change in so many ways. It has necessitated the acceleration of digitisation in both the public and private sector, encouraging the mass adoption of remote working technologies. All of this has been set against backdrop of our exit from the European Union; one of the biggest paradigm shifts in recent British political history.

Amidst this foray, remote interpreting has emerged as a bolster for one the most important aspects of our everyday operations: communication. Remote solutions have kept pace with the new digital expectations of staff and consumers or service users, reduced health risks by maintaining social distancing, and provided more cost-efficient solutions when they've been needed the most.

Even beyond COVID-19, the use of remote interpreting options and their ability to drive efficiencies will continue to be vital. This will be proven as the economic effects of the crisis are felt for years to come, and digitisation proceeds its march. In this new normal, it will be crucial, not only for public and private sector organisations to utilise remote interpreting options, but also to utilise them in tandem with face-to-face for the most efficient balance possible.

At Word360, we have worked with both the private and public sector to help meet their interpreting needs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to do so. Our expert understanding enables to help our clients drive efficiencies by making the best possible use of their interpreting options, reinforced by our industry-leading software platform, Wordskii.

Wordskii not only allows them to access our services but also to view real-time usage information for the most transparent and flexible overview of their requirements possible.



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Celebrating 30 years in business, Word360 is the Midlands' leading translations and interpreting agency, working with major global clients to help remove language barriers where it matters most. Operational in over 55 countries through a network of more than 9,800 specialised linguists, they enable global conversations and provide award-winning support across multiple industries and sectors.