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Auto Physical Damage

Long-Lasting Pandemic Trends That Might Surprise You

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5 MIN READ

It is no surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed much about the way we live and do business. It may come as a surprise, however, how long some of these changes may linger long after the worst of the pandemic is behind us. Even more interesting is how interconnected many facets of life and work are, and how things can have a ripple effect permeating through industries. From e-commerce influencing the way auto repair businesses conduct inspections, to teleworking at the root of surging musculoskeletal injuries, and the recent suburban sprawl increasing vehicle demand—it is all linked, and much of it is likely here to stay.

1. A More Customer-Centric World

When the pandemic first hit many people turned to technology as a lifeline to the outside world. Apps were not only a way to stay connected with friends and family, but they also helped us get what we needed from the safety of our homes. With the touch of a button, you could have lunch, face masks, and a new car delivered to your front door all on the same day. In 2020, online orders for home food delivery more than doubled in the U.S. This surge in technology reliance, originally caused by a need to stay protected from the virus, evolved into an expectation from consumers across all kinds of industries—including P & C. Insurance companies turned to virtual estimating as a way to keep employees and customers safe from the pandemic, and later realized that customer satisfaction and work efficiency actually increased due to the digitization of this process. This trend is causing auto carriers to engage with and meet customer expectations in new ways. Now that consumers have been exposed to this new method of inspection, it is likely to stick around, and potentially grow or evolve further in the post-pandemic world. According to the 2021 Future of Claims Study by Lexis Nexis, consumers are embracing automated claims processes more since the pandemic started. The 2021 study showed that 62% of people report they enjoy the convenience of filling a claim virtually—a 4% increase since the 2019 survey. Additionally, the majority of consumers surveyed stated that they believe many of the habits adopted during the pandemic will be the “new normal.”

2. Renewed Focus on Mental Health

Last year, we not only relied on apps to connect with others or to buy commercial goods. We also began to rely on them for peace of mind. In April of 2020 mental wellness apps saw a combined 2 million more downloads

during that month compared with January of 2020, reaching close to 10 million total downloads. The stresses of the pandemic caused many people to experience increased anxiety, depression and insomnia. They turned to these apps to find a sense of calm in a world of chaos. Additionally, when high profile athletes like tennis star Naomi Osaka, or Olympic gymnast Simone Biles took public action to protect their mental health, the world took notice, in a positive way. Simone Biles was praised for her withdrawal from the women's team gymnastics final at the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo citing mental health concerns. This resurgence in prioritizing mental health has made its way to the workers' comp sector. Because mental health is sometimes falsely associated with delaying recovery and increasing costs, it has long been treated as a "pariah" in workers' comp. This renewed focus on the topic, however, is shifting views as employers are realizing addressing mental health is key to returning employees to work. When a patients' mental health is neglected, it can inhibit their ability to heal from physical injuries, thus prolonging their return to work as the two are largely linked. This renewal in mental health awareness seems to be here to stay. According to Fast Company, the pandemic-induced surge in teletherapy and telehealth show no signs of returning to pre-pandemic levels any time soon.

3. Suburban Sprawl Driving up Car Ownership

There were many reports in 2020 about the drastic decrease in driving when we were all sent into quarantine. Subsequently, we have also heard plenty of rhetoric about employees who found that working at home gave them an opportunity to relocate from expensive city centers to more rural areas, where property was more affordable and larger homes with more square footage were available. When all was done, in 2020, more than seven million households moved to a different county, surpassing 2019 numbers by half a million. Perhaps counterintuitively, despite people not driving to the office as often, a surge in people moving to less densely populated areas with no public transportation has led to an increased demand for automobiles in 2021. As long as people continue to telework, either permanently or part time, the demand for personal vehicles may continue to rise. Ultimately, this demographic shift is having an impact on how the collision repair industry does business. It's influencing everything from the distribution of traffic patterns and claims volumes, to how autobody shops strategize on the geographic placement of locations.

Adaptability Is the Key to Success

Even before the pandemic, the world was always changing around us. However, it seems things are changing more rapidly and in different directions than we once predicted. The pandemic has made us more adaptive than ever. As people, and as businesses, we are learning that being able to navigate unexpected challenges quickly and effectively is what moves us forward and that sometimes, adversity brings about long-lasting change. Time will tell how persistent or impactful these trends will be.

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