Technology takes on greater prominence

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Tim Zanni | Global Leadership

For all the discussion about the benefits of technology as compared to potential pitfalls, during a time of crisis there is no greater opportunity for technology to shine.

As the COVID-19 outbreak expanded from a global health emergency to being classified as a global pandemic, many companies have shifted most, if not all, of their employees to working remotely in response. At the same time, some schools, colleges and universities have closed their campuses and switched to more distance learning.

This re-emphasizes the fact that the technology exists today to enable these remote options to help to fight this virus. It's innovation from the technology sector that is now almost taken for granted.

Recognizing the role technology can play in the battle against COVID-19, the technology industry answered a call to action by the United States Office of Science and Technology Policy to assist with the response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Technology companies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, IBM and Twitter came together to brainstorm with the U.S. government on response needs and solutions. "Cutting edge technology companies and major online platforms will play a critical role in this all-hands-on-deck effort," said U.S. Chief Technology Officer Michael Kratsios.

Here in the United States, during a press conference held on March 13th by the COVID-19 task force, the efforts of the tech companies were put front and center when President Trump mentioned their assistance. There are many ways in which technology is being used to help in the efforts around the COVID-19 response.

— **Stopping the spread of misinformation:** Twitter has stated "we have a prompt in place which directs people searching for Coronavirus content to accurate information from the relevant local bodies." Google's Trust and Safety team "has been working around the clock and across the globe to safeguard our users from phishing, conspiracy theories, malware and misinformation, and we are constantly on the lookout for new threats."

— **Tracking the spread of the virus to enable faster response to hard hit areas:** Facebook is working to supply anonymous data to researchers in this effort.

— **Efforts to diagnose patients and improve testing:** Tencent is using their AI Medical Innovation System (AMIS) and cloud technology to help quickly identify cases. Verily, an Alphabet company, has created a [website](#) in collaboration with the state of California to expand access to COVID-19 screening and testing in areas with a high volume of known cases. Microsoft and Amazon have committed millions of dollars to help local healthcare workers on the front line.

— **Using supercomputers to assist in analysis for treatment development:** Researchers are using the IBM-built Summit supercomputer to analyze compounds as they race to find a cure.

— **Autonomous vehicles and robots being used to deliver medical supplies to hospitals and food to those quarantined at home:** JD.com, a Chinese e-commerce company, has enlisted such self-driving robots in Wuhan where the outbreak originated.

One of the many things to take away is that we are reminded again that in a time of crisis, as global industries, communities and citizens, we come together to find a solution. This time it's humans and technology together for the greater good.

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