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Consequence of COVID-19 is that real estate is going to morph into something that it wasn't before - by David O'Sullivan

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David O'Sullivan

We are all living in a different world than the one we expected at New Years of 2020. Our lives have been turned upside down and we have adapted to new procedures for work, shopping, eating, social events and schooling. One thing we have found is we can adapt, possibly more than we thought. This is a time of forced changes in our world and many will have lasting impacts.

This virus has the potential to change everything about how we live. We just don't know what the overall impact is yet. One of the inevitable consequences of this pandemic is that real estate is going to morph into something else that it wasn't before. I don't know what it is yet, but I have several ideas.

Almost universally, every developer seems to agree that health and wellness will now be at the top of buyers' wish lists, positioning some who've been doing it for years ahead of the curve. Such things as air purification, cleaning protocols, aromatherapies, lighting, and water filtration may become standard features. Also a lot of technology will deploy touchless and keyless, but to stay ahead of the curve even more we may see biometrics like voice prints and optical recognition. Even thumb scans will soon be obsolete because they require everyone to scan their print on the same device which becomes an area of concern. In the future, there should be no need for building residents to have to touch anything in the building, nor should building staff have to touch residents' items without protection protocols in areas like valet. Touchless is inevitably going to become the new normal.

We all need to be aware of the trends. We are in the business of knowing what our buyers want. As designers we also have to be careful about changing course too quickly. Some trends, of course, are certain—and not just because of coronavirus. In future buildings, with the advent of more technology that optimizes remote access and living, we expect to see an increase in designated home offices. In terms of technology, we anticipate more no-touch interfaces, preventing residents from ever needing to grab door handles or push elevator buttons. From a design perspective, living

room-like terraces will also be a mainstay within projects in my opinion, as well as more private elevators. Common areas will also be smaller in the future with more private spaces, and residents will want access to more fresh air and more outdoor space. Post-corona everything's on the table.

For certain there will be fewer porous surfaces or difficult to clean materials used. Certain materials that were in vogue just five years ago, like concrete countertops, would not even be considered in our developments moving forward at this point. The priority, now more than ever, is to create sanitary and safe environments that people can enjoy and maintenance teams can properly clean. Luxury has to co-exist with the 'new normal' we're returning to and it's our job as developers and designers to find out what that is. Another consideration, we also have to make sure we're not overly dependent on construction materials that can't be produced here in the U.S moving forward.

I believe as designers and developers there are three focus areas for us to consider: Review | Reinvent | Rebuild

Review is an opportunity to look at our culture internally, our clients who are part of our success and our end users whose relationships form the basis for loyalty and success. We all know the importance of satisfying clients. The cost of acquiring a new client is estimated at 8-10x the cost of keeping a good client. This also applies to buyers and tenants. Review is to confirm our values, explore our communications both internally and externally, and assure alignment. This often means adjusting our internal processes and thinking in general to bring this together.

Reinvent is the opportunity to better meet client needs which have in fact become more focused in the past 60 days. The need that clients have for a new focus on providing a feeling of safety and security for more essential products and services. Our essential workers are the first line of this. Next will be all of the products and services companies and what they offer. Prioritizing essential needs and focusing on improving life, less with coolness and more with meat and potatoes kinds of activities.

Reinvent also means to relook at the way you reach your clients. Retail is restructuring as department stores change to showrooms and logistics stations, with much more of the transaction volume moving online. Offices will be less about the requirement for working and collaboration by sitting next to the person and more of an occasional physical meeting spot. Working at home for those types of businesses that can be effective doing so, will become much more of a norm. Products and services that meet the needs of at home workers offer strong market potential.

Rebuild is to take this opportunity, to take the review and reinvent and plan now for how to make this happen. How to get your staff focused, aligned and ready to implement on this. New products and services or refocused products and services should be the next priorities to work on, starting now.

These last 60 days slowed most of us down and now provide a chance to hit restart, probably a once in a lifetime opportunity. Those that take advantage of this will be the leaders of the post-pandemic reality.

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