

Microsoft Ignite 2020: Exciting collaboration-focused highlights

By [Sanjit Debroy](#)



Ignite 2020, Microsoft's largest event of the year, was delivered as a digital experience this year. Aligned with COVID-19 responses across the world, Microsoft used this far-reaching platform as an ideal opportunity to showcase new and upcoming Microsoft technologies, which will directly enable organizations to meet the challenges of a changing world and rebuild for a better future.

Echoing CEO Satya Nadella's opening keynote remarks focused on Microsoft's defined emphasis on response, recovery and resilience in the face of the global pandemic, the company stands poised to pave the path forward for true digital transformation. Emphasizing customer engagement and optimized operations to meet the ever-changing landscape of our "new normal," Ignite 2020 highlighted newly updated and improved tools geared toward the new hybrid working normal, ever-increasing virtual landscapes and collaboration for both face-to-face and remote teams as key components to organizations' success in the immediate future.

Among the many featured announcements, significant focus was paid to demonstrating the adaptability and practicality of many flagship Microsoft products, including Microsoft Teams, Power Platform and Azure.

Microsoft Teams: Serving as a dynamic means of collaboration for individuals and groups across organizations and industries, Microsoft Teams has greatly contributed to the way users promote collaboration, learning and well-being from any location in the world. Providing a seamless transition into the now-universally-present, virtual workplace, Teams is currently undergoing updates to add a variety of additional teams-focused features, some currently launched and others upcoming, including:

- *Custom Layouts* -- Scheduled for deployment later this year, the ability to use customized layouts will allow for greater personalization and flexibility for users. Leading to a further individually-tailored and dynamic content viewing experience, this feature will provide even more freedom for presenters to directly impact how content is displayed to participants during a meeting or demonstration or conference call.
- *Breakout Rooms* -- This feature, currently live, allows meeting organizers to divide participants into smaller groups within the broader meeting. This is ideal for a variety of functions such as facilitating workgroup discussions, brainstorming sessions or multi-tasking during a set timeframe. Even more practical, presenters have the added option to move between breakout rooms, make announcements to all meeting attendees at once and decide when to bring all members back into a single meeting -- mirroring some of the flexibility typically found with traditional in-person meetings.
- *Together Mode* -- This reimagined mode, which differs from the user experience of other platforms, assists participants in feeling closer together, as though they were in a traditional group meeting in one room, though they may be physically dispersed. With even more updates to new Together Mode scenes projected to be launched later in 2020 -- including auditorium, coffee shop or conference room settings -- teams can utilize options when selecting meeting locale that best addresses their individual needs.
- *Webinar Registration, Reporting and Meeting Recap* -- When required, meeting hosts can use a more-structured registration feature, via automated emails, to monitor attendance as well as the option to access a reporting dashboard to better understand attendee engagement and experience. Similarly, the meeting recap works to assist teams in staying on-track with the meeting objectives -- ensuring that workflow proceeds continuously without interruption and allowing others who could not attend to remain up-to-date on what occurred.
- *Other New and Improved Features* -- An updated channel info pane provides a summary of participants in any given group, pinned posts or other relevant information to onboard new team members or keep existing members informed. Other new functionalities now in place to assist in hybrid work environments include Room Remotes, Teams Casting, Proximity Join, Cortana Voice Assistance, Teams templates, an improved search experience and much more.

- *Well-being Features and Productivity Insights* -- Powered by MyAnalytics, these new features promoting the well-being of employees will be included components of Teams beginning this month -- allowing managers or team leaders to highlight specific and personalized insights focusing on suggestions to improve workplace habits and productivity. Additionally, Microsoft introduced virtual commutes, reminders for scheduled breaks and partnered with Headspace to further encourage and emphasize the importance of employee well-being.

Power Platform: Power platform has been a ringing success for Microsoft amid the global pandemic, with updates scheduled for the remainder of 2020 through March 2021 for Power BI, Power Automate, Power Apps and more. Among these notable additions, the creation of a "Return to Workplace Solution" within the Power platform -- launched at Inspire -- is being hailed as a comprehensive solution allowing organizations across industries to manage the return of employees and workstreams to the workplace, end-to-end.

Azure: Azure-based solutions are now more instrumental in current workplace models than ever before, allowing organizations to employ AI models to aggregate data and glean greater insights. *Azure Orbital*, for example, is a recently unveiled service that allows customers to transfer data from satellites to the Azure cloud directly, fundamentally impacting data processing and storage while simultaneously providing a means for processing data and scaling operations directly in Microsoft Azure. Similarly, *Azured Mixed Reality* is also a newly-launched feature which covers object and spatial anchors, enhances remote rendering and further improves AI-enabled decision-making functionality -- connecting users to the physical world around them via enhanced geospatial capabilities. And, *Azure Communication Services* brings rich communication APIs to applications across any device, on any platform, using the same reliable and secure infrastructure that powers Microsoft Teams.

Ignite 2020 effectively highlighted the success Microsoft has found with its suite of products made to build a technology roadmap for the current pandemic and beyond. In a world of uncertainty with ever-changing restrictions keeping teams and workforces apart, Microsoft demonstrated a vision for a future where collaboration, teamwork and cooperation need not be sacrificed, leading the way with technological solutions to allow individuals to further thrive and succeed.



Sanjit Debroy, general manager at [AgreeYa Solutions](#), holds extensive knowledge of the latest technological developments, key industry trends and market dynamics. At AgreeYa, he is the person behind the company's technology consulting, knowledge management, design thinking, services delivery and corporate strategy. A decade old professional, Debroy has a keen interest and in-depth understanding of Microsoft technologies and their potential to deliver digital transformation for businesses and communities.