



Let's Get to Work

Eliminating Digital Friction for Remote Work Success



For many people, the workday starts pretty much the same as it did a year ago.

The morning alarm goes off, even after hitting the snooze once (maybe twice). They get up, get dressed, make breakfast, grab a cup of coffee, and head off to work.

The only major difference is the 10-second-or-so trip from the kitchen straight to the home office, rather than a lengthy commute during morning rush hour.

It's one of the fundamental ways lives have changed since the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, which spurred worldwide lockdowns, closed offices, and forced an exodus of employees to work from home well into 2021.

But now that the emergency transition from office to home has passed, and new routines and workflows have been established to maintain productivity and business continuity, it's time to take stock of the situation.

What happens now?

It's certainly not an easy question. Business leaders worldwide are still trying to find the right answer, looking

at work scenarios, weighing the risk of digital friction, and carefully considering their options for what comes next.

Obviously organizations could try going back to the way things were — back to business as usual by steadily returning the entire workforce to the office when it's safe to do so.

A growing number of executives, however, are starting to wonder if going back is really the way forward. After months of building better at-home work setups and establishing new routines and workflows, perhaps business as usual doesn't look the same as it did a year ago.

What if this temporary solution to a global crisis is actually the next step in work evolution? That working from home, even for just part of the week, can be as productive as — or even better than — the office?

The new reality of the "new normal" is starting to become clear: Remote work isn't going anywhere.



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1 More Than Just a Temporary Solution

Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co. responded to the worldwide spread of Covid-19 much like other organizations. Within five days, the Ohio-based insurer shut down its offices and transitioned more than 98% of its 27,000 employees to work from home on what seemed like a temporary basis.¹

But the shift wasn't without difficulties at first. Although the company had contingency plans in place and already maintained a small work-from-home culture, employees still encountered a few productivity roadblocks early in the transition to remote work.

"So one thing that came up is that for some associates, the headsets with microphones attached that worked with some systems in office didn't work when people got home, so we had to scurry to get new ones delivered," Nationwide CEO Kirt Walker told Fortune in a 2020 interview. "And some associates didn't have adequate home internet, so our tech teams got involved to work with providers."

Then something unexpected began to happen: Working from home started to work really well and employees were becoming productive.

The promising results of its remote work rollout soon convinced Nationwide to make a bold move. A couple months after sending employees home to work, the

company announced the change would be permanent and revealed plans to close all but four of its 20 physical offices.

"At the end of the day, we looked at key historical events that shaped society: the Great Depression, the 1918 pandemics, WWI and WWII, 9/11, and the financial crisis," Walker told Fortune. "During these crises people reduced consumption, grew more frugal. After the crisis, worry continued and it was a permanent mindset shift.

"That's really important. We think the world is changing. We've got to take cost out of the system. We want to enable sustainable growth."

Nationwide isn't the only one. Other companies — including REI, Twitter, Fujitsu, Shopify, Siemens, Revolut, and Facebook — are following suit by giving employees the option to work remotely in some form even after offices reopen.²⁻³ And as productivity continues to show signs of improvement, the percentage of permanently remote workers is projected to double in 2021 to 34.3% compared to the pre-pandemic 16.4%, according to a survey of CIOs by Enterprise Technology Research.⁴

But that still leaves companies with a couple big challenges: Making remote work a sustainable option and also growing productivity to pre-Covid levels — or beyond.

NEW DEFINITIONS OF WORK

Not only is flexibility changing the way people think about work, it's also changing some of the terms used to describe it, too. Here's a closer look at some popular work-related phrases.

Telework/telecommuting: A broad-definition term for an arrangement that allows employees to perform their duties and responsibilities from an approved work site other than the office.

Remote work: Generally describes the practice of fulfilling job requirements from a location outside the office. Also denotes physical distance from the office (i.e. working from a different city, region, or country).

Mobile work: Refers to work that isn't tied to a single location, as well as work that involves traveling from place to place.

Working from home (WFH): Performing job duties remotely from an employee's home versus in an office setting. Initially seen as a benefit of telework, it's now become almost synonymous with remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hybrid work: A work arrangement or environment that isn't entirely remote or in the office, and combines elements of both based on employee needs and responsibilities.

Working from anywhere (WFA): An umbrella term describing work that's done from any multitude of different locations. It implies a flexibility in location choice, and is usually referenced along with device mobility and other enabling technology.

Sources: US Office of Personnel Management⁶; IBM⁶; Dell Technologies⁷; VMware⁸

2 Exploring the Forces Behind Productivity

The future of work hinges on an important factor: productivity.

But what drives productivity? And how can working from home become just as productive, or more so, than time spent at the office?

Unfortunately, these kinds of questions aren't easy to answer. After all, productivity doesn't just happen. It's the steady result of employees whose well-being and work experiences are deliberately supported, nurtured, and improved by employers in various ways — flexible hours, benefits for health and childcare, professional training, fair compensation, good work environment, etc.

And although surveys do point to promising remote work productivity — including a third (34%) of employees and nearly half (52%) of employers who believe productivity has improved over prolonged working from home during the pandemic, according to a January 2021 PwC US Remote Work Survey⁹ — circumstances still vary widely from industry to industry, company to company, and even employee to employee.

For some, working from home offers several unique advantages — fewer interruptions, quieter work environment, comfortable workspace, a break from

office politics¹⁰ — as well as zero commute time. But it can also create many new productivity pitfalls, too.

Distractions; difficulty meeting business goals; less effective collaboration and teamwork; and less engagement and sense of belonging rank among the top challenges when working remotely, according to Lakeside Software's The Future of Digital Workplaces report.¹¹

Trying to work from home with children running around, too, can be a "productivity disaster" for many parents, said Nicholas Bloom, a Stanford University economist, in a 2020 article.¹² Not having home office setups to reduce noise and provide privacy also greatly impact employees' ability to focus.

But Bloom's 2015 research into working from home also indicates a more serious productivity impact on the horizon: Mental well-being.

"(Study participants) reported feeling isolated, lonely and depressed at home," said Bloom, who's also a senior fellow at the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR). "So, I fear an extended period of working from home will not only kill office productivity but is building a mental health crisis."



LOOKOUT FOR BURNOUT

Burnout, caused by prolonged work-related stress, remained high throughout the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, according to recent Gallop research.¹³ Fully remote workers now experience more burnout than on-site workers, in part because "many employees feel like the workday never ends as they scramble to shift from home life to work life and back again, trying to keep it all afloat."

But one of the biggest influences on productivity — both at home and the office — continues to be technology, which accounts for about 30% of employees' experience at work, according to the Employee Experience Index report by Forrester Research, Inc.¹⁴ The tech resources available to employees — from physical devices to less-tangible productivity apps — greatly impact how users do their daily work, how much they're able to do, how well they're able to do it, and even how they feel about their jobs.

Almost a third (35%) of respondents to a recent WhistleOut survey,¹⁵ for example, said weak internet connection has prevented them from getting work done at some point. More than two-thirds (83%) also said they could be productive without the internet for less than half the day.

Simply put, the quality of users' interactions with work technology, known as digital employee experience (DEX) or end-user experience (EUX), is key to productivity. And in the context of remote work, which depends entirely on technology, improving those experiences is important now more than ever.

While working from home can be a challenge in many different ways, burnout is becoming a major concern as pandemic-related remote work continues into 2021. This form of work-related stress not only impacts productivity, but it can also lead to serious health conditions such as depression, insomnia, high blood pressure, and even heart disease.

Here are six common causes of employee burnout:

- 1 Lack of control:** Unable to make decisions about scheduling, assignments, and workloads, and also not having the resources needed to get work done.
- 2 Unclear job expectations:** Not knowing what a supervisor or others expect from an employee, or how their role contributes to the organization.
- 3 Dysfunctional workplace dynamics:** Having a difficult boss or colleague that contributes added daily stress.
- 4 Extreme activity:** Constantly using up energy to remain focused and engaged on tasks and projects.
- 5 Lack of social support:** Feeling isolated, anxious, or lonely at work or in one's personal life.
- 6 Work-life imbalance:** Working long hours leaves little time to recharge and spend with family and friends.

Source: Mayo Clinic¹⁶



3

Focusing on the Remote Work Experience

In a year's time, enterprises have managed to transition thousands of employees from working in the office to working from home. They've weathered the chaos of disrupted workflows and maintained business continuity during a pandemic.

But the job isn't done yet.

The new task at hand is, in some ways, just as urgent and necessary. As more organizations begin to adopt some form of remote work as part of their future, managing employee experiences for better productivity will be critical.

From a high-level point of view, that means challenging long-held assumptions about how work should be done and how productivity is measured.

"Rethinking how goals are set and identifying key performance metrics will be critical to managing remote workers in the new normal," noted Forbes contributor Caroline Castrillon in a December 2020 article, "This Is the Future of Remote Work in 2021."¹⁷

From a business viewpoint, better overall remote work experience will likely require new investments in technology and possibly new organizational roles dedicated to

Remote work experience is made up of all the interactions involved in working from a location other than the office and, because of its complete dependency on work technology, is a big part of overall digital employee experience (DEX).

supporting employee experience. In fact, IT spending worldwide is expected to grow to \$3.9 trillion in 2021, an increase of 6.2% from 2020, according to a Gartner webinar, "IT Spending Forecast, 4Q20 Update: Recovery in 2021 But Recovered in 2022."¹⁸

DISCOVERING DIGITAL DIVIDES

Executives, IT, and employees all agree remote work will continue in some form after the pandemic. But when it comes to digital employee experience (DEX), there are clear divides within organizations. Here are a few key findings from a recent global survey by ESI Thoughtlab in partnership with Lakeside Software:

64%

of employees and C-suite say DEX quality is just average or worse while 60% of IT rates DEX as good or superior

67%

of IT leaders say DEX is a critical priority, but nearly half of C-suite say it's not measured

90%

of C-suite say DEX is a priority post-pandemic, but only 7% of employees report seamless digital experiences

12.1%

revenue increase and 18.1% cost reduction are possible with significantly improved DEX, according to C-level respondents

Source: The Future of Digital Workplaces report by Lakeside Software, May 21, 2021

And then there's the perspective from IT, which is on the frontline of removing digital friction and managing remote work. Before organizations can do anything else — whether it's redefining the way work gets done, changing the measure of productivity, or IT budget planning — IT must first answer some very fundamental questions:

- What is the digital experience of these remote workers?
- What makes a user's experience good or bad?
- How can IT identify and measure the impact technology has on users at any given time?
- And how can IT support and improve those experiences — even if when employees are spread out across regions and time zones?

Those are the kinds of challenges organizations are starting to tackle head-on as organizations move further into this new world of work.

Digital friction is defined as "the unnecessary effort exerted by employees in using technology for work."

Source: 5 Ways Digital Friction Is Silently Killing Your Firm's Productivity report by Gartner, July 29, 2020¹⁹

4 Digital Challenges Remote Workers Face

Even before the pandemic, when employees were at the office and able to use their familiar work setups at their own desks, technical difficulties still happened.

Workers still dealt with occasional slow logins, weak internet strength, or trouble accessing apps. And, really, who hasn't filed a help desk ticket for a mysterious error message or even a dreaded blue screen of death (BSOD) at least once?

But for millions of employees now working from home, with just an internet connection and basic hardware keeping them in touch with coworkers and giving them access to essential work resources, any kind of digital friction can be completely disruptive and distressing. And these issues will likely continue as long as employees use apps and devices in new and different ways.

Because while video conferencing via Zoom or Microsoft Teams might have been only an occasional work occurrence before Covid-19, it's now essential for daily meetings. Usage of Slack, a messaging tool that helps teams collaborate, has exploded since employees started working from home — so much so that there was a temporary outage early on in 2021 just as U.S. workers began their first post-holiday workday.²⁰ And common apps — such as Office/Microsoft 365 and web browsers — that remote workers now depend on every day are consuming more system resources than their devices can easily handle, according to Lakeside Software community data featured in a 2020 white paper, "How GPUs Accelerate Work-From-Home Productivity."²¹

A few other common remote work issues include:

- Not having the necessary devices and equipment to effectively work outside the office
- General "slowness" resulting from latency, connectivity issues, poorly performing apps, outdated equipment, etc.
- Poor home Wi-Fi strength, which exists outside the corporate network and is often beyond IT's reach
- Relying on new software tools and services — for communicating, file sharing, and other productivity needs — that sometimes stop working or can be temporarily out of service

When these problems arise, end-user experience suffers. Productivity comes to a screeching halt. And while 25% of surveyed employees cite lack of help desk responsiveness as one of the top challenges when working remotely, 92% also believe most of the digital issues they experience can be avoided or prevented, according to Lakeside's The Future of Digital Workplaces report.

Letting frustrated employees figure it out for themselves, though, isn't an option. The surest way to help remote workers stay productive and thrive while working from home is to provide necessary resources, quick remediation, and proactive support that solves potential problems before they impact users.

But in order to take those necessary steps, IT needs to have the right tools and strategies in place.



5 Digital Challenges IT Teams Face

Those who work in IT aren't immune to the difficulties faced by most other remote workers. After all, many of them are now working from home, too.

But IT must also deal with an added layer of challenges in order to deliver needed services and support to remote workers — challenges that affect the health and stability of digital infrastructures as well as the productivity of an entire workforce.

Many of these issues fall into three main areas:

Visibility

There's an undeniable visibility gap when it comes to remote work. And without a complete view of the digital landscape, eliminating digital friction and maintaining good end-user experience can become even more difficult.

In addition to trouble keeping tabs on devices, virtual desktops, and apps, there are also blind spots — such as home networks, unauthorized connected devices, and other variables outside the corporate network — that can raise security concerns and impact day-to-day work performance.

Greater dependency on cloud apps and integrations, too, makes monitoring service quality necessary to quickly identify and resolve issues in order for remote workers to remain productive.

Dive Deeper into DEX

Some issues are just the tip of the remote work experience iceberg

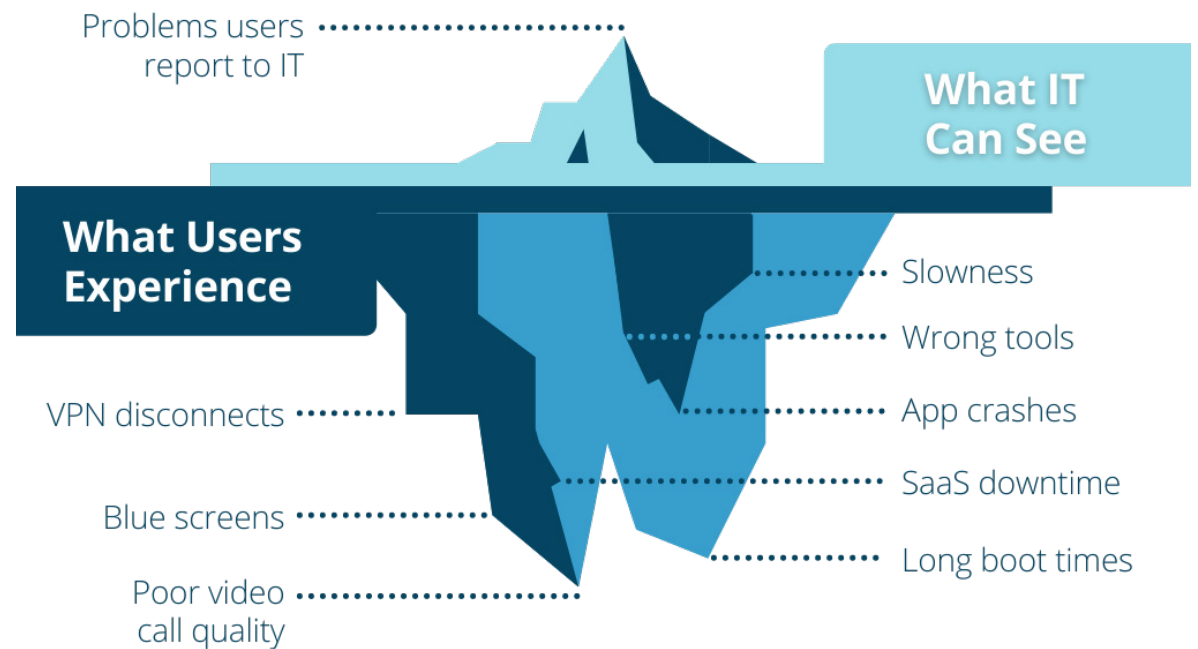


Figure 1: Infographic illustrating the various issues users face that are often outside IT's visibility.

Support

Handling a support ticket is no longer a matter of walking over to an employee's desk and checking on a device that works within a controlled, up-to-date digital environment. Solving issues reported by remote workers — if they report them at all — involves root cause analysis and troubleshooting from a distance and with limited visibility.

Support is especially problematic for issues caused by home Wi-Fi or unauthorized connected devices (such as a personal printer or webcam), which are typically beyond IT's control.

Right-sizing resources

During the rush to transition employees from office to home, IT teams scrambled to provide employees with the basic tools and equipment needed to get work done in the short term. But now that the dust has settled and many employees have spent at least a year working remotely, the need for upgrades and right-sizing is becoming apparent.

Device refreshes that were put on pause during the pandemic are back on the priority list. Video conferencing and other graphics-heavy productivity apps — which used GPU more than 99% of the time in 2020, according to community data collected by Lakeside — require more CPU power. Bare-bones remote work setups need to be enhanced with additional monitors, high-quality web cameras, better headphones, or other equipment to meet employee needs.

Software licenses need to be re-evaluated, allowing edge-case users to receive app or service upgrades or rollbacks based on their specific needs. Identifying and purging unused/underused software is also critical for optimizing digital environments as well as eliminating unnecessary IT costs.

Meanwhile, the ability to access employees' devices and work setups is limited due to social distancing. And the timeframe in which devices can be serviced is exceedingly short now that remote workers increasingly depend on them to do their work.

While some of these challenges are more daunting than others, all of them can be solved with the right solution in place. By creating a better remote work strategy, not only are organizations laying the groundwork for better remote work experience, but other beneficial outcomes, too.

Productivity App GPU Requirements		
Year	GPU Usage	No GPU Usage
2015	48.21%	51.79%
2016	84.61%	15.39%
2017	83.65%	16.35%
2018	96.09%	3.91%
2019	97.70%	2.30%
2020	99.02%	0.98%

Figure 2: The relative growth of GPU requirements for productivity apps over time, according to Lakeside Software community data.



6 Finding a Solution for Better Outcomes

It's been a year since organizations made the sudden leap to remote work in response to the pandemic. And despite hitting some roadblocks along the way, it's worked fairly well for many enterprises so far.

So why change things now?

At this point, it's no longer a matter of adapting to a global emergency. It's time to start thriving in this new world of remote work. And the way to start is by prioritizing digital employee experience, getting rid of digital friction, and boosting productivity for employees regardless of where they're located.

But as discussed in previous chapters, solving the user and IT challenges surrounding remote work can be a tall order. Expanding visibility, providing proactive support, and enabling future transformation requires a versatile and comprehensive solution that also puts end-user experience first.

That's why more and more organizations are turning their attention to digital experience management (DEM).

Digital experience management, sometimes referred to as end-user experience monitoring or management (EUEM), is the process of analyzing usage and performance data across devices, applications, infrastructure, and services to understand how end users' interactions with technology

affect the quality of their digital experience.

In other words, DEM quantifies what users experience by continuously collecting data directly from endpoints, giving IT greater visibility into how devices, apps, services, and other technology work for users, as well as better insights for improving digital experience overall.

In terms of remote or hybrid work, where employees are spread out and use any number of devices, this kind of data can be vital. With just a lightweight agent gathering metrics at the endpoint, IT has real visibility into hardware and app performance, latency, resource usage, and other user and device details that can impact remote work experience and productivity.

These insights also give IT a basis for creating and refining strategies that can help optimize remote work setups, including:

- Proactive support using automation and AI-powered capabilities
- Need-based hardware and software procurement
- VDI right-sizing, planning, and migration
- Software rationalization and license management
- Engagements for self-healing and self-service

Digital Experience Management Workflow

But data does more than help solve immediate challenges for IT and remote users. It also guides organizations as they consider long-term goals, initiatives, and transformations surrounding flexible work.

In the case of most Lakeside customers, digital experience management was a central part of getting remote workforces up and running. But as many of these enterprises continue to support employees working from home a year later, DEM is helping to reshape and refine their IT strategies as well. Planning and assessing for cloud migrations, increasing service outage visibility, improving video quality, investigating home network saturation, reducing service desk tickets, and monitoring resource needs are among some of their top priorities going forward.

For OGIS-RI Co. Ltd., a Lakeside customer and information system subsidiary of Japan's Osaka Gas Co., digital experience management was initially used as an assessment tool to right-size VDI for a migration to Windows 10 in late 2019.²² But in the wake of Covid-19 lockdowns, the company also found DEM useful for maintaining its remote workforce, which was already largely in place, as well as monitoring endpoints and apps for usage and need-based procurement.



SEE

Capture the entirety of end-user experience with deep, real-time telemetry data and extensive history without compromising user privacy

ACT

Shift IT from reactive to proactive to detect problems before they happen, prioritize actions using AI-based analytics, and quickly remediate issues

TRANSFORM

Use a platform that integrates seamlessly with existing technology tools, and execute successful deployments and migrations without disruption to employee experience

Figure 3: Infographic illustrating the continuous cycle for improving remote work experience while using a digital experience management solution.

EPILOGUE

What Happens Next

The path forward is still unclear for most organizations, but remote work has at least opened up a whole new world of possibilities.

Go back to the way things were, with everyone working in the office? Make home the new, permanent workplace? Or embrace a future where employees work from here, there, and everywhere in between?

Whatever the outcome, one thing is certain: Data-driven insights from digital experience management solutions such as Lakeside Software's Digital Experience Cloud will help guide the way.

Powered by Lakeside's DEM solution, SysTrack, the Digital Experience Cloud platform can scale to millions of endpoints per instance across geographies, securely gathering more than 10,000 data points every 15 seconds from the edge — even when users are disconnected.

Using these advantages, organizations gain visibility across their digital environments and explore strategies that will eliminate digital friction and power productivity for their remote, hybrid, or on-site workforce.

Some of key areas in which Lakeside can help include:

End-user experience management

Improve end-user experience and productivity through expanded IT visibility, end-user experience scoring, self-help engagements, persona-based segmenting, and other insights.

Digital workplace planning

Streamline cost-effective strategies for right-sizing setups, VDI migration projects, and deploying cloud-based services.

Service desk operations

Take a more proactive approach to IT support by harnessing artificial intelligence capabilities for quicker remediation, ITSM optimization, automation, and "level 0" support.

IT asset optimization

Track service performance and resource usage over time, and also identify unused/underused apps for software rationalization and license management.

Using Lakeside's DEM capabilities also helps organizations establish digital experience scoring as a high-level key performance indicator (KPI), allowing business leaders to measure and track productivity over time. These KPIs will also help C-suite executives gauge the impact remote or hybrid work has on business outcomes — including technology innovation, better employee retention and recruitment, and higher IT cost savings and ROI — and determine once and for all whether the "new normal" is a sustainable, productive part of operations.

Because whether remote work is the next evolutionary step or merely a part of an increasingly diverse work culture, building a better future starts with better experiences.



7 KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Remote work isn't going anywhere.

Many big-name companies around the world — including Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co., Twitter, Facebook, REI, Fujitsu, Shopify, Siemens, and Revolut — have officially made remote work part of their future business plans. The percentage of permanently remote workers is projected to double in 2021 as well.

2 Productivity is key to the future of remote work.

Can productivity from remote work reach, or even exceed, pre-Covid levels? That depends a great deal on employee well-being, engagement, and good digital experiences, which are vital for high-quality work performances.

3 Remote work experience is the new focus.

As organizations use remote work in some form to move beyond the challenge of maintaining business continuity, managing digital experiences and improving productivity for remote workers will be the next critical steps.

4 Digital disruptions threaten EUX and productivity.

With just an internet connection and basic hardware keeping remote workers on task, technical issues can become especially distressing.

5 IT faces visibility, support, and resource right-sizing challenges with a distributed workforce.

Remote work structures are making it difficult to maintain digital environments, apps, cloud services, devices, and good digital employee experience.

6 DEM holds the solution to many remote work challenges.

Data is key for providing the expanded visibility and actionable insights needed to support remote workers and build better IT strategies.

7 Lakeside's Digital Experience Cloud powers productivity.

Lakeside's cloud-native, SysTrack-powered solution gives IT and organizations the tools they need to take remote work productivity to the next level.

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About Lakeside

Lakeside Software is a leader in digital experience management. We develop software that provides the visibility IT teams need to design and support productive digital workplaces. Learn more at www.lakesidesoftware.com.