
Five things Covid-19 has taught us about climate action

Tracy O'Rourke, CEO of Vivid Edge, looks at five things that Covid-19 has taught us about climate action.

We are unprepared

Both climate and COVID-19 are global threats that have not been sufficiently visible for the world to respond – with devastating consequences. As COVID-19 emerged, each nation and each person had to rapidly adjust to this sudden and unknown destructive force on our lives and economies.

While climate risk is starting to be appreciated, I believe it is still regarded by many as a steady gradual decline and a problem that governments and large industry must solve.

Climate catastrophe will strike suddenly and unannounced, at an unknown time, and potentially impacting many nations. Imagine for a moment that there is a seismic climate catastrophe due later this year that could be stopped with just one action by each person and each business, what would you do?

Do it, now.

We are capable of so much more

We were able to do so much more than we expected when we put our hearts and minds to it. Responding to global crises can be so daunting that it breeds inertia. In my home country, Ireland, one of the things we are particularly proud of is our ability to thrive in adversity.

Our history has bred a survival instinct, a phenomenal sense of community and an entrepreneurial spirit. These characteristics are not preserved for the Irish. If COVID-19 on a global scale has taught us one thing it is that we were able to rapidly change how we work and how we live, overcoming obstacles we would not have believed possible. This is not to understate the pain that this pandemic has caused, rather to appreciate the scale of what has been achieved across public and private sector organisations, in families and communities. The same is true for climate. So much more is possible when we are motivated to look beyond obstacles to find solutions.

A common threat can move mountains

There have been many green shoots through the shock of COVID-19. One of the most incredible in my country has been the private and public health systems collaborating in the face of a terrifying common enemy. The health administration system in Ireland has been problematic and complex, who would have thought that this was feasible?

For climate action, how can we work more collaboratively across public and private sectors?

There seems to be much red tape and administrative complexity hindering real change. As an example, there are some excellent green energy grants available but the administration systems around them can be so cumbersome that project sponsors lose heart.

It can be difficult for innovative delivery models to be adopted into grant systems, procurement systems or tax relief systems and yet the International Energy Agency confirms that availability of new and innovative funding mechanisms is possibly the greatest challenge to meeting climate action targets.

We need to remove barriers and progress in a spirit of partnership; think more strategically and more collaboratively across the public and private sector to instigate real change.

A new way of living

Across the world we have had a beautiful glimpse of a life without traffic: birdsong in the cities; mountain goats roaming the streets of Llandudno, Wales; a deer walking across a pedestrian crossing in Nara, Japan; a herd of buffalo walking along an empty highway in New Delhi; a sea lion is on a sidewalk near Buenos Aires, Argentina.

We have discovered that entire workforces can substantially relocate home without a drop in productivity. Some home situations are challenging, but in a large organisation, I am involved with, over 60% of the workforce surveyed expressed a preference to continue working at home, at least some of the time.

With commercial retail and leisure outlets stripped away, we have rediscovered the simple things in life – walking, reading, eating, gardening, family time. I have lived in the same area of Dublin for twenty-five years and was astounded to discover a secluded hill walk on my doorstep that we never knew was there!

Over time we will emerge from lockdown and return to a new norm; a better one if we are smart. Many of us will dare to make bold changes to our lifestyle, changes we did not believe were possible.

It may seem that sustainability is paused while the world navigates this invasive virus, but those of us who are involved in the sector are seeing a renewed commitment to do more as businesses find

their way forward. Our European funding partner expects the last quarter of 2020 to be the busiest period ever!

Climate action is part of the solution

When a crisis happens, resilience is the name of the game. Maximising cash balances are top priority, to ensure companies have the resources to last the course. A close second is reducing costs.

In our experience, there is substantial energy waste across businesses through using equipment that works but is no longer efficient. We believe most businesses, large and small, are wasting 30% or more of their energy bill. Cutting energy consumption is a smart way to reduce costs without impacting customers or sales.

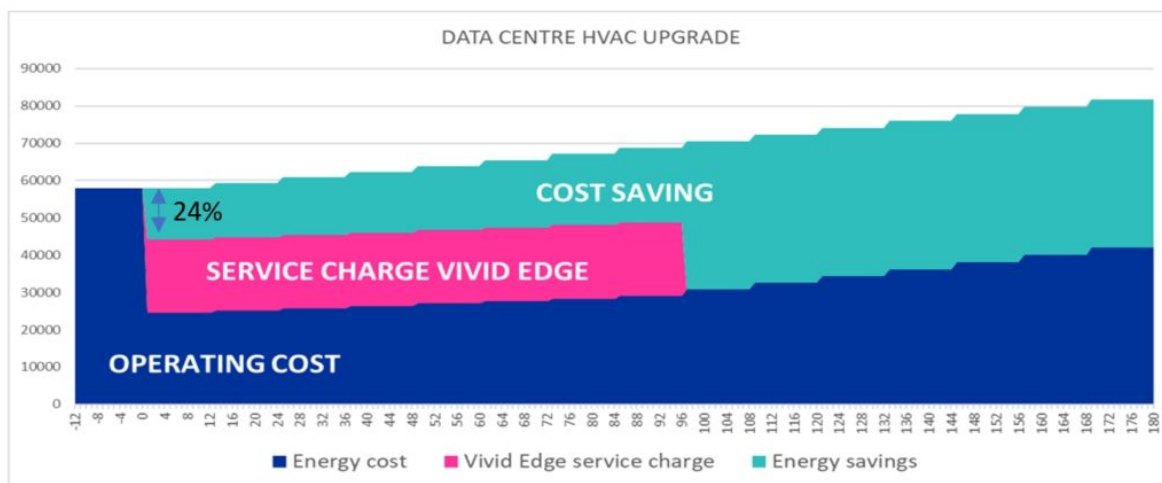
It is such an overlooked opportunity.

A core reason for this is the desire to preserve capital, but models such as Vivid Edge's energy efficiency service model are a smart way to reduce energy consumption and carbon footprint without requiring any capital, and the energy savings can cover the cost of our service fee.

Case study

We profile below the business case for a data centre space-cooling retrofit, replacing ten-year old assets, in a facility that consumes 20GWh per annum.

The equipment has a useful life of fifteen years and the service contract is delivered over an eight-year term. The project delivers 24 per cent reduction in operating costs after paying the service charge and saves almost 1600 tonnes of carbon emissions, equivalent to driving over 200 cars non-stop around the earth.



In this example, a project that was not selected due to other business priorities can be fully self-funding and require no capital under a service model approach. It enables businesses to implement energy efficiency measures beyond their capital budgets.

COVID-19 landed without warning and took many casualties in its wake. It tested our resilience, our leadership, our compassion, our ability to collaborate. While we await a vaccine, it has placed us in a much stronger position, globally, to respond to a further pandemic.

There is much to learn from this experience that is relevant for climate action. Indeed, reducing energy consumption is a smart element of any COVID-19 recovery plan.

Let climate action be part of your response to COVID-19.

For more information on the data centre business case, visit [Vivid Edge](#).

By Tracy O'Rourke

Published: 30 July, 2020