

## Hey! What's New? 2024-99

### As You Head Back to the Office, Zoom Promises That It's Still Relevant

An article on the BBC webpage, written by Alex Christian, says that, for many, Zoom rose to prominence during the pandemic era of working at home in pajamas. Schools held virtual classes on the platform during lockdowns and friends gathered there when they couldn't meet in person. With offices shut, demand reportedly surged from 10 million daily meeting participants to 200 million in March 2020

But as lockdowns lifted, in February 2023, CEO Eric Yuan made a surprising announcement: the company that helped millions of people work from home wanted their own employees back in the office in person. Changing predictions about the future of work prompted a rethink: now, Zoom wants to be known for more than "Zoom calls."

"If our customers use the office, we do too," says Smita Hashim, who joined Zoom as chief product officer in January 2023, just before the company's restructuring. "It means we can make our products even better."

Zoom's new workplace focus extends across hardware and software. Both incorporate AI. For example, its Intelligent Director product leverages algorithmically-selected views of in-person meeting participants, so virtual colleagues see them in a Zoom gallery view – although it does require high-definition cameras that are sold separately. And, following the likes of Microsoft Copilot and Google's Gemini, Zoom has released its own always-on automated assistant for work – an AI Companion that uses generative AI to provide meeting summaries, message drafts and meeting room recommendations.

According to the company, says Christian, this means that Zoom's business "is about far more than video-call. It wants to be regarded as a workplace company – and known for Zoom Workplace, its suite of collaborative tools."

In this article, Hashim talks to the BBC – via Zoom, of course – about the company's transition to the workplace, the evolving role of the physical office and the future of AI at work.

The physical setup is very important to customers – and therefore to Zoom, too, she points out. "The future of work is flexible: 65% of our employees don't live near an office and work remotely. But teams still want to come in and collaborate seamlessly. Alongside human connection, we wanted to be able to test our products. We can only do so if we're in the conference room, too.

"When we meet each other face-to-face, some creative work, brainstorming and decision making becomes easier. We may now have generative AI writing up meeting notes and online whiteboards, but there's still something really engaging physically going over and writing something down as colleagues gather. Some in-person time is energizing – that's why we want to offer the opportunity for all our employees to do it, that's why see our customers also doing it."

Hashim loves that Zoom is well known to so many and they use us for connecting all the time. But, she adds, "we see the future of Zoom as really an AI-driven open collaboration platform that modernizes the work experience. We've gone in this direction based on customer feedback. We've always had video calls, and built-in phone infrastructure, chat capabilities and now Zoom AI

Companion. Our AI works in the background to even recommend a desk for employees to sit near their teams for their office days.”

Hashim is seeing growing comfort and usage among customers. “But there are still worries over security and privacy of data and assets – they often go through a rigorous process before turning on AI Companion. And they ask us hard questions related to security – as they should. We've also taken the position – the right one – that we never use any of our customers' conversation data to train our AI model or third-party ones. And we give controls to customers to turn individual features on and off, so they have control.”

As generative AI becomes better, she concludes, “it's going to become more of an agent for teams to work on their behalf, sending messages such as, 'These customer requests came in overnight, I've set up meetings for you to talk through them'. People are burned out by constant mundane tasks. The hope is that AI frees up time so employees can work on energizing and engaging jobs instead. We're working on that now.”