



The IT Response to Blackout Tuesday

June 02, 2020

By: [Michelle Bailey](#), [Rory Duncan](#), [Curtis Price](#), [Leslie Rosenberg](#)

IDC's Quick Take

Blackout Tuesday, on June 2, 2020, aims to put a moratorium on business as usual across many industries in the hopes of raising awareness to the Black Lives Matter movement and the social injustices and inequalities that resulted in the tragic murders of George Floyd (in Minneapolis, Minnesota), Breonna Taylor (in Louisville, Kentucky), and Ahmaud Arbery (in Glynn County, Georgia). This IDC Link highlights the actions that many IT leaders are taking in support of racial justice, in the hopes of affecting a positive change among their employees, partners, customers, and communities.

News Highlights

The start of June 2020 marks a unique and unsettling time in the world when the confluence of the COVID-19 impact conjoins with the escalating, national civil unrest of Black Lives Matter protests and subsequent riots. Individual states and municipalities have been working to restore order and calm tensions while allowing citizens to express their frustration at the system that has brought Americans to a place of civil unrest. Meanwhile, at the national level, there are still conflicting messages, confusion, and the lack of a defined strategy on how we will ever move forward to a safe, productive, and inclusive society.

This week, many technology leaders have taken to social media and company blog posts to express their own personal frustration and support of the Black Lives Matter movement while laying bare the inequalities of our social systems, especially in light of COVID-19 as Black communities are feeling the brunt of the disease.

While each executive's comments have been relatively genuine, it is more important to recognize that these IT executives are taking a lead in having difficult conversations surrounding inequality and injustice and are empowering their employees to reflect and extend these conversations in their own communities. The more people that talk about these challenging issues, the less frightening it is to have these important and difficult conversations.

IDC's Point of View

Leadership Matters, Authenticity Is Essential, and Allyship Is a Differentiator

CEOs from Cisco, Microsoft, Dell, AWS, Google, Apple, HPE, and Intel each released statements or financial support, condemning bigotry, institutionalized racism, and inequality. These CEOs underscored solidarity and unity in their messaging, highlighting the ongoing importance of greater diversity and inclusivity within their organizations and globally. More importantly, key executives spoke personally of how this period is impacting their employees and local communities. This step by these technology leaders pushes well beyond offering generalized support, extending into allyship by using their position of power to offer aid and advocate for change. For some, this has meant an intentional interruption to business, taking time to step back and allow their constituencies to act. This leadership approach recognizes that the future for IT organizations increasingly revolves around building relationships (not

just products) and that trust is driven by being accountable and having a consistent corporate point of view — or else face being seen as opportunistic or disingenuous. These leaders recognize that there is no single "silver bullet" to solve inequality and that the private sector has an important and influential role to play in what has historically been considered issues of policy or politics. Further:

- **Cisco CEO Chuck Robbins**, a longtime humanitarian, took a bold step yesterday in cancelling the annual Cisco Live U.S. conference. He also donated \$5 million to charities committed to ending racism and discrimination. The event of more than 30,000 attendees had moved to a virtual conference format in response to COVID-19. As an explanation, Robbins noted, "We don't believe the time is right to host an event in the middle of this tragic moment in our history. Our hope is that we use this time to process, heal, and define the actions we will take as organizations and individuals to make a difference and move forward towards a better, more inclusive world." Later, in an open letter, Robbins stated, "How we respond will be an important moment in our nation's history. We at Cisco will lead in these efforts... We have never shied away from the tough conversations or tackling challenges... We must lean in to our conscious culture..."
- **Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella** tweeted, "There is no place for hate and racism in our society. Empathy and shared understanding are a start, but we must do more. I stand with the Black and African American community, and we are committed to building on this work in our company and in our communities." Microsoft has also been using its social media sites to repost messages from the Black community at Microsoft.
- **Google CEO Sundar Pichai** posted on LinkedIn over the weekend: "Today, on U.S. Google and YouTube homepages, we share our support for racial equality in solidarity with the Black community and in memory of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others who don't have a voice. For those feeling grief, anger, sadness, and fear, you are not alone."
- **Dell Technologies Chairman and CEO Michael Dell** shared his sentiments with employees and on Twitter on Monday: "The murder of George Floyd is an atrocity. We all stand in horror, grieving as a nation alongside his family and his community. To see a man killed, a life ended cruelly and senselessly, is something that will haunt me forever. But for people of color in communities all over this country and around the world - that footage is not a surprise, it is all too familiar. The fault lines of our society are laid bare. From the devastating and disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 to the devastating impacts of police brutality, the long-standing racial injustice in America that began 400 years ago is impossible to ignore. And the people who have been ignored are now demanding to be heard. We are listening." Dell Technologies also supported space for tough conversations among its community and has been reaching out internally to Black employees on how to build an organization where we all feel safe and valued. He also stated, "I am optimistic about what we've built at Dell... I've always believed diversity is power. It's how we win and win the right way. We can lead by example into our inclusive culture. We can lead by example and surround each other in love and support when we need it most."
- **AMD CEO Lisa Su** announced contributions to the NAACP and the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Foundation. In her comments this week she said, "Recent events are a painful reminder of the work still ahead to end racism and social injustice. Together, we can and must make something good come from this unacceptable situation. @AMD will do our part to help our employees and communities effect systemic and lasting change starting with contributions to the @NAACP and the @HBCUFoundation."

The Private Sector Takes the Lead on Awareness and Responsibility

As the world is in a state of compounding crises (i.e., COVID-19, record unemployment, financial market declines, and civil unrest), citizens are looking for leadership. At the state and local level, there have been guidelines and action. But, at the national level, there has been no defined strategy across any of these crises. Typically, complex societal issues are discussed and managed by policy makers and educators, and some strides have been made. But, in this new reality, a new infusion of ideas and action has been needed to accelerate change. As a result, the market has seen the private sector bring thought leadership, new [solutions](#), community activism, and philanthropy in support of their employees, customers, and communities. Examples include taking personal time to ensure personal and family wellness, in-kind and cash donations to frontline causes and the development of problem-solving technology solutions such as Webex for schools, connectivity for underserved communities, and [incident response for hospitals](#). IDC believes it will be the grassroots, community-based action that will help get citizens back on their feet and the empowerment by the private sector to help them get there.

The Rising Importance of Intersectionality

In many ways, life in the corporate tech world is a microcosm of broader societal life. Many of the societal challenges that different groups confront daily often find their way into corporate environments. Old ideals, traditions, stereotypes, and beliefs permeate an organization's structure and introduce a level of friction that can act as a counterbalance to the corporate goals and mission statements of being a diverse and inclusive organization. For individuals who challenge societal norms on multiple fronts and face discrimination across more than one aspect of race, gender, age, religion, or abilities, succeeding in a technology organization can feel especially overwhelming and isolating.

Tech companies that involve diversity and inclusion as part of their mission must constantly demonstrate their commitment to achieving the mission not only through words but also through action. Recognizing the societal challenges that impact groups within an organization is the sign of an aware organization, but displaying the **will** to affect positive change is the sign of an "action oriented" organization.

The recent events in the United States have presented an opportunity for companies to stand up, show support, and speak out against racism wherever it exists. Actions like these from tech heavyweights such as Apple, Cisco, Dell, and Microsoft are important for all groups that deal with injustices both inside and outside of the workplace. These leaders see themselves as "change agents" in the broader society, and they see their workplaces as places of tolerance and understanding.

For groups under the broader umbrella of diversity and inclusion, the commitment, support, and actions taken by tech leaders at this time highlight their willingness to act on issues that they believe in and that have an impact on groups within their employee base. This should create a sense of unity among these groups and inspire trust that the issues most important to them are also issues for which their organizations are willing to fight. In the end, the coordination, communications, and solidarity within these groups is critical to pursuing agendas that seek to drive organizational and societal changes on issues that are common to all groups.

Technology as a Force at Play

The broad use of technology among consumers and technology employees has played a major factor in the response to the civil unrest this past week and the effective response from technology organizations:

- **Social media** has emerged as an essential tool for reporting, listening, and understanding and, in many ways, as a substitute for roundtables and town halls that have historically led to improved empathy and understanding. While social media has had its fair share of being hijacked and weaponized for inciting violence and misinformation, overwhelmingly, the response to Blackout Tuesday has been universal.
- **Fundraising platforms** have been an important agent for financial support. For example, a Twitter request for donations to the Brooklyn Community Bail Fund resulted in more than 50,000 entities donating \$1.8 million in support of the nonprofit whose mission is to challenge racism, inequality, and injustice in the criminal legal system and the immigration and deportation regime.
- **Virtual events** have meant that technology organizations can be nimble in their ability to respond to real-time crises and delay messaging during inappropriate social impact events.
- **Civilian video** has made the greatest impact. There is no single technology that has played a bigger role in uncovering the hidden and systemic racism and the accompanying violence. To be seen is to be believed. The impact of civilian video exposes the breadth of and impact on the lives of the African American community.

We are at an important social juncture where citizens in a democratized society can do and should do better. That has been a consistent call to action over the past few days. Hearing and seeing actions from some of the largest technology companies — empowering their employees and reassuring their customers and partners — prove that these companies can not only solve technology problems but also have a bigger purpose to help make lives better for us all.

Subscriptions Covered:

[Diversity, Inclusion and Women in IT](#), [Technology for Social Good](#)

Please contact the IDC Hotline at 800.343.4952, ext.7988 (or +1.508.988.7988) or sales@idc.com for information on applying the price of this document toward the purchase of an IDC or Industry Insights service or for information on additional copies or Web rights. Visit us on the Web at www.idc.com. To view a list of IDC offices worldwide, visit www.idc.com/offices. Copyright 2020 IDC. Reproduction is forbidden unless authorized. All rights reserved.