

WHITE PAPER:

The New Normal IT Survival Guide

Business as usual is no more. The traditional workplace has been transitioning for more than 30 years, with the advent of computers and a host of other innovations changing the way people work and what they do each day. Automation allows organizations to streamline their workflow, eliminate mundane tasks and reduce manual labor. What was a slow shift to remote work accelerated with the pandemic and heightened the need for work-from-home (WFH) initiatives, cybersecurity awareness and defense, unified communications and cloud computing.

All of those moves are taxing already overwhelmed IT departments. With workers in disparate locations, it is not easy, or in some cases, physically possible, to provide basic on-site services to those team members. Nonetheless, many companies are digitally transforming their workflows to adapt to the current business environment and rely on technology more now than ever before.

Those are important points to remember in “the new normal.” While the business community may have been familiar with, or in the early stages of, adopting flexible work schedules and cloud, the COVID-19 pandemic forced many “non-essential” organizations to embrace new options and shift mindsets quickly. Many organizations are transforming to digital workflows to adapt to the “new normal” and relying on technology more than ever.

Unfortunately, while the computer age had arrived years earlier, many businesses had yet to grasp all the power that the latest innovations had to offer. The COVID-19-induced work transitions did not always go smoothly. Between the challenges of moving people and technology, implementing new policies, and connecting and securing each system, errors occurred, and employees struggled. Cybercriminals tailored their attacks to take advantage of the situation and caused even more disruptions.

Organizations with proven WFH strategies avoided most of those issues. With remote-enabled technologies, cloud computing, unified communications, and other secure systems in place, many of those businesses could seamlessly and quickly scale offsite operations and transition employees to a more permanent work-from-home (WFH) situation. Previously implemented cloud solutions and remote management capabilities lessened the issues and lowered the adoption curve. That adoption undoubtedly contributed to 62% of employed Americans reporting in a Gallup® poll that they were working from home during the COVID-19 crisis.¹

Technology is a “new normal” enabler. Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, the latest IT innovations are providing businesses with greater efficiency and increasing flexibility. New technologies allow

Cyberthreats Soar with Uncertainty

Cybercriminals love news and events, new regulations and other attention-getting activities. Curious employees may open links or files infected with spyware and compromise their companies' security posture.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a perfect example, with a 26% increase in the volume, severity and scope of cyberattacks in the initial month, according to the Center for Internet Security. Businesses should be mindful of the risks that uncertainty brings, especially for employees in a remote or WFH environment. Recent threats include search engine spamming and ransomware attacks on personal devices.

Phishing: An attack used to steal data or extort funds. Attackers fool victims into opening emails, instant messages, or texts and opening a malicious link or file, which installs malware, encrypts data, or steals information.

Social Engineering: A scheme to manipulate people into giving up confidential information, passwords, and other credentials, or providing access to protected systems. Phishing emails offering COVID health advice are a great example.

Ransomware: A form of malware that encrypts files before demanding a ransom from the victim to restore access to the data. Even those with a VPN in place are not immune from ransomware attacks on personal devices.

1. Gallup Inc. April 3, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/306695/workers-discovering-affinity-remote-work.aspx>

leaders to make quicker decisions and smoothly transition vital parts of their operations with little disruption. These innovations help organizations overcome new challenges with fewer headaches. With all the unknowns that businesses face today, from the global pandemic and natural disasters to increasing government regulations, the value of IT systems and support has never been higher. Investing in the right solutions and IT services partners may not alleviate every organizational problem, especially those controlled by outside forces, but companies typically save time and money resolving issues with those valued resources in place.

According to Global Workplace Analytics, businesses can save more than \$11,000 per employee per year in real estate and utility costs, absenteeism, turnover and productivity by adopting WFH policies.² In areas where commercial property and living expenses are high, those savings could be substantially higher. Employees gain back part of their lives and pay no gas or parking expenses.

There is no reason for businesses to wait for another pandemic to prepare for the next new normal. With a host of available technologies, including cloud services, mobility solutions, cybersecurity measures, remote monitoring and management, and productivity tools, as well as co-managed IT options, it is easier than ever to revolutionize the workplace for any size company.

The Evolution and Ongoing Challenges of Traditional Workspaces

Over the past century, relatively few things have changed related to office operations. Though the advent of new technologies has provided employees with more capabilities and efficiencies, many of the mindsets and processes remain the same. Computers do provide work teams with greater access to information, remove some of the complexities of certain operations and automate mundane tasks. However, most employees follow the same procedures and work in similar environments as their parents and grandparents.

More recent shifts could have a more significant and longer-lasting impact. Remote and flexible workspaces are reshaping where, when, and, in some cases, how companies engage with their employees and customers. Accelerated adoption of unified communications solutions and other remote technologies are helping to keep everyone connected.

This transition is more than a WFH option. Companies are untethering employees from the traditional office setting and giving workers more freedom on where and when they perform their job responsibilities. While WFH was a consideration for relatively few companies before the pandemic (as low as 7%, according to some researchers), many businesses are reevaluating the opportunities after experiencing positive results.

Workspace realignment must support an organization's primary mission. In some cases, remote work may not be a perfect option for everyone. For example, production line workers in manufacturing plants, retailers and most hotel staff members must be on-site to carry out their job responsibilities.

While remote work options are highly beneficial, implementing and managing those systems with travel restrictions in place and ongoing health concerns can be a challenge. Even large enterprise

2. *Global Workplace Analytics*, <https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/>

companies with vast IT resources, including highly skilled tech professionals, realized they would need help handling all those issues in the new norm and partnered with managed services providers to deliver long-term support and fill other gaps.

With all the unknowns that businesses face today, from the global pandemic and natural disasters to increasing government regulations, the value of IT systems and support has never been higher.

Expect New Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic is just one of the many reasons for expanding employees' work environment options. First, no one can predict when mass illnesses, natural disasters or weather extremes will force businesses to close, even if just for a day or two. As more organizations condition their employees to rely on a WFH option, local, state or federal government officials will be under even more pressure to shut down non-essential businesses if emergencies arise.

The new norm gives companies greater flexibility when facing any potential closure or disaster. Remote worksites can be compelling pieces of a business

continuity plan, protecting essential communications systems and data and ensuring the organization can support its customers in times of need.

Another challenge organizations face is natural disasters. No one can predict with great certainty where and when a hurricane or flood will affect their community and how much damage it could inflict on a business. WFH environments can minimize downtime and allow companies to restore essential parts of their operations quickly.

Without remote options, any of those emergencies could disrupt communications with employees, customers, suppliers and other associates. Future uncertainties could interrupt supply chains, affecting the delivery of fuel and other vital supplies that allow employees to travel to and from offices. Sustaining employee productivity through any of these scenarios will be difficult, if not impossible, without WFH options.

The rising costs of supporting traditional office spaces is a challenge many businesses have been grappling with for decades. As the headcount increases, there is a subsequent upsurge in business expenses. Before the pandemic, many commercial real estate markets were booming, and mortgages, rent, taxes, parking, physical security and maintenance costs were growing at an alarming rate. Even if the demand for office space drops, companies that adopt remote workforce initiatives can still cut a substantial amount of expenses from their bottom lines.

The Workplace of Tomorrow

When intelligently designed and professionally implemented, the new norm can be a significant business enhancer. Several other factors support the movement toward flexible workplaces. First, organizations can exponentially grow their pool of potential employees by recruiting in distant geographic regions. Rather than compete with enterprise organizations for quality talent, especially

in larger metropolitan areas, smaller businesses can cast a wider net for similarly, if not more highly, gifted employees. Remote work options help companies attract those highly skilled professionals who may not want to leave family and friends or prefer not to relocate due to financial hardships or other quality-of-life choices. Casting a wider geographic net also allows companies to attract a more diverse workforce. Bringing in people with different backgrounds and customs can spur new ideas and encourage strategic planning.

Economically challenged cities and rural areas are great recruiting areas for companies with job openings where remote work is an option. Of course, applicants must meet specific criteria to qualify, including a work location with minimum internet speeds and other lines of communication.

Employee satisfaction is another opportunity in the new norm. A recent survey found that 77% of respondents appreciate the flexibility of working at home, with 69% indicating satisfaction with their well-being in a WFH situation.³

Quality Communications Systems Are Essential

Since aspects of the new norm often take place outside of a corporate office, with some employees possibly hundreds, if not thousands, of miles away, discussions and collaboration can be difficult without the right tools. Businesses must take a new approach with their communications systems. Even organizations that fail to adopt a remote work model will need upgrades to ensure that their customers and business partners can effectively reach the right people and access the proper information.

The latest generation of communications platforms includes voice, video and text. Email remains the business standard, and many of the new options can leverage those systems to deliver messages in multiple formats, including hosted VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol). Whether employees work from home, in a corporate office or flexible workspace, or from the road, these technologies allow them to talk, share information and collaborate seamlessly.

Some organizations may need to upgrade their infrastructure to attain those capabilities. For systems to operate at peak performance levels, with secure connections to the cloud and other platforms, reliable networks are a must. Qualified personnel should evaluate internet speeds, bandwidth and basic security precautions, and additional protection measures should be put in place before remote teams can access any systems behind the corporate firewall (see sidebar).

Build for the Future

Companies that steadily invest in new technologies and consistently reevaluate their employee work environments typically reap higher profits and experience less turnover than less proactive competitors. Those costs of improvements are offset by the benefits, including greater efficiency, higher customer and employee satisfaction, and lower expenses.

³ Global Workplace Analytics' Global Work-from-Home Experience Survey <https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/global-work-from-home-experience-survey>

Continual evaluation and transformation should be a standard practice in the business community. Those who fail to understand the value of those ongoing actions and investments can look at the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses that already embraced cloud solutions, mobile technologies and remote work were able to carry on with few interruptions at the onset of the pandemic. At the same time, their rivals scrambled to catch up.

Supply chain issues in the computer industry were the source of disruption for many businesses. The inability to procure laptops, network equipment and other vital supplies critical for building a WFH environment slowed implementations and led some to utilize personal devices for work, further compromising the company's cybersecurity stance. Those businesses that invested in remote work options before the crisis experienced fewer workplace disruptions and technology issues.

Enterprise companies were the early adopters of the WFH mantra. With large teams of technology professionals capable of developing and supporting a variety of new devices and solutions, these organizations were well-positioned to make successful workplace transitions.

Smaller businesses can now realize the same benefits of WFH without making significant capital investments. With the latest technologies and access to cost-effective outsourced IT professionals, it is easier than ever for any size organization to follow a similar path towards innovation.

The New IT Environment

In today's rapidly changing business world, technology truly is a game-changer. Companies that invest in the timesaving and distance-enabling innovations not only gain a competitive advantage but help ensure their survival. Technology allows businesses to overcome many of the unknowns that may come their way. Companies are using Zoom, Webex, Microsoft Teams and a variety of unified communications platforms to replace face-to-face discussions and virtual desktops and other cloud-based applications to boost productivity. Remote work-enabling solutions are business-critical in the new normal.

Essential Tech for the New Normal

No business should allow employees to access corporate systems without approved security safeguards in place. To start, the organization must update each device with the latest software updates and patches. A trained IT professional should evaluate the internet bandwidth and existing security protections for each potential remote environment, and when possible, make improvements to bring each site up to industry performance standards.

Here are some of the most essential technologies for the new normal:

Identity Management (IdM): A framework of policies and technologies for ensuring that the proper people in an organization have secure and appropriate access to technology resources.

Unified Communications: Integrated technologies including IP telephony, voice mail, web and video conferencing, desktop sharing, instant messaging, UC and more. Unified communications exists to bring people together to connect, communicate and collaborate, sometimes referred to as the "3 Cs".

Windows Virtual Desk (WVD): A complete virtualization service running in the cloud that allows companies to deploy desktops and other applications to remote workforces.

Smart investments in IT and the people who design, implement and support those systems are the key. It is not just to improve productivity and enable WFH employees, but to strengthen the connectivity for everyone inside and outside the organization. For example, a recent IDC study found that more than 50% of respondents had difficulty communicating and collaborating with internal colleagues, with 43% suggesting those issues also extended to external stakeholders.⁴ Wise technology investments, like those listed below, can significantly improve those numbers.

- **Cloud services:** Virtual business tools like Microsoft 365® and Google's G Suite provide remote and on-site employees with a flexible way to manage email and documents, as well as chat and collaborate with coworkers and others.
- **Hosted VoIP:** These systems allow employees to take and make calls using their business extensions from virtually any location using a VoIP-enabled phone, PC or smartphone.
- **Advanced cybersecurity:** Employees working outside the corporate firewall using unknown networks creates additional risks. IT professionals recommend that businesses increase protection levels for remote workers by requiring the use of VPNs and utilizing remote monitoring and 24/7/365 Security Operations Centers (SOCs).
- **Co-managed IT:** An outside technology team expands and enhances internal IT capabilities. These partners may provide ongoing remote monitoring and management, multi-leveled help desks, on-site support and a variety of other services. Co-managed IT partners may also offer technology implementation and perform project work as needed.

The Elements of Co-Managed IT

Which services and solutions can MSPs provide to larger businesses?

Remote Monitoring and Management (RMM): Off-site supervision and control of IT systems (i.e., network devices, computers, servers) using agents and other managed services tools.

Professional Services Automation (PSA) Platforms: This software allows organizations to manage projects, track time and service tickets, plan resource usage and collaborate with contractors.

Help Desk: A department or support team responsible for answering users' technical questions and triaging support.

On-site Support: Technical assistance at the user's location. With WFH, many IT departments cannot address remote worksite issues and outsource those services.

Leverage Co-Managed IT to Navigate the New Normal

With employees working across the region, state, country or globe, multi-location organizations need a much more comprehensive support network than those with single facilities. No matter the size of a business, the increasing distances and growing complexity of these technologies make it difficult for staff members to design, implement and maintain every system. Even cloud solutions require some level of configuration and support expertise.

4. IDC Research blog, "Remote Work in the COVID-19 Era: Are We Ready?" March 16, 2020. <https://blogs.idc.com/2020/03/16/remote-work-in-the-covid-19-era-are-we-ready/>

The best option for many organizations, big or small, is to contract with outsourced managed services providers (MSPs) who can manage and protect their IT resources virtually anywhere. Remote work environments require constant attention. Without monitoring, management and ticketing systems in place, and skilled professionals available to assist, it is all too easy to overlook potential cybersecurity threats or systems issues. MSPs responsibly handle those duties for a large portion of the 32.5 million businesses in the United States, from single-employee firms to Fortune 500 organizations.

Outsourced IT professionals provide not only the new normal technology expertise these companies need but offer the peace of mind that business owners, big and small, need to weather whatever crisis lies ahead. MSPs fill the gaps and deliver constant, reliable support.

Supplement the IT Staff

Complexity drives specialization. In the new norm, businesses that focus more on their core operations and leverage their available resources wisely are prospering. Look at how companies like Amazon and Grubhub flourished with their delivery services during the pandemic. Or consider more local examples like neighborhood restaurants and flower shops. Many small businesses cut back on activities that provided a low return and began promoting new or existing services with higher demand in this new normal.

Organizations should look at IT the same way. Businesses that employ internal IT teams can refocus their efforts on automation projects that improve efficiencies, strengthen controls and reporting, and partner with MSPs to support WFH, cybersecurity or other areas of specialization. These co-managed IT arrangements have many advantages for everyone involved. With broad experience working with numerous organizations, MSPs can offer a host of best practices to help the team optimize its systems and processes. These outsource partners utilize technology management platforms that can oversee thousands of employees' workstations from a single computer, and triage potential issues, using internal and external resources, before they create more significant problems. Those services are crucial in the new normal.

*A recent survey found that
77% of respondents
appreciate the flexibility of
working at home,
with **69%**
indicating satisfaction with
their well-being in a WFH
situation.*

Imagine how the pandemic affected a company based in the UK with a North American headquarters in Chicago and several production facilities located in other cities around the US. Now add WFH options to the equation and figure out how an internal tech team can adequately support the ongoing needs of each user.

Without “boots on the ground” in each location, workers might wait days for a fix to their IT emergencies. Co-managed IT ensures local support and individualized services to address the unique needs of each worksite. Whether helping companies sustain secure and robust WFH environments or enhancing the capabilities of

in-house IT teams, these professionals are a cost-effective solution for businesses of any size. By leveraging outsource partners with co-managed IT capabilities, organizations can reduce their total

support costs while improving employee productivity and work satisfaction. Those can be significant competitive advantages in today's risk-averse business environment.

Co-managed IT puts business owners in the driver's seat. They can partner with MSP firms to augment their internal teams during off-hours, fill skills gaps, support remote teams or address any other areas of opportunity. With an expanded bench of outsourced professionals following industry standards and best practices, the reach and technical capabilities of that combined team are virtually unlimited.

Own the New Norm

Business operations will never be the same. Things have changed and organizations will continue to adapt to whatever new normal comes next. Savvy leaders are looking further ahead than ever and partnering with other skilled professionals to intelligently modify their business strategies and operations.

By continually evaluating work environments and cost structures, companies will gain insight on what the next new normal will look like and what projects or transitions should take priority. Investments in technology solutions and infrastructure will ease the burden for employees and business leaders.

Innovation and automation will lead the way. New tools that enable remote workers can increase productivity, profitability, and employee satisfaction and reduce turnover among team members and clients.

Organizations that optimally leverage their limited resources have a higher chance of prospering in the new normal. More companies are partnering with third parties to co-manage or augment tech support teams to maximize their IT investments. Expect that trend to continue as more organizations hedge their bets to prepare for the next new normal.

For help with your technology, contact your local TeamLogic IT office.

TeamLogic IT is a national provider of advanced IT management services for businesses. With locations across the U.S. and Canada, TeamLogic IT provides managed services, computer consulting and support services focused on helping companies minimize downtime and improve productivity. TeamLogic IT helps businesses compete better through the effective use of information technology.