

INNOVATE

FOR THE NEW NORMAL

A survey by Global Workplace Analytics and FlexJobs conducted last year found that only 66% of companies allowed remote work, and 16% were fully remote. The onset of the global coronavirus pandemic has now forced organisations of all sizes to work remotely.

This is going to become the new normal even after the threat of COVID-19 infections has passed, says Richard Firth, CEO of MIP Holdings. “The world of work will change forever. The epidemic has pushed fast forward on the digital worker. The maturing of tools has allowed companies to manage their people from home, and by and large, the major networks have held up. We have finally entered an era where the average employee will swap petrol for data, tar for fibre, roads for networks and buildings for clouds,” he says.

“If this happened just five years ago, the work from home strategy would have been far less successful. We believe this has been a perfect storm – technology and the epidemic collided at the right time!”

He adds that software tools like workflow, automation, mobile apps, IoT, near real-time analytics, Big Data, video and audio web conferencing, rules engines and the digital call centre have all contributed to the successful implementation of remote work. The key, however, has been in Business Process Socialisation (BPS), where workflow, people, applications and processes interact in real time to help employees complete their tasks.

“We Believe This Has Been
A PERFECT STORM”

“Some of our customers have managed to move their call centre staff to work from home, and BPS is allowing them to dynamically allocate calls and service customers in a distributed environment. Some clients in the financial services space have moved 100% of their staff home, and service levels have maintained really well throughout lockdown.”

According to Firth, the current remote work environment has highlighted a few glaring blind spots on the part of technology companies, which will need to be remedied as companies across the world make remote staff a standard part of their operations in the future. “Products like Zoom, Teams, Skype and House Party are operating system or hardware agnostic, making them ubiquitous because they can be used across platforms. Apple, for example, could get caught in the Blackberry messenger false sense of security. Apple only builds for Apple and they ignore ubiquity. Yet to be successful going forward, product vendors must ensure that products like Teams, Zoom, and so on, work across IOS and Android.”

He adds that it is rumoured that even Microsoft Azure runs more than 50% of its hardware on Linux. “This is a position that the previous executives at Microsoft would never have made, but they are obviously understanding that it is essential to have the right technology running the right areas of the business. The era of technology bigotry is dead. How many senior executives have sat in meetings where they are told we have to run on a specific platform or database instead of choosing the best tool for the job?”

The changes we are currently seeing are only going to intensify in the future as companies figure out how to gain more benefits from a remote workforce, and companies across the value chain will need to look at adapting how they work and what they offer to stay relevant, Firth says. “There have been many predictions around the changes that we will see as a result of COVID-19. Most of these have been centred on the short-term economic impacts of global lockdowns. Retail, for example, is under huge pressure as general retailers are doing very badly. Some have even threatened not to pay rent, so there’s no doubt that e-commerce is going to ramp up significantly. This makes it even more confusing that our Trade and Industry minister allows us to buy food from Checkers but not general merchandise from Takealot.com,” he says.

“But, the big elephant in the room is what is the experience in working from home is going to do to the office rentals market. Companies are realising that there is no longer a need to have an entirely office-bound workforce, and the savings in terms of rentals can be significant. MIP is already looking at space requirements, with an immediate minimum of 30% reduction in demand going forward. Landlords will have to adapt their offerings in the future, or risk going out of business. Whether companies offer technology, services, or physical goods, they will have to adapt to the way the world of work has changed, and start providing innovative alternatives to the old ways of doing things.”



By Richard Firth
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