

Key Digital

Empowering
your remote
workforce

Introduction

In the current climate, it's hard to imagine that remote working was not always commonplace. But in 2018, just over 8% of the workforce in the European Union said they worked from home.¹

On the whole, Europeans rely on physical workplaces. This is not due to a lack of demand from employees – when faced with two similar job offers 80% of people would turn down the position that didn't offer flexible working conditions.² Nor does it stem from a lack of technology – almost everyone has their own smartphones, computers and tablets that could enable them to work from home. It is primarily an infrastructure challenge, though there can also be cultural hurdles to overcome. Employers have to ensure that remote working is not only secure and productive from a business perspective, but employees' health and wellbeing is maintained.

The aim for remote work is to ensure business can continue to operate as normal regardless of a team's location, and to enable business continuity at times of disruption. The fundamental challenge of mass remote working is to make it as seamless and collaborative as if employees were working in the same building.

Yet, the challenge of establishing remote work is something many employees don't fully appreciate – they just expect their employers to get on with it. Key Digital's research has found that 74% of European workers believe that remote working and collaboration will be written into contracts in the future.³ Additionally, 60% of workers trust that their employers are investing in the technology now which will be needed to meet the workforce requirements of the future.

This paper will explore how businesses can overcome this challenge and create a remote working experience that delivers positive outcomes for the organisation and its staff. We have identified the three areas which must be addressed to ensure that continuity is upheld from central to remote working:

- **Enabling the entire organisation to productively and safely work remotely**
- **Protecting mission critical processes and information**
- **Keeping the remote workforce engaged and healthy**

1. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/coronavirusandhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019>
2. <http://assets.regus.com/pdfs/iwg-workplace-survey/iwg-workplace-survey-2019.pdf>
3. <https://www.ricoh-europe.com/insights/future-of-work/index.html>



Chapter One - Enabling remote working

Undoubtedly, some parts of your business or teams have been successfully remote working for some time. But most organisations face a challenge when empowering all business units to work remotely and enabling them to work at a standard that can ensure business continuity, even in times of great disruption. This is particularly true for mission critical areas of the business – such as accounts payable and receivable, operations and HR. Trust can also be an issue for employers initially, but this is often unfounded. In fact, 85% of businesses in a 2019 study confirmed that productivity actually increased in their business as a result of greater flexibility.⁴

Enabling your teams to work remotely goes beyond basic hardware and software considerations. On top of business performance, employers need to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of their remote workers. While working from the sofa may seem appealing, it does not encourage good posture and if done for a prolonged period, could result in longer term health issues. Avoiding this is easy for employers in the physical workplace (the value of the furniture market in Europe is a staggering €29.1 billion⁵), but harder to ensure for remote workers.

Getting the basics right

With most employees having their own internet connections and devices capable of performing work tasks, the temptation could be to let employees just log in and start work. But with business continuity, productivity and employee wellbeing of fundamental importance, employers should ensure workers have a consistent and safe remote working experience.

Here is a list of the basic equipment your employees need to productively and effectively work remotely, while protecting their health and wellbeing:

■ **An appropriate workspace:**

This will increase productivity and wellbeing – studies have shown that clutter in the workspace can increase stress and feelings of anxiety and impacts how the brain functions.⁶ Remote workers should have a desk large enough for a computer and other equipment and an adjustable chair so that a screen is at eye level and the keyboard can be used with straight wrists and forearms running parallel with the ground.⁷

■ **The right computer:**

A company issued computer is best practice as it allows you to install all necessary software and provide access permissions, giving your entire workforce a remote working experience. Where this is not possible, employees using their own device should have a PC or laptop with a minimum of 4GB RAM, a webcam and speakers.

■ **High-speed internet access:**

We recommend a minimum download speed of 50 mbps and upload speed 20 mbps, to enable multiple applications, cloud services and collaboration tools.

■ **Telephony:**

For flexible work and full remote work arrangements, the employee should be provided with a VoIP application that can act as an extension of the company's phone system.

■ **Additional monitors:**

Providing employees with multiple monitors is also advised as it can help to improve efficiency and assist with posture. Studies have shown that employees using multiple screens are 42% more productive.⁸

Collaboration and communication tools

Connectivity, communication and experience are the three core components of a productive remote workforce. One of the biggest advantages of supplying your teams with a company-issued laptop is that it enables remote working in a consistent way. This is not just best practice, it is the expectation. Key Digital research has found that 78% of European workers expect their employer to provide them with the tools to work collaboratively with their colleagues, regardless of their location.

Providing employees with a company laptop allows you to ensure security protocols are followed and that everyone has the right software installed – meaning that your entire workforce will have a consistent remote working experience.

This will have a significant impact on productivity but will also help foster collaboration and employee engagement. It means that employees can help each other with any challenges or questions – building a sense of teamwork and minimising the impact on IT support workers.

Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) and cloud-based services should be at the core of any remote working suite. These systems centralise key software and applications into one platform for communication via audio, video and instant messaging, and collaboration through features such as screen sharing and real-time document editing. These tools help bring your entire workforce to the remote working age even those with high customer contact. With UCaaS and cloud-based software, a call centre worker can conduct their job remotely in exactly the same way as if they were at the office.



One of the primary benefits of a unified communication service and cloud-based software suite is that it enables seamless communication and collaboration. It creates a consistent experience for each worker – software and hardware will work together harmoniously despite coming from different manufacturers. This interoperability is vital for productivity and collaboration. People can quickly and effectively talk to each other and edit work as easily as if they were sat side-by-side. This has natural productivity benefits, but it also helps to de-centralise workflows and ensure version control is maintained – limiting those nightmare scenarios where people's hard work is corrupted by server errors or multiple people accessing it at once.

There is also a growing variety of collaboration hubs which companies can employ such as Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex, Slack and Workplace by Facebook. For those businesses who do not yet have the economic resources, free versions of these tools are often available. However, although these tools have large capabilities, each business should evaluate how well they will support their teams working remotely.

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4. <https://www.iwqplc.com/global-workspace-survey-2019>
 5. <https://www.statista.com/outlook/17050000/156/office-furniture/united-king-dom#market-revenue>
 6. <https://hbr.org/2019/03/the-case-for-finally-cleaning-your-desk>
 7. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-sit-correctly/>
 8. <https://www.jonpeddie.com/press-releases/jon-peddie-research-multiple-displays-can-increase-productivity-by-42/>



Taking it to the next level with process automation

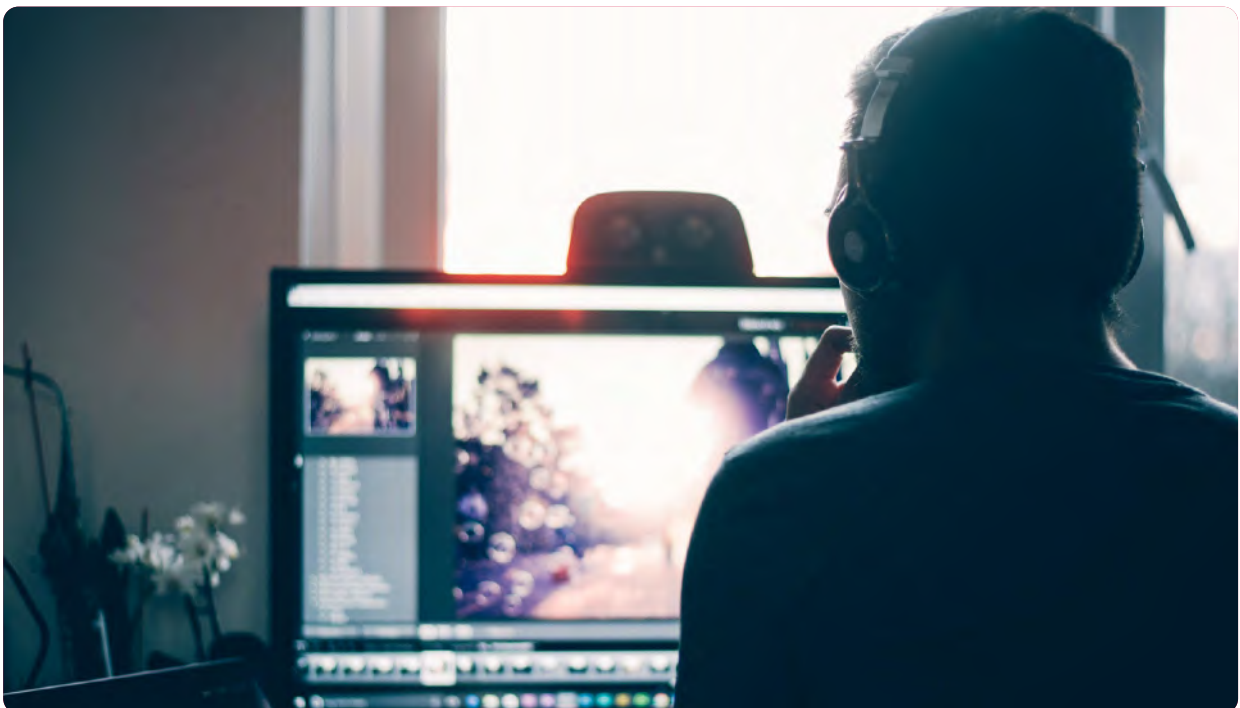
With the right infrastructure and collaboration tools, teams will be able to work productively and effectively. But to really take performance to the next level, you can move towards digitising and automating critical business workflows.

Process automation can be the piece that really lifts remote working to keep your business running as usual. It is particularly useful for business units such as procurement, invoicing, HR and mailroom – freeing up those teams to engage fully in more strategic tasks to drive the business forward. Not only does this boost productivity, it can eliminate those time consuming and repetitive tasks, which can be difficult to fully replicate outside of the office environment.

Automation had previously been a topic that brings trepidation to many employees, but attitudes in the workplace are shifting, as people are starting to better understand its advantages. Our recent research found that workers understand the benefits automation can deliver to them personally, with 75% of European workers wanting employers to leverage automation as a tool to improve their work/life balance.

Communication and engagement with employees about automation is key. Emphasis should be placed on how technology will be used to enrich tools such as intranets, or central knowledge bases to provide individuals access to all materials necessary to perform their tasks efficiently.

Remote workers, more than anyone else, want to feel informed. In this respect, companies and organisations need to provide all necessary information and resources, to empower their workers – and allow them to learn about the latest and greatest in the organisation – without wasting time searching for information.



Chapter Two - Protecting your business' vital information

Adopting a remote working model will understandably invoke some fears around keeping vital business and customer information secure. The losses stemming from data breaches are set to exceed \$5 trillion by 2024.⁹ But in tandem with this has been the progression in quality of security solutions, which when adopted, can provide business leaders with peace of mind.

Advances in virtualised environments, multi-factor authentication (MFA), and next-generation encryption have all made the prospect of secure remote working possible. Essential security controls such as firewall/network address translation traversal, encryption, and IP VPN deployment options should be a strategic priority for the entire remote working programme. The implementation of behavioural analytics can also help in detecting suspicious activity.

Security should not be left to employees to implement on their devices. It should be controlled and managed by the employer. Issuing a company laptop to remote workers brings with it improved ability to manage security permissions.

Acknowledging the obligations companies have is essential to safeguarding not only their data, but that of their customers. Failure to do so will not only result in a loss of reputation but also risks the large monetary penalties legislated by GDPR.



⁹ <https://www.juniperresearch.com/press/press-releases/business-losses-cybercrime-data-breaches>

Here are our tips to help ensure remote working does not compromise security:

- Education and training should be provided to all employees on basic security prevention practices – including how to spot suspicious activity.
- Establish clear procedures and protocols for remote working, including logging off and closing the computer when not in use.
- Users should be forced to use a strong password with a minimum of eight characters, including a combination of capitals and lower-case letters, numbers and a special character.
- Login details and passwords should not be written on pieces of paper and never written on a post it and stuck to a computer screen. A computer must be configured to manually enter passwords to the organisation's system and any website logins.
- Wireless connections used for remote working need to be private and secure.
- Data should be stored securely, either encrypted on the device or through secure cloud storage. Public cloud storage solutions should be avoided where possible.
- Those using personal devices for work purposes should store personal and company data in separate areas on the device and apply password requirements to access company information. A paid version of anti-virus software should be installed and renewed annually.
- Employees who live with multiple people should sign off the remote session or business applications whenever they leave their desk – to protect confidential or customer information.
- Operating systems and software updates should be working properly and updated automatically.
- A Microsoft firewall, or another firewall that may come with anti-virus, should be on and active.
- Company data should be backed-up at regular intervals, either to a company server, or through an appropriate cloud storage solution.
- If provided a laptop, the employee should not be allowed to download other applications without permission. If it's the employee's desktop or laptop, the policy should be that employees can only download applications that come from reliable sources.
- A periodic schedule should be established to check all remote devices to ensure security isn't compromised.



Chapter Three - Keeping your workforce healthy and engaged

Although the power of technology can address many of the challenges related to remote working, one area it can't support as effectively is ensuring a remote workforce continues to be engaged and looks after its health. Remote workers will benefit from a better work-life balance, however they may also encounter problems such as isolation. Workers may also face a range of unique challenges when working from home - especially in today's environment. They are juggling work with other external distractions such as childcare, chores and home dynamics. It is imperative that when adopting policies to ensure teams can work remotely, these policies ensure that a workforce's wellbeing is also prioritised.

Here is our advice for remote workers to ensure they stay healthy and their wellbeing is protected.

1. Create a morning routine:

Even though remote working does away with the commute to work, a routine to start and end the day is important to establish work and life boundaries. This could be something as simple as making a fresh pot of coffee to enjoy whilst reading the morning news or going for a run and stretch before sitting down to work.

2. Get dressed for work:

What you wear on Sunday morning is likely to differ from what you would put on for a Monday in the office. Maintaining that distinction, despite working from your home, prevents falling into the trap of becoming lazy and failing to give your work the attention it requires. It will also mean you are prepared for those ad hoc meetings done over video.

3. Maintain regular working hours:

With remote working comes the ability to work flexibly, fitting your job around day to day personal life matters such as home-schooling children or seeing to the repair of a household appliance. However, it is easy to lose the structure of a working day and it becomes easy to stay logged on to work late into the evening. Where possible try and maintain regular working hours, and track how disruptions have impacted your day to adjust your hours accordingly.

4. Create a dedicated workspace:

Replicating your work environment at home will make it easier to avoid distractions and help you stick to regular work hours. Doing this could entail setting out a room in your home to be used for a temporary office or dedicating an area of your living space. Doing this will also help maintain the routine of going to work.

5. Socialise with colleagues:

Use collaboration tools to continue to communicate with your colleagues. Feelings of loneliness, disconnection and isolation can develop when working remotely and away from the buzz of an office space.

6. Be present in meetings and be heard:

Not being physically present in a meeting room can easily lead to disengaging from the topic and changing focus to distractions such as emails or social media. To avoid this, you should treat conference calls as if you were in a room with the other participants, turning on your camera will help convince you of this. This will lead you to being both present and engaged with the task.

7. End the day with a routine:

Mirroring the first step, the day's end should be met with a routine signifying that work has finished for the day. This routine will differ depending on the individual. For some, it may be the simple action of shutting down your computer and returning the place you worked to its normal state. For others, it will be starting to prepare dinner. Both routines work, the importance lies in creating a division between your work and personal life.



Conclusion

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2020 will be marked as the watershed moment in which remote working became commonplace. Although it will have acted as a forceful push for some businesses, formalising makeshift policies and the hasty introduction of infrastructure, it will enhance your business now and prepare it for the future.

Andrew Ratcliffe, Managing Director, Key Digital

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Following the recommendations set out in this white paper will help maintain business as usual, while working from home. By retaining connectivity, companies will be able to work remotely, both effectively and productively; delivering business continuity, engagement and productivity benefits that are needed at this time.

Key Digital's main considerations for intelligent and effective remote work:

1. Ensure your teams have the basics in place - not just the technology, but the right workspace and equipment to safely and effectively work remotely.
2. Collaboration and communication are key - prioritise software and tools that enable your teams to seamlessly communicate with each other and consumers and collaborate on documents and tasks as if they were in the office.
3. Formalise security - ensure you have the right systems and processes to protect your company's vital information - either through remote IT infrastructure or the cloud. Educate and engage employees on security processes and practices.
4. Amplify remote work with process automation - this will boost productivity and employee morale, automating difficult and laborious workflows.
5. Out of sight, but not out of mind - the wellbeing of your workers should be of the highest priority. Help them create an environment that ensures remote working not only benefits the company, but the employee.





For more information:

01282 479466 | info@key-digital.co.uk | www.key-digital.co.uk

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