

Industry organisations seamless

One thing is certain in the new, scary and confusing world we now live in; people have become totally reliant on the UK's hardworking comms and IT providers who are keeping our hospitals, emergency services, food stores, logistic companies, government, civil services and utilities functioning, not to mention enabling millions and millions of people to work safely from home.

It has been well publicised that the UK lags behind other countries in the roll out of high bandwidth connectivity, so it's reassuring to hear that our ISP's can handle the additional workload of home-based employees. Andrew Glover, Chair of the Internet Services Providers' Association says: "ISPs are ready to handle any potential extra bandwidth and consistently assess the demands that are being put on their networks. Our members' networks are built to support 'evening peak' capacity, which generally means at least ten times the typical daytime (working hours) demand, driven by streaming video, sports content etc."

Now, and in the weeks to come, comms provider engineering teams will be risking their own health by entering customer premises - including hospitals and care homes - to ensure that on-premise servers are set up to support the inevitable increase in remote connections to accommodate the potential increase in traffic from their employees. It's also nice to hear of generosity and collaboration in such endeavours. Andrew Skipsey, managing director of Hampshire based M12 tells us: "Our customer service and engineers have helped hundreds of businesses and thousands of users seamlessly transition their comms set up to be able to work remotely and it's great to see vendors including Splicecom offering the remote options at no cost."

It would be astonishing if ICT channel businesses weren't able to implement their own business continuity procedures and rapidly utilise the collaboration tools they sell to enable their staff to work in isolation, but as the UK's faces an escalation in the rapid spread of COVID-19, it is interesting to learn how different teams are facing up to the challenge of this unprecedented crisis.



NATHAN MARKE
DWS

"100% of DWS staff are now working from home. We had well tested business continuity plans in place and knew that the technology would be straightforward. We have had a few niggles, which are to be expected but have been fixed quickly. More broadly, there have been reports across the business community of contention on cloud networks, and concerns have been expressed from many quarters about security in the rush to get UK Plc working remotely. The much more critical aspect for us pertains to our people, given what looks likely to be an extended period remote working. We are a very sociable business with a thriving culture so understanding the impact of the replacement of human interaction with digital is an unknown. Staying productive, ensuring everyone's welfare and maintaining what makes DWS a unique place to work is, perhaps, our biggest priority."



JAMES SHRAGA
FIDELITY GROUP

"Fidelity Group has promoted cloud collaborative working for its internal teams for many years, allowing staff to work with strategic partners in South Africa and India. We have been conscious of the environmental and lifestyle benefits of remote working which have also been promoted to our customers, it is fair to say they have been reacting to current circumstances and the level of urgent demand that this has driven for home working is at an all-time high. Now more than ever before, hosted telephony, mobile data solutions and cloud technologies empower our teams and offices to continue to collaborate and work together whilst remote working. Our channel partners have risen to the demand and are supporting the role out and training for these new workplace environments. We trust that these solutions will serve to mitigate against some of the economic issues ahead."



ANDY WILSON
CITYFIBRE

"At CityFibre, we are as prepared as we can be at this stage and have a dedicated task force in place to manage our response to COVID-19. Over recent weeks we undertook multiple simulations to test our capabilities ahead of formally closing multiple offices, and in line with the latest advice all of our office-based staff are now working from home successfully. As CityFibre's channel focused division, we completely understand how the recommendations for more agile working through services such as video conferencing can put added pressure on our customers' underlying infrastructure. It is because of this we are committed to working with them to find solutions and ensure business continuity is not affected."



VICKI RISHBETH
FOCUS GROUP

"Focus Group has a robust Business Continuity Plan in place. The COVID-19 developments over the last few months have given us the opportunity to review, test and be confident that the plan in place enables our team to work flexibly, while maintaining our service levels and key product delivery. Our strategy has been to adopt as many cloud-based technologies as appropriate and possible; meaning our teams have access to their applications and services from remote locations. We're confident in our ability to deliver a business as usual experience to our customers and colleagues alike."



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DANIEL ALVAREZ
GLIDE GROUP

"At Glide we have been thinking about contingency plans to mitigate the effects the virus may have on business for some time. Our 300 plus staff now have the capability to work from home and a named tactical stakeholder group of individuals has been empowered to make important decisions in a rapidly evolving situation. Most importantly, the technology is in place to allow our teams and our customers to continue as normal. The UK communications infrastructure will come under extreme pressures in the coming weeks and months, as we are already seeing through the mobile networks. The need for full fibre and greatly increased backhaul capacity has never been more relevant. Having our own fibre network means we are well-prepared to meet the challenges from both customers and employees."



STEVE MCINTYRE
NIMANS

"The wellbeing of our employees and providing business continuity to our customers remain our top priority - and we're continuing to keep a close eye on the latest government and NHS guidance. We are continuing to provide the same reliable service to our customers whilst also making some sensible operational changes internally, such as using alternative technologies including VC and Teams as part of a more dispersed workforce. We have put in place a robust Business Continuity Plan designed to keep our staff safe and the company fully operational and we are fully prepared should the situation worsen. In these challenging times our warehouse remains fully operational and a huge amount of deliveries are being made."



TIM BROOKS
PRAGMA

"Like most comms companies, we use our own IP telephony and UC applications across our business. When we started Pragma eight years ago, we decided to use cloud services wherever possible, so that our other systems and processes could all be operated remotely. We've spent the last few days testing these systems and checking our processes and communication plans, so it's all systems go. One area that cannot be operated remotely is our warehouse. We hold at least three months stock, so inventory levels are good. We've implemented a split team structure, with two separate teams working alternating days in the warehouse, to limit the risk of all staff being ill at the same time. Whilst it's impossible to protect against every eventuality, we feel well prepared to continue to supply and support our resellers throughout the coming weeks."



DARREN GARLAND
PROVU

"As a distributor we identified the need to ensure our long-term reliability - it is vital for us to keep our warehouse operating, receiving stock and shipping out our customer orders. We made the decision to isolate our warehouse team on 11th March, a few days before the Government advised people to work from home. For those able to perform their roles outside of the office, we enforced a remote working policy - so far, so good! We are in uncharted territory, but with most of our staff trained to be able to work in the warehouse, we have the capacity to rotate our home working staff to cover and maintain operation at least five times. We are in a strong position to adapt to this way of working and will continue to support our partners in every way we can."



IAIN SINNOTT
VANILLAIP

"We have a permanent ability for all staff to work from home, so the only required action was an e-mail to say don't travel. More importantly, Uboss has made us, and our partners, ready to add mobility services to any customer extension that now needs to be remote, as well as deploying softphone devices, mobile applications and setting up a vast number of new conference bridge moderators. What we have seen in the last few days is an urgent need to relocate the voice devices, followed by a realisation that people now need to do more than just hold a simple call. The pay-as-you-use conference bridge that is built into all business setups has been very popular as a second step and now we are seeing the deployment of UCOne Trio collaboration apps and MS Teams integration tools. It's going well."



MANDY FAZELNIA
ZEST4

"Zest4 has fully deployed a working from home solution to keep our team safe. The team use their home internet connection to securely 2-factor authenticate into Zest4's internal customer servicing applications. We only allow company provided equipment with cloud based anti-virus to ensure equipment is always up to date and protected. Zest4 has more than adequate bandwidth available. As a connectivity provider we pride ourselves on being 'forever connected' and we are more than able to cope with the spike in home working. Members of the team without adequate bandwidth from home have been provided with our 4G 'internet in a box' solution. The use of cloud-based email, telephony and collaboration allows Zest staff to be in contact from anywhere with an internet connection and we can continue to deliver our award-winning service without disruption."

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