

# Could home working become



**W**hatever the Government decides in the next month or so, the COVID-19 pandemic will prevent the ICT channel from doing business conventionally for the foreseeable future.

The lockdown may be eased slightly, but social distancing measures will remain in place, so travelling for meetings, or simply commuting to the office, may be off the agenda for some time to come.

Channel businesses like those featured in the month's Kaleidoscope, have been selling remote working and business continuity solutions for years and some may decide to implement some aspects of remote working permanently. There is no denying that well managed conference calls can replace physical meetings, thereby decreasing travel costs and increasing the time to do other things.

Before the Coronavirus hit, the bigger crisis was and remains global warming, so why not be greener and encourage home working both internally and externally and sell more solutions in the process? As reported in the national press recently, it appears many people, having become accustomed to home working, are pushing to maintain the status quo indefinitely for health and lifestyle reasons.

This said, home working is not all sweetness and light. We hear of some comms and IT business that have never been busier and isolation can lead to more stress and in some cases staff burnout. Even with video conferencing, the lack of being physically present in the same working space as someone suffering psychologically makes this harder to recognise.

In an article for small business.co.uk, Steve Arnold, CEO of absence-management platform e-days, says that making conversations on mental health and employee wellbeing in the workplace normal needs to be encouraged. "If you do not already have a system in place to handle this, then it is highly recommended, as it is important for your employees to feel they have the support if ever they should need it. As a case in point, see the 'Don't suffer in silence' article penned by Focus Group joint MD Chris Goodman on page 32.



LOUISE ABBEY  
9 GROUP

"Our teams continue to demonstrate their dedication to providing partners with exceptional service, while working from home. We created a responsive communication plan, tailored to the current situation. Our goal was to keep our partners and teams connected through regular communications, which aim to be clear and informative. Alongside the important operational updates, we share positive stories and photos along with fun things such as playlists and movie recommendations. We have had a fantastic response – the communications are keeping everyone connected, despite social distancing. The marketing team supports partners by providing clear and concise customer communications and campaigns. These materials were designed to comfort and reassure customers, while advising them on how our partners can support their business. We hear that customers have been patient and hugely appreciative of the support our partners are providing. These anxious times bring frustrations, but the best of human nature can rise to the challenge."



DAVID ALLDRITT  
HIGHNET

"Most businesses in our sector have all the tech and the required know-how to deploy 100% home-working. However, maintaining the wellbeing of staff and their team cohesion can be challenging. To help us in this we use Yammer not only for formal company information but also for non-work chat within a 'Social Media' group. We also have daily 'coffee break' meetings via Teams, making it easy to stay connected with colleagues in our virtual staff lounge. Whilst it is easy to reach partners and customers by email and social media, getting the content and tone right is less straightforward. We've been communicating regularly as trusted advisors, listening to our marketing experts, and listening most carefully to the issues our customers raise. The selective targeting of our messages will be key as restrictions begin to lift and customer focus changes from survival to recovery, and finally to growth."



JULIE INGLIS  
KUBE NETWORKS

"We continue to communicate with customers across the usual methods of ecasts, providing industry updates and guidance on how to make remote working, call handling and network security the best it can be in line with their business objectives. This is a great time to progress projects with customers as well as reviewing and enhancing network security and enabling changes in how they operate and communicate going forward. New product trials on hosted and security products are also on the increase and as a Cisco Premier Partner there are some great incentives for customers to take advantage of. We have found customers very receptive to these reviews, as they have time to focus on projects which perhaps were not high priority previously, as a result there are some fantastic discussions taking place with many of our customers on a regular basis."



wavenet  
wholesale

## TeamsLink

Secure and efficient external voice calling  
from within your Microsoft Teams client.

# the new normal for business?



JULIE MILLS  
TRAIN2WIN

"When we first developed our virtual onboarding and 'assisted plug and play' services, we could never have imagined their importance in a situation like today's. Not being able to get onsite is a new challenge to many channel partners, but we're able to step in with a tried-and-tested approach. We're also busy helping partners who see now as a good time to switch comms platforms, as a lot of this work can be done remotely. Like everyone, we've had to close our offices, but the team are doing brilliantly working from home. You've really got to try and support your staff at times like this – as well as the customers who intend to stick by you no matter what – and at the very least take time to show your appreciation. This is when people's true colours start coming through and I think the comms channel has so many people to be proud of."



SHARON MCDERMOTT  
TRENCHES LAW

"To a great extent, we were well equipped to make the shift to home working. When we expanded our office infrastructure to three sites, we invested in a robust, IP-based phone system that allows us all to stay connected with a UC solution irrespective of location. We also each have high-speed broadband at home. We now attend many more industry briefings, and update all clients by phone/email with the latest insights – ensuring they're clued up on the evolving landscape while encouraging them to think beyond the pandemic so we can all get ahead of the curve. We've ramped up the advice we share to the wider industry on our personal social media channels too. With everyone working so hard, we're keen to protect morale. Daily planning calls are keeping everyone focused and motivated, online training is being continually delivered by our senior management team, and our weekly quiz and fizz over Zoom has become a favourite!"



MARK CURTIS-WOOD  
VAIONI

"We already had a strong, people-first strategy in place which made it easier for us to implement WFH and business continuity plans immediately. To keep everyone engaged and entertained, we've launched several initiatives including encouraging video-chats to stay connected and regular daily virtual huddles. Fun at 5 - which normally takes place on Friday at the Fibar - has moved to a virtual bar and along with Wellbeing channels on Teams and WhatsApp, staff can now share resources such as guides to managing isolation, as well as articles, quizzes and brainteasers. As a provider of critical services, we have remained 100% fully staffed and operational. We're keeping in touch with our partners through weekly business updates but are also making sure they have access to support and resources to help them through this period of uncertainty. We are also using downtime to review our processes and make them stronger for the bounce back."



TIM MERCER  
VAPOUR MEDIA

"As a cloud specialist we embraced flexible and remote working way before COVID-19. Our boardroom is set up to become a video conferencing room with the click of a button, for example, which means we can be in 'face-to-face' contact with someone almost instantly. This familiarity with video meant we didn't have to culturally adjust when the world moved en masse to tools like Teams and Zoom. Overall, we've defaulted to video for complex project discussions or advanced conversations surrounding upcoming deals, which we would usually hold in person. It's as close to 'round the table' as we can get. Internal team huddles usually take place via video too. Our management team is also working extremely hard to maintain morale and the sense of camaraderie among employees. Our people make Vapour what it is, and the potential psychological impact of lockdown which has been widely reported on in the media, is something we readily acknowledge."



IAN ROWAN  
WILDIX

"Routine is the best advice I can give to anyone working from home right now and coping with the changes the lockdown has brought upon us. To keep in touch with our partners we are lucky to be involved with a technology that is designed to do just that and daily we leverage our platform to reach out to new and potential partners. We are hosting a series of technical and sales online training sessions, under the government furlough scheme. Staff that are furloughed are not allowed but encouraged to learn and this is covered within the government's furlough payments. This not only allows us to keep our partners updated, but also helps keep the communication channels active. When lockdown is over there will be many obstacles faced by sales teams and new opposition given. The last thing we would want is a lack of knowledge to be a barrier a salesperson cannot overcome."



SUE ELLIOT  
WINDSOR TELECOM

"We want to be as helpful as possible to our customers and more than ever that means giving practical advice and focusing on straightforward things they can do right away, with our account managers being really hands on supporting implementation. When COVID-19 struck we reduced our contract lengths to make it easy for customers to put in place immediate solutions for managing their comms from home and allow a move to more future proofed solutions as and when they're ready. This took away a lot of fear and uncertainty at a time when this was already in abundance. We are fully working from home ourselves. We've always embraced flexible working and as a cloud-first business the transition was pretty straightforward. We're using a combination of our own Cloud Telephony service, integrated with Microsoft Teams and Office365 for collaboration with our customers and colleagues. We're a close-knit bunch so daily team calls, clear priorities and twice weekly quizzes are keeping morale, motivation and productivity high."

**The perfect product at the right time**  
Upgrade your customers Microsoft Teams direct routing experience with TeamsLink and TeamsLink Pro inclusive of unlimited UK Minutes. It's the ultimate solution to control business continuity.

**Protect your margin,  
protect your customers**

Call **0333 234 9911**  
**wavenetwholesale.com**