

Has the office had its day in



GAVIN JONES
BT WHOLESALE

"There will have been apprehension from partners around how a Covid-enforced decentralised workforce may impact productivity, but the situation has been handled well and had a positive effect in some cases. Equally, the speed with which transitions have taken place with minimal disruption will fuel belief that investment in remote working processes is worth exploring. Given that offices will require social distancing measures, decreasing capacity, we may see partners blending practices, providing a centralised hub but placing less emphasis on its consistent use while also taking advantage of remote working's geographical and flexibility benefits. The promise of agility will become a key characteristic of partners' future efforts. We need to bring products to market that require simple activation, limiting the need for complex reselling and build processes. Covid-19 has driven an increase in demand for self-serve deployments and digital-only selling and these will only become more common within the landscape."



One good thing to come out of the Covid-19 pandemic must be the acceptance of on-line collaborative working. People have become more confident of using video conferencing platforms and something that used to be regarded as a dark art for tech geeks has become a working norm.



PHIL RACE
ADEPT

"In these Covid times you'd be insane not to question the entire paradigm of commuting to an office to conduct work, when work isn't a 'place', it's an 'activity'. However, I think the office as a place to commune, communicate and collaborate will continue to have a purpose and remains important, particularly in the psychological aspects of being an employee. I think ADEPT will adapt its strategy, taking a more holistic view of the companies we serve, where the boundaries of companies include the kitchen table and the home study, as well as the office desk. This changes the security model, the support requirements, the network needs, and the cloud requirements for many businesses. FTTP at home anyone?"



IAN ROWAN
WILDIX

"It will be a long time until we return to the office en masse, if we ever do in the same way again, not just through fear when the pandemic is over, but also acceptance that has been gained during this lockdown that people can work from home, can still be efficient and actually increase productivity. Add to this that there will be a reduction in operational costs from running the office and this rise in the "Smart Worker" mentality will be the new normal for so many. I think we will see a big change in the devices people use at home. People working in isolation won't want a headset and will look at devices that are aesthetically pleasing when located in a shared area of their houses and also provide functions that help with the work-life balance. This is critical to productivity increases for smart workers."

This has given channel players a great opportunity to sell home working solutions to clients and many resellers have reported record revenues in the early stages of the lockdown.

On the flip side, for some industries such as retail and manufacturing, staff working from home represents a huge challenge. But the biggest impact could be around the corner. With so many people working successfully remotely, will they ever want to return to an office environment? Are we set to see a rapid decline in city-based offices where communications products and services are the lifeblood of channel businesses?

Brianne Kimmel, a venture capitalist in Silicon Valley believes "there is a place for a physical office to exist,



DAN MACKRELL
SHIRE LEASING

"I believe Covid-19 will have a permanent effect on the traditional office space long after the lockdown is over. The ICT channel offers a wide range of feature rich technology which enables businesses to mobilise their workforce to work remotely. Covid-19 has forced us to embrace this technology and now we can benefit from the efficiencies it offers whilst maintaining service levels. During lockdown our dealers have closed business remotely through our portal and completed documentation electronically. Research shows remote workers can be more productive. Coupled with the reduced costs, it would be hard to ignore the case for a mobilised workforce. Whatever businesses decide, we do know future strategies will certainly continue to embrace the technology they've been exposed to and are utilising now."



MYLES LEACH
NFON

"It is an over-simplification to say that the 'office has had its day.' According to YouGov, around 40 percent of Brits had never worked from home before. Necessity is the mother of invention – everyone who can feasibly work from home has now done so. Businesses are seeing the benefits of something they may have been culturally adverse too in the past. As we adjust to this new model, businesses will implement smarter working practices to better enable a more agile workforce. However, many businesses will have existing office lease commitments – so they cannot just 'pull a Twitter' and adopt full remote working overnight. There will be an increase in demand for technologies that enable effective working from any location, which is great news for the channel. The key for vendors is to make sure they are supporting partners, providing the tools they need to successfully sell into any working environment."



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in the new business normal?

but it should be an optional space for employees to choose based on preferred working style”.

YouGov recently questioned 2,000 office workers across the UK and, beyond changes to productivity, the majority said there are aspects of traditional working they sorely miss such as in-person conversations with co-workers and the relationships they have forged in the office. So, will people be hankering to get back to the office water cooler for some good old-fashioned office banter or will they prefer to spend more quality time at home without all the hassle of travelling to a workplace?

For this month's Kaleidoscope, we asked channel players a simple question: "Do you think the traditional office has had its day?" Predictably, the responses were mixed because, like so many issues surrounding this pandemic, who really knows what the future holds?

One thing is clear. Agile ICT resellers that can respond to customer demands for flexible, robust, and secure solutions that successfully blend remote and office communications will ultimately win through.



ANDREW COOPER
NEC

"It's clear that the world of business communications will be a very different landscape post-pandemic and many businesses have been looking closely at the costs of office space. To stay ahead of the curve, resellers will need to be agile and adaptable with their approach. Many workers who've found quick fixes using free video conferencing apps will soon start looking for more robust and feature-rich business-grade solutions. This is good news for the channel. Security is another factor and there'll be plenty of IT managers looking to keep a tighter grip on their company data. We've already seen a growing demand for call management applications and presence – many businesses with contact centres will look for tools to manage their customer service levels even when their teams are spread across multiple locations or working remotely. The goalposts have moved for resellers, but the opportunities are alive and well!"



GLYN THOMAS
IP CORTEX

"Most businesses have been adopting more flexible working practices, enabled by technological advancements in recent years. With investment in better connectivity we will see a dramatic increase in remote working and reduced office footprint. However, there remains a role for traditional office working as the reinforcement of company culture and the comradery of physically being with colleagues are some things that technology cannot replace. If recent months are anything to go by, then it will only have a positive impact, as we are communicating and engaging even more than usual. Reduced travel and the flexibility of broadening the working day has created even greater 'presence' than before. We are capitalising on this opportunity to get even closer to our partners via all UC channels, especially video conferencing."



ANDY SMETHURST
GAMMA

"Whilst it's safe to say that the way we work will never be the same again, I do believe that it's important for employers to not lose sight of the fact that for many staff a home-office environment may not be conducive to a productive day, five days a week. I don't fully buy into the idea that if given a choice everybody will want to work from home going forward. As humans, we are incredibly social creatures, and we crave the company of others. As someone who works in sales, I feed off the energy that only an office environment can provide. The challenge being, I only need it a couple of times a week, especially when you throw in a commute. For the channel, Gamma see all of this as an opportunity. Businesses will need to arm their employees with the right communication and collaboration tools as well as access requirements for them to work effectively anytime, anywhere."



JOLINE CRAMOND
FOCUS GROUP

Covid-19 has changed our world and changed our industry! The ICT channel can only assist the landscape of the disruption this pandemic has caused. We would be ignorant to think that we could ever carry on doing business as we were, this is the awakening that was needed. Do we need to go into the office? Probably in some instances for our mental health but there is now an acceptable balance between home workers and office presence. As one of the strongest contributors to the UK economy I feel certain that the diversity in our product portfolios will keep our sector strong. Adapting to the disruption is key to our success. Our product portfolio is stronger than ever, and it will only adapt with the ever-changing landscape of ICT."



SUSIE WARDELL
EVOKE TELECOM

"The traditional office as we knew it will never be the same again, especially in the upper SME, mid-market and enterprise segments. Whether you look from a commercial, health, wellbeing or productivity angle, businesses have taken giant steps to create the office of the future that can't be retraced. Using technology to work from anywhere, on any device, work is now a thing you do, not a place you go. Sales strategy for Evoke will focus on creating additional value by maximising the technologies that have already been trialled or invested in, whilst ensuring security of a remotely distributed workforce remains high on every agenda. From a marketing perspective, messaging is no longer about a 'move to cloud' or a cost consolidation discussion. We believe future marketing messages should be built on empathy and understanding of vertical specific organisational issues and business challenges, using technology as mere enabler to provide the answers."



ADAM CATHCART
9 GROUP

"While home working is not new, the crisis has fast-tracked adoption for leaders who have been more hesitant to adapt. The technology is proven, and those who were once skeptical are now singing the virtues of this way of working. Coming out of lockdown, we predict a blended approach, with employers giving those who want to work from home the option to do so. For some, isolated working or distractions at home can be a struggle and these individuals should be given an option to work from a more traditional office environment. The post-lockdown era for sales and marketing will see brands competing for attention in the digital space. Those who have carefully considered their strategy and adapted their messaging and techniques during the lockdown period, will thrive. Staying connected with our partners and maintaining very positive, genuine relationships has been our priority during lockdown, as it always has been."



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