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Coping with Remote Working:

How Technology is Enabling Businesses During the Coronavirus Outbreak.

Owing to the rapid increase in the number of positive COVID-19 cases across India, the country has gone into a complete state of lockdown to contain the spread - with only medical and essential services functioning as usual. These are trying times for everyone as both the government and private sectors work dedicatedly in service of the economy while exercising exceptional precautionary measures for people's well-being.

As a result of these unprecedented times, work-from-home has now become the norm. Once the realm of freelancer work culture, now large firms have also seen the merit in this policy and have been utilising this model to encourage employees in maintaining a good work-life balance as the situation required.

In light of today's current global scenario, the work-from-home system has now been fast-tracked into a temporary, yet mandatory mode of operation. Thanks to pre-planning and the proper implementation of existing tools, many organisations have successfully adapted to the work-from-home model as much as possible. As the uncertainty of the current time period adds to this long stretch of remote working – a fair share of challenges on both the employees' and the employers' side will need to be addressed as a result.

Business Concerns

The challenges and benefits of working from home have long been debated, with considerable arguments for and against the concept. There is no "one size fits all", more so with teleworking. Companies that are falling behind the curve now have the opportunity to move up at a rapid pace to join their peers. That said, facilitating work-from-home as a mandate rather than an option has brought some pertinent concerns to the fore. These include:

Collaboration: In the absence of an office space, getting used to a lack of easy face-to-face collaboration is a major hiccup on the operations front for both managers and people working under them.

Monitoring: Keeping an eye on your colleagues' workflows is an integral part of the office environment, with employees dedicating their full attention to their respective tasks. This same dedication might be affected while working at home. Add to that the distractions and responsibilities of home life - leaving managers genuinely worried.

Efficiency: While work-from-home may seem to provide the liberty of working at one's own pace, when people are not strict about their working hours, it is not uncommon to end up logging extra hours for less work - leading to collaboration issues and missed delivery deadlines.

End-to-End Security and Compliance: Security will always remain a concern for businesses of all sizes and types. Enterprise security providers have taken huge strides for a robust network, data centre, and information security. In times like this, providing remote access office servers, enforcing download and browsing restrictions, installing authentication certificates, etc. are some of the crucial steps the IT administrators have to take to enable secure teleworking.

Remote Connectivity: Network access and continuous high-speed internet bandwidth can be a challenge during the work-from-home process. Unlike office-based servers, public networks can have slow data flows (or no connection at all even) and are generally difficult to work with. This inconsistency in network availability is a prevalent source of concern that organisations have to keep an eye out for.

Access to Critical Data and Business Applications: Additionally, the kind of access that office networks have to critical data and business applications will not be so easily available on other networks, particularly ones used during work-from-home. These tools are usually subscribed or tied to specific office servers but are crucial for certain employees in their day to day work. Having ready and remote access to these applications thus becomes a priority that organisations must take steps to address.

Addressing the Challenges

Despite these prevalent concerns, there is hope in the form of technology that can come into play to face these issues. Through innovation and ideation, a host of solutions can provide relief during these uncertain times, and have already started to make their presence felt.

Organisations have been using the cloud (public or private depending upon their requirement) for years now. Businesses can breathe a sigh of relief because of the hybrid cloud model, which offers the best of both private and public cloud models. While the former provides the security for sensitive information, the latter allows scaling as per the requirement.

In regards to remote access, mobile data and Wi-Fi hotspots have proven to be an effective means of providing ready internet capabilities. Extending on from this, VPN solutions also allow quick and secure access to critical data and business applications from office servers as well. By pairing these portable network options along with VPN access, a safe and secure remote working environment can be created to ensure production rates are still manageable.

Additionally, a variety of software required to work-from-home are available online. In fact, most companies use these Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) offerings for day-to-day office work, which is why the office-to-home transition has been possible without much disruption. Video, audio, and unified conferencing tools are making remote meetings and discussions possible without much disruption – allowing for quick and easy collaboration between team members working on projects. Keeping channels of communication open and being able to share data and work across the team - thanks to share drives and cloud services that make for easier work experience. This allows for seamless collaboration in real-time - eliminating geographical limitations while at the same time creating a substitute for an office environment where everyone's work has visibility.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT): A Superhero without the Cape

In such times of social distancing, ICT has become the central nervous system of businesses worldwide. Be it telephones, mobiles, internet or virtual private networks (VPN), ICT providers play a crucial role in keeping businesses afloat through the seamless exchange of information. Considering the impact of COVID-19 on businesses, many technology providers have also waived off a subscription (fully or partially) or are offering extended services for the same price.

Several ICT initiatives have come forward to help with their services. Many ICT players have developed a substitute for traditional VPNs where users are placed in local data centres, rather than having to connect to global VPN servers first – thus ensuring more concise security while granting faster connection and less bandwidth consumption on the network. Cloud-based operations that allow for remote access and concurrent usage for VPN servers are being provided and implemented to great effect by retail organisations. There are many start-ups that provide a virtual workplace by utilising real-time video, instant chats, screen share and more to create an engagement that makes an organisation's members feel like they're all working in the same building. Even personal wellbeing during work-from-home is being tackled through the use of applications that help maintain mental and physical fitness for employees. Had it not been for the proactive approach of technology companies and service providers, such a drastic transition in work culture would not have been possible on a global scale.

Airtel Business offers a variety of such solutions in remote connectivity, collaboration, cybersecurity, and virtual desktop space. Click here to know more about these solutions.
The COVID-19 pandemic is undeniably one of the biggest crisis of our times. But the bright side of the story is that the recent technological advancements have been put through their paces and have, so far, proved successful.
The reservations from some quarters against the adoption of innovative technologies have nearly crumbled. Developing countries have adopted digital solutions at a pace that would not have been possible otherwise. And with the eventual containment of the outbreak, enterprises of all sizes will come out stronger and better prepared to minimize the impact of such incidents in the future.