Enabling a remote workforce.

The key communications challenges and solutions in crafting a successful remote work strategy.

Introduction

The requirement for a water proof remote working strategy has never been more critical, or more in the spotlight, and whilst on paper this can seem like an open goal with many business benefits, there are unique challenges that IT leaders must address to make the most of their remote work strategies.

This eGuide takes a look at some of the key business drivers behind creating a remote working policy, as well as the challenges and technology solutions that can make supporting, enabling and developing your remote workforce significantly easier.

This Guide Highlights:

- Why remote working is important
- Common challenges to overcome
- What communications technology you need

Why implement a Remote Working policy?

What are you trying to accomplish? Whether it's to provide current employees with more flexible work arrangements or beef up your business continuity strategy it's key to understand why building out remote working guidelines is worth your time and energy.

Here we look at two tried and tested justifications of any remote working policy, Employee Satisfaction and Disaster Recovery.

Employee satisfaction

It has been identified that employees who are engaged and motivated within their job role have higher employee satisfaction, a survey carried out by Leadership IQ identified that only 24% of office workers said they loved their jobs, compared to the 45% of remote workers who did. It is this higher rate of job satisfaction in remote workers which can lead to improved productivity, increased profitability, reduced absenteeism and increase employee loyalty. This can have a positive effect on overall company growth in the form of higher employee retention and lower turnover.

As we enter the year of 2020, where mental health awareness is at its peak, it's crucial that organisations are providing their employees with opportunities to increase their job satisfaction. A study conducted by The Ohio State University revealed that there is a close relationship between mental wellbeing and job satisfaction, therefore employees who are consistently reporting low employee satisfaction were at a higher risk of excessive worrying, depression and sleep problems.

Remote working can improve mental health, by lowering stress level in up to 82% of workers.

Natalie Briggs 2019[1]

Business Continuity

Most companies already have a disaster recovery plan (DRP) in place for their IT services. They make sure their data is backed up daily and have written up procedures in place to restore a failed piece of hardware should they ever need to. But what happens when their voice services are disrupted?

Any number of events can occur to make an office voice services unusable – from builders accidentally cutting through cables during road works, to an epidemic that results in high staff absenteeism, or even a natural disaster that damages an office. When staff are unable to answer the phones, business grinds to a halt.

If a company has already set up remote working arrangements with a well-developed infrastructure it is likely that business will be able to continue as normal, with no mis-haps.

40%

of organisations rated their ability to recover their operation in the event of a disaster as fair or poor

Infrascale.com[2]

Key challenges your strategy should tackle

Enabling remote workers to be effective is more than simply equipping them with a smartphone. Without the right tools remote working can have a negative impact on employee productivity. Additionally, if remote workers are lacking in enthusiasm and not receiving the essential support they need to be efficient and effective, the knock-on effects for your business will quickly become apparent.

Common complaints about remote working include:

• **Lower job satisfaction** – Remote workers often feel they are not able to be productive because they don't have access to the right information, contacts and tools when they are away from the office.

• **Feelings of exclusion** – Remote workers frequently feel excluded because they miss out on important communications, or they don't have the same level of interaction with their other colleagues as office-based workers.

• **Frustration at inability to perform** – Remote workers commonly complain of feeling inconvenienced and frustrated because they have to carry separate business and personal devices and use multiple tools for work communications – many of which aren't designed for use in a mobile environment.

• **Interruptions and distractions** – One of the most obvious challenges for remote workers are interruptions and distractions. They can seriously damage your productivity. After a distraction it can take a while to get back into the deep focus that leads to quality work.

• **Poor service delivered to customers** – This is particularly a problem because remote workers often can't be easily contacted when they need to be, or they don't have the right information at hand to deal with a customers issue.

• **Important decisions delayed** – When key people are away from the office, or poor decisions are made because people don't have access to complete information.

• **Increased risk of security breaches** – Commonly because employees end up using non-approved consumer apps to communicate or to store information, as it's simply easier.

• **Loss of valuable information** – This is becomes an issue when an employee leaves and company data or contacts are stored on the workers personal phone.

Solutions for a successful remote workforce

Mobile workers still face incredible challenges and frustration when they don't have the right tools to keep them aligned with the rest of the organisation. So how are these challenges overcome? What solutions can be put in place and how do you know which solution is right for you?
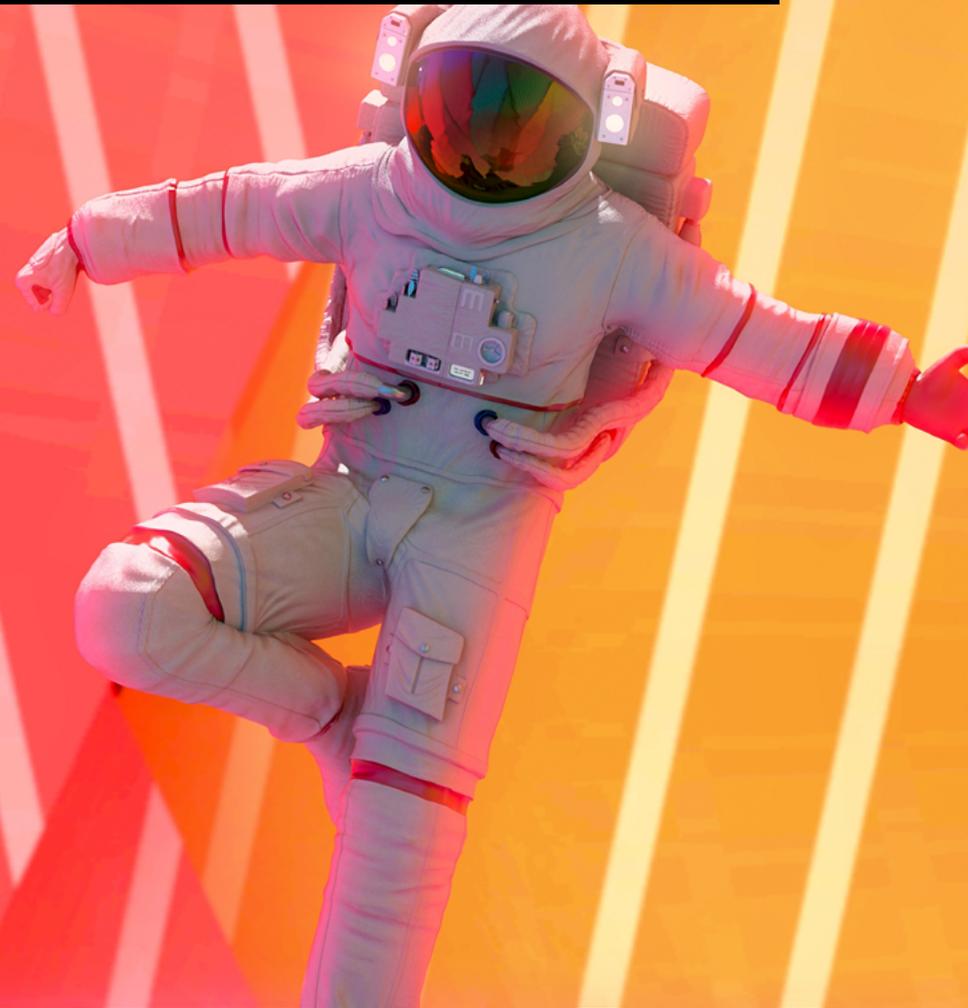
A platform to unify your business communications

Unified Communications is a reliable infrastructure which enables businesses to integrate all of the ways they communicate, including voice, video and data. It's easy to deploy and roll out to employees around the world, as well as being a cost-effective solution. And, crucially, it can help to facilitate remote working and communication between teams in different places.

A business Grade Mobile Service

Traditionally, businesses have been hamstrung by limited access to good value, reliable mobile data services, often having to rely on products initially created for the consumer market. Your employees will have a wide range of requirements from their mobile service, from using it to make and receive calls, to it becoming a potential source of connectivity should their home broadband fail.

An integrated cloud based phone system

Hosted phone systems have long replaced traditional desk phones and taken advantage of today's high-speed broadband and mobile technology. Combining fixed and mobile telephony into a user-controlled online interface equips employees with powerful and flexible usability features to ensure they have the full fat technology they are used to at their office when based remotely.

Many cloud based phone systems offer CRM integration - this can be an easy way to ensure your teams can access the right contact details for customers and suppliers for mobile workers.

Conclusion

A remote working policy underpinned with good technology can provide valuable opportunities and significant advantages for organisations:

• Higher productivity and responsiveness

• Increased employee morale and engagement

• Improved collaboration, enabling new ideas and faster decisions

• Better customer experience, encouraging loyalty and referrals

• Lower risks of security breaches and loss of valuable information

• Lower operational costs

By maintaining a focus on your objectives, you can craft a policy which not only delivers tangible business benefits but also create a workforce which can benefit from the freedom and flexibility associated with best in class remote work strategies.

Annotations

[1] Natalie Briggs 2019 https://www.avocor.com/blog/business-blog/remote-working-statistics/

[2] https://www.infrascale.com/25-disaster-recovery-statistics-for-2015-infographic/