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Powering Staff for Remote Working: Getting the Infrastructure Right

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Biography

Darren began his career as a graduate Military Officer in the RAF before moving into the commercial sector. He brings over 20 years experience in telecommunications and managed services gained at BT, MFS Worldcom, Level3 Communications, Attenda and COLT. He joined the VIRTUS (<https://virtusdatacentres.com>) team from euNetworks where he was Head of Sales for the UK, leading market changing deals with a number of large financial institutions and media agencies, and growing the company's expertise in low latency trading.

Additionally, he sits on the board of one of the industry's most innovative Mobile Media Advertising companies, Odyssey Mobile Interaction, and is interested in all new developments in this sector. Darren has an honours degree in Electronic and Electrical Engineering from University of Wales, College Swansea.

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Abstract

The technology industry has been the enabler of remote working in some way, shape, or form for some time, whether it is required due to personal appointments, childcare or work life balance. In many cases, it has been allowed as a perk, for medical reasons or limited to senior executives, but since “not going into the office” has become an effective way of preventing the spread of COVID-19, it has been necessary for tech teams to support mass, enforced working from home.

Introduction

In today's world, remote working is the new norm. Even those industries that have traditionally been reluctant to allow remote working, such as financial services and legal sectors, are having to embrace it if they are to continue to operate.

On the surface, the technology is out there to enable both this immediate need and to power the broader shift to greater remote working that we are likely to see across a high number of businesses. Some technology companies that produce software used by remote workers, including Zoom and Slack, have subsequently received a bump in share prices in recent days. These remote conferencing tools, and other



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technologies, which give users access to a collaborative, scalable and convenient remote virtual work environments, are being speedily deployed by many – together with providing laptops and mobiles with serious processing power.

But organizations need to be mindful that supporting mass remote working isn't as easy as simply downloading the software, or buying the laptop; the technology has to actually work at scale to deliver results. Fundamentally, the backbone of successful remote working will be the infrastructure that underpins it.

Meeting immediate needs

Most immediately, ensuring employees have access to the systems which enable access to a virtual working environment will, of course, be crucial. Businesses must be committed to providing training and guidance on how to get the best from collaboration tools and ensure that security solutions must be deployed to enable remote strategies and protect the data, applications, and infrastructures which support them.



However, tools and training aren't all that is needed. A surge in use of cloud applications will put intense pressure on the security, servers, storage and network of any organization, and to deal with these new demands, IT departments need to deploy more forward-looking capacity management strategies to be able to meet their needs.

This puts the data centre strategy front and centre for IT managers – and it's wholly outsourced or co-located data centres which are winning the day. Not only can



they support demands for high-bandwidth and reliable connectivity, they also provide physical security, redundant power, expert monitoring and 100% uptime guarantees.

Powering a systemic change to working practices

In the face of a global crisis like the Coronavirus, the immediate priority for many businesses is to simply keep operations running. However, when it comes to remote working, it appears that the current crisis is “forcing the hand” of many organizations.



If organizations are able to embrace more flexible working practices permanently, they can expect to reap long term benefits. Cost savings can be achieved by making strategic decisions to save on costly office space and businesses can be more agile to speedily take advantage of new business opportunities in different geographies. Winning the battle for talent can also become a reality by attracting and retaining staff who are unable or unwilling to work in the office, potentially harnessing the skills and experience of individuals who have to juggle child care or look after elderly family members with work, and Generation Z who don't want to work in traditional ways.

Just ten years ago the idea of mass remote working would have been impossible – the underlying infrastructure simply wasn't in place to support it. But today, the global data centre industry is already powering billions of internet-connected “things” and the vast volumes of data they generate.



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The backbone is firmly in place to help deal with the demands remote working will bring. Of course, this is improving all the time. Developments like High Performance Computing (HPC) provide a compelling way to maximize productivity and efficiency and increase available power density and the “per foot” computing power of the data centre – crucial as we move away from centralized office hubs into thousands of disparate home offices.

Any discussion around data centres inevitably comes hand-in-hand with environmental concerns, and organizations are already working hard to fuel a power hungry industry with renewable energy. One of the overarching benefits of remote working is likely to be in the form of improved ecological good, as commuting and business travel are significantly lessened.

There are other benefits too. While there may be increased IT set up costs, the requirement for businesses to have expensive office facilities may become a thing of the past, powering a more scalable and cost-effective business environment. Collaboration needn't suffer either. Businesses must rethink how they build teams, looking at the tools and processes required to drive social engagement and power productivity remotely, but with commitment from employees and employers to find new ways to engage, there is no reason why business culture can't continue to flourish and thrive.



There is no doubt that the coronavirus will change people's attitudes and behaviours – potentially forever. This new world approach will be here to stay, and remote working will become the new norm. Data centre strategy will become even more critical in ensuring the infrastructure is powerful, safe and reliable for people to work wherever they want, whenever they want.