EMBRACING THE DIGITAL WORKSPACE

A GUIDE FOR SMALL TO MEDIUM Sized BUSINESSES
The adoption of digital technology across the business spectrum has happened so quickly that, in many cases, not all of the usual rigour and strategy was able to be put in place. The challenge now is to make sense of the chaos, recognise the key benefits digital transformation brings and put a thorough plan in place to develop a digital workspace that reflects your new business objectives for the emerging brave new post-pandemic world.

The way we work and live has been transformed over the past year, driven by technology that enabled people to work from home — something that’s been a life-saver for many small and medium-sized companies. And it looks like being remote-ready will continue to be a business imperative for some time to come.

**TIME TO TAKE STOCK**

68% OF UK CEOs BELIEVE THE SHIFT TOWARDS LOWER-DENSITY WORKPLACES WITH FEWER PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER WILL ENDURE

75% OF CITY FIRMS ARE REVIEWING THEIR SPACE PROVISION

Source: PwC 23rd CEO Panel Survey 2020
Source: The Guardian 8th October 2020
This has highlighted the business-critical nature of digitally transforming the workplace – which now extends far beyond the confines of the traditional office – in giving companies the agility and flexibility to overcome sudden challenges. This, of course, is on top of the greater efficiency, productivity, cost savings and security that can be achieved through improved collaboration, data analytics and modernised approaches to secure connectivity.

Digital technology is also key to delivering the working environment that employees need and employers can support, making it vital to attracting the right talent, building morale and improving employee wellbeing. Today, people want the ability to communicate and collaborate freely and easily, when and how they need to.

So now’s the time to take stock and carefully consider where you are on your digital workspace journey, where you need to be and how to get there.

55% OF EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE ARE MILLENNIALS – TRUE ‘DIGITAL NATIVES’ WHO EXPECT TECHNOLOGY TO BE UP-TO-DATE
62% OF EMPLOYEES ALREADY WORK FROM MORE THAN ONE OFFICE LOCATION

“The digital workspace is the fabric that connects your people to each other, your clients and the business systems that enable them to perform.”

Adam Harding, Chief Technologist - Digital Workspace

GUIDE YOUR THINKING WITH SOFTCAT’S THREE-STEP STRATEGY:

1. REASSESS
2. REFINES
3. REIMAGINE

Step one is to look inwardly taking a people-first approach. Conduct structured interviews, surveys and focus groups with your staff to gain a thorough understanding of how technology is working across your organisation. Is it benefiting or hindering your workforce, from admin to sales to IT, and is it helping you meet your business objectives?

Use your findings to identify the different employee personas within your organisation in terms of workstyle, function, resource and accessibility.
**WORKSTYLE**

Where, when, how and under which conditions a person works, and how they can work better in the future.

For example, with 98% of office-based employees wanting to work from home at least 1-2 days a week and half 3-4 days¹, it’s essential your people are given the apps, devices and equipment they need to maximise productivity, motivation and wellbeing. Some 78% of employees feel they can work at home as effectively or more effectively than in the office and nearly half check work emails after 9pm².

Enhanced mobility is also key for non-office-based workers, like frontline staff in retail, healthcare, education and construction, to improve collaboration and the customer/patient/student experience. Here a move away from shared devices can increase security and efficiency.

**FUNCTION**

The apps, data and collaboration tools they need and want to perform their work to the best of their ability.

The pandemic is the ultimate technology (and people) stress test, so work closely with your team to assess which apps and collaborations tools have performed best, and the data they genuinely need to access when mapped to their individual workstyle. It’s essential your people are equipped to work anywhere to enable more efficient internal and external communications and working practices. It’s also vital to ensure you have the required software asset management tools in place to maximise their value.

**RESOURCE**

The technical resources required to power the applications, data and collaboration tools for each of the working scenarios you’ve identified. This extends beyond device specs right through to connectivity and any required backend infrastructure.

Is the connectivity platform in place to deliver secure, performant and robust virtual meetings on Zoom, WebEx, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams? Do you need to transition any of your apps or desktop services to SaaS or the cloud to enable greater flexibility without the additional IT burden and cost? What measures do you have in place to rationalise and simplify your hardware and software estate, maximising their value and immediately eradicating unnecessary cost and contract overlap?

**SECURITY**

Flexible working increases the threat to your sensitive data as it will be being accessed by many people in new scenarios. This means you need to review your data security taking a three-step approach to ensure you cover all the bases:

1. **Track your assets** – Itemise your assets (data, apps, devices, software, hardware, etc) and establish where are they, who’s using them and how vulnerable are they to attack? Is your software being regularly updated with the necessary patches? Are you using scanning software to check your vulnerabilities?

2. **Control your permissions** – Determine where and how user privileges are applied, and check permissions are only granted to those who need access.

3. **Store your logs** – This enables you to look back at events occurring across your systems, software, apps, devices etc, as well as identifying any malicious activity, which is key should an incident take place.

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1. Source: How to manage working from home following covid-19 lockdown. People Insights June 2020
Once you’ve reviewed the current state of your digital workspace and identified where you need to make improvements, it’s time to prioritise what you need to do. One method, which we’ve used successfully at Softcat, is to take the MoSCoW approach.

This involves dividing tasks into:
- Business objectives
- Technology objectives
- IT operations objectives

Then classifying them under one of the four MoSCoW priorities:
- Must – Those tasks critical to the successful delivery of a project
- Should – Those that carry a high value, but are not viewed as essential and can be delayed if necessary
- Could – Those that are desirable but not necessary unless time, resource and budget permit
- Won’t – Those that carry the lowest importance and after consideration have been removed from the list of objectives

2. REFINE
Once you’ve assessed your assets, permissions and log storage, it’s time to build an ongoing comprehensive cyber security strategy. The first step is prioritisation. Define and focus on what’s most important to your business. Consider the internal and external impacts and act accordingly. With a plan in place, you can then start securing your supply chain, implementing policies and processes to tighten up your relationships with both suppliers and customers.

**IDENTITY**

With your people accessing apps, software, documents and other data from various devices and locations, each with their own unique set of permissions to use and control, good identity management is key to making everyone’s lives easier and your systems more secure. To protect your people and your business, implement single digital identity, utilising device trust and multifactor authentication linked to roles-based access control and a Cloud Access Security Broker (CASB).

**COLLABORATION**

Avoid disparate systems for voice, video, chat, room systems, content co-creation and file sharing, as these can cause confusion. A poor user experience across these will create a low level of adoption. Go for teamwork hubs like Microsoft Teams and Slack, which provide a unified base to support all these activities and native integrations for Zoom, 8x8, Ringcentral, Cisco Webex and many more. This enables you to enhance and extend the capabilities of the teamwork hubs. Whichever tools you choose, ensure thorough training and guidance is given to ensure maximum adoption and effective use.

**APPLICATIONS**

Identify which applications have overlapping functions, then consolidate them to reduce the IT burden and licensing costs. Use the workstyle and functional elements of your persona development to identify whether people require locally installed or online access to applications using Software as a Service or via virtual desktops hosted in Microsoft Azure, AWS or the Google Cloud Platform. Bear these three application rules in mind:

- Justify the business need: must the user have access?
- Minimise the risk: ensure you control the permissions
- Review: regularly check permissions, business need and controls
2. REFINE

Mine your workstyle and resource persona feedback to inform the style of devices and type of accessories required for each persona, ranging from laptops, workstations, thin clients and tablets, to monitors, headsets and unique accessibility items. Introduce a unified endpoint management tool, like VMware Workspace ONE to enable easy central management and control of all types of devices, whether business or employee owned.

To simplify things further, consider Device as a Service (DaaS), a subscription style model that cuts upfront purchase cost and offloads device lifecycle management and integrated logistics of multi-vendor and multi-operating devices to a partner such as Softcat.

Key areas to focus on include:

DATA
This vital business resource must be managed so that those who need it can access it under secure, compliant conditions. This means carefully considering three factors:

- Regulation: pin down regulations on the type of data you manage and the regions you operate in.
- People: work with your employees to identify the data they need access to and the preferred format.
- Storage: how do you need to store it to optimise accessibility, compliance and storage costs?

Classify and tag unstructured data so that you can implement the correct policies to limit access to the right people, and make sure it’s available when and where they need it. Keep your footprint small and improve performance by setting retention periods, keeping it de-duplicated and archiving off older material. And of course it’s vital to back up your data, even if it is hosted by a cloud service.

OPERATIONS
You can only refine your operations if you have full visibility of your assets and processes. This is why it’s worth introducing an asset inventory and workspace analytics tool to identify what you have, and how everything is performing. These can be selected depending on the level of sophistication of your operations. You can decide whether to run these yourself, or to outsource them as a SaaS offering or managed service, which can free up valuable staff resources and tap into remote expertise.

Increased remote working also introduces greater challenges for monitoring workspace and productivity monitoring, as well as managing the workflows and tasks that you and your customers depend on. Building out an observation platform empowers organisations to confidently deliver digital experiences by analysing every interaction in the chain.

Solutions like Unified Endpoint Management enable you to manage every device in every use case, reducing costs and improving security.

PLATFORM
Insight from your employee personas in terms of workstyle, function and resource will provide the key criteria for your choice of platform to support your digital workspace:

- Devices: are they shared or one-to-one, and do they need to be ruggedised or lightweight?
- Online services: SaaS or virtual desktops, or offline?
- Applications: online or offline?
- Data: what storage and access needs are required?

This information will dictate your operating system of choice and component suitability, alongside support requirements from independent software vendors such as Adobe, Autodesk, and Dassault.

The outcome will include some, if not all of the following: SaaS, Windows 10, Google Chrome OS, Apple macOS, iOS, Android and virtual desktops and apps.
Once you’ve reviewed and refined your digital workspace in the right way, you will have created a platform for ongoing innovation that will help you continually improve the way you work along with the employee and customer experience – essentially future-proofing your business.

This will enable you to harness the power of the latest technologies, such as AI-driven automation and robotics, deploy new applications and platforms quickly and effectively, and develop better operational and finance models. It will enable you to reimagine the way you work.

3. REIMAGINE
Developing your digital workspace means you will have more company data than ever at your fingertips. Used in the right way, it will help you to make quicker, more informed decisions, optimising your operations, streamlining processes, driving efficiencies and improving the employee and customer experience. This will ultimately make you consistently more competitive and agile, and enable you to give customers what they want faster than ever before.

The key is to identify the data that will help you meet your business objectives and future challenges, then find the applications that will enable you to analyse it to extract the intelligence you need.

The range of business apps continues to grow and your digital workspace will enable your team to access them wherever they are, quickly and easily direct from devices or via the cloud. Pin down your business needs and then source the apps that can help your company run better. For example, do your people need to review designs remotely with augmented reality, monitor industrial equipment with machine learning, or simplify routines with on-device intelligence?

Frictionless access means apps are easy for employees to use, helping to improve adoption within your workforce. This leads to greater consistency within your business, where all employees have a personalised view of key information.

Your digital workspace enables ongoing digital transformation, which offers the opportunity to harness exciting new technologies, leverage automation, and streamline workflows.

Take augmented reality (AR), for example. AR apps bring life-like experiences to your employees’ screens, transforming remote expertise and off-site support, saving time and resources. They also open new ways of training and collaborating, improving communication, productivity and decision-making through enhanced visualisations and shared experiences.

Machine learning, meanwhile, powered by artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, enables the automation of industrial processes, transforming workflows and driving efficiencies.

The key is to carefully plan and manage the development of your digital workspace so that it can support the data, applications and future innovation your business needs.
Whatever technologies you combine to create your own digital workspace, first and foremost it should be a business enabler. The trick is to harmonise more flexible ways of working with risk management and innovation. This is built on the foundations of secure people-centric design.

PRIORITISING PEOPLE AND SECURITY
PEOPLE

Whatever challenges your business faces now and in the future, you will only be able to overcome them with the support, commitment and engagement of your people. To attract and retain the talent you need and then get your team to perform to the best of their ability, you need to create the right environment of apps, devices and tools to enable flexible working and inspire collaboration, as this will drive motivation and improve personal wellbeing.

What workers want:

The findings of People Insight’s survey of over 8,000 UK employees show the steps business need to take to ensure their commitment, loyalty and wellbeing. Here’s how many days a week people prefer to work from home:

- 50% 1-2 days
- 31% 3-4 days
- 17% 5 days
- 2% 0 days

Source: People Insights Survey June 2020

SECURITY

In an era when privacy and data protection is critical both from a legal and personal standpoint, it’s vital to ensure your digital workspace provides a secure environment wherever your employees are working, whether in the office, at home or in the field.

Critical areas are:

- **Access** – implement strict protocols to control access to data
- **Edge** – protecting the evolving boundaries across devices, datacentres and cloud
- **Operations** – implementing the necessary governance through monitoring and policies
At Softcat, we specialise in optimising the digital workspace by securely connecting people, apps, data and devices to drive agility, flexibility, collaboration and success.

We believe in putting people first. That means ensuring your digital workspace solution is not only right for your employees in terms of both productivity, job satisfaction and wellbeing, but also you the employer.

We recognise that change is constant and that new generations are continually entering the workplace, bringing new levels of knowledge, experience and expectation of new technology that businesses need to understand and satisfy. We will work with you and your changing workforce to drive the right kind of innovation across your business to empower your people to perform to the maximum.

We’ll work closely with you to assess, design, build and manage a digital workspace that puts your people first, while meeting your specific business objectives.

HOW CAN SOFTCAT HELP

DIGITAL WORKSPACE
We will focus on the following key areas:

**PLATFORM AND OPERATING SYSTEM**

The foundation of your digital workspace, we’ll help you choose an interface that’s user friendly, reliable and secure, whether based on Microsoft, Google, Apple, iOS, Android or virtual desktop technologies.

**COLLABORATION**

We’ll use our expertise and experience to ensure you get the right tools in place to get your people working better together wherever they are, boosting co-creation, productivity and new ways of thinking.

**DATA**

We’ll help you assess, access and use your key data to create an intelligent workspace and drive better business decision making, by harnessing the power of accurate reporting and intelligent automation.

**SECURITY AND COMPLIANCE**

We’ll ensure an ongoing robust security and compliance strategy runs through your digital workspace solution covering all areas from on-site and remote user access to applications, connectivity, devices and data storage.

**PEOPLE**

We’ll help you manage the change digitalisation and digital transformation brings across your workforce, breaking down barriers through training and ongoing support to ensure your teams embrace new technology and get the most from it for both your business and their own wellbeing.

**DEVICES**

We’ll work with you to enable users to choose the phone, tablet, laptop or thin client devices that best suit their needs and way of working – and your budget.

**APPLICATIONS**

We’ll help you source and purchase the right applications and software to meet your objectives quickly and easily, while taking care of integration, compliance, and software consolidation.
TAKE THE NEXT STEP

TO DISCUSS IN MORE DETAIL HOW WE CAN HELP YOU DEVELOP YOUR IDEAL DIGITAL WORKSPACE, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR ACCOUNT MANAGER OR EMAIL DIGITALWORKSPACE@SOFTCAT.COM