



Microsoft Fast Study –
Post-COVID
working environment



"The digital renaissance might have been supported by technology, but its success has been dependent on people."



Case Study 1

Remote Work

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Foreword

2020 brought about a change in the way many people and businesses work. Some of these changes will be temporary, some permanent. One thing is certain, some form of hybrid work environment will be the new normal from now on.

Businesses have always had to evolve. Sometimes, that evolution happened slowly while at other times it happened so quickly many businesses languished and either struggled or failed completely to adapt. But it doesn't take long for the new normal to become the next normal.

The shift to new working environments was accelerated by COVID. But the shift was already happening. Many businesses had already embraced flexible working arrangements, technologies that weren't tied to users being in specific locations and thought about how to run a distributed company.

The post-COVID working environment requires business and end users to think differently about their IT needs and capabilities. Digital transformation has accelerated bringing complexity in the form of new security, connectivity and accessibility challenges that need to be met while ensuring rapid deployment of technology to ensure seamless productivity for employees.

Dicker Data has addressed these needs and have built solutions to help its partners deliver outcome-based capabilities for the new way of working. That means focussing on strategic challenges such as security and storage. The move to the cloud, new and more robust tools for managing security and a focus on collaboration platforms is transforming the very idea of what work is.

Work is no longer a place we go – it's a thing we do. The massive disruption of 2020 has given rise to a new way of working and thinking about the nature of work.

One of the foundations of this transformation is communication. With the era of the big CBD office coming to an end, Leader Systems is working with customers to help them take advantage of faster and more reliable communications from the NBN and rapidly expanding 5G cellular networks. These will not only allow people to connect but usher in new ways of thinking about systems are deployed and used.

When different restrictions were put in place to prevent the further spread of Sars-Cov-2 virus businesses scrambled to enable their workforces to be productive from home. That's meant working with trusted partners to procure the right hardware, assist with deployment and ensure that security is fit for purpose. Tools such as Desktop as a Service and a shift to more cloud-based systems will ensure businesses are fully equipped as the post-COVID working environment becomes the next normal.

Beyond 2021, businesses will continue to face disruption. Disruption is a normal part of business life. The investments businesses make now, as they adapt to the post-COVID working environment, should be made with an eye to the future. That's why partners such as Dicker Data and Leader Systems are so valuable.

They have deep and broad expertise and experience that enables them to offer sound advice about to be use technology as an enabler to navigate the changing waters ahead.

For more information on the New Next: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-au/newnext>



Remote Work

Dicker Data

Working 9-5 is over - welcome to the new world of work

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions and lockdowns some businesses were better prepared for remote and distributed workforces than others. Staff were equipped with laptops and many systems were remotely accessible allowing teams to remain productive when unable to access the main office.

But that doesn't mean there weren't challenges. There's a marked difference between occasionally working remotely and being ready to work outside the main office for weeks or months at a time. That meant businesses needed to look at everything from security and support to system and network architecture in order to ensure that workers could be productive without compromising business operations.

The post-COVID world has prompted businesses to challenge old assumptions as they adapt to the world in 2021 and beyond.

Ben Johnson, General Manager at Dicker Data, leading value-added distributor of hardware, software, cloud, and emerging technologies, says the pace of digital transformation driven by the COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented – something Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella says resulted in two years of digital transformation taking place over just two months.

"Systems and apps that had not been updated were quickly virtualised," says Johnson. "External access was bolstered and the increased use of public cloud platforms like Azure gave businesses more scalability."

That rapid transition required businesses to sometimes put aside plans and ideas that were long held. In some cases, the (Standard Operating Environment) SOE was sidelined as productivity became the new focus. Businesses were forced to re-evaluate their infrastructure strategies as they reconsidered on-prem, cloud and hybrid options. Centralised systems were moved or re-architected to the edge to facilitate access and even where internal security was strong, there's been a need to bolster external security.

The digital renaissance

That transition was not purely about the systems and security that underpin enterprise systems. Businesses are facing a new world where face to face and direct experiences are being usurped. Digital is now the default with almost all employee and client interactions requiring both real world and digital options.

"There's no replacement for human interaction and face to face engagement; as humans we crave constant interaction. While lockdowns, boarder restrictions and community transmission uncertainty continue to impede the ability to physically meet, there's a greater emphasis on the role of technology to facilitate those connections", Johnson says. "It's not about eliminating face-to-face interactions but to focus on enhancing how we virtually collaborate and build unified and inclusive experiences."

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Face to face is still important but meetings will have complementary physical and virtual opportunities for attendance and contribution.

While this renaissance has progressed, many businesses have struggled to keep up. **Research from Valoir¹** found that while almost two thirds of the workforce has transitioned to remotely working, barely a quarter of workers have been provided with new or improved technology since the onset of COVID-19.

As businesses invest in the tools needed to get the greatest value from their human capital, they will reap the benefits of an engaged workforce. This is critical for fostering a sense of belonging in the workforce – a critical factor for success.

While all those changes, businesses have had to adapt their security strategies.

The security question

Even those that thought they had their internal security in order, had to make changes. Public cloud services from reputable providers offer strong security – even up to levels that are endorsed by government agencies. Perceptions about the security of cloud services have given way to reality.

Cloud providers typically have access to more security expertise than many private companies. This means that businesses are able to outsource security activities to a trusted cloud provider which allows internal personnel to focus on high-value internal activities.

Through the pandemic the cybersecurity threat level facing businesses has increased. **Research from CheckPoint²** found that criminals have been executing phishing campaigns discovered impersonating the WHO and popular conferencing platforms to steal sensitive information.

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¹<https://valoir.com/blog-1/working-at-home-is-working>

²<https://blog.checkpoint.com/2020/05/12/coronavirus-cyber-attacks-update-beware-of-the-phish/>



"Technology, delivered with the support of partners that understand your business and take the time to learn about your specific needs, will ensure productivity and security are balanced and delivered."

The building blocks of the digital renaissance

"Digital is the default in the post-COVID world," says Johnson. "Success will depend on how well people are equipped with technology that is agile, robust and secure. Our digital capability needs to support easy connection and accessibility."

The first half of 2020 wasn't just about the rapid uptake and transformation of systems within businesses. New features were and continue to be added to digital platforms faster than ever before. For example, Microsoft Teams has seen dozens of new features added to support the new world faster than we've ever seen.

Alongside the addition of new features and expanded functionality to enable distributed teams to work together businesses have also been focussed on ensuring their security posture is strengthened. As the remote work revolution evolves, two-factor authentication has expanded and increased use of single sign-on applications has taken a leap forward enabling organisations to improve accessibility and as reduce the support overhead typically associated with remote access.

People are the key

The digital renaissance might have been supported by technology, but its success has been dependent on people. The adaptability of people has been the foundation of the work from home revolution's success. But that success relies on equipping people with the right tools.

"Remote work is here to stay which means remote devices like laptops are for everyone. They are no longer 'special' with the desktop to laptop transition now in full swing," says Johnson.

Laptop shipments increased during the pandemic and that increase shows no sign of abating according to recent data from IDC.³ A big factor in that, according to Mr Johnson, is an acceleration in the shift to Windows 10 from Windows 7. But the requirement for well-equipped home offices is now expected. As well as monitors and easy docking solutions for that growing fleet of laptops, businesses need to invest in high quality headsets and webcams now that online collaboration is the default.

Although people are getting better at using the technology, support remains critical. Mr Johnson says as much as 3-5% of

employee time is spent dealing with technology issues. This is why businesses need to invest in remote support tools as well as remote deployment technology, such as Windows Autopilot, as well as newer, more reliable technology.

Businesses were pushed, during the early days of the pandemic, to get people working productively as quickly as possible. BYOD became part of that new normal as people used the tools they had at home to connect and work. This, in turn, pushed businesses to improve security. The concept of the SOE changed with businesses forced to abandon old notions and confront the new reality.

Mr Johnson says there has also been significant growth in virtualised solutions such as Citrix and Windows Virtual Desktop.

What will 2021 bring?

With the rapid uptake of new technology in 2020, 2021 will be about catchup.

"Security will be key," says Johnson. "VPNs will continue to be critical so teams can connect to legacy applications. Not all workloads can be moved to the cloud because of regulatory challenges so businesses will continuously to adapt and upgrade their security posture."

Storage needs will continue to accelerate he adds. The line between the cost of physical and virtual storage will be blurred with some storage, such as static data returning to on premises solutions with more dynamic data going to the cloud.

The focus is not on IT – it's about outcomes. The continued rapid evolution of collaboration platforms and deployment of new technology has been important. But the most successful transitions have been the one where the business outcomes have been the most significant priority.

If necessity is the mother of invention, then we've seen the massive disruption of 2020 give rise to a new way of not just working, but considering what work is.

Work is no longer a place we go to – it's now, more than ever, a thing we do. Technology, delivered with the support of partners that understand your business and take the time to learn about your specific needs, will ensure productivity and security are balanced and delivered.

³ <https://www.idc.com/promo/pcdforecast>



Remote Work

Leader Computers

The digital renaissance is in full swing

While 2020 might not be the year anyone imagined when they made their resolutions, it's likely that 2021 will follow suit and be a very different world to the one we left in 2019. While changes from year to year are usually incremental, we've seen some significant changes. And these will continue.

The working environments of 2021 and beyond will be different to those we grew accustomed to before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The trend towards remote working has been gathering pace, slowly, for some time. Individuals have been able to negotiate work from home arrangements over the years, but businesses were rarely equipped with anything more than the bare necessities to make this work. And, even then, it was seen as a privilege reserved for a small number of employees.

The COVID pandemic changed this. Jaimie l'Anson, the Sales Manager from Leader Computers, explains.

"The steady rhythm of working nine to five was replaced with a more outcome focussed approach as people balanced children learning at home, limited travel and other shifts", he says.

As a result, businesses have invested heavily technologies to enable teams to work effectively from home and other remote locations. That's reflected in data from IDC which forecasts laptop computer shipments to continue rising through to 2024 while desktop shipments are expected to fall over the **same period**.¹

¹<https://www.idc.com/promo/pcdforecast>

Leader Computers supports over 12,000+ resellers across Australia. l'Anson and his team has seen first the impact of the pandemic as the company has supported businesses and communities as they have adjusted to the new normal with work/school from home demand due to COVID 19.

Endpoint devices are just the start says l'Anson. Workers also need reliable access to systems, data and services that have traditionally been accessed over local networks.

"Businesses that were contemplating using cloud systems to replace on-prem applications had the decision forced," says l'Anson. "Managed service providers have become central and not peripheral for businesses that were slow to make the move."

Although businesses have been moving towards digital transformation and increased use of cloud applications and other remotely managed systems, the pandemic pushed remote enablement of applications and services from the 'too hard basket' to 'essential – get it done now.'

"Managed service providers have become central and not peripheral for businesses that were slow to make the move."

Telecommunications became pivotal

That also meant businesses had to learn how to remotely support teams working in a variety of locations with different end-point devices over a variety of different connection technologies and performance levels. But l'Anson says the success of the rapid development of remote workforces, both at Leader Computers and with its customers, has been surprisingly effective.

"Some businesses were reticent to support telecommuting but have been surprised by how effective it's been in many instances. While there are some roles that don't support remote workers, for those that do, it's been a boost to productivity and work morale," says l'Anson.

The importance of telecommunications in this transformation can't be under-estimated adds l'Anson. While the NBN has been much maligned over the last decade, it has enabled more people to connect remotely at speeds that support near-seamless operations from home.

Telecommunications have been a challenge for businesses. But the development of faster, ubiquitous connectivity over rapidly improving cellular networks as well as fixed connections means the nature of the workplace is changing. Until recently, most people had to commute to a central office in order to effectively communicate and collaborate with colleagues. But communications technology is changing that.

"The era of the big central CBD office might be coming to an end," says l'Anson. "It's likely to be replaced by smaller satellite offices that are closer to where workers live and give the benefit of communal workspaces without the overhead of big city real estate. There will be a new mix to where people work and live with a mix of work from home, smaller suburban offices and reduced spaces in big cities."

The tools have been there

While some of the tools needed for a remote workforce to operate successfully are relatively new – fast and easily accessible networks, cloud services and SaaS applications – others have been around for some time explains l'Anson.

"Portable computers, VPNs and network have been around for a while but business investment in them has not been significant. This had made them into crude instruments rather than precision tools."

The last year, through the COVID-19 pandemic has shown its possible to use these tools in a more powerful and enabling way. Rather than investing in lowest-cost solutions, companies are now looking at better laptops and external displays as business-grade home offices are now normal.

But that journey is still in progress. Businesses, because of product and personnel shortages at the start of the pandemic, had to prioritise the procurement and deployment of new hardware where it would bring the most benefit or alleviate the most pain. And systems that were hastily procured or upgraded are now being reviewed to ensure they are secure and reliable.

"The journey is still in progress," says l'Anson.

From the scramble to 2021

When the movement and gathering restrictions were initiated during the early days of the pandemic in March and April 2020 there was a scramble to equip workers with the tools they needed. This led to shortages in everything from laptops to displays to webcams and mics. By the middle of 2020, things were 'working' but there were issues.

During the second half of 2020, says l'Anson, businesses realised they had to play catch up and rectify issues with security which drove a shift towards new or better multi-factor authentication.

Work was also done to make systems that worked more reliable and stable. Many backend systems were built on the assumption of an always on local network. While fixed networks like the NBN and cellular connectivity are widely available, they don't offer the same characteristics of reliability, latency and performance as local networks. So, backend systems have been given more attention with many of those issues addressed.

With workers now equipped with a solid hardware toolkit that can access a variety of tools that allow them to deliver the same, or in some cases, better productivity and outcomes than the traditional office, the next year will see the technology investment focus on refinement and smoothing the rough edges of hastily executed remote access projects from 2020.

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The new world of 2021 and beyond

l'Anson says "We've learned that the best person for a job doesn't have to be in the office or even in the same city. In fact, a geographically dispersed team can be an advantage. For example, a team with members on the East and West coasts of Australia can expand manned support teams for a longer part of the day without running night or afternoon shifts."

One of the promises and expectations of the shift to working from home has been about improving work-life balance. With commuting times reduced, workers can now spend more time at home and less in cars and on public transport. Interstate and overseas trips will be less common as businesses have seen that it is possible to successfully conduct business using remote collaboration tools such as Office 365 and Microsoft Teams.

But this shift also requires a change in how work is managed. l'Anson says the shift to outcomes rather than time spent at work means there will need to be an increased emphasis on project management skills and tools. This makes collaboration platforms like Teams increasingly important, as well as greater reliance on tools like MS Authentication and Office 365.

Remote access has moved from the 'Nice to have' column in requirements matrices to 'Essential.'

With an increased fleet of remotely managed devices, businesses are now looking at the entire procurement process. Desktop as a Service is emerging. With hardware now commoditised, businesses will look to shift capital costs into operational budgets so they can hold onto capital funds for high value projects that improve the business' bottom line.

2020 has been a massive disruption to business. But alongside that disruption we have proven that technology can be an enabler of a more mobile workforce that can effectively work from home and be as productive, or even more productive, than staff working in offices.

Home offices and satellite workplaces will become a regular feature of corporate life. Workers will not need to spend hours each week simply travelling from home to an office. Where teams need to physically meet, smaller offices in suburban areas or co-working spaces will allow people to get together as they simply carry their office in a laptop satchel.

The post-COVID world will be one where technology enables greater worker and workplace flexibility. Collaboration using digital tools, as well as access to corporate systems and information, will become seamless as businesses find better ways to securely connect and work together.

Businesses that have embraced change and looked for ways to leverage technology so that teams can work from anywhere at any time have discovered that the assumptions they had no longer hold.

Businesses like Leader Computers are a trusted partner that can deliver the right tools and support to enable their partners to successfully navigate these new waters and help their customers adapt to a post-COVID world.