

Top 10 ways to navigate the new normal

Never before have companies, individuals, organisations, societies and other entities and their staff been compelled to adapt to such massive change in such a short space of time due to the exigencies of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here's how you can navigate this situation when working from a home environment.



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“Most businesses have already accepted that the new normal means working effectively with distributed connected teams. We’re faced with new challenges that require purposeful, scheduled communication as well as flexible technology that will enable supply chains to collaborate and overcome obstacles,” explains Rob House, operations director at Open Communications, an independent communications solutions provider that integrates best-in-class technologies with real-world situations.

Here are his top 10 tips for your home office:

1. A reliable business internet service

Everything relies on your Internet connection! Ensure it’s a business service, as with a home package you typically share a port with five other properties. Choose an uncapped option — no throttling, no interruptions. Also consider a small UPS for your router so that loadshedding doesn’t cause further disruptions.

2. A working environment that suits you

A home office is not one size fits all, but do consider the lighting and keep a neutral background for video calls so that your inquisitive pet, kid or towel-clad partner doesn’t make a surprise appearance!

3. A computer with enough power

There’s nothing worse than being faced with the Spinning Wheel of Doom, or the Blue Screen of Death when you’re on deadline. Consider a memory upgrade or reinstallation of the operating system — sometimes small enhancements

make all the difference. Ensure you've done all those pesky updates and that your antivirus is up to date.

4. Cloud-based business applications

Your home base is far from the office servers. You need access to information, regardless of your location. Microsoft Office 365 should be a top priority. Email — from any computer on the planet. CRM — done. File sharing — online. Computer crashed? Just use a different one and still have access to all your documents and applications.

5. Business-class voice service

Funny, we don't mind waiting a few seconds for a web page to refresh, but we cannot cope with tiny delays to voice traffic that affects our conversations! To get things done, you need to speak directly to someone, but cellphone networks are expensive and struggle with the high demand. Add the Teams Voice Plus service to your existing Microsoft Teams bundle and you can make high-quality business calls to any phone number.

What's more, by combining Microsoft Teams with Direct Routing, Teams Voice Plus enables you to communicate with any contact (colleague or customer) whether they're online or on mobile, at work or queuing at the shop — all within the Teams interface where you can see everyone's status and share files, ideas and conversation.

6. Video conferencing that works

Good quality video conferencing that's easy to use is probably the most powerful tool in your technological kit. Enjoy seamless communication with Teams Voice Plus, contacting colleagues on their landlines and video-calling customers in high definition.

7. Time management and discipline

Set boundaries. Allowing for time to do chores, help the kids with homeschooling, and work through your to-do list and scheduled meetings is essential to good productivity and well-being.

8. Flexibility and ingenuity

Let's face it: in the face of the coronavirus-induced lockdown and the need to maintain your operations and generate income or other outputs, the gloves are off as far as traditional thinking is concerned. The companies that survive the next 12 months will be those that innovate and find new, more cost-effective ways of doing business and surmounting the challenges. Add some entrepreneurial flair to your approach.

9. Secure everything

Having all your work in the cloud means your business communications and transactions are all over the public internet — prone to phishing, ransomware attacks and the like. Ensure all your business solutions are secure. On the web you can rely on SSL certificates and standard secure connection methods (https in URLs, padlock in the browser... all familiar stuff), but when selecting business applications ask questions such as: Where is your data being stored? Is it PoPI compliant? Who are you trusting with your confidential information?

It needn't be scary; just ensure all the security boxes are ticked. And don't choose inferior software simply because of a 'killer feature' or a cheaper monthly subscription.

10. Backup strategy

We've all had that cold-sweat moment: The last four hours' work, all gone! Have a backup strategy that covers file loss (autosaving and version control) as well as computer failure (backups and cloud storage).

"We're living through a Communications Revolution, and only those who can access the information and people they need at the right time will survive," concludes House.

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