

THE FUTURE OF WORKPLACE RECOVERY

As we're all aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world of work, perhaps permanently. During lockdown, working from home became a necessity for most, if only temporarily, and it has prompted businesses to re-evaluate their working methods, policies and estate requirements.

During a recent roundtable, participants discussed the monumental shifts we've seen this year and whether the workplace, as we know it, is dead. Attendees then learnt how Sungard Availability Services is adding greater flexibility to its Workplace services with the aim of helping businesses react to both planned and unplanned events.

Is home working here to stay?

It will not surprise you that during the first national lockdown the number of people working from home more than doubled with almost all (94.7%) organisations having staff working from home.

According to a McKinsey Digital report, the UK has vaulted five years forward in consumer and business digital adoption in a matter of around eight weeks. Since the start of the pandemic, videoconferencing platform

Zoom has seen daily usage soar by more than 300% and Microsoft Teams reports its number of daily active users increase by 12m in just one week.

However, the rapid shift to remote working proved a baptism of fire for service providers and 55% of businesses changed provider or reduced their service levels because of technology problems. Consumers also became less tolerant of failure with almost a third (32%) stating they would switch provider if a website was down for more than 24-hours.



We are seeing a renewed focus on split-site working for A/B teams and increased willingness to explore other enduring solutions.

The shift to working from home was born of necessity and executed at speed. While many at first enjoyed the novelty of working from home — saving time and money on commuting, spending more time with family and being able to wear comfortable clothes — as time has gone on, serious shortcomings have started to emerge:

- **Increased vulnerability to cyberattacks**

More than a quarter (27.6%) of organisations have had to implement additional security measures to prevent cyber-related incidents like the well-publicised attacks on Garmin and Honda.

- **Higher expectations of regulators**

Given the extreme circumstances, at first, regulators tended to take a more relaxed view of less-than-ideal home-working arrangements but now that the immediate crisis is over and businesses have had time to prepare, it is only a matter of time before HSE requirements on homeworking are enforced.

- **Working environment**

For those not fortunate to have a well-equipped home office, the drawbacks of not going into the office are becoming more apparent as time goes on. The reality of working from home can mean:

- **Unsuitable facilities**—having to work from the kitchen table and share internet access.
- **Distractions** caused by children, deliveries and domestic obligations.
- **Feelings of isolation** without the daily camaraderie and loss of the casual interactions between colleagues that build strong interpersonal relationships. These often enable issues to be resolved quickly and informally rather than through official channels.



Concerns over cybersecurity defences and confidentiality. In certain sectors, this means employees are forbidden from printing documents at home.

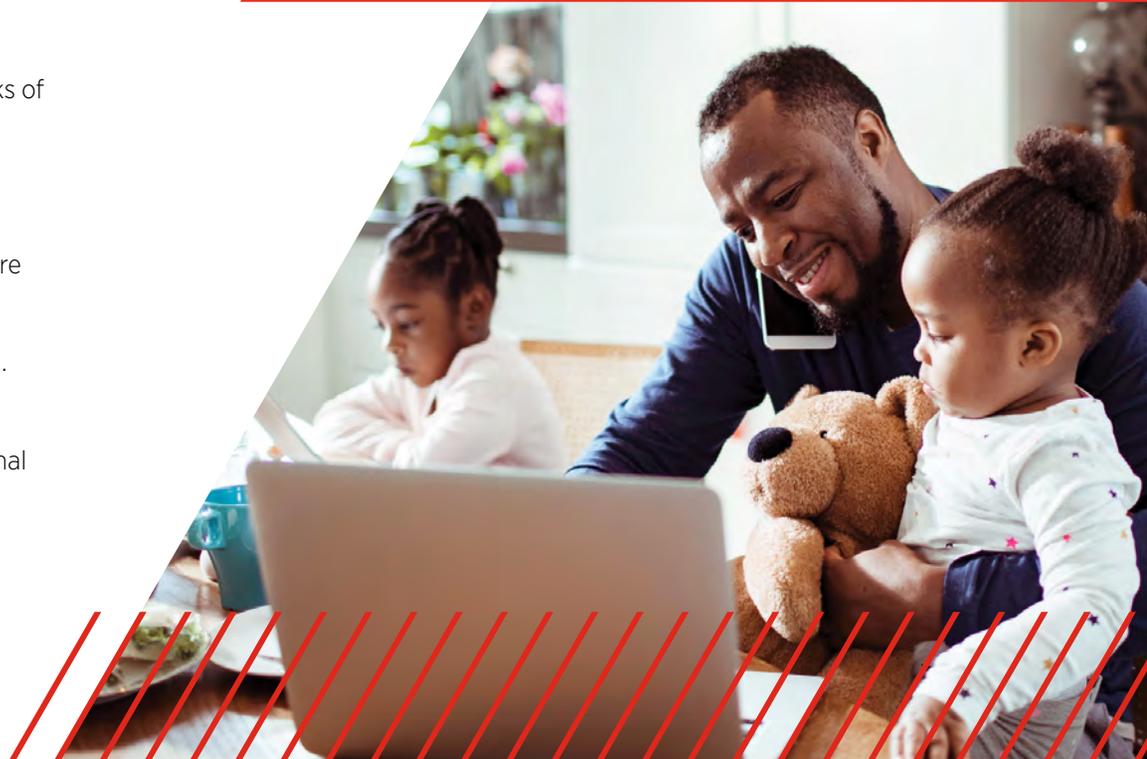


Research shows that creativity suffers without collaboration between colleagues. A recent survey suggests that while productivity levels have been maintained during the pandemic, companies' spirit of innovation has declined drastically as their workforces were dispersed.



Difficulties assimilating and training new starters, and with managing staff remotely.

These and many other drawbacks mean that reports of the death of the office may be premature.



Workplace adapts to ‘the new (for now) normal’

Sungard Availability Services has consulted external experts about what the pandemic means for our 16 UK workplace recovery centres (WRCs) and has adapted them accordingly. We are fortunate in that our facilities are typically designed as self-contained suites, rather than large, open plan areas, which helps limit the spread of infection, along with the following precautions:

New COVID-19 safety measures implemented

- **Protective Perspex screens**, 2ft high, have been installed in key locations, protecting more than 2,200 Workplace Recovery desks throughout the UK. Further screens have been stored centrally, ready to deploy instantly at time of test or disaster (ATOT/ATOD). These screens, coupled with revised desk layouts, help occupants comply with government distancing guidelines and increase potential suite occupancy from 30% to 80%.
- **Thermal imaging cameras** — These have been installed at entrances to several sites, with plans for roll out to the whole estate, to unobtrusively measure the temperature of everyone entering the building.
- **Fever screens** — Already installed at several sites and with more installations planned, these strategically placed screens can read body temperatures within seconds and alert individuals if they have a fever. The digital display panel will also remind them to wear a facemask if one isn't detected.
- **Track and trace system** — Sungard AS is also operating its own localised track and trace system to alert any site visitors who may have come into contact with an individual who later tests positive for coronavirus.
- **Implemented one-way systems around buildings** — to support government social distancing requirements. This extends to allowing visitors to enter through the lobby and leave through the fire exit.

- **Discouraging use of communal coffee points** — customers are instead encouraged to set-up refreshment areas within their own suites.
- **Enhanced cleaning procedures** — We've introduced more regular cleaning routines with suites and sites thoroughly cleaned throughout the day and fully sanitised after an invocation. We are also using electrostatic disinfectant to clean our suites and there is a monthly fogging programme in place.
- **Listening to customers** about the safety measures they want.

While COVID-19 has preoccupied our thoughts this year, the usual risks to business continuity have not gone away. People tend to forget that at the start of 2020, excessive rainfall led to the wettest February in England and Wales since records began in 1766. Companies still need contingency plans for all the other risks they face including fire, flood, denial of access to premises, cyberattacks and hardware failure.

New product — Serviced Workplace

In response to demand from customers looking to exit their production office leases and move into a more flexible ‘office as a Service’ arrangement, in July 2020 we launched Serviced Workplace. These are dedicated suites **designed for full-time occupation** (not just ATOT/ATOD).

The contract is **tailored around the needs of individual customers** with pre-defined support hours and free recovery to shared seats in another Sungard AS facility. Customer employees are given a photo ID badge to allow easy access, which gives them the right to ‘drop in’ to an alternative Sungard AS site to take advantage of the Wi-Fi and refreshment facilities.

Dedicated Workplace becomes more flexible

Alongside the introduction of Serviced Workplace, we have upgraded our Dedicated Workplace offering to give customers easier access and increased usability. The main changes are that:

- While, due to lease restrictions, suites are not designed for full-time occupancy, testing and usage constraints have been greatly relaxed.
- There is no invocation fee and only one hour's notice is needed during normal business hours (three hours outside business hours).
- Customers now have unlimited access to their suite for testing, swing space when a temporary office is needed, training, split-site working and additional processing. In short, customers are free to use their suites for whatever they need.

Shared Workplace improvements

Perhaps the most radical change, our popular Shared Workplace service is **now available for scheduled, as well as unplanned, events**. Having said this, in the event of a diary clash, we will do our utmost to accommodate all customers, but disaster declarations will be prioritised over routine bookings to allow us to support customers in their time of greatest need.

This means if clients expect disruption to occur due to a pandemic, extreme weather, civil disruption or maintenance works, to list some examples, they can access the Shared Workplace facility.

For unplanned events, there is no invocation fee and only one hour's notice is needed during normal business hours (three hours outside business hours).

Q&A

Q: Does installing Perspex screens increase the number of people who can work in the suite?

A: The short answer is 'yes' as it introduces another layer of protection that allows us to move to 1m+ social distancing yet still comply with government guidelines. On a practical level, it prevents people leaning left or right over a colleague's desk and invading their space.

Q: I know at the start of the year we could only use our suite for a disaster situation, is there scope to give us more flexibility in the future?

A: Yes, as mentioned before we've actually just changed some of the terms and conditions around our service. This opens up the opportunity for customers to use the site as part of a split site staffing, which one of our customers has been using their space to do for the last few months, or book in scheduled events if your building will be unavailable or in a tier where staff are unable to travel to.

Q: We house NHS key workers and, following a high incidence of infection, the Health & Safety Executive has advised us to change our vent system to 100% fresh air only to get greater airflow through the building. Has Sungard AS got the ability to do this?

A: This is the first time someone has asked us about this, but as I understand it we have made this available at our sites since the start of the pandemic.

Q: If there are planned restrictions put into place that mean we cannot get into Mansell Street, can we use another site?

A: Yes for scheduled events, customers are welcome to use any other Sungard AS sites should restrictions allow. We will hold a copy of the customer PC image and telephony, which enables them to rollback to any available Sungard AS WRC around the country. Many Mansell Street customers find our Borehamwood WRC to be their most convenient alternative location.



How businesses are using workplace recovery is changing. To learn more on how we're adapting our service to meet these needs and how workplace recovery can still fit into your future disaster recovery planning, contact us now.

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About Sungard Availability Services

Sungard Availability Services provides managed IT services, information availability consulting services, business continuity management software, and disaster recovery services.

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