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By Dave Moorman

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BRING EVERYTHING UP TO SPEED

Creating a Digital Workplace:

A Sound Business Strategy for 2022 and Beyond

With the arrival of the global pandemic, many companies found themselves going all virtual, with personnel working from home or a different location. As late as July 2021, some analysts were predicting that working from home (or a hybrid combination of office and home office) would become the new norm. However, recent studies indicate that executive attitudes are shifting.

In October, global real estate services firm Cushman & Wakefield1 released a prediction that most of the world would achieve herd resiliency to COVID-19 (70% are either vaccinated or infected) by the second quarter of 2022. They also noted that 40% of the workforce2 had returned to the office as of September 2021, and that current trends make it likely more office workers across the globe will be returning to the office in Q1 2022.

At the same time, a percentage of firms are "trying" to make the hybrid model work for numerous reasons. One is that many employees simply don't want to return to the workplace full time. A study released this month (November 2021) found that 50%3 of workers would take a pay cut to work remotely at least part time.

These statistics are evidence that hybrid workplace models may be with us for a long time — if not forever. Even so, there is no substitute for in-office working and the benefit of team interaction and inspiration it brings.

No matter where their future workplaces may be, shrewd business leaders recognize that the past year's "in-office pause" is giving them a chance to rethink the nature of their firm's work and its efficiency. There may never have been a better time to seize new opportunities and make the move to a digital workplace. No matter where you are in the process, or what your position might be, this article will help you create a future filled with office and employee productivity and corporate resiliency.

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Enter the Digital Workplace

The concept of the digital workplace isn't new, but it is taking on new importance in the post COVID-19 era. Even as some organizations are letting their staffs work partially remote, cyberthreats for remote workers remain a significant threat. Per a Forrester study4, some 74% of companies blame recent cyberattacks on vulnerabilities caused by current remote work technologies.

These concerns make it especially important to structure your digital workplace for both security and success. Issues to consider range from ensuring enterprise-grade security and protecting your company data, to fostering effective team collaboration.

Here at Novatech, the concept of a digital workplace has always been part of our corporate DNA. It is a big part of the Managed Office and companies like yours can achieve the potential benefits of the digital workplace. We have developed some suggestions for digitizing your business and its processes. This effort will also help you achieve secure workplace productivity, anytime and anywhere for everyone in your organization.

In the remainder of this article, I will share my thoughts for a simple, four-step process. None of these suggestions are designed to endorse any product or solution. They are possibilities, not recommendations.
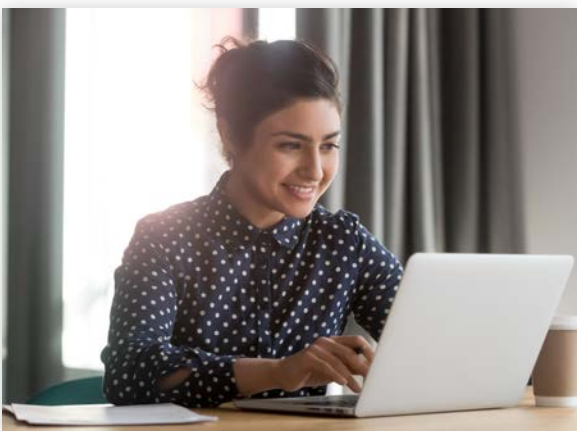
Achieving a Digital Workplace Revolution

Step 1: Scan all paper office documents using advanced intelligent data capture and recognition.

Through this process, the text on scanned documents is converted into a digital text format that can then be organized and indexed to enhance search and workflow processes. The goal is to take all unstructured data in your organization and to make it structured. Virtually all enterprise content management (ECM) platforms offer this functionality. Whatever your chosen solution, ensure it offers robust security and preferably enables captured documents and their content to be accessible easily on any device. (If you are still storing documents in bulky, insecure file cabinets, I urge you to make a switch right now.)

Step 2: Use digital workflows to move documents securely around your organization.

Digital document mobility is highly valuable in any company. It speeds document sharing and access while enabling document governance and helps firms meet compliance mandates. Most ECMs support secure document distribution and workflows, review and sign off. This leaves "digital breadcrumbs" that allow firms to trace how their document flowed through the organization (and even to partners and vendors, if that's important to you).

This solution is a must in highly regulated industries, and most business leaders in firms subject to compliance mandates understand this. However, I have been surprised at how many business professionals don't realize that any breakdown in process can be very costly. Regulators have fined firms heavily for not using best practices or monitoring staff to ensure they are following protocols. Digital workflows help eliminate this concern. Industries that aren't regulated can also benefit by automating manual business processes. This helps increase productivity, lower overall cost

and improves client satisfaction. The goal of every organization should be to automate as many processes as possible.

Step 3: Enable online document collaboration among employees.

Products such as Microsoft Teams and Workflows for Google Docs simplify document collaboration. SharePoint and Flow (now Automate) is also a great option if you are already using it, and your staff knows how to set it up and configure it properly. Personnel may be able to work together on document edits and approvals through a central repository, and all edits will be tracked. (This is another important aspect of achieving compliance if you are required to do so.)

Step 4: Safeguard your most valuable asset: your data.

Last, but not least, are data protection and business continuity. It is crucial for organizations to secure "unstructured"7 data — any information that cannot be organized into a database, such as documents, images, PDFs, emails and texts. The majority of the world's 64 zettabytes5 of data fits into this category.

(Hint: unless your firm has taken steps to organize and structure its data, up to 90% of it will be unstructured.6) I will cover this topic in a future article.

In addition, the increase in extreme weather and ransomware events is proving that local data backups are not the safest bet. Offsite data backups are a recognized best practice, but business leaders must identify their business requirements before finalizing their best approach. Other issues to consider are how long it will take to restore data and whether staff can access files and folders themselves. Single-file restoration can also be another helpful feature since it avoids the need to wait for an entire drive to come back online.

I hope this article has given you some good ideas — and encouraged you to strongly consider moving toward a fully digital workplace. If you're still on the fence, consider this recent comment by Gartner Senior Director Analyst ,Michael Woodbridge. "The digital workplace, and those who lead it, will shape the future of work."7

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1) https://www.globest.com/2021/10/01/latest-prediction-has-majority-returning-to-office-in-q1-2022/?slreturn=20211016083545
2) Ibid
3) https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2021/11/11/workplace-survey-remote-pay-cut-covid/6367601001/
4) https://www.cepro.com/news/study-finds-link-between-cybersecurity-attacks-and-remote-work-technology/
5) https://starry.com/blog/inside-the-internet/how-big-is-the-internet
6) https://venturebeat.com/2021/07/22/why-unstructured-data-is-the-future-of-data-management
7) https://www.gartner.com/en/conferences/emea/digital-workplace-uk