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The New Hybrid Workplace: Designing for Telecom/Tech Resilience

By Lynn Haber

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Together [Channel Partners](#) and [Channel Futures](#) provide inspiration, insights and tools to help every partner thrive in a new, digitally transformed world.

About the Author



LYNN HABER is senior editor for Channel Partners and Channel Partners. Prior to joining Informa in 2016, she spent three years as a senior editor for TechTarget. Before that, she created content for tech publications and corporate communications. During that time, she was deputy editor at ComputerWire, a London-based news and research service, and communications editor for Midrange Systems magazine. She also worked as an editor for Cahners Publishing and ComputerWorld.

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The emergence of the hybrid workforce changes everything. Think about your pre-pandemic remote workforce, of whatever scope. Now think bigger — much bigger. And don't assume this is a numbers game. It's not. For businesses, a highly distributed workforce translates into a newly emerging and conceived workplace. That means employers will need to provide this distributed workforce with everything they need to be productive, connected and seamless.

Truly, a workplace without borders.

The hybrid workplace is where people work in and move between a combination of locations — home, on the road and in an office. And they have all the bits and pieces they need to do their jobs: the connectivity, the devices, the apps, the data, the collaboration, the management and the support.

Recent research from Gartner about the sudden strategic interest in remote work is driving renewed interest in many related topics, technologies and the long-term outlook. The pandemic has accelerated the topic of remote work and the related and broader topic, the future of work.

“There's a spectrum when we talk about remote work,” said [Craig Roth](#), vice president and analyst at Gartner who covers the digital workplace. “Recently with coronavirus, remote work means at home, and that's pretty much it. But, when we talked about a remote work last year, we talked about people working from the local coffee shop, the library, a park bench — or wherever you were. Then you have a related term, mobile work, which has the flavor of someone on the go.”

Since COVID-19, use of the term “workplace of the future” has spiked.

Remote Work: The New Ab-Normal

Here are four reasons why the current remote work situation is abnormal and will not continue as-is past the crisis.

- 1. It was unplanned.** HR, process, software, device, information security and internet policies did not have time to be implemented using best practices. A proper remote work road map might take 6-18 months.
- 2. Workers don't think this is how work will be from now on.** Most workers see this as a temporary situation and have not adjusted their work styles and communication methods as deeply as they would if they thought this was a permanent situation.
- 3. The nature of the work has changed.** Work itself may be COVID-impacted. The result feels more like being on a special project than doing the same project as before, but at home.
- 4. Co-workers are behaving differently.** This is a stressful and panic-stricken environment. Psychologically returning workers to their “safe space” may require returning them to their old offices, where remember their only worries being the stress of the job.

Source: Craig Roth, [Gartner Blog Network](#), April 6, 2020

That's according to queries on Gartner's website, said Roth.

He points out that when it comes to buying patterns for the post-COVID-19 workforce search data, considerations focus on what businesses care about: remote work, work from home, productivity, virtual conferences and virtual meetings. That prompts technology purchases for video conferencing, meeting solutions, workstream [collaboration](#) and employee monitoring, for example.

In fact, a recent [Gartner](#) poll found that 48% of employees will likely work

remotely at least part of the time after COVID-19 versus 30% prior to the pandemic.

For many employees who have now experienced working from home, there's no going back. And many employers get that. Publicly, companies such as Facebook, Twitter, Square, Shopify, French automaker Groupe PSA, Box and Slack [are committed](#) to the new workplace, according to CNN Business.

But a digital business with long-term resilience requires planning. And without telecom service assurance (TSA) and service management, in particular, the hybrid workplace flies out the window. Designing for telecom/tech resilience is everything. The current pandemic and work crisis are not the first crisis that forced offices to close and probably won't be the last.

It's time to hit reset.

The Bits and Pieces

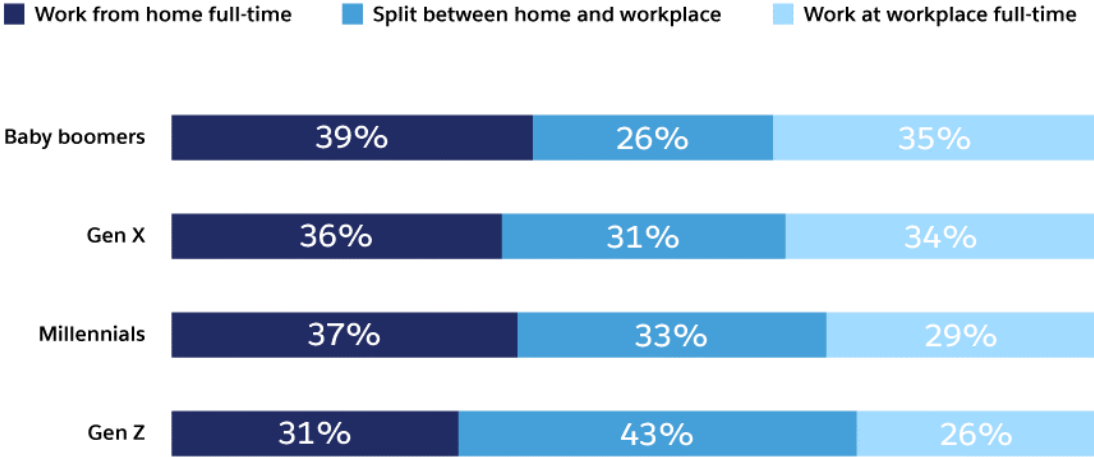
There's a long list of must-haves to mobilize a business. Even before the pandemic hit, technology industry changes put the cloud, unified communications, SaaS — and especially the internet — front and center. That raised alarms (or should have) about redundancy, security, the need for SD-WAN equipment, implementation and management.

In a [recent Dice.com Sentiment Survey](#), a rising percentage of survey respondents report technical issues working from home. "For sysadmins and other technologists tasked with maintaining employee equipment and connections to office databases, this is an important takeaway," a senior editor at Dice Insights wrote in a blog.

The tech bits and pieces required to support a highly distributed workforce often involve multiple suppliers. So who and how many calls does a partner make to do an installation for a customer? And are you a partner who talks to your customers about redundant internet to get their employees where they need to go? How are customers doing the daily management of all the moving parts? When something breaks or goes down — the internet, the security, the router — whose problem is it?

"That's a difficult one. Unfortunately, it's often an employee turning into their own IT department from their home," said Gartner's Roth. "If it's

Most Appealing Work Scenario



Global workforce survey, June 16-17, 2020

Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

software problem, or the operating system crashes, you can call the company IT department and they can remote into and fix it. But, when it comes to something like your connection, whether the Wi-Fi is working, or the internet is going up and down, the home work environment wasn't meant for high service levels. Most telephone companies have a very different [connectivity] tier for business and [service] reliability.”

Companies turn to their telecom providers, master agents or subagents, MSPs and VARs to help them mobilize their workforce. As part of that conversation, it's critical that partners talk to their customers about supporting the infrastructure for their distributed workforce.

Out of sight, out of mind? Big mistake.

So what are we talking about?

It's called service assurance and service management, a service that manages everything related to the telecommunications. Usually, that means anything that leaves the building — the internet, voice communications, conferencing, mobility, data networks, the WAN, etc.

What we're not talking about is the businesses LAN or computers. That's the responsibility of the IT department, as are the applications.

If you're an agent selling telecom services, do you offer telecom support services? You should. Think of these services as the telco department that your customers don't have and probably don't want to have or support. In fact, they don't need to have a telecom department in order to have telecom efficiency.

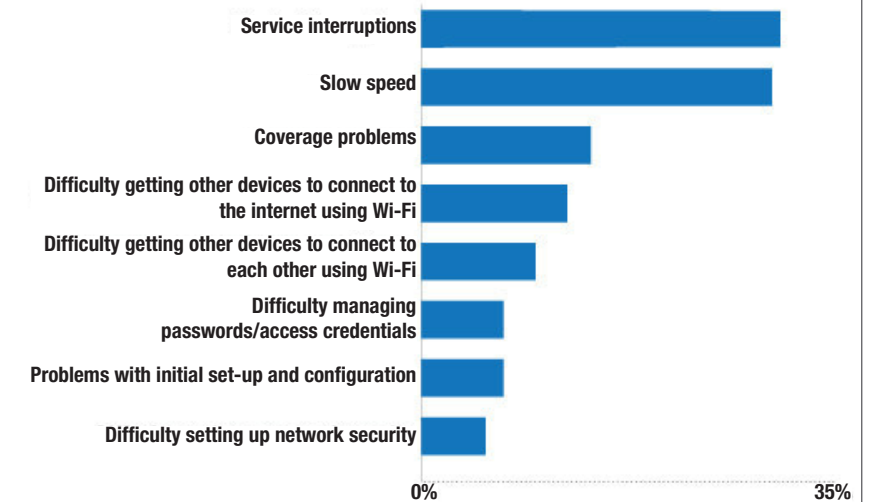
As your customer's trusted adviser, you can eliminate telecommunication headaches for them. And in the process you help them and their employees stay productive. You also help keep the customer's business afloat.

This is how partners solidify their customer relationships. From the customer's perspective, the partner business is a robust practice offering the full menu of services and solutions that they need.

For the partner business, security assurance and service management are

Technical Issues Experienced with Wi-Fi

US Broadband Households Using Wi-Fi at Home



Source: [Park Associates](#)

another revenue opportunity. As the customer's partner, you offer security assurance and service management on a recurring revenue model. And it comes in flavors. There are Tier I and Tier II support services. Headaches are gone for the customer and for the partner.

Working as an outsourced telecom department for the customers in a Tier I model, technicians can work directly with suppliers. Or, in a Tier II model, the customer works with suppliers with escalations going to the outsourced technicians, who move up the break-fix process on the backend with a ticket and the management of the process.

Looking at this opportunity by business size, firms with over 1,000 employees usually have a telecom department or dedicated staff for the

telecom service and support function. But not always. Enterprises with fewer than 1,000 employees tend not to have dedicated staff for telecom. In some cases, the IT service department might fill in.

Either way, service assurance and service management providers offer a range of services, or functions, that partners can offer their customers. The service can be customized to meet their needs. So, for example, a business may be tired of managing the mobility. You, the partner, can offer them that specific service.

Even businesses that were prepared to support telecommuting workers prior to the pandemic probably weren't ready to do it en masse when work-from-home orders were implemented. At companies across the spectrum, cybersecurity threats increased, VPNs were strained and there was pressure on bandwidth.

Telecom Expense Management

What about telecom expense management (TEM)? Isn't this the same thing as service assurance and service management?

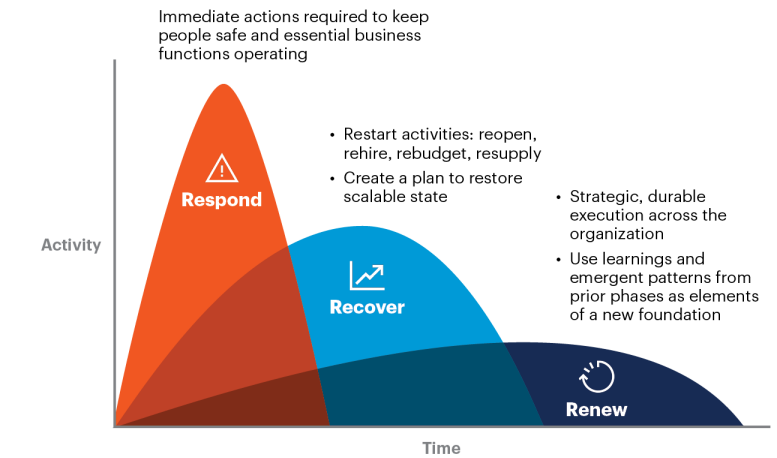
No, it's not.

Telecom expense management is about managing telecom costs, contracts and assets. Its services provide enterprise IT, procurement and finance departments with the ability to order, provision, support and manage costs of corporate communications and associated IT services with their inventories. This includes fixed and mobile telephony and data, cloud license tracking and emerging IoT connectivity, according to Gartner. There are also tools to help with C-level technology strategic decision-making.

Research Points to Opportunity

Recent [research](#) on the Telecom Service Assurance (TSA) market by

The reset



gartner.com/SmarterWithGartner

Source: Gartner
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Gartner

MarketsandMarkets reports on the current market dynamics as well as the numbers. The global telecom service assurance market size is expected to grow from \$6 billion to \$9.4 billion by 2025. Short-term and long-term growth drivers include a growing mobile subscriber base and the big growth in wireless data traffic, IP traffic and cloud traffic, and the growing complexities in communication network system by Internet of Things and 5G technologies.

“By offering your customers these new services, you’re helping them protect their businesses.”

But here’s what report researchers say about COVID-19 and the global TSA market:

“The global lockdown has resulted in fixed broadband networks taking on the lion’s share of responsibility for keeping the world connected. The network traffic grew 30-40% overnight, driven primarily by working from home (video conferencing, collaboration and VPNs), learning from home (video conferencing and collaboration, and e-learning platforms) and entertainment (online gaming, video streaming and social media).”

Partners should note the report’s findings that among all solutions, the services segment is expected to grow at the highest CAGR during the forecast period. That’s due to the adoption of TSA solutions across enterprises and service providers. In turn, there will be increases in demand for consulting services, integration and deployment services, training, support and maintenance services.

This is a call to action for agents and partners. It’s a ripe opportunity to be the knowledge source for your customers. And, more importantly, to have a breadth of service offerings at your fingertips to help transition the customer into a digital workplace — and that applies to the immediate pandemic situation as well as to customers’ long-term strategies.

While agents may be the first partners that come to mind for offering service assurance and service management to their customers, this new opportunity extends to MSPs as well. It’s a way to bring in new revenue with existing customers. For both agents and MSPs, some service assurance and service management vendors allow you to white label the services.

In fact, partners should reach out now to existing customers with these vital services. You can strengthen the relationship with the customer. Have a conversation with them about a new and critical service offering to get them through the current crisis and beyond.

Time for a New Conversation

By offering your customers these new services, you’re helping them protect their businesses. You’re protecting your own as well: If you don’t offer service assurance and service management to your customers, someone else will.

Given the pandemic and the imperative for businesses to create a new virtual workplace, it’s important for employers to have redundancies built into the field for their employees. It’s no surprise that internet connectivity and insufficient bandwidth is a big problem for businesses.

With children being schooled from home and streaming over the internet escalating, remote employees are struggling with the internet and their ability to do their work. On top of usage, bandwidth and internet issues, employers have the additional problem of securing the virtual workplace. Existing security for today’s makeshift virtual work scenario, may not meet the needs of the business.

Are you talking to your business customers about wireless backup for remote workers’ existing cable modems? What about conversations with customers about bandwidth and making sure employees have enough to be productive? Where’s the data center today? Where is the bandwidth going to and coming from?

The pandemic has dramatically changed the telecommunications conversation that partners should be having with their customers. It has also changed the menu of services that partners should have at their fingertips.

There’s no better time to differentiate yourself from your competitors.