essential technology solutions for returning to the office
how distributed teams can thrive in a post-pandemic work environment

introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic forced organizations to rethink their approach to a traditional workplace environment.

By the end of March 2020, 88% of surveyed global organizations were requiring at least some of their workforce to work remotely, according to data from Garnet. But this monumental shift did not end when the global health crisis subsided. Remote-work trends are expected to continue well into the future, often resulting in a hybrid workforce with distributed teams spread out over several locations: on-site at a traditional office and in employees' homes.

This environment poses unique challenges for organizations that are inviting teams to return to the office. Without the right technology to empower a hybrid workforce, businesses are facing gaps in communication and collaboration between teams, as well as a decline in employee morale.
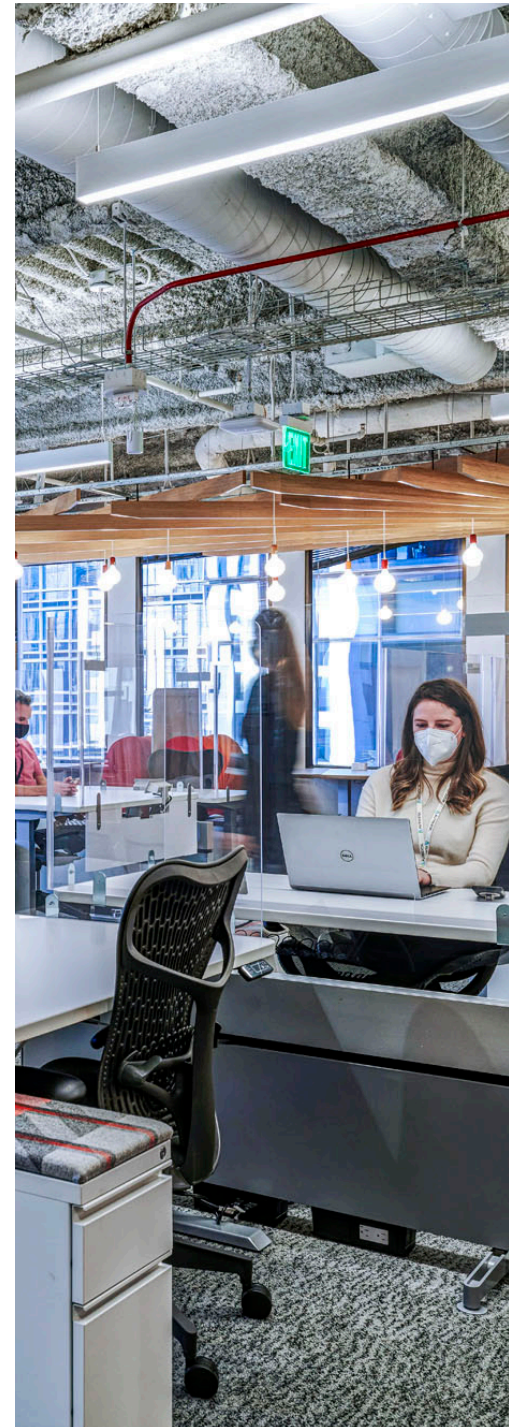
In this report, we look at each of these challenges in greater detail and identify the essential technologies needed to help teams thrive in this new normal.

the problem

On a global scale, the approach to remote work has evolved – but for many businesses, the approach to technology hasn't.

Organizations are bringing their teams back to the office without making the necessary updates to their office systems, such as conference-room technologies. This creates an inequitable work environment in which some teams have better access to shared files and meetings than others, leaving remote teams struggling to keep up. In turn, this hampers efficiency and productivity across the organization, ultimately hurting the bottom line and increasing employee turnover.

Let's look at some of these obstacles more closely.

lack of interoperability across technology platforms

At the onset of the pandemic, many organizations rushed to implement a patchwork of systems to enable remote work. But this created a disparate tangle of technologies that were not always seamlessly integrated. As teams return to the office, this lack of interoperability continues to create roadblocks. For example, on-site teams may have access to collaboration tools that remote workers do not. Or, those on the local network may be able to use applications and file-sharing protocols that differ from those off-site. Without seamlessly integrated technology platforms, hybrid teams cannot do their jobs effectively.

meeting inequity

In a post-pandemic environment, workplace meetings look completely different. While conferencing systems have allowed for off-site participants for decades, most systems fall behind when it comes to truly capturing every moment. Traditionally, people in the conference room have the best vantage point, while off-site participants must rely on audio alone or lackluster video that is often focused only on the presenter in the conference. This inequity leaves off-site teams at a disadvantage, resulting in communication breakdowns and productivity loss.

morale decline

Naturally, not all employees are eager to return to the office. And if they immediately encounter technology issues and other roadblocks that make their jobs even harder, this has an enormous impact on morale. These frustrations occur at the worst possible time, when organizations are trying to get their teams excited about coming back to work. As a result, turnover rates increase, slowing down operations even more.

the solution

The right technology integrations can make returning to the office a far more seamless and exciting transition. A wide range of solutions is available to improve communication and collaboration between hybrid teams. In addition to boosting productivity, these technologies can make the workplace a more attractive place to work, helping employees feel fulfilled and engaged with their jobs.

robust technology ecosystems

The modern office can be powered by a robust technology ecosystem that allows employees to seamlessly connect, disconnect, and retain information shared across all devices and locations. These systems are seamlessly integrated, providing greater control over the office environment, while also fostering collaboration among hybrid teams.

Integrated ecosystems can connect and automate a wide range of devices, including:

- Video conferencing cameras, microphones & platforms
- Digital signage
- Conference-room touchscreens
- Lighting

- Window treatments
- Office climate systems
- Smart boards
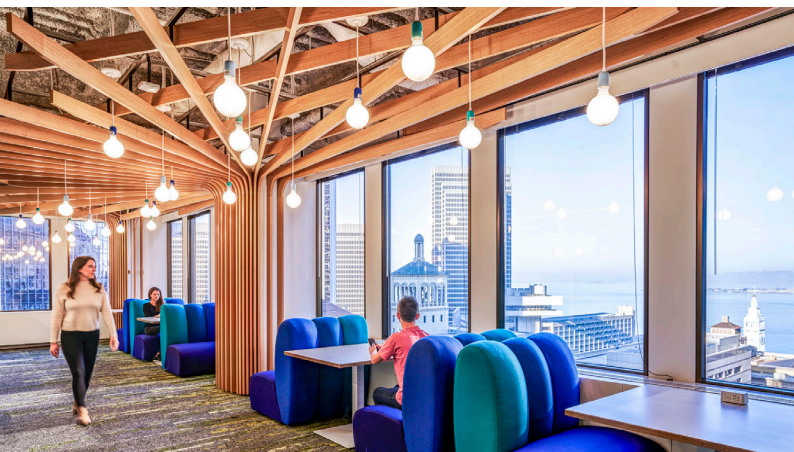- Distributed audio & video systems

a smarter approach to conferencing

The traditional conference room has become a key pain point for hybrid organizations, as remote teams often miss much of what's happening in the room. This is where newer, more robust conferencing equipment is essential. Rather than having a single camera, typically aimed at the presenter or the conference table, today's systems can capture 360-degree views of the space and people within it. Cameras can be adapted to any room arrangement and can also be focused on the whiteboard, allowing remote participants to see every moment and every note taken.

responsive, touchless environments

Conference rooms can be equipped with technology that gets meetings started faster and allows for more seamless collaboration, no matter where participants are located. Digital touchscreens placed outside the room identify when rooms are in use and allow employees to view schedules and book rooms with a few taps. Upon entering, employees' personal devices can sync automatically with the technology in the room, checking them into the meeting and allowing them to control the systems. In-room lighting and shading can respond automatically to the arrival of participants, while tabletop touchscreens can connect with remote participants instantly. These systems also make the space more touchless, creating a safer, healthier workplace.

collaboration devices

Smart boards and file-sharing platforms should be seamlessly integrated, so that teams can easily share notes, documents, and other details from the meeting, without having to tediously follow-up with coworkers afterwards. The smart boards can capture every detail and make it available to all participants. Meetings can also be video-recorded by the in-room camera systems, in case participants need to re-review any content.

brilliant a/v

Audio-visual integrations can turn a lifeless office space into a vibrant productivity center, making employees feel excited and proud to come to work every day. Distributed audio and video systems can stream important or motivational messages across a space. Large-scale video walls can connect with displays in conference rooms and huddle rooms, connecting teams across the office. Game rooms, office kitchens, and other shared spaces can also be outfitted with A/V systems. All of these solutions have a positive impact on morale and help employees feel connected and valued.

scalable systems

With the right A/V partner, in-office technologies can be duplicated and scaled across multiple office locations. This is especially advantageous for larger organizations with offices spread all over the world, helping to create consistency for operations and branding. Employees that travel to different locations will thus be already familiar with the systems deployed, eliminating guesswork.

wellness solutions

The environments where we work every day play a fundamental role in our overall health, and in a post-pandemic environment, maintaining a healthy workforce has never been more crucial. Innovative in-office wellness solutions can help improve employee performance and wellbeing, including their morale, energy, and focus. Integrated technologies within the space support employee health on several levels: cardiovascular, respiratory, immune, and cognitive. This is achieved with technologies such as dynamic lighting, air and water purification, ambient sound, and other systems that address the key factors in which physical environments affect your employees' well-being: health, stress, performance, and comfort.

networking

An organization's network infrastructure is the critical backbone that enables all of these technologies to work properly. If the network isn't adequately designed to accompany the integrations, then connectivity issues will ensue. As teams return to the office, it's imperative that the network is audited and upgraded as necessary to ensure fast, reliable connectivity. This is especially important to wireless networks, where a lack of Wi-Fi coverage or poorly placed access points can significantly limit the performance of connected devices. Additionally, upgrading to the newest Wi-Fi standard, Wi-Fi 6, is essential for increasing speed and reliability in heavily connected offices.

conclusion

Returning to the office after a pandemic doesn't have to be a bumpy transition. With the right technologies, employees can thrive whether they work at the office or hundreds of miles away. Upgrades to conference-room systems, collaboration platforms, audio-visual systems, and office automation devices are essential for creating a vibrant workplace that boosts productivity, strengthens communication, and lifts employee morale.

About AVDG

AVDG is a national leader in audiovisual and automation solutions. Since 1996, we have transformed the way that organizations use and integrate technology. As a partner, we identify and cultivate opportunities to maximize systems, operations, environments, and future-proof technology. Designing commercial AV solutions that will sustain the future of the business and workspace, we work to ensure that each investment produces the greatest return. Our partnership mindset enables us to see each project through to its full potential. For more information, contact AVDG today.

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