



CIONET

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

**VIDEO ON:
TRANSFORMING
COMMUNICATIONS
TO ENABLE
ANYWHERE
WORKING**

This article was written by Roger Camrass, global research director for CIONET and a visiting professor at the University of Surrey, and is based on the conversations during an event in February 2021 on 'unifying your communications for anywhere working' sponsored by RingCentral, a leading player in cloud based unified communications.

The recent move to home working has created a global revolution in the way we conduct business. At the heart of this revolution is the development of unified communications, enabled by Cloud, that has enabled a relatively smooth transition from office to home. RingCentral introduced the discussion evening with observations on how cloud-based communications has underpinned the rapid move to home working and provides a powerful development platform for new services.

The implications of home working

Many of the delegates such as Network Rail had observed a strict policy of working from the office until the advent of the pandemic last March. In this case some 30,000 of the total workforce (46,000 staff) were sent home in days. This created an imperative for fast decision making. Transport for London described a similar situation with some 20,000 home workers. Avon mentioned 16,000 home workers, and Unilever over 100,000 home workers in 120 countries.

The implications of a hybrid work environment continue to surface and evolve, for example:

- The need to create a level playing field between office and home workers
- Shorter and more regular meetings, especially between countries
- Challenges of onboarding new recruits, with the need for a buddying system
- Annual kick off events now entirely virtual and able to accommodate more people

Delegates felt that in many respects the new work environment was more democratic and has encouraged flatter structures. One CEO asked a member of his team to introduce a young child who had interrupted a meeting. Social awareness and sensitivity is on the increase.

Collapsing the business footprint

The likelihood of a continuation in hybrid and home working well after the pandemic has prompted companies such as Unilever and WPP to review their office footprints. In the case of WPP, 1,800 office locations could be reduced to just 50. A reasonable assumption is that offices will need to accommodate 25% less people in the future. The impact on retail is particularly severe with a near collapse of the UK high street – with many physical stores being replaced by online channels (as in the case of Arcadia and Debenhams).

Global companies such as Unilever are used to a virtual environment given that teams operate across multiple regions and countries. It is only occasionally that such teams can meet each other physically. Video has become a successful channel for collaboration compared to audio conferencing where the latter was not sufficiently inclusive. The need to have everyone on Video creates a more focused and engaged meeting place.

In the case of sales, one delegate from ConvaTec mentioned that the salesforce who normally visited hospitals to sell medical devices had been converted to virtual calls. This meant that more clients could be spoken to during the day, and this was improving salesforce productivity. Again, Video has been a powerful enabler here to support sales people and patient care.

Promoting wellbeing

Much has been spoken publicly about mental health and social issues associated with home working. The extensive use of video has helped colleagues to keep a close eye on their counterparts, many of whom have been struggling with home schooling in addition to heavy workloads.

The home environment comes into sharp focus with the use of video communications and provides an early warning system should workers be struggling to cope with day to day pressures. Video calls and regular video updates have proven to be a powerful way of informing and encouraging disparate communities of home workers. CEOs and managers are communicating more frequently to maintain moral.

In the long-term delegates recognise that home working cannot adequately address the need for social interactions – especially important for younger workers. The ‘water cooler’ effect cannot be easily reproduced although virtual lunch break events and social evenings help to compensate for the usual run of back-to-back business meetings.

Unified communications platforms

Cloud has enabled distributed working to take place at a scale that would not have been possible ten years ago. The availability of Office 365, Teams, Google Hang-out and Zoom have been essential tools to enable mass migration to the home. Equally, delegates such as Avon recognise the power of social media in maintaining personal and as well as business connections – vital for agents to engage local consumers. High end sales and customer management can be achieved effectively over Video links. Overall, unified communications have been a powerful enabler of hybrid working and will continue to evolve rapidly to cover current gaps such as social clustering.

Taking the next steps

Most organisations proceeded rapidly to relocate staff last year. Fortunately, many of the technical platforms such as Office 365 were already in place. However, managers need to look ahead at the next phase of development in how we will work in the future. Such considerations may include:

- Strengthening national and international networks to encompass multi-media communications – voice, data, image and video to any destination (fixed or mobile)
- Integrating communications platforms and channels to improve efficiency and quality of service (e.g. using Cloud)
- Ensuring quality connections, end to end, to avoid drop-outs during critical business meetings and client discussions
- Continuing to add features to facilitate and enhance connectivity and collaboration between individuals and organisations
- Raising communications to an appropriate level of seniority within the organisation to make the right investments and align with broader facility plans



About CIONET

CIONET is the leading community of more than 10,000 digital leaders in 20+ countries across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Through this global presence CIONET orchestrates peer-to-peer interactions focused on the most important business and technology issues of the day. CIONET members join over a thousand international and regional live and virtual events annually, ranging from roundtables, programs for peer-to-peer exchange of expertise, community networking events, to large international gatherings. Its members testify that CIONET is an impartial and value adding platform that helps them use the wisdom of the (IT) crowd, to acquire expertise, advance their professional development, analyse and solve IT issues, and accelerate beneficial outcomes within their organisation.

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