

GUIDE TO REMOTE WORKING

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of technology in the last two decades has enabled many changes in the way humankind operates. It has facilitated faster movements of goods and people across borders. It has helped in faster and more effective communication. It has enabled many and provided opportunities for growth.

However, as we stand on the cusp of one of the biggest epidemics in modern history - COVID-19 - it also forces us to rethink some of the ways we work.

Companies across the globe are compelled to explore remote working for their entire staff, without having the necessary time to explore options and understand what suits them best.

This is, without doubt, one of the most challenging times of this century.

At Pepper, we have always harnessed the power of technology to make our lives more efficient. We have pioneered communication initiatives that facilitated the transition to remote working in a smooth manner.

Many companies consider this as a temporary phase and it might not be good business sense to invest in expensive remote working tools. However, the situation does require options and things that are simple and easy for people across companies, regardless of the size to understand and use at short notice.

At the same time, several companies deal with confidential information and security is of utmost importance.

As a communications company, all of these are aspects that we have to consider on a daily basis. We have tried many methods and tools to check what fits best and would be the most cost effective. We have compiled this list in the hope that some will find it helpful in this time of need.

SETTING UP REMOTELY



Setting up a remote working option for your company, whether it is for a crew of 5 or 500, is a challenge, especially when it has to be facilitated with minimal notice. While some companies have processes in place, there are several things to be considered before going remote.

In a situation like the COVID-19 epidemic, it might be hard to implement all the processes effectively. In this report, we bring you some steps that can help ease into the transition.

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BEFORE GOING REMOTE

The biggest challenge most companies face before going remote is ensuring all the policies are in place to ensure they can function with minimal disruptions. There are issues and challenges that might arise on the go, and without set processes, it would be difficult to resolve these in a timely and effective manner.

The processes listed below are the standard steps for remote working. It would be advisable for each company to evaluate their unique situation and build further on this, based on the nature of work.

PHASE 1

Who Does What: Each member of the team should have a clear understanding of their roles & responsibilities. The chain of reporting, tasks, deadlines and reporting procedures should be clearly outlined. Recording these on email or a document accessible to all parties would ensure a reference point for the future.

The Core Team: Identify people in each team who can contribute insights on what their team requires, and provide effective solutions to working remotely.

PHASE 2

Equipment Check: Remote working needs quality equipment. While in office, there could be IT Support to help with any troubleshooting, this is not an option at home. One final equipment check to ensure there are no bugs in the system would be the most effective way to avoid snags in the future. Also, make a list of who is assigned what equipment to ensure there is no confusion when the team returns.

Data Security: It is important to ensure your most critical data and clients' information is safe. You might need to install additional software on all systems to ensure all data is protected as per your policy.

PHASE 3

Remote Trial: Have a remote trial with the Core Team to iron out any possible issues before you deploy it across the team.

Training Sessions: New technologies can be daunting. Implement a LIVE training programs and video training modules.

One Last Meeting: Before you go remote, one last team meeting is critical to keep up team morale and answer any last-minute queries

While the above steps help put some processes in place, it would also be helpful to have the Core Team focusing solely on resolving issues in the first few days till the team is comfortable working remotely.

If your team does not have an HR process, identify two team members who can connect with all the people at regular intervals to check if there are any further issues.

Install programs like Zoho Assist to ensure you have remote access to systems if any troubleshooting is required once you go remote.

INFRASTRUCTURE



Before teams can go remote, companies need to ensure that the basic infrastructure is in place.

This could be ensuring that all the softwares on the laptop are up-to-date, and the computer can connect to external networks as well.

The Indian Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has relaxed restrictions for Other Service Providers (OSPs) till 30 April 2020, enabling employees to work from home. The deposit fee required to setup such a facility has also been temporarily waived.

We have compiled a list of places and softwares that might help you establish the required infrastructure.

Checklist:

- **Laptops**
- **Software Updates**
- **System Internet Connectivity**
- **Access to required documents**
- **Important contacts list saved in the system**
- **Enable VPN**
- **Security software updates**
- **Establishment of remote helpdesk**

VIRTUAL COMMUNICATIONS

Being connected and able to collaborate effectively is one of the biggest challenges in remote working. Introduction and training for new tools is not advisable during a quick transition.

There are various options available in tools that we use on a regular basis to help collaborate.

CHAT | CONNECT | COLLABORATE

TEAM COMMUNICATION | MESSAGING APPS

Telegram: While WhatsApp has become the norm for most of us for daily communication, this could also be a noisy, cluttered platform often distracting us from work. Telegram is a great alternative, with groups supporting up to 2,00,000 members, multiple file formats, heavy files and web view.

The app also offers features such as 'read-only mode' for some members, stop members from clogging the group with stickers or media, ensuring communication stays on track.

Con: The files might stay on the employee's phone.

Communication does not stop, whether we are in office or working remotely. It is important to have a multi-functional chat tool that does not require special permissions to access and use.



TEAM COMMUNICATION | CALLS

Now that meetings are replaced with calls, most of us spend a lot of time on the phone. While phone calls can suffice for some interactions, there are various tools that support calls with a large team or webinars and virtual training sessions.

Zoom: The perfect tool for remote conferencing, Zoom's free account allows calls up to 40 minutes (audio or video) & can host 100 people. Some of their cool features include Meeting IDs and password-coded invites and MP4 call recording options.

The Share Screen Option allows sharing control of the screen as well, or creating a collaborative whiteboard. Breakout rooms is also a cool option for training & workshops - allowing you to divide the participants in groups and hop between them as needed.

Google Hangouts: Hangouts / Meet is a pretty easy platform to connect for audio or video calls. There is no time limit on the calls but it lacks several other key features.

Skype: Most of us are familiar with the app for more than a decade. The free version works pretty great, though only 50 participants at a time for video calls.



TEAM COMMUNICATION | FILE SHARING

Sharing files virtually and collaborating real-time is a challenge when working remotely. This is especially a challenge for designers and ongoing projects. But working remotely should be no reason to slow the pace.

DropBox: One of the oldest collaborative tools, the free version offers up to 2 GB of storage. The Business version allows more features, including password protection and creation of different spaces.

Google Drive: Google's ecosystem is great for real-time remote collaboration. If you are already hosted on this platform, just ensure your settings allow file sharing for the whole team.

WeTransfer: While this platform does not allow real-time collaboration, it is one of the most preferred options to send heavy files. The free version allows file transfer up to 2 GB.



TEAM COMMUNICATION | COLLABORATIVE WORKSPACES

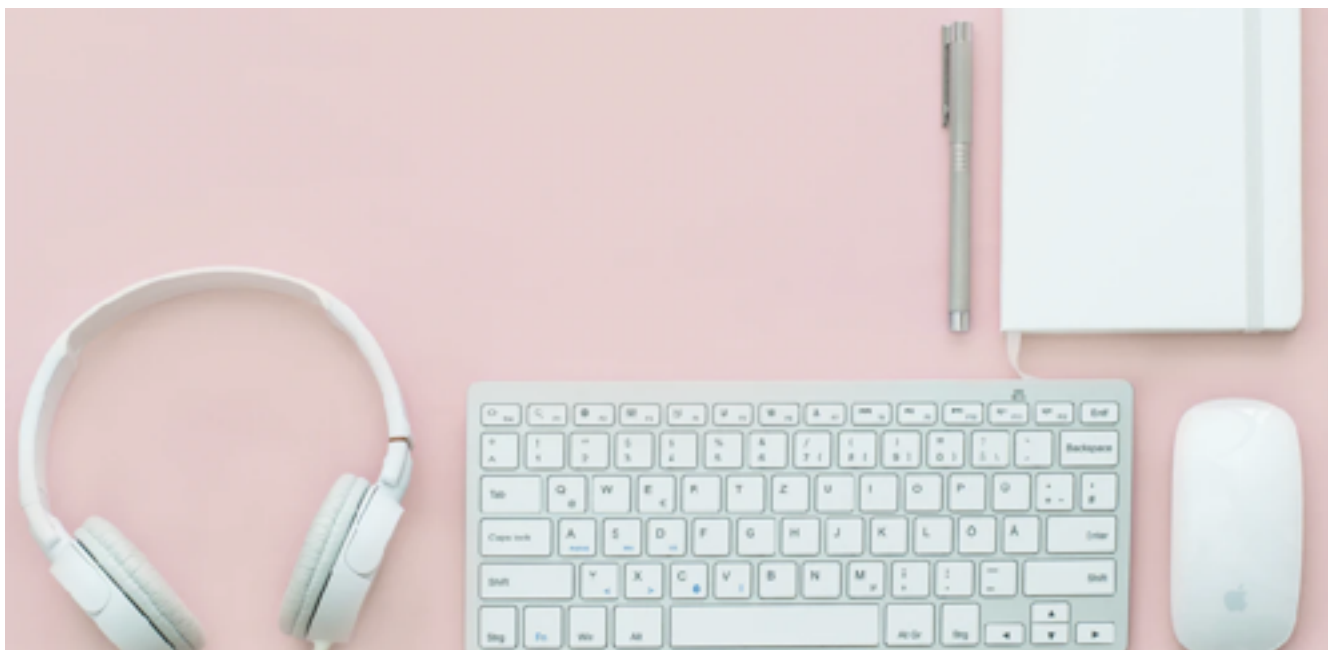
It helps having a single channel of communication, where the team can chat, share files and ideate. While each of the platforms mentioned above have their uses, a collaborative workspace helps in being more organized.

Sococo: This is a paid platform, and allows integrations with Zoom and Google. The unique feature is the gamified version of the office, where you can assign team rooms, chat and collaborate, share files and whiteboards. The platform gives a 14-day free trial, making this the perfect time to test it out for your purposes.

Slack: One of the most popular collaborative platforms across the world, Slack has features that include messaging one-on-one, groups, voice and video calls and file sharing. The free program is perfect for small teams and even allows integration with other cloud-storage apps for easier coordination.

Wire: This is a paid platform, offering features such as messengers, voice and video conference calls, file-sharing and even external collaboration. While it is highly rated, the mandatory paid feature might not make it attractive for all companies.

Workplace By Facebook: Most of us spend a lot of time of Facebook, so Workplace could be a great place to work as well. The free version works great for smaller teams, allowing multiple groups, auto translate on messages, video calls and even 5GB file storage per person.



MANAGING CLIENTS & EXPECTATIONS

A critical challenge of remote working - especially amidst social distancing - is ensuring client expectations are managed effectively. The lack of scheduled face-to-face weekly or monthly meetings could hamper productivity for those who are unused to remote working.

The tools mentioned above can help more effective collaboration and ensuring timelines are met.

Identify PoCs: Identify a single point of contact for each client, reporting formats via email and potential crisis areas before going remote.

Stay Transparent: For once, the world is on the same page. All countries are taking precautions to ensure the spread of COVID-19 is limited. In these times, where meetings are not possible, it is important to retain the trust of a client. Being transparent about your situation and challenges would help address any possible

issues instead of false promises of delivery. Ensure you have regular calls to discuss the progress, share ground realities and possible challenges that might arise in the near future. It also gives clients the much required time to prepare themselves if such conditions come up.

Assess the possibility of meeting delivery timelines based on operational challenges. Communicate delays, if any, to the client well in advance and negotiate new timelines well in advance

Access: Being accessible is critical to ensure any issues are resolved immediately. Stay in touch regularly via emails, calls and send periodic reports to the client on the status of work.

Prioritise Work: Based on the delivery timelines, you might need to reconsider the teams assigned and restructure, based on the priority of each project and timelines.

Internal: Mid-week checks on the status of work, weekly calls to identify problem areas, pre-deadline assessments and ongoing conversations can be effective in ensuring there are no last-minute issues in timelines and delivery.

KEEPING UP MORALE

When teams sit together, there is a sense of a being a part of a 'team'. They chat, make jokes with each other and 'hang out'. They ideate, collaborate, clarify doubts and inspire each other by being around the team.

This becomes a hurdle when the team members are working remotely. Yes, we definitely have team calls to discuss the important issues but because of the time-bound nature, it becomes difficult to cover all the topics, rest alone the little doubts. This leads to a larger problem - feeling isolated.

Some of the collaborative tools mentioned above help ensure the team stays focused and can work as effectively. Avoid one-on-one chatting to avoid fragmented team communications.

Shifting away from the apps that we use in our social lives, like Whatsapp, to cloud-based, work-related platforms also help bring in more seriousness to remote working.

Break Time: Designate specific break times for the team where they 'hang out' with the teammates. Identify specific members of the team who can initiate non-work conversations about current topics - ideally, not related to COVID-19. It could also be good to relax general rules about not sharing memes and jokes on the office groups during that 'break hour'.

HouseParty: This is a cool app that allows you to 'virtually hangout' with people and play games and chat. The only handicap is it allows a maximum of 8 people at a time.

It is also important to have periodic checks about health and well-being, ideally done on an one-on-one basis. Establish a protocol for any employee to connect to the HR or a team member if they are not feeling well - mentally or physically.

DATA SECURITY | CYBERSECURITY

When in office, we are usually connected through a secured and fast internet connection. At home, we often experience interrupted internet services which adds extra hurdles to team collaboration. This could lead to avoiding usual protocols that could compromise data security or lead to a breach.

Device Security: Ensure that all the security protocols are activated on the device provided to the employee. Define what constitutes company property and what platforms the employee is allowed to access.

If your company policy restricts access of certain external apps, continue the same. Access to collaborative tools should be done on a case-to-case basis. The employee should be briefed again about security policies of the company.

Establish a plan to ensure the device can be wiped remotely in case of an emergency.

Offline Files: This is the most critical part of remote working. While it is necessary to ensure access to relevant files, data security can be compromised when some files are taken offline or transmitted to unintended destinations. Collaborating on the cloud is one solution to address this, which could ensure the documents are not downloaded to the system itself, especially if it is not a company-provided device.

VPNs: The Indian Department of Telecommunications have temporarily relaxed rules related working from home for OSPs. This includes the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) from specific locations. Secure VPNs can help companies allow remotely connected employees to access corporate resources.

A GUIDE FOR PEOPLE

With no commute, no traffic-stress, Work From Home seems like a blessing. However, WFH is not as simple as it seems. Overworking is a serious problem with remote working, as is not putting in enough hours.

With no one overlooking your shoulder to check what you are working on, if you are spending time browsing Instagram or taking a power nap, it is way too easy to lose track.

While some of us struggle from underworking, few of us also find it difficult to keep track of time and end up working beyond office hours. Maintaining balance, when your workspace coincides with your rest-space, can be a challenging task. Following are a few measures that can help in striking that balance.

Separate Workspace: As awesome as working in bed sounds, that is the worst thing possible for your mindset. Designate a separate space for ‘work’ helps you separate work and home. It also helps you mentally ‘take a break’ from work when you step away from the designated workspace.

Set A Reminder: Set a timer to remind you to take regular breaks, get up and stretch. And since we tend to wander away or lose time playing with the dog, a reminder to get back to work is also important. It is also important to remind yourself to log off at the end of the day, and inform your team of the same.

Make A To-Do List: A to-do list is advisable at all times. When working at home, it gives you a clearer flow of things to be done and helps to improve your productivity. And it gives a sense of accomplishment as you tick each item off. Account for the time that you might spend on spontaneous tasks and breaks. The idea is not to create a long list, it is to effectively manage time without creating excess stress.

No Household Chores: A day at home feels like it is time to clean up the space, or cook something elaborate for lunch. Restrict all housework related things to beyond work hours.

Tell People You Are Working from Home: It helps avoid distractions and help you plan your day. Of course, nothing much to be done about your pet dog or cat. They just add some colour to your video calls.

Take A Shower: An obvious one but needs to be said! We would even recommend changing out of your pajamas. It really helps transition from home to work.

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A GUIDE: EQUIPMENT RENTAL

Lastly, one of the challenges companies face is to find resources to rent the right equipment or in a timely manner. We are giving you a small list of places that can act as a starting point.

Type of Equipment	City	Vendors
Laptops Desktops	Bangalore Delhi Mumbai Chennai Hyderabad	Rentsher Prime Asset Source Electronics Bazaar Sunsoft Get It Rent
Printers Scanners	Bangalore Delhi Mumbai Chennai Hyderabad	Sunsoft Get It Rent

Other than these, there are also various resources in your area a simple search online can help you find.

IN CONCLUSION

Remote working can be a challenge, especially in times like these where virtual collaboration might be the only option. We hope this guide has helped resolve some key issues.

There are innumerable online resources that can make life simpler. Explore and find what suits you best!

Just remember: Communication is critical - especially in times like these!

If you have more questions, drop us a line at info@pepperpr.in

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