

# Workplaces

A man and a woman are shown from the chest up, both wearing white VR headsets. The woman on the left is smiling and looking upwards. The man on the right is also smiling and looking towards the camera. They are in a bright, modern office environment with bookshelves in the background. The man is wearing a light blue button-down shirt over a black t-shirt, and the woman is wearing a light blue long-sleeved top. Both are wearing dark wristbands.

NOVEMBER 2020 | YOUR GUIDE TO THE NEW ENVIRONMENT OF WORK • \$9

**HOW TO LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY IN  
THE WORKPLACE POST-COVID-19**



**A**dvancements in technology have been improving workplace productivity for years, allowing us to work virtually from anywhere. Now that a global pandemic is forcing us to work from home, the question being posed seems to be, why return to the office at all? According to NELSON Worldwide's "Evolving Workforce Expectations" study, only 7% of employees want to return to work a full five days a week. If employees are a company's most valuable asset, employers must make the workplace a sought-after destination for everyone, one that people are excited to return to.

Brands will need to reevaluate their office portfolio and determine a plan to ensure their employees can take advantage of new technologies that make communicating, collaborating and connecting more seamless than ever before.

But while technology continues to rapidly evolve to better bridge the gap between physical and virtual workers, the most critical element for successful adoption and activation of these tools will be a robust change management strategy. Employers must provide holistic awareness, training and buy-in to effectively activate these new, digitally focused offerings.

Here are the four ways technology can be used to make the workplace a sought-after destination:

### **Instant communication**

Brands are having to communicate with their employees more than ever before, and because so many things are constantly evolving, the need for immediate communication is imperative.

Integrated workplace management systems like iOffice and its employee experience app Hummingbird, previously considered luxuries, will be necessities. With technology like this, employees can reserve workstations or conference rooms, submit service requests, get alerted to incoming mail, visitors and more, all from

their own mobile devices. Employers can also keep a close eye on who is in and out of their facility each day, constantly monitoring capacity to keep their employees safe.

As wearable technology gains more popularity, many employers are realizing these tools offer a unique opportunity to communicate with employees. With the traditional, in-office, nine-to-five likely becoming extinct, a singular means of communication like email won't be enough. And with employees working from a variety of environments, including coffee shops, home offices, hotel lounges and even their cars, wearable technology is something they'll always have access to.

As the mobile workforce and risks of cybersecurity attacks continue to increase, innovative solutions like Samsung Knox are changing the way companies use wearables, embedding their software within workers' mobile devices and smartwatches to secure company data, and help mitigate breaches of private company information.

### **Real-time collaboration**

Collaboration tools will only gain more popularity during and after the pandemic. From video conferencing to file sharing, there are numerous tools that will make the hybrid workday more seamless. It is no longer



just about meeting virtually anymore, it is about going a step further to integrate with multiple platforms, support blended teams, provide robust collaboration opportunities and the ability to accommodate smaller breakout groups virtually.

Even before the pandemic, tech giants like Microsoft were perfecting their cloud-based collaboration tools, but the social distancing, work-from-home mandates are accelerating this trend. These brands have taken a close look at how consumers have had to change their behaviors drastically in a short period of time and made improvements to their tools to make the digital experience as close as possible to the real-time experience.

Today, digital meeting facilitators can set up automated emails connected to their meetings, making it easier to manage attendance. They can also view a dashboard afterward to get a big picture report of attendee engagement. Video webinars can be recorded and later shared with the group along with a full transcript, file attachments and any discussions from the chat window of a video or call. From custom backdrops and screen sharing, to virtual chalkboards and collaborative documents, there isn't much you can't do remotely anymore, making tools like these imperative when returning to the physical office.

Other tools such as Slack and Microsoft Teams reduce the amount of emails needed in a workday, by offering one, cohesive platform for teams to communicate. Mural is another online tool for ideation sessions, provid-

ing a more visual-based platform to facilitate blue-sky thinking.

### **Connection without distraction**

Video conferencing technologies like Zoom are here to stay. Especially since many white-collar corporations are extending the work-from-home period until as late as next summer. This means many workers will need a hybrid environment to connect with clients, colleagues and business partners. Many will still want their own desk space to retreat to for heads-down work, but the popular open concept environments aren't conducive for lengthy zoom meetings or other new-age virtual tasks.

Rethinking conference rooms of all sizes is one way to accommodate these new hybrid environments. Because guests, clients and other visitors from outside of an organization are less likely to go into an office that isn't theirs, large conference rooms, both within the tenant space and the shared building, sit empty and unused.

These underutilized meeting rooms can be transformed to a few different types of meeting areas:

- **Production pod** — For one-on-one video conferencing meetings, this would be a place where employees can go to chat with their colleagues who may be working from home or their client who may not be comfortable coming into the office. Although there isn't much square footage need-



ed, the room must be soundproof and equipped with all the AV technology needed to perform a seamless video call, including a large monitor with easy connection to a laptop, a power source and good lighting for video visibility.

- **Collaboration suite** — This area would be a little bigger than a production pod to accommodate a larger group. The room should come with everything the smaller production pod includes, but with an even bigger monitor with an auto-framing video camera to track and focus on who is speaking and stacked theater seating for visibility. It would create a physical destination that puts blended teams on equal footing.
- **Presentation studio** — This production room equipped with podcast equipment, a green screen, advanced sound and recording tools will be beneficial for employees creating more elevated, digital content that will continue to remain the norm, years after the pandemic.

**Essential safety**

Revolutionary technologies are improving the quality of life for millions of Americans living through this global pandemic. Telehealth services are increasing in popularity due to COVID-19, offering a safe way for patients to stay out of overwhelmed health care systems and prevent the risk of exposure. Smartphone and wearable technology tracking has even been used to trace con-

tact of those infected with the virus.

When employees return to work, these types of technologies can make a huge difference. Employers and landlords can start small with zero-touch adjustments, like automated doors and motion sensor lighting. Steelcase’s RoomWizard is a hands-free solution for meeting room reservations. Employees simply walk into an available room and begin working, and the smart technology marks the room in use.

Larger investments include innovative technologies such as body temperature walk-through kiosks, germicidal UV light and more. Investing in technologies that make employees feel safe can go a long way and hold significant value.

In the end, the key to success when returning to work will be change management. Think about how quickly we’ve all adjusted to day-to-day routines like working from home, going to the grocery store and dining out at restaurants. Wearing masks, temperature checks and social distancing were once foreign behaviors none of us ever had to practice, a few short months later, it seems normal. Managing expectations and offering the tools and environment needed to communicate, connect, collaborate and stay safe will set employees up for success and get them excited to return to the new workplace destination. **WPM**

---

*Editor’s Note: Barbara Riekse is Workplace Practice Leader for NELSON Worldwide.*