



New Study Finds More Than Half of U.S. SMB Owners Believe Working Remotely Is Here to Stay Post-Pandemic

Embracing remote work has been a love-hate relationship for many small and medium-sized business (SMB) owners. With new technology allowing workers to work from wherever and whenever more than ever before, employers have had to balance this reality against having the peace of mind that frequently comes from being in the same physical space as your employees. As owners try and adapt to this new tech reality, more and more companies have been adopting a hybrid approach—offering the option for some remote work but not fully committing.

Now, we're living in a different reality. The coronavirus has made it abundantly clear that the need to work remotely is no longer a perk or a convenience – it's a necessity. But thanks to the technology that has been enabling more productive and collaborative remote work in recent years, notably unified communications tools, the ability to stand up a remote work environment can be very easy, fast, and affordable.

And yet, anything new, especially something that happens so rapidly such as the need to shift the majority if not all of a company's workforce from centralized to remote, can certainly cause issues and concerns. So, to better understand how businesses are adapting to remote working and to gauge how prevalent remote work may be post pandemic, Intermedia commissioned a survey of 250 small and medium-sized business owners or senior decision-makers that employ between five to 250 people. These respondents had to have at least 50% of their workforce in office-based roles.

Of those businesses surveyed, nearly 85% of their employees worked in a centralized office pre pandemic. That number has, not surprisingly, decreased dramatically – to 26% – once social distancing and shelter in place orders went into effect.



Highlights of the Findings

READY TO HAVE EVERYONE HEAD BACK TO THE OFFICE? NOT SO FAST

Early findings from the report reveal that of the SMB owners who increased remote working as a result of social distancing, 57% said they will likely maintain increased remote working options for employees in the long-term. This indicates a shift not only in the way businesses operate but also how business owners, employees, and customers will engage with one another in the future. Among the biggest benefits of shifting to remote work, SMB owners have found that employee availability (up 19%), job (up 15%), and life satisfaction (up 7%) have all increased, while overhead costs have gone down.

Respondents offered real-world examples with comments like “workers attitudes have improved” and employees are “happier” and “more productive.” There are obvious pressures from the shelter in place protocols, but workers specifically noted their reduction in stress was due to no longer dealing with stresses around office work, commuting, time away from family, and the costs associated with being in a physical location, seem to result in workers that are more engaged and ready to make a difference.

BUSINESS OWNERS STILL SEE THE VALUE OF IN-PERSON MEETINGS, BUT VIDEO CONFERENCING IS ON THE RISE

One of the top concerns voiced by those surveyed was the ability to engage with new prospects and continuing to serve existing customers while Coronavirus-related interaction restrictions are in place. Almost all SMB owners (94%) said in-person interactions have been essential to conducting new business in the last two years. Additionally, 72% said that the current restrictions on face-to-face meetings will play a significant role in their team’s ability to continue business as usual. Technology however, was not cited as a top concern, implying that getting the right tools deployed in order to keep their businesses running was not a barrier.

In fact, survey findings indicate that companies are turning to technology to help deliver face-to-face interactions once reserved for in-person meetings. **57% of respondents indicated a reliance on video conferencing pre-pandemic, while that reliance has jumped to 84% currently – an increase of 27%, the most significant jump across all communications channels covered within the survey (including phone, email, chat, and others).**



REMOTE WORK ISN'T JUST A TEMPORARY FIX

Remote work has been expanding considerably over the past few years. It's allowed companies to have a larger pool of candidates and reduce costs. Workers crave a more flexible lifestyle that balances work and play, which often means they want the option to work from anywhere. Plus, technology now provides a perfect foundation for employees to work from any location with total accessibility, easy collaboration, and robust security.

COVID-19 has certainly made us reexamine the entire concept of work, illustrating that many jobs can be done remotely without sacrificing productivity. As more business owners realize that employee availability and job satisfaction can remain high, if not increase, within a remote working environment, the findings of this survey indicate an increase to remote working will remain well after the pandemic passes.

Methodology

This survey was conducted among 250 business owners or senior decision makers, from organizations employing between 5 and 250 people. Respondents belong to organizations where at least 50% of staff are normally office based but there has been a reduction in office-based working since Covid-19. All interviews were conducted online by Sapio Research, in partnership with Intermedia, in April 2020 using an email invitation and an online survey.

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