

Pivoting an Enterprise Level Organization to a Fully Remote Workforce on Short Notice

A TBI CASE STUDY

Like thousands of companies around the world, in response to COVID-19, TBI made the decision to put a mandatory work-from-home policy in place for the safety and health of their employees on March 16, 2020. Within 24 hours, the 200+ employees of the tech company were fully operational, up and running from their respective homes without difficulty or problems.

Approximately 25% of TBI's employees were already telecommuting, national sales managers, operational support, project managers and others. Additionally, most TBI departments have their own work-from-home policies in place, allowing for occasional remote workdays, but having the entire organization remote work, simultaneously was unprecedented. The systems, tools and process established five years ago by TBI's IT team allowed for remote access and high productivity when engaged with the company's cloud infrastructure.



LOGISTICS

TBI's Director of IT, Joel Hoffman, says he's been preparing for this moment for several years—planning, testing, appending and expanding over time. The first order of business was to identify what systems were mission-critical; these systems were then migrated to SaaS or VPN-accessible systems, starting with the implementation of NetSuite. One by one, Joel and his team migrated these systems to tools that enable employees to utilize them without being tethered to the office.

Microsoft O365 along with Azure Active Directory allows users to have the exact same experience they would if logged in at the office. Additionally, moving from the on-prem file server to OneDrive and SharePoint meant that employees wouldn't need to be physically on-site or even VPN-connected to access critical files and applications. The phone systems, both 8x8 and Five9 (department-specific)—even TBI's antivirus solution is SaaS-based. Databases and software that TBI employees use live in the cloud, and therefore, are updated the minute an employee turns on their computer and logs on to the internet; it is a completely seamless experience for all users.

After getting the heads-up from the executives about the possibility of remote work, Joel put his team to work, testing loaner laptops, ordering more for employees without and verifying all the necessary software, security and functionality needed was up-to-date and ready to go; they also gathered peripherals like cables and power strips and pulled them together for deployment. In addition to hardware, the team tested functionality of phones and conferencing to ensure departments critical to partner success like operations didn't experience any loss in work. To note, TBI was already in the processes of migrating all employees to laptops, so that each would always have the ability to work from home, if needed; the employees who needed loaner hardware were scheduled for upgrades within the next six months; as Joel likes to say, "planning never stops!"

On Friday, March 13th, all office employees were sent home to work, and by 9 a.m. Monday, March 16th, TBI was a fully functioning remote organization. And tickets being opened with IT were primarily user issues, such as missing passwords or bookmarks from office computers that were missing from their loaners.



PEOPLE AND CONSIDERATIONS

IT handled logistics and foundational support of remote working, while department heads across the business were making plans on how to manage specific challenges as well as to ensure the “people” aspect of the transition was being handled with transparency and empathy.

Apart from logistics, required hardware, VPN needs, bandwidth support and security, considerations TBI business units discussed and planned for included:

- How was the lack of face to face interaction going to affect morale?
- Productivity measurements and touchpoints
- Employee satisfaction, time/family management

TBI teams host meetings via Zoom and ask for video usage whenever possible, to help with communication (facial expressions, etc.) and feeling connected. Microsoft Teams helps with side conversations and quick questions, HR initiated a company Yammer group to share kids activities for those with families at home, they encourage a kind of virtual water cooler environment where employees are encouraged to share pictures of pets and kids, generally keeping conversations more lighthearted and uplifting.

Culture and employee morale is a key factor in TBI’s success and working to maintain that is vital to a successful all work from home scenario. Weekly, themed virtual team happy hours take place on Fridays, and several teams have come up with fun and unique ways to stay upbeat and connected during a very stressful transition and time. Examples include a “pajama day” status meeting, lunch hour BINGO game, get-to-know your co-workers morning coffee session. Each of these ideas has been born from necessity and developed within a few days of making the transition.



FORWARD-THINKING

TBI’s IT team worked tirelessly to implement a plan that was years in the making. “When people plan for disaster and business continuity they think, flood, fire, earthquake,” Joel comments. “An unexpected lesson we’ve learned from recent events is that while your physical location may be fine, your employees could be at risk. In this scenario, planning to use other office space as a recovery site is not feasible, and your business needs to be nimble enough to send the workforce home at a moment’s notice without impacting business operations.”

With timing uncertain, the IT team already has plans for return to the office. When ready, they suggest a gradual return, spaced across the course of a few days, so IT is able to give every employee the attention needed to get back into the swing of things and ensure workstations are fully functional.

For more assistance to help your business and that of your customers transition to a fully remote work environment or shore up gaps in existing plans, [visit TBI’s dedicated resource page](#).