

CREATING CONNECTIVITY - BUILDING PRODUCTIVITY

by Eric Posa

With the sudden need for a remote workforce thrust upon many organizations, our use of technology has changed. For organizations that have been leveraging technology as part of their business strategy, it has probably been more of a shift than a change. For many companies, however, this has been a swift awakening as to the limitations of their infrastructure, processes and ability to communicate.

There are three important areas of your technology that can help your organization take on this new challenge and set up your teams for success.

Communication

Without a doubt, communication can be your company's greatest strength or it can be huge weight, pulling on your staff and slowing down their ability to deliver prod-

ucts and services at the same speed and quality as before this work from home (WFH) movement.

It is critical that your team has a clear and concise outline of the technologies they can use to communicate with each other. It is also important that the leadership team evaluate whether additional tools can be added to improve upon this communication.

This should be a mix of email, chat, text message, phone and video conferencing. Many of these tools may already be included with your suite of software, so make sure to get a full inventory of what is available

Make sure that you are having weekly meetings with your larger teams to obtain feedback on how communication has been working and to address any challenges. You may find some users who need help with some tools, and providing training can help with their performance.

Last, just because you can wake up and log on immediately now that you are remotely working, it doesn't mean you or your team should be expected to be connected 24 x 7. Disconnect and spend time offline to clear your head and spend time on yourself.

Productivity Suites

As mentioned previously, it is important to inventory all your applications. You may have tools you promised to learn about one day that may help you

today. Printing, faxing, public drives and other "standard" technologies are not built for the collaboration and access that WFH environments require.

If you haven't expanded the use of your productivity suites like Microsoft 365 or G-Suite, now is the time to put together a strategy. The leadership of your organization should analyze the challenges and leverage these tools to solve them.

Software like Microsoft Teams, Slack, OneNote, Salesforce (the list goes on forever) are all built around connectivity, accessibility and production. For example, you can utilize Teams to do a video conference, take notes, pull up documents and use a whiteboard, all in one window instantly. The video can be recorded and stored in Microsoft Stream to review at a later time and utilize all of the other apps available with your subscription.

It is imperative that you build a strategy around these tools to ensure you are leveraging your technology to improve your business performance.

Security

There is a direct relationship between security and speed or performance. The greater the security, the less agility your organization has. The more layers of protection you add to a process, the more the ability to change that process is negatively affected.

All organizations should be having a conversation about if/how we make changes to our processes and infrastructure to adapt to this WFH requirement, what does it do to our cyber security program? Do we fall out of compliance? Do we have to redo our risk assessments or change our incident response plan? Once the dust settles, it is critical to regroup and assess the changes to



ensure your risk has not risen unexpectedly.

Make sure you are communicating to your staff the changes to security now that they are working remotely. Be very clear with expectations on how they should be handling information, both digital and physical. Make sure they have awareness training and that they do not loosen up their processes and sacrifice security.

Last, ensure they are working on devices that are using Virtual Private Networks (VPN), antivirus that is up-to-date and that they have a device that is running on a supported version of Windows or Mac. Many of these vital issues are missed in the

mad dash to get connected; however, this does not absolve you from compliance and best practices.

Moving Forward

It is critical that you take this opportunity to evaluate your organization's ability to be remote. There is a large workforce that is coming up the ladder that doesn't know anything but mobility. Now is the time to see where your company succeeds and where there are opportunities for growth in providing this environment.

Once this is all over, do not go back to the way it was. That would be like having a heart attack, quit-

ting smoking for two years and then picking it up again. It is easy to go back to the way it was, but it could be severely damaging and even fatal for your organization.

This is an opportunity to separate yourself from your competitors, improve your team and deliver on your promise of an outstanding product or service, regardless of challenging times. The companies that step up and leverage technology to move forward will come out of this situation far ahead of the pack, and the impact can be forever positive.

Eric Posa is vice president of operations for Copeland Technology Solutions

"Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all." - Dale Carnegie

WHEN THE MARKET IS DOWN, TO SELL OR NOT TO SELL

by Damon Piatek

We are faced with an economic downturn of history making proportions and the future is uncertain. However, when we are faced with a slowing of business beyond our control, we must focus on things within our control.

Right now, as uncertainty abounds, businesses may be tempted to stop focusing on sales, and like the rest of the population, hunker down praying that they can ride out the storm. While this might be your first instinct, the desire to wait is not a rational one. You will only fail at sales if you fail to sell. Now is the time to push hard, seeking new clients and new territories.

I know something about surviving and even thriving in an unstable market. I started my company in the economic downturn of 2008, and found that it was, surprisingly, just the right time. Customers were willing to listen to sales reps because it was imperative for them to get the most bang for their buck in tough financial times.

Now is also the time to take good care of the customers that you do have. Take stock in what customers are still buying from you or how their needs have changed, the items or services that everyone will be looking to buy and that you are best suited to sell. Focusing on these products or services and providing better service than anyone else will make your company stand out from your competitors and will earn you the goodwill of your customers.

It is also tempting to start cutting all costs in the company, again with the hope of surviving until we can emerge on the other side of this crisis. By all means, trim some of your expenses, but now is the time to spend on sales and marketing. Spend to gain share. Cutting cost is generally a necessity in times like this, but sales is a place where cutting costs could cost you opportunities when the economy begins to swing back.

As soon as you are able to get out for meetings, networking, and sales

calls or even as soon as you are able to bring customers back in to your place of business, you will want to be prepared with carefully planned marketing and sales strategies. Your people should be prepped and ready. When the economy swings back, it is imperative that you and your people are ready to jump.

Sales is a long game, and often clients don't bite on a first or even second sales call. Your activity today, may not actually pay off until next year, so now is the time to start building relationships with potential clients. Everyone is stuck, with very little to do, and many potential clients are willing to entertain a distraction. Use the technology available to you to speak to people who are, quite likely, sitting right with their phones and laptops, answering calls and emails more quickly than usual. Use your sales and marketing people to your advantage.

Damon Piatek is president & CEO of Welke Customs Brokers USA