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# Supporting the Hybrid Workforce With Integrated IT



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Two and a half years have passed since COVID-19 began its angry descent on the world, and although much of the panic has faded, businesses are noticing lasting effects. One of the most noticeable changes due to the pandemic is the increase in remote work. COVID-mandated lockdowns sent workers home, and many have never returned to the office. As a result, Gartner reports, 82% of business leaders intend to allow employees to work remotely at least some of the time.

Although most executives report that the shift to remote work has been successful, they still struggle with the logistics of supporting a hybrid workforce. Supply chain bottlenecks have made it harder for companies to adopt distributed IT, which is key in connecting workers across locations. In January 2022, PwC surveyed 678 U.S. executives, and almost one-third said they expected continued supply chain disruptions. Additionally, 60% of the executives said digital transformation is their most critical growth driver.

“Businesses have been scrambling to create remote solutions or platforms that allow their customers to work from home,” says Phil Bowers, director of marketing at Grandstream. Although uncertainty remains the only certainty for businesses today, new approaches to networking and unified communications can help.

## **New workplaces, new challenges**

For workers and employers coping with uncertainty, hybrid work provides many advantages. Workers have more flexibility to manage nonwork priorities, and employers save costs with smaller real estate footprints. Both parties also benefit from increased productivity, with almost half (49%) of IT professionals witnessing productivity going up and an additional 35% reporting that productivity levels stayed the same.

Hybrid work can also alleviate burnout, which has been detrimental to workers since long before the pandemic. In 2017 Harvard Business Review reported that burnout results in up to \$190 billion in healthcare spending

each year in the U.S. alone. Hybrid work won't prevent burnout entirely, but a 2021 report by Catalyst found that workers with remote work access experienced a 26% decrease in work-related burnout.

With all the benefits of a new hybrid workforce, however, there also come challenges. Cyberattacks have risen exponentially since the onset of the pandemic. FBI officials reported that internet scams in 2021 resulted in \$6.9 billion in losses – up 50% from 2019.

According to the FBI, some cybercrime losses in 2021 that remote work may have contributed to include:

- **Business email compromise:** \$2,395,953,296
- **Personal data breach:** \$517,021,289
- **Tech support:** \$347,657,432
- **Ransomware:** \$49,207,908
- **Phishing/vishing/smishing/pharming:** \$44,213,707
- **Malware/scareware/virus:** \$5,596,889

Aside from securing company data, IT departments are struggling to provide workers with the tools needed to transition seamlessly between home, office, and outside work locations. In early 2021, U.S. executives planned to support hybrid working with a 70% investment increase in IT infrastructure.

Along with all other challenges come supply chain bottlenecks. A quick bounce-back in global trade since the worst of the pandemic has resulted in various issues, including shipping container shortages, lack of warehouse space, and congestion at ports. Tim Huxley, chief executive of Hong Kong-based Mandarin Shipping, told CNBC that the shipping industry is building more container fleets but that most of that fleet won't be ready until 2023 at the earliest. He said more investments in infrastructure such as ports, roads, and bridges are also needed, but those could take years to materialize.

Truck driver shortages are another reason for issues in the supply chain, and the shipping industry is one of many experiencing a reduction in the labor force. A report published by

Gartner in September 2021 explained that 64% of IT executives cite talent shortages as the most significant barrier to the adoption of emerging technology, compared with only 4% in 2020.

Although pandemic-related issues in the workplace are complex, new IT management solutions and resilient supply chains can help.

Bowers says Grandstream has benefited from its ability to be flexible and adjust strategies on the fly. “We pivoted and responded to the initial COVID disruption in March 2020. We started to anticipate supply chain issues, and we were pretty aggressive in buying a lot more components than we thought we would need.”

Bowers also points to diversified manufacturing facilities as an aid to resilience. The company has gone from one prepandemic manufacturing facility to half a dozen now.

## **The right gear at the right time**

With the right networking and unified communications gear, businesses can better support their hybrid workforce. Some of this gear is Wi-Fi-enabled phones, conferencing technologies, unified IT management, and robust endpoints.

Hieu Huynh, director of technical support at Grandstream, explains that whereas traditional IP or desk phones are wired, remote work and the need for employees to bring endpoints home have led manufacturers such as Grandstream to develop wireless-capable devices. Now, he says, “Those tend to be the most popular, especially when some people at home don’t have the necessary wiring available in whatever room they work in.”

Aside from obtaining the right equipment, businesses need people to manage these devices. “It’s become



a challenge having an IT manager manage hundreds of devices remotely rather than having it all on a single LAN [local-area network] that he or she has full control over,” says Huynh. One way to get around this management issue is to invest in cloud-based software and equipment. It’s all about fostering agility.

Stephen Manley, a senior technologist at Druva, explains that focusing solely on survival is the biggest mistake companies make during challenging times. Instead, he says businesses must embrace agility, which requires teams to make data-driven decisions. And he says the cloud enables that agility. For example, with an organization’s data protected in the cloud, teams can access and work with data wherever and however they need to. The cloud enables organizations to “make better, faster, and more decentralized decisions” at minimum cost, Manley says.

Adopting cloud-based technology can also increase the number of available access points for workers in varied locations.

For example, Bowers explains that Grandstream’s GWN cloud accounts place no limit on the number of access points employees and system administrators can maintain and manage. And managers can do it all from a mobile app. “One of the great things about the mobile app – in addition to being able to monitor and manage access points – is that you can add them by just scanning a barcode,” Bowers explains. Best of all, the app and the cloud management system are free – a rarity in an industry that has made software-as-a-service (SaaS) subscriptions the norm for everything from accounting to marketing.

Of course, none of these elements help if businesses can’t obtain the right equipment at the right time. Even companies ahead of the curve must cope with supply chain headaches, which means that IT departments and the people they support may have to wait weeks or months to receive the gear they need. To combat these issues, companies must do more than consider agile solutions. They must source their equipment from suppliers with resilient supply chains.

## Solutions for hybrid work

Grandstream is setting an example for others in the hybrid-work world by remaining agile during trying times. The company is not only internally flexible but also provides unified IT and networking gear that helps businesses of all sizes accommodate hybrid workers.

Among the hundreds of products the company offers to support the hybrid workforce are Power over Ethernet (PoE) switches, gateways, analog telephone adapters, and those free IT management portals. In addition, Grandstream provides a one-stop shop for all of the above, simplifying procurement.

Grandstream has proven exceptionally resilient in the face of supply chain challenges. “We decided to stock up on components early,” Huynh explains. And fostering resilience for the long haul, the company has redesigned most of its devices to use alternative, easier-to-source components. “So we were never stuck if one vendor of a particular component didn’t

have stock. We were able to buy alternative components to make it work,” explains Huynh.

It’s all part of the company’s forward-looking outlook and one reason Grandstream stands as one of the top providers of unified communications and networking technologies supporting the hybrid workforce.

## Conclusion

One of the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is the emergence of a hybrid workforce. Although hybrid work has benefits such as increased flexibility and productivity, it also presents challenges for IT leaders needing to manage workers around the world.

Distributed teams require businesses to improve their IT infrastructure, strengthen their security, and provide seamless opportunities for virtual collaboration. Unified communication and networking equipment makes this possible, but companies that want to purchase such equipment still face supply chain issues.



To help workers succeed while working from home, companies should consider purchasing cloud-based equipment that enables them to install and manage unlimited access points. They should also look for equipment sellers with resilient supply chains.

Grandstream is a leading manufacturer of business communication and networking solutions, creating award-winning products that empower businesses worldwide. During these unprecedented times, the company has proven to be agile and resilient in the face of supply chain bottlenecks. In addition, whereas most of its competitors require customers to purchase management platforms separately, Grandstream's is entirely free, with no limits.

Because of its full-access management software and varied product offerings, Grandstream serves as a critical resource for businesses seeking versatile IT support. For example, the company was one of the first to produce phones with built-in Wi-Fi.

Bowers says, "Companies that don't incorporate these different technologies – that aren't adding Wi-Fi and networking into their offerings – risk getting left in the dust, because that's where everything is going."

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