

# The role of technology in the hybrid office

Symetri's hybrid office guide to the smart ways we all work now, and the smarter ways we'll work next



# Why read this whitepaper:

The purpose of this white paper from Symetri is to itemise the principal routes for developing a robust strategy for implementing the new way of working. The requirement for greater flexibility, and agility is rapidly settling on the commercial world as an expectation for the many rather than an aspiration for the few.

The paper identifies the technologies to consider and the benefits they will bring not just in terms of workflows, efficiencies, and productivity, but also in workforce motivation, well-being, sustainability, and cost reductions.

## 3 main take-outs:

- 1. Have a plan**  
To maximise the benefits of hybrid productivity that IT can bring to a business, the best start point is to 'design out' from core business processes; avoiding the possibility of having to re-visit and rebuild the foundations later down the line. A roadmap will guide you in the right direction. This is no longer a 'fix', it is the future strategy.
- 2. The hybrid office is an irresistible force that brings diverse opportunities for increased productivity along with it**  
There's no single solution to adopting the hybrid approach. It is an ecosystem of technologies, methodologies, practices and policies from which any business can select depending on its own priorities and its existing IT architecture. It's not exclusively about technology or place, but a blend of both centering on people.
- 3. Flexible strategies attract the best people, drive the best outcomes**  
Digital-savvy staff have as firm a grasp of the digital world as their employers do because it has become the 'core' of their everyday life, their connections and interactions with others. They can communicate anywhere at any time. They understand access to global information, knowledge, and instruction. They want flexibility and choice in how they work.



# The new personality of work: A question of balance

COVID has forced new ways of working upon businesses everywhere. As companies adapt, they are discovering more about how the new personality of work can evolve. Benefits are coming to light such as potential savings in real estate costs, a logical outcome of fewer people coming into the office on a regular basis, and the ability to be more flexible as employees gain more of their personal time back as a result of not commuting. Improvements to the environment were also identified as people travelled less. The fall-off in commuting led to a reduction in pollution levels.

The shift to home working is not simply about less commuting however. It's about a fundamental restructuring of the processes and technologies that make it possible to work at a distance, across dispersed teams, without losing any of the productivity and quality outcomes that prevailed before.

Also coming to light is the realisation that these aspects of what a business does can be more than sustained. They can be improved through home working, or a balance between home and office as pandemic-imposed restrictions ease.

New approaches to the IT infrastructure are also being evaluated and adopted, given that a proportion of the workforce is no longer simply requiring occasional 'remote' access to systems, but is looking for longer-term, permanent solutions that enable high levels of productivity.

Remote connectivity solutions have now been adopted at the core of operations for most companies. This has been a long period of significant change and adaptation for many industries and it seems that the 'new normal' is universally accepted as being here to stay.



## The hybrid office has arrived

The 'Hybrid Office' was a revolution that came upon us so fast, that initial transitions to home working in response to pandemic protocols and government requirements, were tactical in nature.

They were designed to plug gaps that might have occurred in project/client servicing continuity. They were a bridge from how we used to work, to how we will work in the future.

Now, businesses are looking beyond the responsive approach to longer term strategies; progressive, pragmatic, and productive. This puts focus on the new working environment model which the hybrid office encapsulates. In addition to this cultural change, those within the Building

& Infrastructure and Product Design & Lifecycle industry also need to consider data when looking at their approach to the 'hybrid office'.

For instance with design and engineering applications, you will be dealing with large files and data sets on a daily basis. This is not much of an issue when you are in an office with the files on a local server, however when remote working is required, we have to consider the impact of latency over the wider area connection.

We also must consider the security and backup of the data. If users are experiencing slow openings and saves for example, there will be a tendency to copy files from the source to the local device which compromises corporate policies.



SECTION 1

# Creating a hybrid office IT roadmap

There are two basic directions in which the creation of a hybrid office way of working can be developed, depending on the agility of the business and your people, and the expediency you require.

The necessity to take immediate or longer-term action will most likely be dictated by project status and, to some degree, expectations of how you work arising from your client base and the nature of your projects. This latter consideration involves splicing what is desirable for your business with what is acceptable to your clients.

## **A definite strategy is required**

It will help define the technologies you need to explore further and save time by enabling you to move swiftly into a new normal. As it saves time, it will enable you to make informed decisions and avoid additional costs along the way; costs that may arise through a reactive approach involving possible false starts and later additions/purchases to complement progress already made. The two scenarios are as follows:

### **1. Traditional office-based**

Where the workforce spends more time in the office than at home: Office at core | Home at edge

### **2. Agile working**

More time at home than in the office: Home focus | Office connection

## **The way things are today**

Digital transformation has been making an impact for many years, driving the paperless office, empowering greater collaboration, realising the benefits of Building Information Modelling (BIM) and the many associated benefits arising from developments such as the use of the Common Data Environment (CDE).

Along with the digital advantage has come the digital threat to data and overall systems security. The extremely sensitive and high-stakes nature of many projects has necessarily put security at the top of the agenda. Meanwhile, the adoption of digital ways of working has been evolutionary; as ever-more advanced technologies have become available, companies have taken them on board. Much of the progress has been step-by-step. Now it needs to pick up pace.

## **The traditional setup**

Although all infrastructure is on premise in the traditional setup, the needs of remote users have usually been accommodated. Users have gained access to resources either through a virtual private network (VPN) or a connection to their desktop in the office using software specifically designed to enable remote access.

## **The traditional setup with access through the VPN**

The physical desktop remains centre-stage in the traditional setup. Users still need a desk in the office as in this scenario, they connect into their workstation located at their desk.

At best, the approach is tactical; effectively a short-term fix. It's designed to serve the 'remote' need when access from a location other than the office is necessary. It is not designed to be a robust, ongoing framework for a semi- permanently dispersed workforce.

It embraces cloud-based capabilities and mobile apps and can work via any connected device. A number of vulnerabilities can arise when an 'entry-level' approach to remote working (allowing beyond-the-office connection) is adopted. It's about connection, rather than integration. 'Remoteness' is, almost by definition, of a lower level of efficiency than 'closeness'. For example, a drawing that takes minutes to open in the office can take significantly longer to open over a VPN.

The possibility of users coming into core systems via their own devices when they connect in remotely, opens up security weaknesses since it's often the case that the devices will not be secure, validated, monitored, controlled and regularly updated by the IT team. They're also often not directly sanctioned by senior management or systems administrators.

When formulating a strategy to integrate home working in a more robust fashion, such validation, central management, and sanction is essential, and not just from the data security aspect.

## Scenario 1: Office at core | Home at edge

The 'working from home' shift presents other opportunities, of a commercial nature. If physical attendance in the office is scaled back, it follows that physical space can be too. As productivity becomes more ubiquitous – work becoming something you do, rather than somewhere you go – noticeable cost savings become more achievable.

As space is reduced, the costs of running the business can be brought down. Associated environmental benefits can also accrue. These come from alleviating the carbon footprint of the business, both from the office premises and the effects of the workforce commute.

From an IT perspective, the requirement for and dependance on the on-premise infrastructure can be lessened. The IT infrastructure can be relocated in a data centre which would provide client devices in the form of rack-mounted workstations.

### The data centre advantage

With the infrastructure relocated, users can run all their Computer Automated Design (CAD), Computer Automated Engineering (CAE) or Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) software applications from the device in the data centre using connectivity software.

Such software enables any device, such as a Chromebook or laptop, to work as if it were a high-powered desktop computer, performing the same functions at the same speed but from a remote location; either at the office or at home.

Software as a Service (SaaS) Solutions

Data Centre



Client VPN



Rack Mounted  
CAD Workstations



Remote Users



## Scenario 2: Home focus | Office connection

Two routes are available in scenario 2, when the emphasis on working culture, if this becomes the focus of your strategic intentions, shifts to home working.

### Virtual desktops

A virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) enables users to connect to a virtual instance remotely from anywhere, through any device. It enables users to connect either to the cloud or into the on-premise IT infrastructure. It also makes collaboration easy and seamless; a key factor in effective home working.

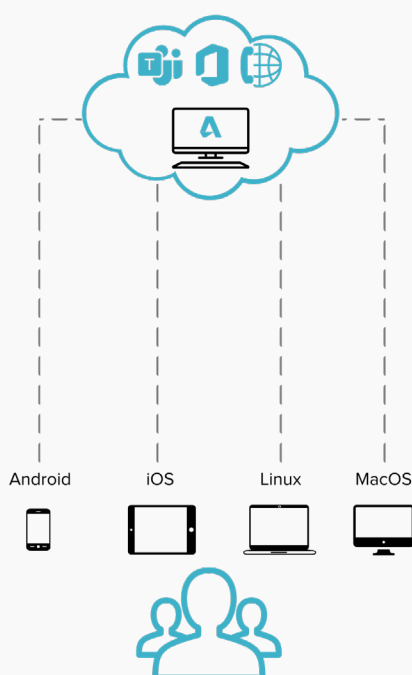
### Software as a service (SaaS)

Deploying SaaS in conjunction with Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) enables users to continue to

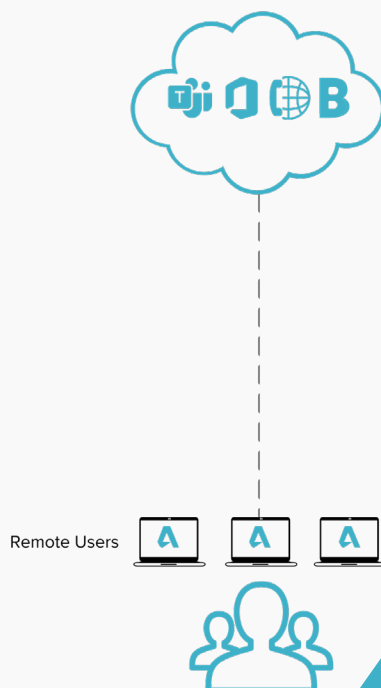
work seamlessly from a physical device such as a mobile workstation, and connect to those software applications – BIM 360 and Office 365 for example – critical to their roles.

This means that users will not always need high-powered workstations with them to run their graphics intensive CAD, CAE or PLM software when out of the office, as they will get the same power by connecting into the software via the cloud or on-premise infrastructure.

Desktop as a Service (DaaS) Solutions



Software as a Service (SaaS) Solutions





SECTION 2

# Supporting the new working culture

## Technology edge and the human factor

Employees want flexibility. Recent times have demonstrated that such a desire is not beyond the realm of possibility and is certainly within the realm of technology. Employers/businesses want certainty, predictability, continuity.

IT offers the connection between the two sets of needs; the ability to achieve balance between personal goals (not forgetting that business owners and leaders are people too, with the same desires for choice and flexibility) and company responsibilities/schedules/timelines/projects.

Given the technology options available, obvious questions arise: Why ever go back to the office? Rather than a 'hybrid' solution, why not go completely virtual?

Such a move is possible but probably not desirable. The question of sanity arises; people want to see and socialise with colleagues/ share ideas in a less formalised fashion than the scheduled team meeting. They want to laugh, interact, bond with colleagues and friends. This is

the deeper value of the hybrid office; combining the technology edge with the people need.

The hybrid office has rapidly evolved. It was not so long ago the rallying cry of VoIP providers and collaborative technology vendors extolling the philosophy that 'work is something you do, not somewhere you go'. Now it brings what you do and where you go together, whilst bringing in numerous additional dimensions:

- **Something you do**
- **Wherever you go**
- **Whenever is right**
- **With whoever you need to**
- **Or for whomever needs you**

SECTION 2

# Necessity is the mother of invention

So, what happens next? Necessity has, as so often, given birth to invention or rather reinvention. COVID imposed heaps of changes to nations, societies, cultures, economies, and people. Along with its deluge of tragedies, the pandemic demanded new behaviours in how people live, how they convene, and how they work.

Initially, the diktat to work from home seemed like an imposition; bringing upheaval and disruption. Perceptions changed. Improvements to the environment were identified as people travelled less. The fall-off in commuting led to a reduction in pollution levels. People found a little more balance on each side of the work/life equation.

There remains the fact that in any discussion of the hybrid office, there tends to be an assumption that all staff will have an ambient home environment to accommodate their working roles. It is not always the case. Some do not have the luxury of office space in their homes and end up working in bedrooms/living rooms/kitchens; the result is that

the hybrid office does not expand their horizons and enrich their career experience, it limits the horizons.

With limited flexibility about working at home, some may view it as an imposition on their personal lives; the work/life balance tips in favour of work to the detriment of life. Rather than working from home, they may perceive the shift as no more than 'living in the office'.

Technology exists to serve people, not the other way round. This is where the ultimate balance, in whatever strategy you decide to pursue, should be struck.



# SYMETRI

ADDNODE GROUP

At Symetri we support innovative companies in the building, infrastructure, and manufacturing industries to optimise their working methods and increase the quality of their projects. Our purpose is to challenge people to work smarter and to turn ideas into new realities that shape a better future.

We partner with best of breed technology partners to bring you the right IT solutions to meet your business needs, supported by a comprehensive range of services to give you peace of mind that your core IT infrastructure and critical business applications will be available when you need them.

Learn more:  
[www.symetri.co.uk](http://www.symetri.co.uk)

Contact us:  
[info@symetri.co.uk](mailto:info@symetri.co.uk)  
0345 370 1444