

Pandemic end-game, how will startups 'reintegrate' their workers into the office?

While the promise of a vaccine gives us hope that 2021 will see a return to the office, some elements of the pandemic world are here to stay.

Temps de lecture : minute

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The use case for remote collaboration has been well and truly proven, with many companies saying remote working will remain a key part of future plans. Some companies are even saying they won't require staff to travel to a shared office space again. But regardless of the extent of your plans, remote collaboration must be secure and effective, and some changes are inevitable. Here's how the future of work will look in 2021.

Welcome to the hybrid office

The office of early 2020 is defunct, but that doesn't mean the office as a concept is over. Individual desks and workstations may give way to more space for meetings and creativity sessions, socially-distanced, if required. It's looking increasingly likely that people will spend 2 or 3 days a week in the office and 2 or 3 days a week working remotely. As a result, we think we'll see a continuation in the trend of organisations splitting up large boardroom spaces in favour of a greater number of smaller 'huddle' spaces.

That all means there is a more pressing need than ever for video communication and collaboration tools, as we saw from Salesforce's

\$27.7B purchase of Slack. In our business, the software we provide is business-critical, but people will also still want some of the room systems like StarLeaf Huddle or StarLeaf Room for Poly, which help them when they are in a meeting room. Increasingly the priority for companies will be to maintain the same high standard of call quality, security and usability - whether people are working from home or an office.

For home offices, the webcam is going to make a return as the key product, whilst apps such as Camo which uses your iPhone camera as an external camera for improved video call quality will increase in popularity too.

The video call will replace most voice calls

We've finally understood that visual communication is a crucial element of human interaction. When people around the world were forced to stay at home, companies jumped on video and collaboration platforms to keep people communicating and working effectively.

Talking to each other with pictures is intuitive and natural. Increasingly, this is how we will call each other. But we need to make that connection seamlessly and we don't need over-engineered, multi-featured apps to do it. We won't necessarily stipulate a video call, we'll just gravitate to the calling system that is intuitive, easy to use, and gets results quickly. Watch teens, they already do this instinctively - they rarely use a voice call, having seen that a video call is a better and more personal way of communicating information.

Security will be a priority

In 2021, we're going to see companies taking a look at their current collaboration solution and weighing up whether they really do have the best platform for their organisation's needs, and if it offers the security

their employees need to conduct their jobs safely at home, just as they used to in a physical workspace. Stories of Zoom-bombing and security scandals have seeded doubts in the minds of those who are making decisions about which products are best.

StarLeaf has always placed a high value on security and that has won us fans in sectors that require absolute confidence in their systems. We own all our own servers, so we're not reliant on third-parties, and this helps us ensure the cyber-resilience of the infrastructure. Customers can decide where their data is stored and it remains under their control - and we don't route information through China. StarLeaf also has a 99.999% uptime guarantee, which is why the platform is favoured by healthcare organisations, parliamentary bodies, education providers and large enterprises alike. If you want to be online where you can reach customers and staff in a secure environment, then it's time to invest in the right solution for you.

Reducing human error will become a focus

The user will also increasingly become the focus of security strategies. Human error or simply negligence is one reason for the vulnerability of collaboration and calling systems. Be careful who you share an invite link with, or where you post a meeting screenshot, it could ultimately put a company at risk of having sensitive information stolen through a silent hacker, or offensive imagery played during a client call. It'll become second nature to check settings before an important meeting such as disabling participant screen sharing, in the same way you would check who will be seeing an Instagram Stories post.

This isn't just important for business meetings, but also personal calls. We're all becoming experts on the types of encryption our messaging apps use, and this is something to be aware of for other collaboration tools too. Calls may be encrypted, but the information stored in the

service such as images shared, may not be. If you're discussing something you care about via an internet connection, make sure it's protected from prying eyes.

It's au-revoir to the business trip

Travel is one of the main things people are eager to get back to doing in 2021. Business travel however, may never return to what it once was. Conferences and events across the world have been able to put on an effective show using virtual platforms without thousands of people having to descend on a draughty conference hall. But perhaps the big argument for these virtual events is that they save people time and money and make events available to bigger audiences. You can drop in on an interesting lunchtime session or afternoon roundtable without having to rearrange your work schedule. You don't have to give up putting the children to bed, to travel to a conference on another continent. Investors are flocking to the platforms that are facilitating them: online events platform Hopin was recently valued at \$2.1B, and the British startup only launched 17 months ago.

That's not to say international conferences will never take place again, but like the office, they will take on a more hybrid format, with certain team members eager to travel to a different city for in-person meetings, and other colleagues happy to dial into events virtually from home. Flexibility will be key.

We'll talk (and more) on the go

More business is going to be done on the move, and the importance of mobile connections will be key. Going into the office for one in-person meeting during the day is no longer the smart option, so more people will call and conference from trains or their car. Mobile technology such as 5G will have a big impact on this: the advent of the next-generation mobile

tech was supposed to untether us from Wi-Fi connections. Though it hasn't quite got there just yet, investments in infrastructure from the likes of O2, EE and Vodafone will enable us to work from anywhere, and we're going to expect to have access to video-enabled collaboration, just like in the office and at home.

It's an exciting moment to rethink how we approach work and, of course, life. COVID-19 may have taken so much from us, but the ability to pause, reflect, and re-examine the things we were used to is something that will benefit us for many years to come. Above all else, we've learned in 2020 that making a human connection - whether with family, customers or colleagues - is key to a successful and happy life. And we will see people prioritise that at work in 2021.

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