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WHERE TO NEXT?

A guide to help your business move forward as we enter the new corporate experience.

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COVID-19 has changed the way business is being done around the world. At Astreya, we have been working closely with some of the world's most innovative tech companies to adapt to the new requirements that this unexpected pandemic has presented. While nobody could have predicted that this pandemic was coming, it should be a clarion call to all businesses to develop a BCP (business continuity plan) and RTO (return to office) plan moving forward.

In this paper, we share best practices gathered from Astreya leadership in IT, AV, and HR developed through our own experiences and those of our clients, some of the world's leading tech companies.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANS AND RETURN TO OFFICE PLANS

In order to ensure continuity, businesses must foster inclusion, have everyone on the same page, and focus on keeping communication as open as possible. Any successful plan must put people's mental and physical health and safety first.

There are several roles that need to have a voice at the table when developing a BCP in order for it to be successful. The stage should be set from the highest leadership levels. IT needs to be included in every conversation around BCP, and ideally will include the CIO or CTO. Businesses are highly digitized, and the pandemic has greatly accelerated the already exponential move towards digitization. The customer experience officer should also be there to make sure that the BCP does not negatively impact customers if and when the plan is rolled out. HR needs representation as part of the planning process, as well. Events like COVID-19 no doubt disrupt how employees work and add additional stressors to work-life balance. It is imperative to design plans that empower employees to do their best work during times of great uncertainty.

It is also important to understand how employees are utilizing technologies as the company pivots from the traditional in-office workforce to the mass adoption of working from home, followed by a gradual return to a familiar work environment, but with a variety of modifications that will require new modes of operation.

# BEST PRACTICES FOR IT SERVICES POST-COVID-19

Astreya has traditionally embraced a high-touch approach to IT services, and we pride ourselves on working seamlessly side by side with our clients. With the new social distancing requirements, the challenge has become how to maintain this same level of IT support and communication in a remote manner. Shifting from on-site support to remote support can cause frustration levels to rise for employees, and it is critical for IT support to have strong interpersonal skills in order to maintain the quality and consistency of remote services.

We've found that the best practices for running IT services during the pandemic require that policy is set first, good communication is ensured, and guarantee that the infrastructure can support a new model. It is also important to agree upon expectations and policies with clients so that IT infrastructure doesn't get overwhelmed.

With proper expectations established, it is then important to evaluate the supply chain to ensure it is solid from low-end assets to more expensive assets. We recommend letting employees buy their own low-priced equipment and reimbursing them later, as there is no longer a reason to stock low-cost peripherals such as keyboards, mice, and headphones. As some employees start to return to the office, we encourage the use of low- to no-touch solutions such as IT smart lockers for vending such equipment. With smart lockers, only one person touches the product, so points of contact are minimized. Smart lockers carry other benefits, as well, including real-time inventory analytics helping management to better track supply and demand for IT equipment.

Astreya is well known for its "white glove" IT service, with our experts deployed on site to assist at all times. In most cases, we have maintained our onsite support, but rather than be on site 24/7, we now carefully schedule on-site visits for times when fewer workers are present at the facility in order to allow for social distancing. So while we still offer the "white glove" service we are known for, it is now more "concierge-style." It will be a while before we can return to just casually dropping by without carefully thought-out appointments.
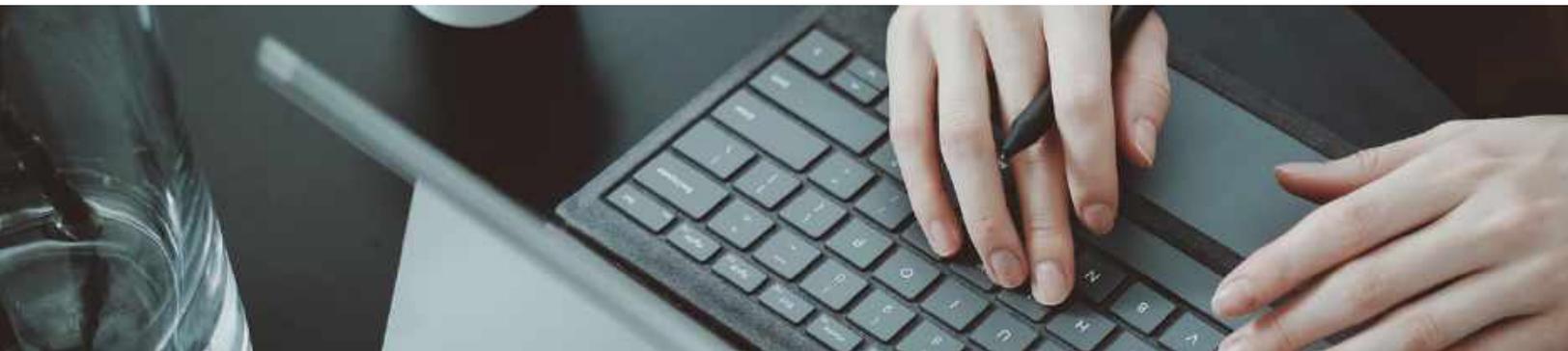
PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO AUDIO/VIDEO (AV) SERVICES

Developing a business continuity plan for AV is particularly important for businesses. COVID-19 came quickly. Everything was normal one day, and then everything was shut down the next day. Forced to pivot quickly, businesses did not have the time required to give proper consideration to what working from home would entail for their workforce. In many cases, encryption, data security, and confidentiality became afterthoughts. It's important to remember that AV equipment like video conferencing puts very high demand on network bandwidth. Also, virtual meetings are being held on employees' personal networks, which can lead to unforeseen cybersecurity issues.

For most companies, event services and managed on-site services have currently been put on hold. With traditional AV support for event servicesMaintaining and fixing physical AV equipment has required that our AV techs be onsite. However, with many of them now working from home, we are left asking, "How do we solve these problems remotely?", everything was physical. With everyone pivoting to online events, we have needed to ramp up our remote support. Often, equipment rentals are put on hold. We recognize there will still be a need for on-site events, but we expect that they will be slower to ramp up.

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"HOW DO WE SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS REMOTELY?"

As we return to the office, it is important to think about how AV rooms and resources will be used differently. Even though we anticipate a lower number of workers in the office we envision conference rooms actually becoming more difficult to reserve and manage, not less. The days of filling conference rooms with employees shoulder to shoulder are likely over, and there will be a need to reserve specific times in order to wipe down tables, chairs, and equipment between meetings.

On the other hand, we expect large spaces to become redundant. The notion of packing the entire company into one large room will be a thing of the past. Those big, expensive rooms loaded with state-of-the-art AV equipment will likely need to be subdivided into smaller spaces that better promote social distancing.

With all of the new challenge COVID-19 has presented to businesses come some important benefits, as well. The industry has rapidly matured in its use of collaboration tools. Things like video conferencing that were once seen by some as a luxury are now the lifeblood of day-to-day business. We have also seen that IT and AV are now working much more closely together to provide robust communication and media services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Don't go back to the old ways simply because it is comfortable. Think about how your needs for onboarding new employees, procuring furniture, and IT equipment may have evolved and adapt and innovate accordingly. Listen to the end-user. It's their life that is being impacted, and it is your duty to make their work life easier. Have a strategy to train all employees on how to use new technologies, particularly for AV equipment like video conferencing. Not everyone knows how to use everything. Where possible, opt for solutions that have remote support capabilities to lighten the burden on those who need to make the office a safe place to operate.

Moving forward, we are continuously asking how we can ensure the same level of service no matter where workers are while providing minimum disruption. We have found that as a result of COVID-19, people have become much more empathetic and patient with each other as we all work towards adapting to this new environment. But people will not tolerate blaming COVID-19 three to five years, out and we all need to take this as a call to develop the plans and strategies needed to deal with other unforeseen disruptions in the future.