

Coronavirus; Non-IT Indian firms and SMBs facing teething troubles with 'work from home'

- Small companies are scrambling to get their act together as new coronavirus threat has reached their premises
- They have to grapple with employees who have age-old laptops, poor network and connectivity with no UPS backups and little knowledge about how to handle group chat and collaboration software.

New Delhi: While it makes perfect sense for IT employees to work from remote locations via video conferencing and collaboration tools seamlessly - especially in the case of tech giants like Google or Microsoft -- workers from the non-IT companies and small and medium enterprises (SMBs) are the worst-hit in India as most of them have little or no clue about how these messaging and collaboration tools work amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Small companies -- from corporate to education verticals -- are scrambling to get their act together as new coronavirus threat has reached their premises, prompting them to send employees home who have age-old laptops, poor network and connectivity with no UPS backups and little knowledge about how to handle group chat and collaboration software like Zoom, Google Hangouts Meet, Microsoft Teams and Flock etc.

Instead of halting operations, however, businesses can choose to shift towards remote working methods with teaching non-IT staff on how to use the latest digital software to connect and work, say industry experts.

The training will take some time and may hamper productivity in the short run but is a win-win situation for the non-tech companies in the long run, in case any such global emergency arises in the future.

According to a latest report by Gartner, 54 per cent of HR leaders have cited that poor technology and/or infrastructure for remote working is the biggest barrier to effective remote working.

Sandy Shen, Senior Director Analyst, Gartner, says that with COVID-19 disrupting the business landscape, CIOs should relook at the digital fulfillment of market demand.

"The value of digital channels, products and operations is immediately obvious to companies everywhere right now. This is a wake-up call for organisations that have placed too much focus on daily operational needs at the expense of investing in digital business and long-term resilience," warned Shen.



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Businesses that can shift technology capacity and investments to digital platforms will mitigate the impact of the outbreak and keep their companies running smoothly now, and over the long term.

"Videoconferencing, messaging, collaboration tools and document sharing are just a few examples of technologies that facilitate remote work. Additional bandwidth and network capacity may also be needed, given the increasing number of users and volume of communications," informed Shen.

The IT industry's apex body Nasscom has asked the government to relax norms for a month to allow work-from-home for technology and back-office employees as a measure to deal with the spread of Covid-19 in India.

Networking giant Cisco said that it has seen "significant growth" in the usage of its web conferencing and video-conferencing service Webex in India.

According to Muneer Ahmad, Business Head, ViewSonic India, due to COVID-19 pandemic, the corporate and educational sector is severely getting affected in the country.

"ViewSonic IFP has a cloud-based software which help teachers and corporates to connect through video conferencing to multiple people at the same time and can split the screen into six screens. It can also connect with various tools like Skype, Cisco WebEx, Zoom, Google Hangouts and GoToMeeting," Ahmad told IANS.

Co-working sector has also taken a hit and the industry is looking at several measures to tackle it -- from ensuring supply of juices rich in Vitamin C to supply of disinfectants and giving work from home facilities.

"The scheduled visits of the clients at our co-working offices have been postponed. Few of our clients have cancelled their outstation meetings and have now started audio/video conferencing for virtual meetings," said Nakul Mathur, MD, Avanta India.

According to reports, India has approximately 1,000 co-working locations (as of September 2019) and is the second-largest market for the co-working industry after China.

As India's first licensed B2B Virtual Network Operator, CloudConnect Communications offers a collaborative platform that allows companies to overcome the COVID-19 threat while maintaining seamless business continuity and optimum employee productivity."We offer a secure, robust, reliable, scalable and trackable mobile-first unified communication infrastructure that aids remote teleworking so that businesses can continue operating even under any unforeseen circumstances," said Gokul Tandon, Executive Chairman, CloudConnect Communications.