

Building a Distributed Yet Collaborative Workforce with Hot Desking & Windows Virtual Desktop

Hot Desking: A Return to the New Normal

In an ever-changing world, companies are taking steps to provide adapted working environments so that employees can return to their offices. One way firms are addressing the major changes brought on by COVID-19 is by implementing hot desking supported by Windows Virtual Desktop Infrastructures (VDI).

A hot desk system allows for a safer working environment where new seating capacities are followed, social distancing guidelines are met, and sanitation cleanings are more efficient. While Windows VDI provides the technology necessary to allow users to access their desktops and applications from anywhere. Overall, this will provide a better work-life balance where employees can voluntarily return to the office and work in a collaborative environment.

Hot Desking: Then and Now

Hot desking as a socially distanced, return to the office solution is going to look a lot different from how it used to look. The term came into use in the 90s and has been growing both in popularity and infamy as a solution involving shared desk spaces utilized by multiple people. In the summer of 2019, just one year ago, opinion articles from supporters and skeptics alike proliferated. It seemed to be a great experiment with the results—failure—almost conclusively in.

However, COVID-19 changed everything. Companies today are looking for opportunities to maintain employee safety while enabling in-office collaboration. Through scheduling software and a virtual desktop environment, hot desking can keep employees safely apart, while still allowing them access to the office environment many of them have come to miss.

Why is Hot Desking Going to Work This Time?

Simply put, it is because businesses have learned to work from home. They had to learn quickly, and as a result, many employers have found that while they are looking forward to a return to the community environment of office life, the desire is not as desperate as they may have anticipated in, say, April 2020. Among their many other complaints, those who took issue with hot desking in “the before times” called the practice hypocritical because companies were demanding in person attendance, but failing to provide an environment any better for collaboration than the home office.

Now, companies feel safe facilitating a limited, rotating office presence because the dramatic shift to remote everything has shown employees to be sufficiently productive and collaborative even from home offices. And as it turns out, the tools they learned to implement to support the work from home experience are in many cases the same tools that will ensure a smooth transition to a new hot desking program.

The Technology behind a Successful Distributed Workforce Strategy

Success in returning to the office is closely tied to success in supporting work from home. The technological tools that make both possible can be broken down into three categories: collaboration, security, and flexibility.

Collaboration

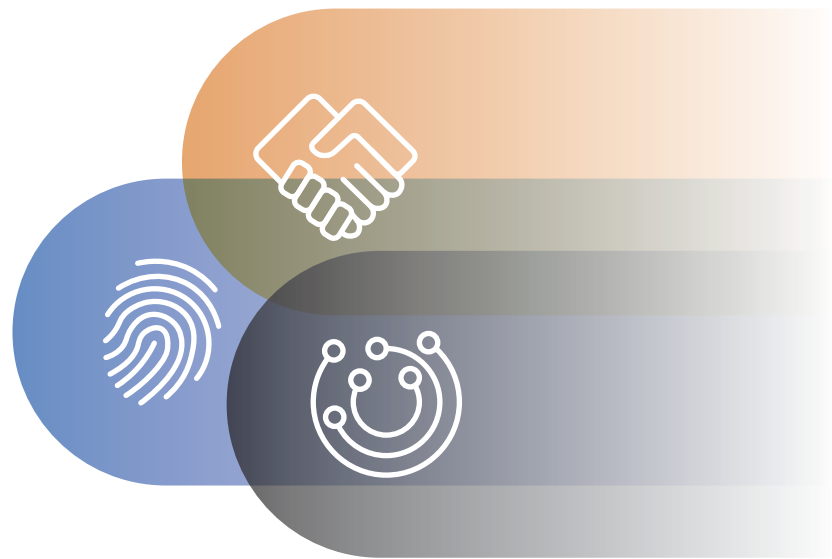
The office used to be a substrate for easy in-person interaction. Collaboration could often be achieved by raising one's voice slightly to get the attention of a coworker across the room. In the hotelling model of hot desking, members of the same team or those who interface with other departments still will not be able to rely on their schedules lining up so that they see each other every day.

What has served them while they worked from home will be what continues to serve them now: software and tools that enable real time collaboration and fast, easy communication. Microsoft Office 365 has a comprehensive suite of collaboration tools for this including Teams and SharePoint.

Security

When everyone suddenly went remote in early 2020, they switched from working almost exclusively on their company issued PC and desk phone to a much more nebulous collection of hand-held devices, tablets, personal PCs/laptops and quickly ordered monitors to replicate in-office setups. Add to that the rotating cast of characters utilizing those many devices and home internet networks and you get a CTO's waking nightmare.

Device management and increased authentication measures became an even more urgent aspect of security as companies rushed to address the new set of vulnerabilities that came with a decentralized workforce. In a hotelling system, threats are similarly difficult to contain if the correct security layers are not in place. Therefore, thoughtfully strengthening security measures, utilizing VDI and ensuring the workforce is adequately trained to prevent social engineering attacks must be a considered part of the return to work strategy. The safer an organization and their clients' data is with a distributed workforce, the safer it can be as they gradually return to the office.



Flexibility

Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) provides a secured, highly available and centrally managed user experience irrespective of user location. This means that no matter what your “office” looks like on the outside, whether it’s a different desk on Wednesday than it was on Monday, or even if it is your home office, once you log into your computer, the experience is going to be the same.

Not only will it be the same from home desk to hot desk, it will also be the same from user to user. This makes for more efficient use of scheduled time slots in the office, as users can get right to work without having to figure out a new system or layout each day. VDI enables people’s work to move with them, so they always have access to the same folders, files, and applications, running in the same environment.

The Future is Blended

The office as we know it is not dead. A lot of companies were pleasantly surprised to find that they could still work together while staying apart, but that does not mean employees do not prefer the in-office experience. Some find it easier to focus on their work in a dedicated space, and many prefer some measure of distinction between their work life and their home life to make it easier to balance the two. Furthermore, we miss each other. Employee morale always benefits from a friendly office culture, something that is hard to achieve without an office.

Hot desking and Windows VDI will open the door for many companies to navigate a safe and responsible return to the office life that helps them thrive.

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