# TIPS FOR MODERNIZING YOUR BACK OFFICE IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

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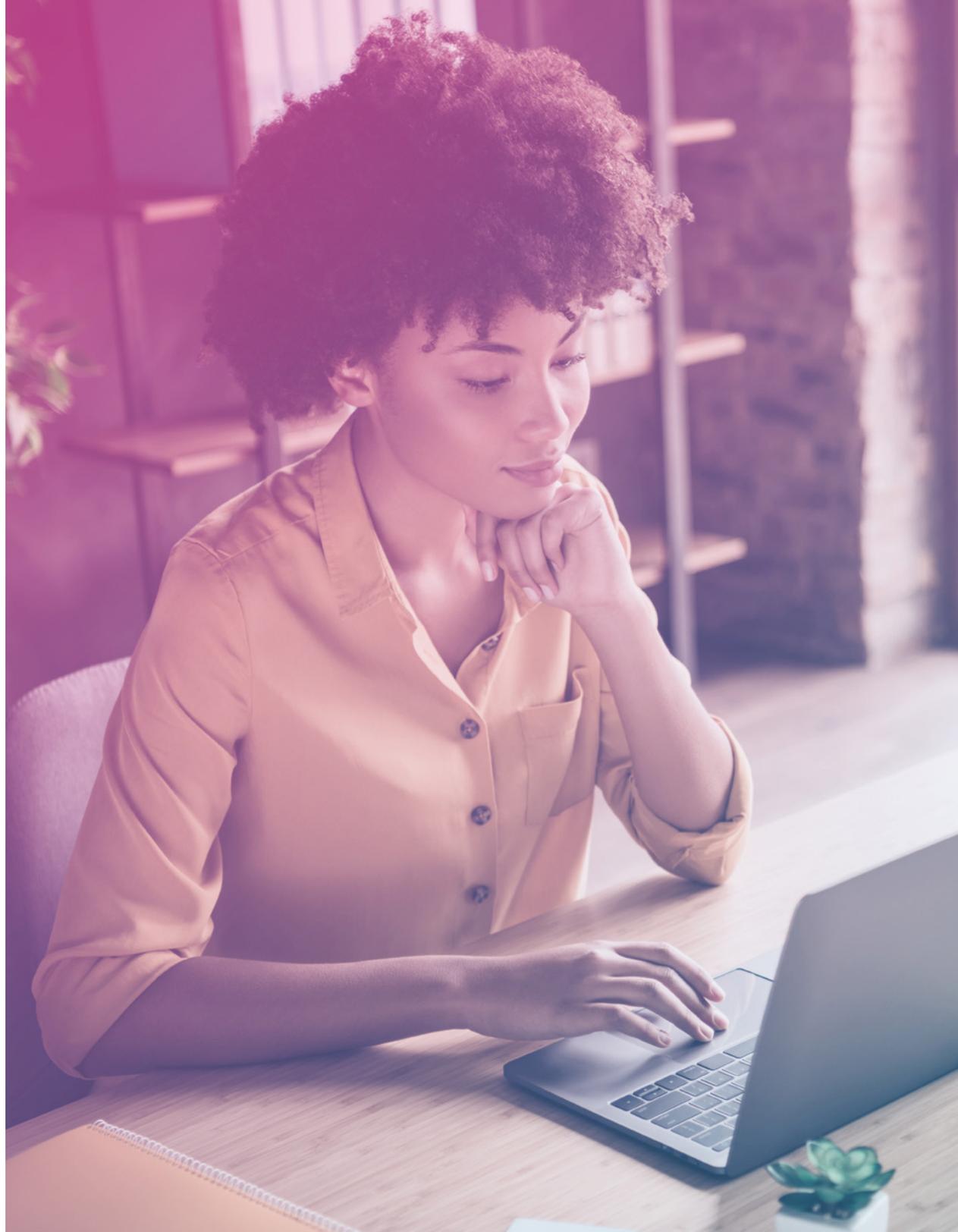
In the earliest chaos of the pandemic, on the backs of employees and IT organizations everywhere, impromptu offices sprung up in bedrooms, basements and even closets around the globe. At the time, there was neither cause nor time to think about sustaining a remote workforce.

As months went on, employees began to discover that working from home had its finer points. Challenges of newfound office mates notwithstanding — roommates, children, partners, parents and pets — some were finding it easier to be productive. Others enjoyed the fresh sense of freedom: If the role allowed, they could walk the dog at lunch or enjoy more flexibility in their work schedule.

By the time 2021 arrived, the concepts of agility and resiliency in the workplace were forever changed. Employers began rolling out more flexible workplace models and modifying on-premises office space, transforming cube farms into collaborative creative spaces with reserved spots for drop-in "hoteling." Many digital-first companies proclaimed their flexible approach to remote work:

- **Quora:** Remote-first policy lets nearly all employees work remotely and relocate to anywhere the company can legally employ them. Will convert existing offices into coworking space.
- **Salesforce:** Declared the 9-to-5 workday dead. Offers flex (1–3 days in office per week), fully remote and office-based (the small number of staff who must be in-person 4–5 days per week).
- **Atlassian** employees can work from home permanently.[ii]

Despite the ability of entire organizations to flip to a work-from-home model almost overnight, not all companies can simply turn on a digital dime, forever, without significant infrastructure and process changes. Reconfiguring the on-premises workspace is the easy part. Supporting remote work in this new world still has a way to go.

A key finding in a survey conducted by SAP Concur was that remote work has made administrative roles "more challenging and complex." More than 40 percent of finance and administrative departments reported that they are managing at least three new responsibilities since the start of the pandemic. A whopping 96 percent are concerned that their institution will "fail to comply with state and federal government reporting regulations."[iii]

Back office organizations are seeking to overcome these challenges not only to enable a more agile, remote workforce, but to use this opportunity to create a sustainable future.

In one survey, more than half said that given a choice, they would keep working from home after the pandemic.[i]

## THE INTELLIGENT, AUTOMATED BACK OFFICE OF THE FUTURE

Replicating paper-based and other manual processes in the home office would make little sense in a digital-ready world. Even if there was enough space, outfitting a home office with the equipment and supplies to process, manage and store paper documents would be costly and inefficient.

It isn't only about paper. As the world becomes increasingly digital, systems and file types proliferate, and create new gaps to close. Even when employees have internet-enabled access to core systems — everything from email to ERP and HRIS — critical content still often resides elsewhere. Putting intelligent automation and content services into place can be a dramatic step in moving the back office of the past into the anywhere-office of the future.

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"Perhaps more than any other function, AP used to be a strictly in-the-office job, mainly because of all the paper processes they had in place. Invoices come in the mail. They have to be opened and keyed into accounting systems ... Checks must be printed, stuffed into envelopes, and run through a postage meter before they're mailed. Security and controls are often paper-based, too — safes are kept for blank check stock and sensitive information."

**How remote work will reshape the back office, benefitnews.com[iv]**

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### Automagic data flows

Back-office processes are famously document-intensive. All varieties of digital and paper files arrive through multiple channels. Employees reenter information into systems, attach files, make backup copies and photocopies, and store these (somewhere), often before sending the information on to the next step. It's time-intensive, prone to error and makes information difficult to find.

Intelligent data capture transforms these manual, multi-step processes by ingesting paper and digital documents, extracting information, and applying intelligence to recognize and classify information. It populates systems with the needed information and goes on to verify accuracy and completeness. If documentation is missing or data is incorrect, it can send up a flag for human intervention. Intelligent capture not only removes extra work and dramatically increases processing speed, it enables a remote workforce by taking paper out of the equation.

### One-click everything, from anywhere

A sudden shift to offsite shines a spotlight on systems with in-house-only access or other restrictions. While internet-enabled applications can help remote workers access core systems, important documents often remain outside the system and require employees to take additional, manual steps in order to work with them.

One study reported that the average employee switches between 35 job-critical applications more than 1,100 times every day, and pointed to employees being overwhelmed with too many disconnected apps, resulting in increased errors, poor processes, and unnecessary actions that could all be automated.[v]

Another concluded that 69 percent of workers waste up to an hour every day toggling between apps.[vi]

Content services that seamlessly integrate with core systems can put unstructured content like documents and images a click away without leaving the core system. The result is a complete view of all information in a central place. For example, vendor invoices can be located and viewed with a click from within an ERP. Complete employee files can be viewed within an HRIS. For many organizations, the ability to access and work with documents from a central location is a game-changer.

### Secure agility and unencumbered compliance
The early days of the work-from-home shift necessitated creative workarounds to work with information. Documents were scattered across an assortment of file-sharing, collaboration and storage platforms and tools, including email and video calls. Remote collaboration, it turned out, was creating a substantial threat vector.

Content services can significantly strengthen security and compliance. Information is automatically classified and available only to those with a need to know. Complete audit trails provide a reliable, current record of all transactions, and automated recordkeeping enforces policy compliance and reduces the volume of sensitive information in circulation.

### Boundaryless processes
A shared physical workspace can help the back office maintain visibility into processes through in-person observations, drop-in questions and ad hoc meetings. A distributed workforce hampers these opportunities. Visibility isn't just a challenge for work-from-home organizations — it's also a common challenge for companies with distributed offices.

Automation makes process more transparent. Reports and dashboards provide views into data and allow for analysis beyond what is possible with manual tracking. While it doesn't replace in-person communication, process-related data helps provide a baseline for understanding how processes are functioning, allows staff to find information they need and helps everyone make better decisions, faster.

## ENABLE YOUR REMOTE-READY FUTURE
For back-office organizations, enabling a remote-ready workforce isn't just about employee preference — it's about securing the future. Paper-based processes and seamless connections across systems is an imperative. In a remote workforce, automating these processes is the only way to achieve the oversight necessary to avoid error, make better decisions and keep business running smoothly.

## 10 GAME-CHANGING BENEFITS OF AN AUTOMATED BACK OFFICE
The benefits of automation to a remote workforce are broad, and they have significant impact. It isn't only about efficiency. Automation can open new doors and new ways of doing business.

**What would *you* do with a remote-enabled, automated back office?**

**1**   Hire talent from anywhere

**2**   Use thousands saved from travel to send big prospects an iPad preloaded with your best demos

**3**   Let your staff put time saved from manual work toward tackling creative projects

**4**   Reinvent your hybrid-work, paperless office space

**5**   Promote your greener culture: reduced paper, printer ink and other supplies, less waste and dramatically reduced emissions from commuting, shipping and couriers

**6**   Less sick time worries — employees can flexibly work from home when a family member is ill without the concerns of contaminating the workplace

**7**   Use the savings from lower operational costs to invest in innovation

**8**   With $22,000 saved per remote employee[vii] , invest in equipment and services to improve remote employees' daily work life, boost morale and ensure their success

**9**   Improve the customer, employee and vendor experience with efficient processes

**10**   Scale up without adding headcount

i. *How the Coronavirus Outbreak Has – and Hasn't – Changed the Way Americans Work.* Pew Research Center, December 2020.
ii. *30 Companies Switching to Long-Term Remote Work.* Emily Courtney, Flexjobs.
iii. *New Survey Highlights Back-Office Challenges and Opportunities for Educational Institutions in Remote Work Environments.* SAP Concur, August 2020.
iv. *How remote work will reshape the back office.* Kim Lockett, ebn.com, June 2021.
v. *Employees switch apps more than 1,100 times a day, decreasing productivity.* Macy Bayern, TechRepublic, 2018.
vi. *The PM Bottleneck: Wasting Time Switching Between Applications.* Plainview Blog, June 2020.
vii. *In Defense of Remote Work.* Jeff DeVerter, Forbes Technology Council. December 2020.

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