



NFON
Cloud Telephone System

Looking to the Future:

Business Attitudes to Remote Working in a Post-Pandemic world

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With more certainty and stability gradually returning to the UK, we thought it was the perfect time to gain some genuine ground-level insight into the impact that last year has had on small businesses.

To that end, we commissioned a survey of 500 UK SMEs.

Conducted by Censuswide, our survey looked at working models and attitudes prior to the pandemic, how businesses have adapted to face the challenges of national lockdown, and how they plan to grow into the new future of working.

Read on to see the key findings from our research.



Pre-pandemic attitudes to remote working

Interestingly, just under 50% of the business owners we surveyed encouraged remote working prior to the pandemic.

When asked about their reasons for this...

50%

of respondents felt working together as a team is important and feared remote working could negatively impact this.

32%

of respondents stated they lacked the right IT set up to successfully work remotely.

17%

of respondents even admitted it was due to lack of trust in their staff to work as hard at home as they would in the office.

So, have these perspectives changed?

From our findings, a number of commonly cited attitudes and perspectives suggest there has been a shift in the way that remote working is perceived.

Of the businesses we surveyed...

33%

claimed to be 'pleasantly surprised' by the results of remote working.

26%

think remote working enhanced their team spirit.

25%

felt that their team worked harder remotely than they did in an office setting.

The key benefits of remote working.

NFON UK Managing Director, Myles Leach, had this to say on how businesses have realised the benefits of remote working in recent times...

"The shift to hybrid-working has been steadily growing over the last decade, but the pandemic has acted as a catalyst by bringing it to every business across the UK. Companies had to make the shift, and they have seen first-hand a host of benefits to their staff, operations and costs."

Across all of our survey responses, the top benefits of remote working cited were...



Reduced company expenses.



Less absence and sickness.



Positive impact on the environment.



Increased staff wellbeing.

Long-term changes for the better

17% of small businesses expect to be completely remote in the future.

49% agree that the pandemic increased their investment in digital transformation.

16% of respondents also claimed **increased customer loyalty** to be an additional benefit of remote working.





How has this impacted digital transformation?

With just under a third of our survey respondents citing insufficient IT infrastructure as their reason for not encouraging remote working earlier, is it fair to say that now, as we move into a post-pandemic era, that digital transformation has seen some dramatic acceleration?

Just under half

of SMEs said the pandemic had **increased their investment in digital transformation.**

35%

stated that the level of investment had 'somewhat' increased... while

14%

claimed their investment in digital transformation '**significantly increased**'

Looking to the future...

'The key for small businesses is to ensure that they have the processes and technology in place to enable seamless collaboration and communication, so that home working colleagues feel just as much a part of the team'

- Myles Leach, MD, NFON UK

We also asked all of the business owners who took part in our survey about their strategic investment priorities for 2021, and the years ahead.

25% of respondents stated technology

was their strategic investment priority for 2021...

18% stated their priority was IT and security

16% said staff training

10% said hiring new talent

What will happen to the office?

With many businesses looking to make remote working and flexible hours a permanent fixture, what does this mean for the future of the office?

Regarding what businesses plan to do with their existing office space, our research found an interesting spread of results.

Across UK businesses, there appears to be a general trend of taking a step back and reassessing overheads in line with more flexible modes of working.

86% of respondents stated that **they had plans to downsize**
by an average of **37%**

20%
collectively expressed desires or plans to move location.

Half the respondents within this 20% plan to move either to a **smaller and cheaper space**,
or a **shared office space**.

Overall, it appears there is a large operational shift taking place. With more and more UK businesses reducing spend on physical office space, and putting more budget into flexible working practices, and the technologies that enable them.

* excluding respondents who answered with "I don't know"





The emergence of AI.

When asking questions about areas of future investment, and how businesses intended to strategise for a more prosperous future, the subject of AI repeatedly came up in our survey responses.

44% of teams believe their workers are ready for AI technologies

48% of UK small businesses already have, or have plans to deploy AI technology

39% plan to invest in staff training for AI technologies prior to deployment



The post-pandemic workplace: key takeaways

At NFON, we've long been devoted to helping businesses in the UK and beyond unlock more operational freedoms.

Flexible modes of working and hybrid practices are things we have championed for some time, so it's exciting to see that adoption of them has passed a clear tipping point, with these ideas now filtering through to the majority.

While the sea changes regarding remote working and digital transformation have been clear, we wanted to conduct research to drill down into the nuances of how businesses are responding to these new modes of working.

- 1. Perspectives of remote working have changed for the better**
- 2. There has been a lasting improvement regarding businesses achieving greater digital transformation, and more effective adoption of remote working practices**
- 3. Strategic investment for the years to come is very much geared around tech, IT, and security, and the training required to support them**
- 4. Lots of businesses have plans to downsize, reassess their overheads and restructure in a way that is more cost effective and flexible**
- 5. Remote working software and collaborative tools have seen their heyday, and from what we've gathered in our research, AI will be the next main pursuit for businesses looking to transform their technological capabilities.**

Visit blog.nfon.com/gb for the data from by the survey

Contact

We are pioneering true freedom in business communications.

Get in touch if you want to discuss how our products and services can help you embrace more hybrid modes of working, and prepare for tomorrow's workplace.

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