THE REMOTE WORKING PLAYBOOK

How to truly enable your business to work from anywhere

INSIDE THIS GUIDE WE'LL EXAMINE THE STEPS YOU NEED TO TAKE AROUND:

- Processes
- Change Management
- Road Blocks
- Security
- Technology
- Remote Access
- The People Factor

THE NEW NORMAL IS HERE TO STAY

"The majority of businesses have been forced to change the way they operate since lockdown, and it’s predicted we will never completely return to our former ways of working. In order to remain competitive, pivot and grow through these troubled times, it is critical that you seize every opportunity to digitally transform."

TTG
THE TECHNOLOGIES GROUP

INTRODUCTION

As we have seen in recent months, remote working is achievable for many businesses. Even if you are a manufacturer; roles in sales, marketing, accounting and customer services can all be successfully delivered by a team based outside the traditional office environment.

Few businesses, however, have a complete strategy in place to maintain remote-working for an extended period. Staff with laptops sat at kitchen tables on backache-inducing chairs, possibly remotely connected to their office PC via a slow broadband link, is not a workable long-term solution. It won't boost productivity, and it certainly won't make for very happy team members.

'Work from anywhere' includes the office. As the business landscape continues to change, many employees will also be working in a hybrid model – both at home and in the office.

This flexibility will be essential to remain competitive, cut costs and attract the right talent through the ups and downs of the pandemic. So by implementing technology solutions to as many processes as possible, a business can ensure the employee experience is seamless and workable wherever they are sitting in the world.

In this playbook I'd like to demonstrate that not all solutions are one-size-fits-all. Your team or teams are made up of very different people, and the remote working programme you introduce and develop needs to consider everyone in the business.

I won't be covering well-trodden ground like Zoom or MS Teams in this guide, but if you are still confused about collaboration and video conferencing, feel free to reach out.

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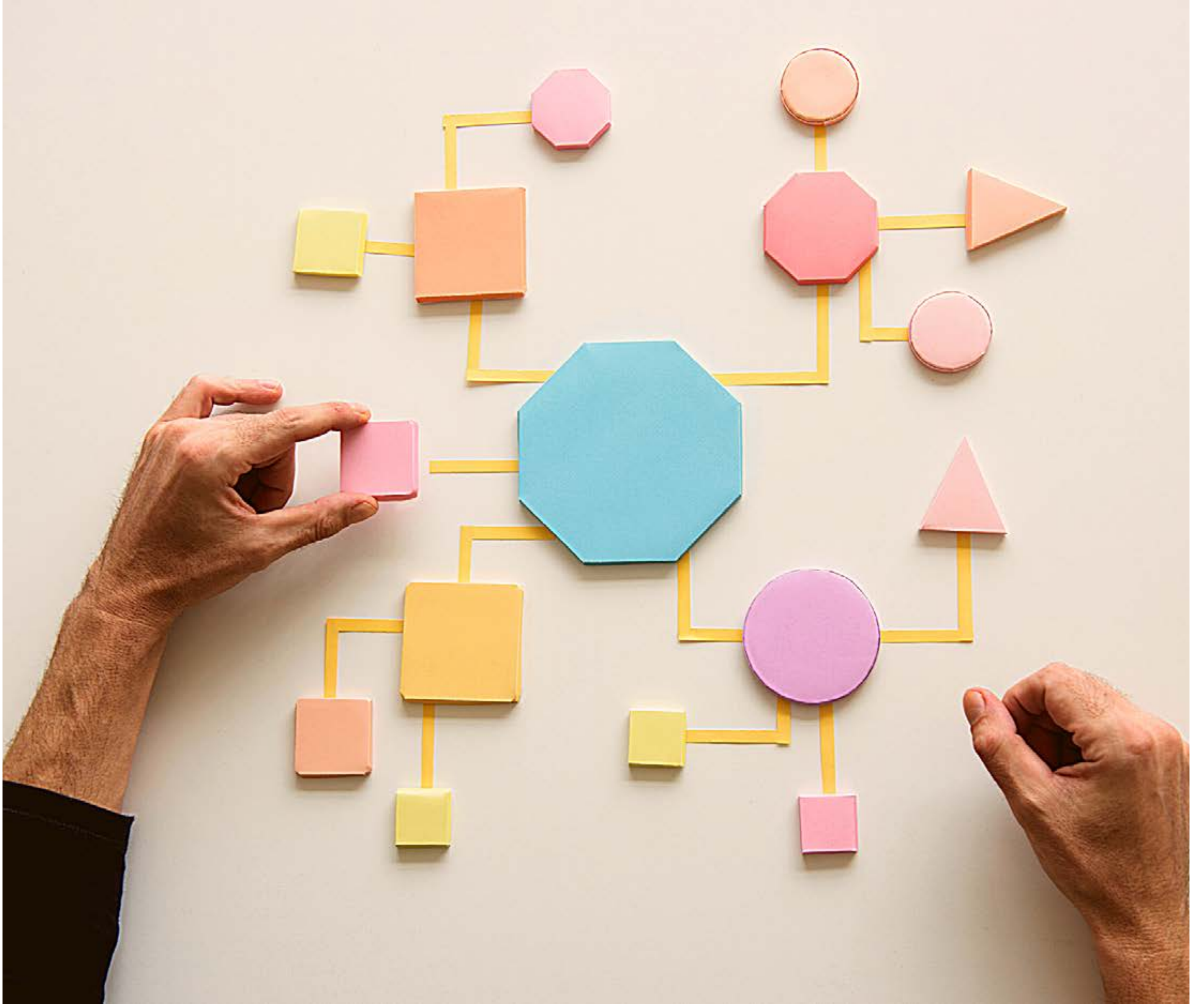
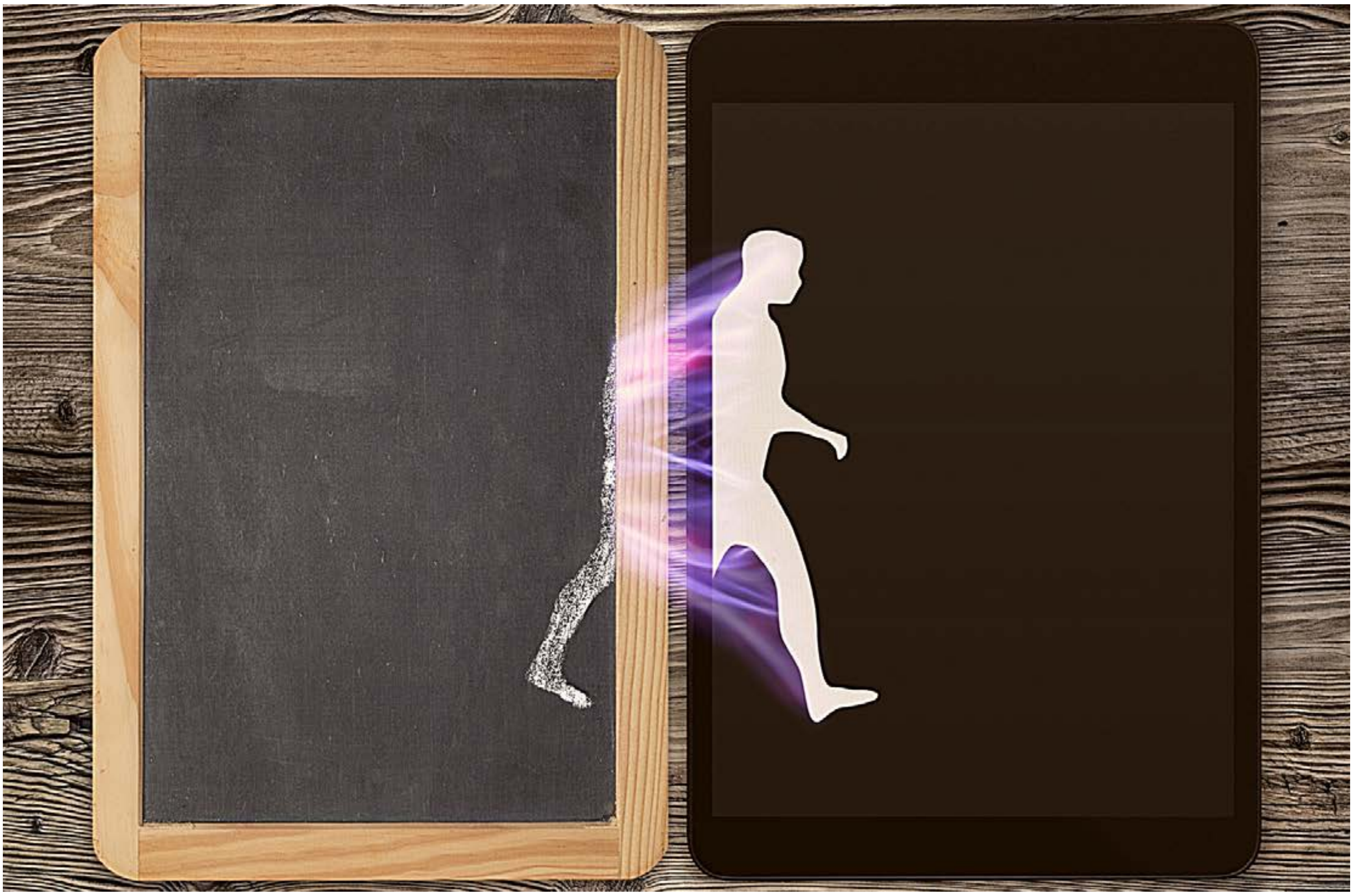
1: EXAMINE YOUR PROCESSES

Each department within your business will have processes and procedures in place for different tasks. To enable a successful remote working strategy, you'll need to have the majority of these documented, including reasons why they are carried out, and by whom. If you are accredited for ISO certifications such as ISO 9001, a lot of this documentation will already exist and should be up to date, which will be a real timesaver.

Within documented processes, tasks should ideally be assigned to job roles rather than specific people. This saves you having to revisit for every personnel change. But it may help you better visualise things if you add in team names as you detail each stage, and it can also help with the next stage of the process.



2: CHANGE MANAGEMENT



This can be a controversial area. As a business leader, you probably know what changes you wish to make and have people in place to implement them. But always keep in mind that employee buy-in and engagement will result in a much smoother implementation, ensure the creation of better processes and address any friction before it becomes problematic.

It's therefore critical to the success of your project that every person in your business knows what's going on and the part they need to play. Online project management tools can help here.

Whether you are using more traditional project management planning or more collaborative, visual planning tools, get them online now so that they are easily accessible, and any warning signs of problems are picked up early.

See **the appendix** for a list of current tools we recommend.

3: ROAD BLOCKS

Every business is at a different stage in the implementation of systems to enable efficient remote working. Work backwards from the required end point to discover the remaining tasks needed to turn this into a feasible reality.

Remote working isn't just about email and file access. As mentioned at the start, the temporary solution of a team member connecting to their office-based desktop PC is not going to cut it, especially if you are planning on using this opportunity to lower costs by shrinking office space.

And there is little point assuming if everyone in the business has a laptop or PC they can therefore work from home, if you have in-house business systems that aren't accessible remotely.

This is not to suggest that every person who can work from home works remotely every day, We are human beings and social creatures, and some of us more so than others.

Roadblocks to remote working include:

- Paper-based materials, such as contracts and postal correspondence
- Legacy IT systems or software that can only be accessed from within a building, or by connecting to a PC based there
- Data that is siloed in one department but is needed in multiple departments
- ‘Fixed’ telephony and communications
- Security concerns

Identifying each area preventing someone from home working will enable you to achieve the best results.

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But if you create a remote working solution that allows full functionality and access for every working day of the year, it will still work when an employee comes into the office to work, catch up, share, socialise or meet.

4: CHOOSE YOUR CLOUD

Having carefully considered steps 1-3, you will now be in a position to form an action plan. While this will be unique to your business, there are many standard components that you can include within it to make it happen. Which ones you choose will depend on the systems you currently have and whether you are augmenting or replacing them.

Firstly, you should try and put every system you can into the cloud. If that fills you with dread, read on.

Many businesses already have a lot of stuff in the cloud – it's basically just like renting capacity and functionality from another system. But not every business can or should put all their systems and data into the public cloud. If you have security concerns, a private or hybrid solution may be right for you instead.

Private clouds use similar technology to public ones and can still be accessed from outside the office by your staff. They are therefore just as flexible as public offerings, if not more so, but the data remains on your private system as the infrastructure you are using is not shared. Long-term cost savings can sometimes be gained by building your own cloud, but it's not for the faint-hearted, incurs considerable upfront costs, and you'll need an expert team to help you do it.

If you have legacy systems that cannot be immediately cloud accessed, or be 100% complete if they are, there are cloud-enabled solutions to assist with that as well. These include:

Remote Desktops. There are a raft of terms and technologies surrounding these, but none of them are akin to a physical PC sat on a desk waiting for an employee to connect. Remote Desktop solutions include Remote Desktop Servers (RDS and Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI, and you can find a more detailed explanation of the differences in the **appendix** of this playbook.

Middleware. This is software that sits between your legacy application and your cloud-enabled application. It can also sit between different cloud applications to speed automation and reduce errors and repetition.

The middleware provides a conduit between the applications, allowing your team to use newer remote-friendly technologies, such as web-portals, without interacting with the legacy application itself. Your legacy system supplier may produce some middleware, but otherwise it will need to be a third party.

Synchronisation. File and database synchronisation has come on by leaps and bounds in recent years – it's no longer a haphazard piece of tech that might break if someone sneezes.

Modern data synchronisation tools allow your team to have access to the files they need when they need them, but with controls, security and safety measures in place. Synchronisation can be especially useful when working offline, as remote desktop technology requires an always-on connection.

5: SECURITY AND REMOTE ACCESS

Any internal systems need to be protected with a proper business class **firewall**. So instead of the free router from your internet service provider, invest in a certified security device that blocks incoming threats and monitors outbound internet traffic too. Very often these devices will also include facilities to help enable remote working.

External systems should be protected with strong, unique passwords but also with **multi-factor authentication** (sometimes called **MFA** or **2FA**).

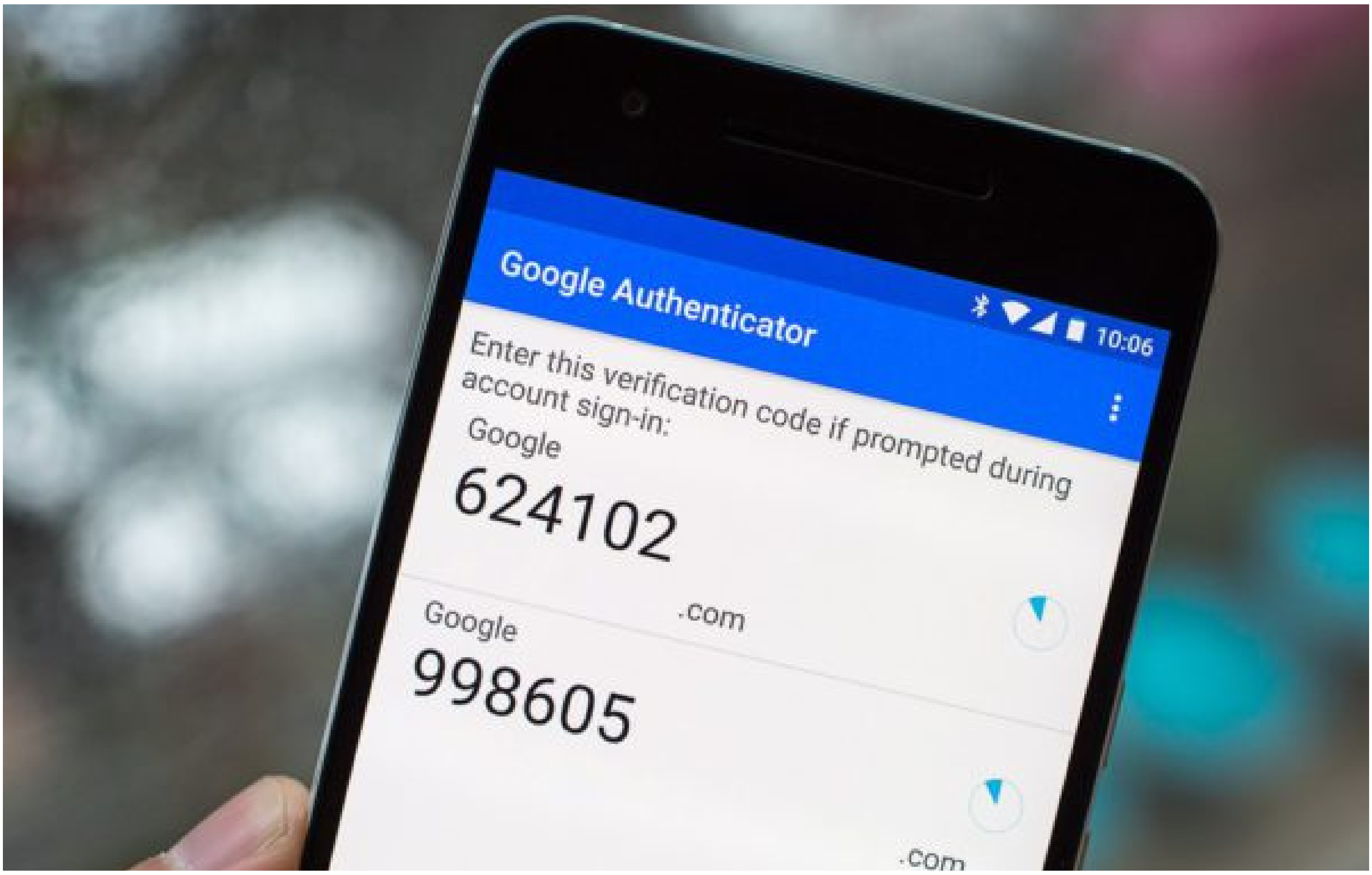
There are many different types of MFA, including number-generating smartphone apps, dongles and more recently face recognition. All of these will help keep hackers and criminals out, and nearly every cloud provider supports one or more of these technologies.

I cannot stress enough the importance of protecting everything with MFA. With many implementations, it's possible to have a single MFA solution for accessing every system your employees use. MFA protects not only against weak or reused passwords, but also partially mitigates against other vulnerabilities such as keyboard-logging malware.

Adopting a ‘security-first’ ethos is a essential, regardless of the systems you put in place. Approach access with a zero-trust mentality and then add a secure-layer on top, allowing access to those who need it, such as trusted staff and partners.

Some worrying statistics:

- SMEs are exposed to over 4000+ ransomware attacks every day
- 61% of businesses reported a security breach in the past year
- Home/remote workers are 3.5x more likely to get scammed or infected than office workers
- An affected business will now take over 14 days to recover their systems and data.
- The cost to business will reach over 16 billion GBP / 20 billion USD by 2021
- Attacks on small businesses are up by 59%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If any private or hybrid cloud solutions are implemented, consider layering on a **remote access gateway**. The gateway will handle the presentation and management of the tools your team uses and protect those resources with, for example, MFA.

That's a great way to provide access and security in one hit and is far less problematic for users to manage than a virtual private network (VPN).

You also need to ensure the security of devices connecting to your systems, because a couple of things will have changed:

- Employees may be using a workplace-provided device, but are now not coming into the office very often, if at all.
    - The primary risk here is monitoring the device for updates and security if it's no longer directly connecting to the office network.
- Employees may be using their own devices.
    - It's challenging to mandate security, but you can still check it’s in place before allowing a connection to proceed.

You should also issue guidance and provide training to your teams to keep them safe.

6: THE PEOPLE FACTOR

When you've implemented the perfect technological solution, you may think that you’re all done, at least for now (remember though, this is a continual journey).

But it would be a serious omission to leave out the human aspect of remote working and its implications. You should also consider:

- Social interaction
- Health and safety
- Comfort and ergonomics
- Training and technical support
- Home internet connections
- Home office supplies
- Human resources
- Culture

Believe it or not, technology can assist with some of the above, but it's not the be-all and end-all of your new working environment, and you should look at each item individually to see how they could be best addressed.

Consider reordering the list based on the new way you intend to work so that you can prioritise, find partners to work with, and ensure your entire workforce is healthy, happy, engaged and productive

SUMMARY

By combining the steps of **Process**, **Change Management**, **Cloud** and **Technology**, **Security**, your **People's** needs, **Company culture** and the removal of **Roadblocks**, you will well on the way to enabling many or all of your staff to work from anywhere. Be that "Work from Home", "Work from the Office" or even from another country, you will increase productivity and not dampen it.

We have included an **appendix** in this playbook as an **online resource**, because the technologies available to assist you are forever moving, and we want to keep this guide relevant and valuable to you for as long as possible.

And in the meantime, good luck in your remote working journey.

Darrin

Darrin Salt.

Darrin is Managing Director of **The Technologies Group** and has spent over 30 years helping and supporting businesses like yours grow through the smart use of technology. Call Darrin on **020 8995 2914** or email **darrin@thetechnologiesgroup.com**

The Technologies Group helps and supports businesses just like yours to succeed through the smart use of technology. As well as assisting with remote working, our award-winning team can provide help and advice with any technology-based business need or issue.

If you have any questions around remote working, do get in touch: **https://thetechnologiesgroup.com/contact**. You can also call us free on **0808 196 8130** or email **enquiries@thetechnologiesgroup.com**

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