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Power Users in the Age of the New Normal

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Questions posed by: Z by HP Answers by: Linn Huang, Research Vice President, Devices & Displays

Q. When the "new normal" is achieved, what will it look like and what needs must an IT decision-maker (ITDM) take into account for their power users (technical and creative professionals) beyond the simpler needs (laptop, virtual meeting software) of a typical office worker?

A. No one can be certain about what the new normal will look like, but for many the current crisis appears to be an accelerant to their digital transformation initiatives with remote work, remote management, and virtual collaboration all staples of operational design. In a recent survey of IT decision-makers around the globe, clear trends emerged in terms of where IT is currently spending through the pandemic crisis, and where it is holding back. The 880 respondents to IDC's *COVID-19 Impact on IT Spending Survey* (conducted June 4 – 15, 2020), on average indicated that they have increased their 2020 budget for security by 2%. Other categories that saw budget increases include enterprise storage, PaaS, and IaaS.

More organizations than not see cloud as the solution in the new normal, but IDC sees challenges with this recognition. When the new normal is achieved, the sheer scale of new remote workloads will stress the entire IT chain from the datacenter through resident broadband connections to worker's home offices. De-emphasizing one end of the chain in favor of the other creates weak links. Instead, the new normal will require IT to emphasize everything – performance clouds to help remote workers stay connected all the way down to responsive devices that can keep users engaged.

For the typical desk worker, this includes PCs with HD webcams, mic arrays, and sufficient memory and CPU for the deluge of video calls. For organizations with sensitive data, this may include cellular-enabled PCs. For power users, workstations are the way to go. Organizations with data scientists and digital content creators should consider sending their employees home with ISV-certified workstations if they haven't done so already.

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The workstation value proposition is built upon three pillars. First, these devices are built to perform with some options configurable up to server-class processors, professional graphics, and ECC memory. Secondly, workstations are optimized and certified to run your most mission-critical software applications. Thirdly, they are backed and supported by some of the industry's most trusted brands.

Consequently, while latency can remain an issue for users plugged into a cloud computing model – particularly for data- or graphics-intensive workloads – a workstation in the hands of your power-users ensures that fewer disruptions and distractions for users.

Q. What are the different challenges and benefits as power users shift to a new way of working?

A. Currently, most workers share the challenges of being consistently away from campus, colleagues, and customers. Workflows can be disjointed, collaboration and communication can be strained, and the efficiency from the collocation of resources is entirely mitigated. For power users who have traditionally designed in shared spaces or with shared resources, those challenges are exacerbated. IT's principal prerogative in moving these users off campus should focus on mitigating disruptions to existing workflows, driving engagement with collaborative tools, and ensuring their users retain the same speedy experience at home as in the building.

Workers will increasingly discover the benefits of reduced downtime (from lack of commuting) but supporting employees in the new normal will be onerous for IT managers. Many were already struggling to keep up with the demands of an increasingly multi-platform employee. Those will struggle even more as their fiefdoms extend all the way to employee homes. In a prior iteration of the survey fielded May 21-28, 2020, 6% of the sampled workforce worked remotely before the crisis sent 53% home indefinitely. Organizations expect 30% of their workers to work remotely in 2021. Remote work will be integral in the next normal.

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Q. What are the best practices and considerations to ensure power users can collaborate with their teammates on data- and performance-heavy projects when working in disparate locations?

A. Translating the office experience to each worker's home requires the right apps/services and the right system for each worker. Necessary apps for a power user include compute-intensive software, conferencing and collaboration apps and cloud storage on top of whatever industrial applications and endpoint security they are deployed. In the absence of physical collocation, digital tools can help mitigate long-term disruptions.

There are two options for your power users:

- » **Option 1 – Send users home with high-powered desktop or laptop workstations.** The right system for a power user (particularly one in the field of engineering, design, programming, or digital content creation) should be a certified workstation to ensure they have the performance they need as well as a large display (if not two) to help them stay engaged with their data and content in a setting that hardly remains distraction-free during the work day. Workstations come in all varieties from laptops to towers that can drive server level performance down to miniature form factors that can be VESA mounted to a display. Some can be rack-mounted for datacenters with users floating in and out.
- » **Option 2 – Look at centralized solutions that would house the workstations in a central environment and allow users to remotely tap into the devices.** When a power user’s workflow relies on shared corporate storage with digital content creation assets, or large design files that an entire team works on, or data that needs to stay secure and locked up, it’s impractical to send that user home with a workstation and rely on a home network to pull the big files from corporate into each employee’s workspace. In this case, it’s best to offer a remote workstation experience where only the pixels on a worker’s screen are sent home while the large data can quickly sync with each user’s workstation in the office.

Organizations that are succeeding in this transition to the new normal are bridging the physical divides by stepping up their games in terms of the tools they are sending their users home with. What worked in the office may not in the home, where personal distractions are greater and quality of internet service is typically less reliable. Many organizations are realizing this now. In the aforementioned survey, the top buying criteria for respondents in their next technology purchase was product reliability at 46%. From a compute perspective, it does not get more reliable than a certified workstation.

Q. How can ITDMs help their power users remain adaptable and ready for possible future changes and disruptions?

A. Keeping power users productive requires IT getting them the right tools that can bridge physical distances and reduce disruptions to workflows. That means responsive apps on reliable hardware. But what about safeguarding against future disruptions? For that answer, IDC recommends companies, at the very least, explore Device as a Service (DaaS) with a trusted partner.

DaaS can help IT catch up and keep up with the new normal. Supporting a complex device lifecycle for remote workers can drain IT resources that will have better use as the world turns into a recession. Partnering with a trusted DaaS vendor can unburden IT as they shift from managing campuses to cities effectively.

A trusted DaaS partner helps fortify the device chain, ensures assets are precisely where they need to be, can help predict productivity-crushing system failures, and can even right-size hardware with employee. Early adopters have touted significant monetary impacts of DaaS both to the bottom line (in terms of cost savings) and topline (in terms of liberating

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IT resources to drive other IT projects such as digital transformation or workspace modernization). If the thought of managing a full force of remote workers causes some anxiety, your preferred DaaS vendor could remedy that.

Q. What are the barriers and/or opportunities to implementing advanced technologies, such as VR, for power users into this new normal?

A. The barriers for more common adoption of VR technologies in the corporate world are generally the same for any rising technology. IDC has found that organizations with successful deployments of either AR or VR headsets share a few factors. They understand the problem the tech is trying to solve in their organizations, they define a clear measurement of success, and they seek the right combination of hardware and apps.

Many businesses in the post-COVID new normal will have developed a deep understanding of the need of these technologies given the newfound sprawl of their workforce. Defining correct metrics and finding the right solutions will still be complicated. Throw in the fact that most organizations will have to start from scratch (given the lack of longstanding institutional knowledge in new technologies) with potentially significant upfront costs, and it becomes easy to see how new projects can stall.

IDC believes that VR, or any digital tool that will allow users to bridge the physical divide, is worth the headache of implementation right now. IT managers can't reduce the uncertainty of the future, but they can ensure their most critical users don't skip a beat by giving them the reliability of high-resolution VR headsets with workstations to keep them online as well as communications and collaboration tools to keep them engaged, all while offloading administrative burden onto a trusted partner.

About the Analyst



Linn Huang, Research Vice President, Devices & Displays

Linn Huang tracks market trends and industry developments that impact the worldwide and U.S. markets for PCs, thin clients, and monitors. He participates in cross-research streams that cover all device categories.

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IDC Research, Inc.

5 Speen Street
Framingham, MA 01701, USA
T 508.872.8200
F 508.935.4015
Twitter @IDC
idc-insights-community.com
www.idc.com

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