



SHIFTING GEARS TO REMOTE WORKING

**Migrating and enabling an
elastic digital workplace**



CHALLENGE

No industry has been spared from the COVID-19 economic slowdown, but the auto industry has been forced to shift gears more suddenly than perhaps any other.

New-auto sales have been stuck in neutral; but stopping and starting auto production isn't as simple as flipping a switch. And even under normal conditions, automakers must constantly adjust their plans and parts ordering from suppliers according to projected demand.

The Argentina subsidiary of a global automaker faced an additional problem, however, when coronavirus-driven lockdowns set in: While the employees had access to basic remote working tools such as VPNs, Skype and SharePoint, there was significant scope for solutioning to integrate and bring all employees on a common platform to offer better flexibility and greater collaboration possibilities.

The company had already begun to embrace flexible working requirements just before the pandemic set in and had been working with the Accenture team on its deployment – so it was aware that it needed a better toolset for flexible work arrangements—from the factory floor to the c-suite.

In late 2019 the company started looking at new options since it was running on dated office productivity software, with different departments relying on a variety of outmoded suites and solutions. Some were still using Microsoft Office 2010, while others had just recently upgraded to Office 2016.

The COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020, however, required that the company accelerate its plan to integrate new work-from-home solutions as the only way to ensure operational continuity in the short and long terms.

Although auto production was affected once COVID-19 cases started rising in Argentina, the company still needed to function—and ensure that its collaborative spirit could be maintained or even enhanced with a largely remote workforce. As social distancing was to set in as a nationwide guideline, how fast could remote working be enabled for all employees? And more, how could the training and onboarding of all be accelerated before the lockdown?





WHAT ACCENTURE DID

The team was familiar with the company's operations and culture, having successfully completed a large-scale platform implementation.

This new challenge, however, required an equal mix of technology, training and cultural change. Just giving the company the keys to a new way of working wouldn't be enough to keep it going during the pandemic; everyone needed to learn to drive, too.

They opted to upgrade everyone from the assembly line to the executive offices with Microsoft Office 365, with a specific emphasis on Teams for collaborative working.

Office 365 also offered the easiest learning curve from the company's legacy Microsoft systems, as well as improved connectivity, enhanced security and the ability to retire old, slow and expensive VPNs that hindered the remote-work user experience in the past.

The fact that certain roles at the company relied on shared workstations, duplicate mailboxes and various versions of Microsoft packages within the same office location only added to the project's complexity.

Once they understood all these challenges, it kicked off a phased migration and rollout (albeit accelerated given the speed at which social-distancing measures were enacted), starting with back-office departments.

The various user groups were segmented by job function, type of operating system and other criteria to ensure continuity of business, like making sure Excel spreadsheet macros that ran in various old versions of the program would be supported. The team even added specifications to improve the system's performance and user experience, including the layout of applications on the desktop and additional security restrictions.

PEOPLE AND CULTURE

As each department received the upgrades, the team held round-the-clock training sessions that allowed the users to organize and align quickly on the best way to manage their operations from afar—essentially putting them at the wheel so they felt invested in the new way of working.

Thanks to the trust developed during their previous work with the company, employees were eager to engage in the training sessions so they could quickly transition to the new way of working.

Since time was of the essence, with employees at work one day and at home the next, they selected key employees to serve as change agents who were trained in advance as early adopters of Office 365. These super users drove adoption within their own departments and even outside of them. They also relied on the change agents, right from the start, to gain an understanding of the various processes and workflows so they could minimize disruption and ensure a smooth rollout. Weekly reviews were held with several stakeholders to ensure that their needs were not compromised as Office 365 was customized and deployed.

Employees with different levels of technical understanding and experience were present in each training session in order to reflect the needs of users across the organization.

Of course, Office 365 was used—Teams, specifically—to train users, either on their mobile devices or through their computers to help build familiarity with the platform, as well as introduce everyone to Office 365's collaboration tools such as OneDrive and SharePoint. Anyone who didn't have the right hardware, such as a headset, was given what they needed to quickly and comfortably transition to this new way of working.





VALUE DELIVERED

From its factory-floor employees all the way up to its president, the company has fully embraced the new suite of software.

It now has an enhanced digital and collaborative work structure that is keeping the company up and running, but the fast pace at which the transformation took place also put the company in a better position to manage the business impacts of the pandemic and pivot operations accordingly. Employees can access their data from anywhere and then share with colleagues without any security risks. And thanks to the protocols defined by the company, employees will have gained the necessary experience to work flexibly.

Employees have reported that the new Office 365 suite has made them more efficient and productive—85% say that their way of working has improved with Office 365, both on-site and at home.

When employees do work on-site, meeting rooms are now only used for essential events or appointments, which has allowed the company to retire—and realize cost savings—associated with desk phones or other old ways of meeting and communicating. The new system allows employees to spend more time focused on their essential tasks, and to quickly connect with colleagues—wherever they are—for speedy and efficient interactions when necessary.

The project's success has laid the groundwork for continued transformation. The team is now working with the company's IT management to transition to more data-driven decision-making. It's also looking at implementing cloud technologies for more collaboration amongst employees.

COVID-19's adverse effects on business will be felt for years to come, but the pandemic also inspired this particular automaker to put its foot on the gas on organizational upgrades. Now it can navigate the road back to normalcy more successfully while being prepared for whatever lies ahead.