

The Media Industry and COVID-19: What We've Learned from Working Remotely

By Eric Mathewson, Founder & CEO, WideOrbit

As we approach the four-month mark of the COVID-19 crisis, it's becoming increasingly clear that working remotely is not the temporary situation we initially believed it would be. It is, in reality, the new normal. With cases continuing to surge in many parts of the country, it's a new normal everyone in the industry would be smart to expect to continue for some time to come. The next generation of media leadership can learn the importance of flexibility and communication from this sudden shift in workflow.

In conversations with [WideOrbit](#) customers, we've discovered that broadcasters are experiencing both positive and negative consequences resulting from the move to remote work. But in all our conversations, one thing comes through loud and clear: Remote work is here to stay, if not forever, then at least for the mid-to-long term.

We've heard that broadcasters are finding remote work has unexpected benefits, for both the companies and team members. Costs are down as productivity has increased. Work/life balance is easier to maintain, particularly for those with families at home and those whose commute has been reduced from several hours per day to the two minutes it takes to walk from the kitchen to the den. They're also finding access to clients easier, especially to decision makers, since they're all stuck at home, too, which allows for virtual meetings unrestricted by the 9-to-5 workday. And in a relaxed, at-home setting, those conversations are often more meaningful, helping to develop stronger relationships.

Virtual upfront presentations have also become part of the new normal, with broadcasters finding engagement as strong or stronger when compared to past, in-person events. And that engagement is coming from the highest level of agency personnel, right through to the individual group levels, as well as the client side. Some have expressed the belief that the work-from-home environment is providing more, and better, opportunities to connect with partners who have fewer distractions and more time to truly engage with sales staff.

Even content production is going virtual, with remote cameras finding their way into the homes of talent and directors and support personnel dialing in virtually.

At the same time, we've heard broadcasters wonder about the logistics of returning to the office in the era of physical distancing – everything from elevators that will need to take fewer people at a time to ensure adequate distancing, to the adjustments that will need to be made to office layouts to create enough space between workstations, to exactly how many people will be allowed in the office, or in the building, at once. All these issues beg the question of how to coordinate who can be in the office and when. And after going through the effort and expense of adapting processes and system access to support remote work, media companies can't help but wonder if a return to the office is worth the logistical headaches.

For the NEXT generation of media leaders, all of this means that working remotely is the current reality and may continue to be so for the foreseeable future. Everything related to working in media operations, from onboarding and training, to team meetings and sales presentations, to inputting orders and pulling data, is happening remotely. To thrive rather than just survive in this new normal, it's important to be flexible enough to perform well regardless of whether you're at home or in the office, including:

- Growing comfortable with appearing on camera as video conferencing replaces in-person meetings, both with clients and with colleagues.
- Embracing virtual communication and collaboration tools, like MS Teams or Slack, and using their video call functions when a quick chat can save time and avoid miscommunication.
- Communicating to the point of what, five months ago, would have felt like over-communicating. Topics discussed or decisions made in one channel should be reiterated through other channels, such as email, your internal knowledgebase or wiki, and, if applicable, within your CMS, so the information reaches everyone who needs it.

All of the above applies to work-specific functions, of course, but it also applies to maintaining social connections with colleagues, mentor-mentee relations, professional development activities, and to networking. Nothing can fully replace in-person connections but with today's tools and a little extra effort, virtual connections can come incredibly close.

Even if the country manages to flatten the curve with physical distancing measures, remote work – whether for some or for all, whether part-time or full-time – will continue to be necessary until either effective treatment or a vaccine becomes available. Through flexibility and creativity, broadcasters have demonstrated that remote work is not only possible, it also has positive, if unexpected, benefits that will continue well beyond the current situation. By developing the same kind of flexibility and creativity in their approach to remote work, NEXTers can thrive both now and into the future, as they move forward in their careers.

Eric Mathewson founded WideOrbit in 1999 after realizing that there was an opportunity to dramatically streamline and automate the buying and selling of media. Prior to founding WideOrbit, Eric worked at Montgomery Securities in San Francisco and New York, managing portfolios for wealthy technologists, as well as Kidder Peabody in Palo Alto, primarily focused on Equity Derivatives. Under Eric's leadership, WideOrbit has been a proud sponsor and catalyst of the NEXT program since its inception, underwriting both TVB NEXT and TVB NEXT Women.