How can technology help you return to the workplace?
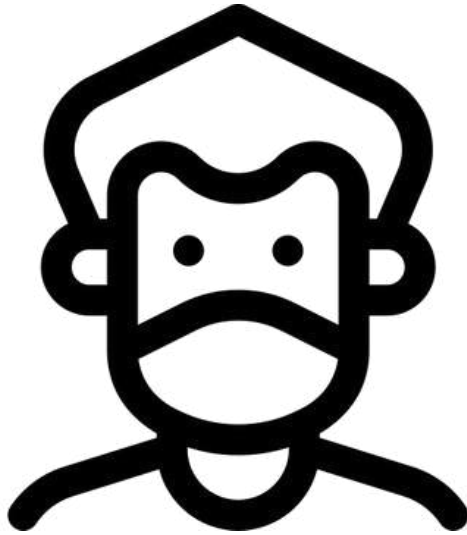
Contents

In this eBook, we look at how technology is helping commercial property owners, operators and tenants overcome some of the challenges posed by the coronavirus as they seek a gradual return to the workplace in 2021.

The global pandemic has been hard on commercial property. In March 2020, we experienced the UK's first nationwide lockdown. Suddenly our city centres, office buildings and shopping centres emptied. Many tenants had to work from home. Our workplaces had to adopt new cleaning regimes and strict social distancing policies. Some commercial landlords have seen building occupancy levels plummet and have struggled to collect rents. Today, as we emerge from another lockdown, many tenants and building owners are revaluating what they will want and need from commercial properties. Going forward, offices and retail units will need to be more adaptable, innovative and resilient.

Tomorrow's workplace

Before the pandemic struck, tenants were already demanding far more from their office spaces than simply room to squeeze in enough desks. Today's tenants want productive workspaces with easy access to local amenities for their staff such as gyms and coffee shops. They expect buildings to be equipped with the latest IT infrastructure and smart technologies to access Cloud services and ensure optimal energy efficiency, environmental control, health, safety and security.

Access control

As we gradually emerge from the pandemic, technology will play a critical role in the safe return of people to the workplace. Access control systems can limit the number of people able to enter a building or regulate access to specific areas. Thermal cameras can be integrated with access control systems to prevent people with high temperatures or without facemasks from entering offices and shops. Thermal imaging systems can be used to effectively monitor employees over time and help stop the spread of infections like coronavirus. They can provide a workplace early warning system that can alert staff that something might be wrong and advise them to seek medical attention. Finally, occupancy analytics and reservation systems can help facilities management identify areas of high footfall that require frequent cleaning.
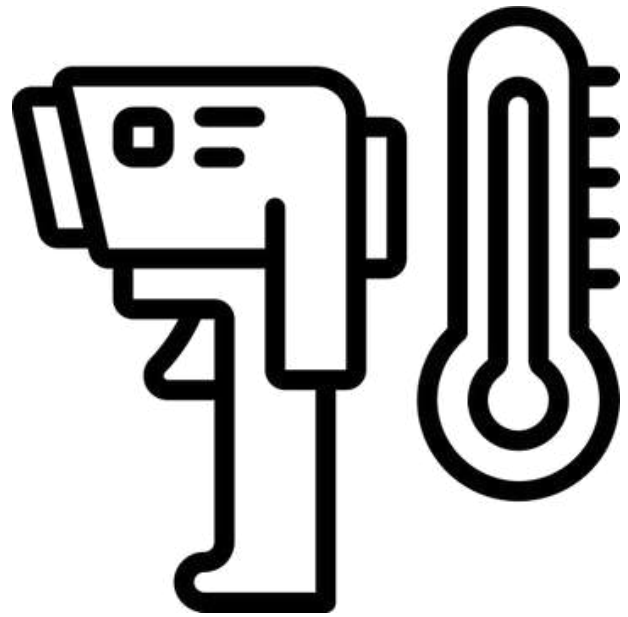
Sensors

The introduction of smart IoT (Internet of Things) sensors for lights and environmental controls means that office workers do not have to touch switches or thermostats. As well as being more hygienic, smart, sensor-controlled HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems can reduce energy consumption by switching off lights, heating and ventilation when rooms are unoccupied. Sensors in offices and shops can also help ensure that social distancing is properly enforced. Sensors can measure the movement of people from room to room. TV screens, digital signage and mobile apps can be used to alert people when a room or public area is too crowded for safety and warn them to disperse.
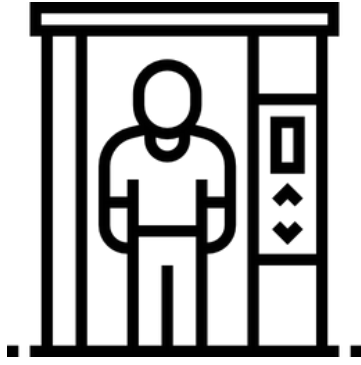
Lifts

Passenger and goods lifts are a critical part of many commercial buildings. However, the confined space of a passenger lift is also the ideal environment for viruses to spread. Luckily, smart, connected lifts can be programmed to be one directional to limit crowding. Sensors can be fitted to each lift to manage social distancing. The building or facilities manager can set the appropriate safe occupancy level for each lift. Once a lift's safe occupancy limit is reached, an audible alarm sounds to warn the passengers. The lift will stop working and the doors remain open until someone vacates the passenger car.

Tenants and visitors can also use elevator mobile apps to call and operate lifts without having to touch any buttons. As well as the obvious health and safety benefits of using smart lifts, they also enable the building manager to monitor every lifts status in real-time. Smart lifts constantly collect mechanical data to enable preventative maintenance, which means fewer breakdowns, less disruption and reduced costs.

Mobile

A quick search of the Google Play and Apple App Store reveal dozens of social distancing mobile apps, which alert the users when one of their colleagues is too close for safety. Of course, a social distancing mobile app is only effective when everyone across a workforce has it installed. Alternatively, there is a range of wearable social distancing proximity monitors available. These small, rechargeable, easy to clean devices can be issued to staff and building visitors. Typically, they operate by emitting a radio signal, which triggers an audible alarm and/or vibrates when one device comes into close proximity with another.

Cloud telephony

At the start of lockdown, Cloud telephony was one of a range of IT services that made moving from the office to home working much easier. Now, having a Cloud telephone service means you can easily manage the phased return of staff. Cloud telephony gives you increased flexibility. A Regional Facilities Manager (RFM), for example, will often work across multiple locations on a daily basis. One day they will be office based and the next day they might need to travel or work from home.

A hosted Cloud telephone system allows you to work professionally from any location and on any device. Cloud telephony allows you to link your employees' home numbers with office numbers and mobiles without compromising on call features. When a member of staff is in the office, Cloud telephony enables them to work from any available workspace. They simply log into a handset, which immediately behaves as their personal extension including any call features they had previously selected. Visit our website to learn more.

Making the most of **Microsoft**

It's essential to upgrade your building's IT network to ensure the easy adoption of new IoT sensors, Cloud services and mobile apps to encourage a safe and productive return to the workplace. Interestingly, many of the Microsoft 365 business applications that enabled us to work remotely can also help you manage a phased return to the workplace.

Return to the Workplace

Designed specifically to enable the safe reopening of offices, Microsoft have created a Return to the Workplace solution built on its Power Platform. The solution offers executives, surveyors, facilities managers, health and safety professionals and staff members a range of tools to help ensure a safe, phased reopening of one or many office locations. The Return to the Workplace mobile app enables staff to check into a building, book workspace in advance and complete a health questionnaire before they attend on site. Visit Microsoft Power Platform to learn more.

Microsoft Teams, Bookings and Shifts

Microsoft Bookings is a handy scheduling app that comes with Microsoft 365. Bookings can be customised to create a meeting room and desk planner to help you with a phased return to work. Available inside Microsoft Teams, the Shifts app enables you to create work shifts for specific groups of employees across one or more locations. Using Shifts you can stagger when and where people are working, add notes and specific time-allocated tasks such as how often to clean workstations. You can use location detection of the mobile app to register when members of staff enter and leave the office. Staff can also post items for management approval such as holiday requests and work rotas.

Learn more about Microsoft Bookings.
Learn more about Microsoft Shifts.

Chatbots

At the height of the pandemic, Microsoft Teams saw a 500% increase in calls and video conferences as people worked from home. In 2021, Microsoft Teams can help your remote workers return to the office safely and productively. Microsoft provides all the tools, documentation and guidance to build your own chatbots and service bots without coding. A chatbot is a software application designed to mimic human conversation using voice or text. Chatbots enable humans to interact with digital devices and ask questions as if they were interacting with a real person. In Microsoft Teams, chatbots can be created to answer questions about anything from office opening hours to health and safety at work policies.

Learn more about chatbots for Teams.

Ready-made App Templates

App Templates for Microsoft Teams are ready-made, customisable applications you can start using immediately as you prepare for the safe return of your workforce. Currently, you will find Building Access, Visitor Management, New Employee On-Boarding, Attendance, Book-a-Room, Checklists, Company Communicator, Employee Training, FAQ Plus and Incident Reporter apps available. The Building Access app, for example, can help you manage building occupancy levels and social distancing. The app enables facilities managers to supervise, track and report employee on-site presence. Learn more about Power Apps.

The importance of upgrading your IT services

Today, technology is helping commercial property owners and operators run their buildings more efficiently, economically and safely while maintaining high levels of tenant satisfaction. Upgrading a building's IT infrastructure makes it possible to adopt the latest back office and operational applications, moving away from costly, error-prone manual systems and outdated, insecure software. As well as driving down the cost of building operations and enhancing safety, new IT infrastructure makes it possible to offer prospective tenants ready-made, digitally enabled workspaces.

IT-ready office solutions mean tenants can simply move in, connect to the building's network and start working.

The global pandemic has changed the world of work forever. Certainly, many people will continue to work flexibly, spending a couple of days in the office and the rest working from home or elsewhere. To ensure a safe and productive return to the workplace requires innovative thinking, the right IT systems, business applications and technical support.

Modern Networks services

Modern Networks offers a wide range of network services and support to help commercial property owners, operators and tenants achieve their business objectives. The following are just some of the services you might need as you prepare for a return to the workplace:

Tech support

Modern Networks UK Service Desk delivers fast, reliable technical support by email, telephone and online during business hours. We also provide on-site technical support and an out-of-hours service.

Business applications

Microsoft 365 suite of business applications enables you to work together with colleagues from anywhere, on any device. The Microsoft 365 suite includes Outlook email, Teams collaboration, SharePoint file management, OneDrive personal storage and popular Office applications such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

Cloud telephony

Work anywhere, on any device with Modern Networks Cloud telephony. Take advantage of low or zero cost calling and our extensive range of call features. There's no expensive hardware to purchase, and our Cloud telephony integrates with a wide range of business applications such as Microsoft 365 and Salesforce CRM.

Private network for managed properties

Our Private Network for managed properties offers resilient broadband with faster speeds, greater reliability and better security for all services such as Cloud telephony, video conferencing, BMS, CCTV and paid parking systems.

IT-ready office solutions

Transform vacant offices into fully occupied, managed workspaces with Modern Networks IT-Ready Office Solutions. We provide secure, segregated IT infrastructure, telephone and broadband services plus 24/7 technical support to tenants in buildings of multiple occupancy. We also take care of shared facilities such as conference rooms and guest Wi-Fi.

For a complete list of our current IT services, visit our website now:
modern-networks.co.uk/services

About Modern Networks

Modern Networks is a leading provider of network support and IT services to the UK's commercial property sector. The company is based in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. We are a certified partner for Microsoft, HP and Cisco. We currently work with thirty top property management firms and provide services to over 1800 office buildings and shopping centres. Our clients include CBRE, Savills, CEG, Cushman and Wakefield, JLL, Knight Frank, Avison Young and Colliers.

Modern Networks is UK-government Cyber Essentials certified. We are also SafeContractor accredited for achieving excellence in health and safety in the workplace. Our Service Desk provides the highest standards of fast, friendly, reliable technical support to all our customers.

modern**networks**