

The **NOW** **WHAT** *Issue*

*A new remote-work reality will
mean long-term changes for how
M&E gets business done.
Welcome to Hollywood's
new normal. P. 15*

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Distributed Teamwork: It's Not 'When,' It's 'Now'



With the right technology and intent we will continue to get creative work done

Abstract: The M&E industry thrives on a 'high-touch' working style. People are used to face-to-face interactions for internal collaboration and creative production. But over the past couple of months, the world has changed. Physical meetings and in-person collaboration have nearly ceased. To stay productive, teams across industries are relying on modern workplace technology platforms. M&E companies are already at the forefront of providing amazing, creative and interactive experiences for customers. Now their employees can experience their own share of amazing collaboration experiences, no matter where in the world they are.

**By Ruven Gotz, Director,
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Humans are social creatures. We rely on body language, facial expressions and vocalizations to interpret the meaning and sentiments of our conversations. For those in the M&E industry, face-to-face interactions and meetings can help you to be productive and efficient when creating content that impacts your audiences.

But now that we are required to be physically distant, how can creators and those who support them in the M&E industry stay productive?

We must also be cognizant that **what happens naturally in-person must be done with intent** when working remotely. By realizing this, we can put a bit more energy into making sure we are understood and that we understand our colleagues.

It comes down to two things: technology and intent.

Let's talk about intent first. It's harder to collaborate successfully when not face-to-face, so it's important to be aware of this and think carefully about mitigating the difficulties. We need to pay closer attention to what people are saying; to pause when speaking to allow others to be heard, especially when small delays in computer-based conference calling make it hard to find space to interrupt. And we should consider using emojis liberally when texting so that tone or intent is clear. Sometimes our text-based communications tools prevent the nuances of expression from coming through.

We must also be cognizant that what happens naturally in-person must be done with intent when working remotely. By realizing this, we can put a bit more energy into making sure we are understood and that we understand our colleagues. Ask clarifying questions and pause for comment more often than you would normally.

Now, how do we best use technology?

First, I'd like to tell you about our experience using technology to collaborate. I work at a company with almost 38,000 employees spread across the globe, so we often rely on virtual meetings to communicate. We've been Microsoft Teams users since its launch exactly three years ago. So, when the current crisis hit, we were ready. But even with our extensive experience with remote working, our organization still had to make some adjustments. We now have zero opportunity to meet face-to-face with clients and each other.

We've made it work by embracing video and trusting the rock-solid Teams infrastructure. And we've felt completely confident in the security and safety of our and our clients' data.

As you get started, here are some tips and guidelines:

Use video (and high-quality audio)

While many of us feel uncomfortable seeing ourselves on video, we must work to overcome this discomfort. Having your face on screen shows that you are paying attention, gives your colleagues insight into your emotional state and provides necessary cues about how to steer the conversation. Coupled with video is the need for reasonably high-quality sound. Buy a good headset with a noise-cancelling microphone so that vocal nuances can be heard and understood.

Also, make sure you are well-lit so that your face can be seen clearly. Don't sit with your back to a window, as this will cast a shadow on your face and greatly reduce the value of being on-camera. Reduce distractions like a rotating ceiling fan or other extraneous movement that can interfere with the flow of conversation.

Use visual tools to enhance your message

When someone can't see your body language, it can be easy to miss the intent of complex ideas. Use whiteboarding tools to sketch concepts or use images and pointers to highlight

specifics. Share your desktop and take notes that everyone can see so corrections can be made in real time.

Take security and privacy seriously

The tools and platforms you use should be secure to protect the privacy of your texts, voice and video. Be sure to configure those tools properly with security options enabled so that anonymous attendees can't crash your calls and post unwanted content to your meetings. Help protect the dignity of your colleagues by muting them if they don't realize their microphones are live when they are eating their lunch. And be ready to eject a person from the meeting if they don't realize they're on-camera when doing something that they'd prefer was not broadcast.

Making a big switch in how we work and how we work together is tough. Old habits die hard. We all must be more relaxed and give each other a bit more leeway in the face of inevitable interruptions and technical glitches.

This great forced experiment will have long-lasting implications on how and where we work, even after the current situation stabilizes and social distancing is eased. Tools, like Microsoft Teams, give us the ability to see and hear each other with surprising fidelity and to work together collaboratively. Those of us who can embrace the new will have more options. We will be the flexible employees and colleagues who can get the job done — from anywhere. ■



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