

M+E

JOURNAL

It's Showtime!

Innovation explodes across every workflow as technology emerges from the pandemic.



Where are you in this accelerated evolution?

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

In the office, behind the camera, and on the screen, diversity is crucial

SECURITY

Remote productions create new security concerns, with assets under siege

SMART CONTENT

Artificial intelligence and machine learning are being applied in new, exciting ways

NEW WORKFLOWS

The cloud is delivering on its promise, powering the future of productions

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THE CLIENT EXPERIENCE IN THE AGE OF VIRTUAL WORKFLOWS

Access anywhere, anytime



ABSTRACT: Virtual workflows, with internal and client-facing systems accessible anywhere on the planet, enable global expansion. However, companies serving the M&E industry must not lose sight of the importance of direct client interaction with dedicated and knowledgeable staff. This is especially significant during a global pandemic, where content owners big and small need confidence that their product is being given the attention it deserves.

By Ramón Bretón, CTO, 3rd i Digital

The shift towards virtual workflows to serve the M&E industry began well before the global pandemic. While economics, logistics, and expansion were the initial driving forces for this change, the sudden need to move to a primarily remote workforce mandated by health and safety guidelines hastened this shift.

The maturation of fully remote systems enabled a global, localized workforce to serve an international client base. Additionally, when systems, staff, and client workload are expanded equally, growth potential is near-limitless.

All client- and staff-facing systems are designed with an intuitive interface free from frustration. While customers and personnel

both use these systems, their goals are different. Staff are motivated by their desire for employment, while clients seek to accomplish tasks in a quick and efficient manner. Virtual workflows and the systems created to interface with them tend to lead to independent use on the part of the client. While this freedom from the need to schedule an appointment is a benefit, the lack of personal interaction has its drawbacks.

THE CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Before cloud-based systems were ubiquitous, interactions between clients and company personnel were very different. Nearly every step of the process — from introduction to final project review — occurred in-person or on the phone. Clients engage with M&E companies for their expertise, and these person-to-person interactions were instrumental in building client confidence in their choice of partner. Aside from some direct interactions between staff and customers when setting up accounts or establishing new project parameters, customer-facing virtual systems reduce the need for direct communication.

When designed successfully, virtual portals deliver a smooth and efficient end-user experience while eliminating person-to-person interaction. Despite making staff available via email, chat, or telephone support and encouraging customers to lean on these when they require assistance, guiding clients to a web-based interface implicitly directs them to accomplish tasks on their own. Virtual workflows are here to stay, but concessions can be made in service of the customer, clearly demonstrating that their projects are being given the attention they deserve.

THE NEW CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

In order to maintain virtual workflows — while providing an increased level of direct interaction between staff and clients — a company must first temper their expectations of profit. Specifically, an appropriate balance between personnel and workload must be prioritized, despite the increase in payroll. The ability of staff to sustain direct, ongoing customer relationships must never be exceeded by a growing client base or the number of projects taken on.

While many customers appreciate the autonomy provided by virtual portals, others may perceive this as a shifting of responsibility away from company staff back onto the clients themselves. Regardless of client com-

VIRTUAL WORKFLOWS are here to stay, but concessions can be made in service of the customer, clearly demonstrating that their projects are being given the attention they deserve.

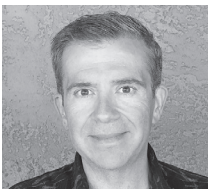
fort level with the independence provided by web-based portals, some basic steps can be taken to strengthen the relationship between client and staff.

First, introducing a single staff member to serve as the primary contact and project lead conveys that client assets are being attended to by human beings and not just automated systems. This project lead would then explain the processes inherent in the work to be accomplished while introducing secondary staff members as needed.

Second, interactions between client and staff are best served via video conferencing. This “face-to-face” placebo dictated by the pandemic is the clearest way to reinforce direct involvement on the part of company staff with the client’s project, more so than emails or even phone calls. Whenever possible, clients should be encouraged to access these sessions via computer so staff can share their screen to demonstrate the use of the portal, share reporting results, etc. Additionally, enabling staff to remote into the client’s computer to directly assist them when needed provides an additional level of service.

Finally, the gardening adage “the best fertilizer is the gardener’s shadow” applies here as well. Time spent in direct person-to-person communication cultivates customer confidence. For example, instead of delivering project status results via email, a screen-shared review demonstrates personal involvement with the client’s product.

It is not necessary to shift away from virtual workflows to better serve clients. On the contrary, web-based client portals provide numerous advantages for the end-user. However, many M&E companies would be well-served to treat virtual portals as a tool, rather than as a means to reduce payroll. By returning to a more hands-on approach to customer relations, clients will be given total confidence that they chose the right company to serve their project. ■



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