

By Alicia Raeburn

PREPARING YOUR OFFICE SUPPLY BUSINESS FOR A GROWING WORK-FROM-HOME POPULATION

There's no doubt about it: quarantine has changed the workplace. As we venture into the fourth quarter of living through the COVID-19 pandemic, with no definitive end in sight, it's time to start accepting these changes may be permanent.

As an office supply business, this may seem negative at first glance. What will happen to the large, bustling offices with a fax machine in every corner that needs servicing and an endless demand for printer paper?

Large office spaces (and their demand for your services) might decrease, but with that comes an increase in home office needs. A culture that is working remotely might change how your office supply business operates; but with careful planning and preparation, this can be a positive opportunity for growth.

Target individuals

Many companies are offering employee stipends to set up home offices instead of purchasing the materials themselves. This means you need to target these employees directly. Instead of selling bulk orders through one office manager, you may now have to sell to individuals. For many office dealers, this is a completely new market. Equip your sales and marketing team with the skills to engage it.

Offer packages

Bulk orders of a single product will become less common. While you won't be selling 20 printers or packages of Post-it Notes at a time, there are still opportunities to sell large quantities

through bundled packages. Curate a home office bundle with popular products, including small printers, wireless keyboards, mousepads, monitors and risers. Brand it with a clever name, such as "Today's Tech Essentials," and market it at a discounted rate to customers, who can then offer it as a "perk" to remote employees.

Go beyond your traditional product portfolio

When the lockdown first started, PPE shortages crippled the supply chain. Office dealers were quick to react, stocking up on electrostatic sprayers, temperature scanners, floor decals and barriers. It was a big win for many in the industry, where dealers both filled a critical need and created a profitable new category that did not exist before.

Demand for PPE and related supplies continues. To stay relevant, it is crucial that workplace solutions providers represent these categories. Add a "COVID-19 Essentials" header and list each category with the relevant products: disinfectants, cold and flu

supplies, barriers, floor decals and PPE. Market them through email blasts and social media campaigns. Turn your website into a sales tool for these new categories.

Watch for similar opportunities to arise. Think about how remote workers spend their days. They are often in front of a computer, typing, using software and attending virtual meetings. Expand your product line to include video lighting, professional backdrops and higher-quality microphones for conference calls. Or feature a new line of standing desks for workers who aren't used to sitting all day. Tap into the "new normal" of workplace solutions and make them available to your customers.

Consider at home delivery

If you serve a local marketplace or have the means to do it nationally, offer at-home delivery for individual employees. This will not only set you apart from other workplace solutions providers, but also allow you to compete with established online retail stores.

The landscape may be different, but workplace solutions providers remain relevant and essential to all workspaces. Position your business to capitalize on this new remote work and adapted office environment and you will be in a position of growth.

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