The Virtual Enterprise: 4 Trends That Are Shaping the Future of Work

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In a virtual enterprise, co-working spaces let employees enjoy collaboration and flexible schedules.

The workplace of the future looks awfully familiar. It looks exactly like your living room (and not because of the open floor plan), or your favorite coffee shop (and not because everyone is way too caffeinated). It looks like an airport, a hotel, or even a public park.

That's because the workplace of the future isn't a place. It's a collection of places — a virtual enterprise where employees can work anytime, from anywhere. Sure, they get together sometimes to brainstorm or just to socialize, share ideas, or swap some gossip. But then they go their separate ways and work wherever they're most productive. Still, they remain seamlessly connected via mobile technology, video conferencing, and cloud-based collaboration tools.

Of course, remote work isn't new: 37 percent of U.S. workers have telecommuted, according to a 2015 Gallup poll. Yet the average employee only telecommutes two days per month, which will likely change soon for many employees as technology makes it easier and easier to support this type of work. Most organizations are already preparing to become a virtual enterprise, even if they don't know it yet.

The following are four trends that point to the future of workplace evolution:
1. The War for Talent

With baby boomers now retiring en masse, the talent shortage you’ve been hearing about for years has finally arrived. It’s a seller’s market, where employers must compete to attract the smartest and most innovative thinkers. Of course, many of the best and brightest are millennials, who tend to view flexibility, mobility and the opportunity for remote work as job requirements, not perks. And they’re happy to live at home with Mom and Dad until they find employers that fulfill their desire for work/life balance.

Telecommuting also enables organizations to assemble the best possible workforces by removing geographical barriers. Rather than hiring the best person for the job within driving distance, they can hire the best person with a Wi-Fi connection.

2. Emergence of Co-Working Spaces

Companies have been toying with the idea of telecommuting for decades. However, many employers are hesitant to let their employees work remotely out of fear that they can only produce great ideas when they get the gang together in person.

To provide employees with the best of both worlds, many companies now provide communal workspaces so remote employees can come into the office and meet with colleagues in person, if and when they need to do so.

Companies that don't want to pay for office space for remote employees can provide them with access to one of the new co-working spaces that are popping up in major cities across the country. These membership-based facilities offer camaraderie, workplace essentials such as coffee and snacks, and a variety of workspaces, from quiet offices to conference rooms to lounges.

The popularity of these new workspaces is just further proof that the conference room of the future isn't really a conference room at all. It's wherever employees choose to meet up and collaborate, whether online or in person.

3. Mass Migration to the Cloud

Not too long ago, if you wanted to work from home for one day, you had to save all the information you needed from the company server before you left the office and then sweet-talk a colleague into emailing you whatever you forgot. Or, you had to log in to a slow, clunky virtual private network (VPN) to access company files.

With cloud computing, authorized employees can quickly and easily access all the information they need at anytime, from any location, on any device. The cloud enables employees to integrate all mission-critical business applications, customer relationship management (CRM) tools, or workflows with their communications system so that they maintain a seamless connection — and business presence — no matter where, or how, they choose to work.

Most companies have now moved at least some workflows into cloud environments. Gartner projected that the worldwide public cloud services market will grow 17.2 percent in 2016 to a total of $208.6 billion (up from $178 billion in 2015). Cloud infrastructure services will see the fastest growth, expanding by 42.8 percent in 2016.

4. Growing Suites of Collaboration Tools

Cloud-based collaboration tools such as file-sharing software, enterprise mobile apps, internal social networks, and video conferencing provide employees with instant access to the information they need to get their jobs done. Rather than wasting time scouring through
email in pursuit of the latest version of whatever document they need, workers can quickly find up-to-date information. Teams can also share information and collaborate in real time using these tools, whether they're on different floors or in different states.

This doesn't just make employees more productive — it makes them increasingly mobile and able to get work done wherever and whenever it's most convenient.

Slow and steady doesn't win the race anymore. In the digital age, it's the nimble innovators who come out on top. Driven by the need to be faster, more flexible, more creative, and more cost-effective, organizations are investing in new technology that enables workers to be productive from anywhere. And that's exactly where innovation will happen in the future — from virtually anywhere.

Speak to a Vonage Business consultant today to help your company become a virtual enterprise.