



CORENET GLOBAL

VIRTUAL POP UP

A pop in community for **corporate real estate professionals**

Pop-Up Webinar: Key Takeaways

11 June 2020

Where are you in terms of returning to the office?

- Our office in Connecticut is already open, and we are actively planning for New York to open within the next week or two. Our New Jersey office will trail behind those. In other markets, down South, we are already open. Our initial re-entry percentage is 25 percent. The time frame for increasing that percentage varies by jurisdiction. Municipalities and governments will have their metrics for going from phase 1 to phase 2. Typically, there is anywhere from two to four weeks in between, where they are watching whether totals are being met. We have a diversity of businesses. There are service lines that never stopped working, such as the occupier side with FM services, which has been active through this entire story. We have had lots of discussions with the landlords around specific things that are happening with buildings and what the protocols are, such as elevator usage and temperature measurements (or not, depending on what the practice of the landlord is). I think our employees are all optimistically looking forward to going back to the office. They are cautiously optimistic. It is nice to see that the conversation is shifting to what happens after the pandemic.
- Here in London, the approach we have taken up until now is that we just have two key people within our office, which is 300 people in the center of London. Our approach is that by the end of this month, we will have a few other key people in. Other than that, our approach is not to start really bringing people back in now until September. That is mainly because so many people have children and with the schools not going back until then, it just makes it very difficult otherwise. The idea is that we will begin with 25 percent of our people and phase it in from September.
- In our organization, we are taking a wait-and-see approach. We have moved our re-entry date out to September. We are nervous around the fall time frame, though, because daycare access is so limited. If kids are going to school maybe two days a week and then two days at home at that time, the whole daycare and child-care availability situation makes us nervous, even in September. We think September could be the right time frame but then we look at these and other factors and wonder how many people might want to come back to the office at that time.
- Our offices are global. In the United States, the schedule for returning to the office is based on the individual employee's comfort level in returning. We are taking the approach of using the office as a tool. If you have daycare or child-care issues, or if you are susceptible to the coronavirus, you do not have to go back. All the safety precautions and measures, such as sanitation stations, temperature checks, and so on, have been put in place. In most instances, it is 'go back at your comfort level.'

What about your landlords? What are you hearing from them?

- The property managers we are working with seem to be doing all the right things. They are putting procedures in place with additional hand sanitizer and thinking about how they are going to limit the number of people in the elevators at one time, or in the common areas and restrooms.

I cannot find one landlord who wants to take ownership of temperature screenings in the buildings. Is anyone else facing that issue? If you are in a multi-tenant building, you might want people screened before they even come up to your suite.

- I am aware that one large service provider is performing temperature checks for their client. Neither the landlord nor the client is responsible. Rather, this integrated service provider is taking that on in a consulting role. It is an arms-length type setup, and I am sure there are legal reasons for that.

How successful has remote working been for your company?

- We are a software development company. Remote working has worked out well for us. Except for a few roles that needed to stay back in the office, such as our mail room, everyone has been doing well with remote working. That now brings up a question: why should we go back to the office? What type of activities would drive someone to go to the office? It should not be simply 'because people want to go back.' We have an opportunity in front of us to rewrite our workplace strategy. I am curious as to how others are starting to approach this question. If you are successful working remotely, how are you deciding who may want to come back to the office?
- I think employees would like to return to the office. Employers have invested in ergonomic workstations and task chairs. And employees often need a quiet space. I expect that a lot of us have kids at home, and it can be really distracting, even when the kids go back to school. For me personally, and with a lot of our employees, the idea of going back to the office is attractive. The office also provides a good IT connection that is usually better than what people have at their homes.
- We are an architectural firm. We are doing great working at home, but I do share the previous comments that most of us are eager to get back to the office. There is a big sense of belonging, a big sense of camaraderie. These are all things that we sort of forget about, being in the comfort of our home, but they are good things that we have when we are in the work environment and part of a team. Working on things together and making progress and getting promotions and so on are all a huge part of working in an office.
- Back to that observation again about why anyone would go back to the office: the way we are evolving is that the office will become the cultural core of the company. People will arrange their schedules to be there for certain events and meetings which can only happen there. There might be certain technology support that is available only in the office. Some people will naturally want to be there more due to distractions or sub-optimal ergonomics at home, or maybe they really feel a need to be with others and do not want to be isolated five days a week. All this is evolving based on a lot of factors, including who the company feels is essential. This whole thing is going to work itself out according to a complicated set of formulas that will evolve in ways yet undetermined.
- There is a short-term solution, and there is the longer-term solution. Since we are having to adhere to the six-foot or two-meter social distancing, it has us rethinking how we use our space and how dense we are making the offices. I understand completely why you would want to use your workplace as your center to build on the company culture. But if you cannot have more than 10 people sitting in a room, how do you do that now? What do you do when you have today's social-distancing limitations? One of the things that has been challenging for us is that for years we have been trying to move the company toward a more mobile way of working where we had fewer fixed desks or assigned seating. Going back to the office, if we continue with assigned seating, that is extremely challenging logistically to figure out who needs to sit where. In the short term, we have an opportunity to rewrite that story and move to full unassigned seating where people will book their seats and we have better control over the spaces that people can go to. That helps us not only with our densities, but as well with cleaning and the cleaning staff not having to clean the entire facility every single day. We are thinking of having unassigned seating

that only certain people will go to, whether that be 25 percent, 50 percent, or whatever the number may be.

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