



CORENET GLOBAL

# VIRTUAL POP UP

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

Sponsored by:



**Pop-Up Webinar: Key Takeaways**

**18 June 2020**

**What technology tools are you using not only to facilitate safe re-entry to your properties post-COVID-19, but to strategically plan for the next crisis?**

- We have customers who are vocal about different aspects of this around workplace re-entry. They say, 'We can now get a strategy around this, we can use hoteling, we can use pre-entry temperature screenings, we can use sensors.' On the longer-term picture for real estate, the outlook is less clear. They are saying, 'How do we manage what is coming next? We do not know how long COVID-19 will last. We do not know how long re-entry will take, or even if our company will survive re-entry. How do I plan leases, how do I know when to retrofit or bail on a property?' There is a heightened interest in being able to use technology to do better forecasting because trying to do that on a paper napkin or in a spreadsheet is difficult. As COVID-19 has taught us, there are a lot of moving parts, and one day can be very different than the day before.

**Are the issues coming out of this pretty consistent around the world?**

- It is interesting. From the standpoint of government guidelines, it goes all the way down to a local level – a city, a community, a parish. There is no single set of guidelines you can use to manage on a global basis. Utah does things differently than Oregon. The United States is different than APAC. Even the social distancing guidelines are different. Companies are operating in different industries and in different buildings. Companies want help to standardize what they are doing, but at the same time need flexibility to address their unique needs.

**We have heard plenty of conversation about hygiene, washing hands, not touching your face, and so on. But it seems to me that our phones are the things we touch most often, and we generally do not pay much attention to it. Are there any suggestions or solutions for hygiene as it relates to phones?**

- We did some research on the dirtiest areas in an office. The desktop and the desktop phones ranked very high. People check their phones a minimum of 50 times a day, either by touching it or by putting it to their face. There are special ultraviolet (UV) units you can buy to place your

smartphone in, and in a matter of minutes the UV light will remove the virus and sanitize the device. You can find those online.

### **What insights can you share about your re-entry to the office?**

- We have started that process. We are located just outside Chicago, and right now we are in phase 3 of the Illinois guidelines, which means no more than 50 percent occupancy per day. There are some other regulations too, such as providing temperature checks and daily health screenings. We have been meeting with all our business heads. For some groups that are essential, such as product development, quality, and operations, we have advised them that they can go immediately to 50 percent and do what they need to do. They are working through that now, with the assistance of Facilities. Certain staff might come in every other day, for instance. It has been a bit challenging for them to get their arms around all this and how to make it work, but we are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. The rest of our divisions, though, are going to come back slowly, perhaps starting at 20 percent and then ramping up 10 percent a month until we get to September. Then we will see what happens after that. We do not know whether we will continue at 50 percent or ramp up to 100 percent, our pre-COVID level.

### **Have any of your divisions concluded that this experiment of working at home is working well?**

- In some divisions, such as our software group, only about 4 or 5 percent are coming back now. Everyone is working remotely successfully, and we are happy to hear that. Ironically, back in the winter, before the coronavirus struck, we started a “workplace of the future” initiative. Some employees were told they could work from anywhere, but if they wanted to be remote, they had to give up their office workspace. Some of these people were managers, but most were staff positions. Since then, COVID-19 has forced all managers to work remotely. We are interested in learning their perspectives when they start coming back. I do think we will have certain positions that will want to work from home permanently and might not want to come back to the office at all. We do not know what the ramifications of childcare will be. We are hearing some stories that parents are concerned that when schools do open again, they might not be safe for their children. Thus, there is a percentage of our workforce that is not going to want to come back to the office. Some will like working from home. Some might want to work a couple of days per week in the office and a couple of days per week at home. The trickle-down effect is that we will have some excess real estate. We currently operate on a 1:1 ratio, but after we exit COVID-19 that will no longer be possible. We will not be able to continue that 1:1 ratio in the future.
- We have found, as most companies have, that working from home has been successful. We have always allowed people to work from home. We are very flexible in that regard, but we encourage people to come to the office. We are in a phased approach, and we had our initial re-entry back on May 7. Those people who were not able to work effectively from home could return to the office. This was a small percentage of our staff, maybe 2 or 3 percent. Next, on June 9, perhaps 10 to 15 percent came in. It is our intent to bring everyone back to the workplace. We do have space for our all employees, but after that we will be looking at implementing a planned remote or distributed work program and offering it in addition to the flexibility that people have already. Our company has done a fabulous job of following the guidelines and we have had tremendous communication with our employees and getting feedback from our employees. We are in a good situation with our workspace and are in a good position to return people to work with very few modifications. We are in a rural area and do not have to deal with public transportation. And we are in a single-story building, so we do not have elevators. We have been supporting people on an individual basis and set up a hotline for that purpose.

### **What kinds of things are you hearing on that hotline?**

- It is staffed by our HR group. We have received all kinds of feedback. Employees can call for help if a family member has contracted COVID-19 or if they have traveled someplace of concern. It is

a very open forum. You can pose whatever question you might have or any concern you have with your job. We have a website with helpful tips from a health and wellness standpoint and a technology standpoint. Our CEO conducts a weekly broadcast to bring everyone up to date. Our C-Suite people have had additional meetings online, and those meetings are recorded and put online for our staff to see. Perhaps we have gone a little overboard on this, but we have truly communicated well and kept the lines of communication open on everything we are doing.

**As you bring employees back into the office, have you encountered any challenges?**

- We are following the guidelines completely. We have temperature checks throughout our space, and lots of signage. People are required to wear face masks when they are outside their workstations if they cannot maintain social distancing. We are taking it step by step, and in each phase, we are gathering feedback from people and modifying things and getting ready for the next phase. We are not in a big hurry. We are being very methodical in what we are doing. My home office was great, with ergonomic furniture and a beautiful view, but I came back to the office as soon as I could. I can be much more productive here than I can be at home.

**CoreNet Global**

CoreNet Global is the world's leading professional association for corporate real estate (CRE) and workplace executives, service providers, and economic developers. CoreNet Global's more than 11,000 members, who include 70% of the top 100 U.S. companies and nearly half of the Global 2000, meet locally, globally and virtually to develop networks, share knowledge, learn and thrive professionally. For more information, please visit [www.corenetglobal.org](http://www.corenetglobal.org) or follow @CoreNetGlobal on Twitter.