

# SMEs Were “More Than Ready” For Home Working

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One of the UK’s leading IT support providers for small and medium sized businesses have revealed statistics from their internal support desk showing that support requests for home working only increased slightly in 2020, compared to previous years.

The HBP Group, who have four UK based offices and support nearly 1,000 SMEs, saw just a 3% increase in IT support tickets relating to home working between March 2020 and December 2020, compared same period the previous year.

Support for remote working and products such as Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Teams made up just over a quarter of all queries raised to the support team in 2020.

Phil Denham, Commercial Director at The HBP Group, explained,

“March of 2020 was the busiest month in our 30-year history as a business. We received more support calls than ever before, but the vast majority of businesses were more than ready for home working. Almost every business we deal with has at least one member of staff who works remotely, so from an IT perspective it was just a case of replicating this for other users.”

Remote working is not a new concept and several different approaches can be used to allow home workers to access business software and data when they are not in the office. The HBP Group employee staff who work from home on a full-time basis as well as having a flexible working policy which allows staff to work from the office or at home when required. So, they were well aware of what businesses needed to do when lockdown struck in March 2020.

Tony Pearson, Operations Director, who oversees all support teams at The HBP Group expected things to be different.

“As IT professionals we are always looking to the long term and try to make sure our customer’s IT systems are as future proofed as possible, but lockdown could have caught us all out. In reality though, businesses had systems in place that allowed them to work remotely straight away. They may not always have been perfect, and we’ve already seen lots of businesses reviewing their set ups to create more permanent solutions for staff. This will allow them to work remotely more often or just to be prepared in case anything like this happens again.”

COVID-19, and the resulting lockdown which took place in the UK, certainly acted as a catalyst for many businesses to review their IT systems, especially as many now face a decision about their attitude to home working in the future.

Joanne Dixon, Managing Director at The HBP Group, didn’t ever foresee her business becoming a remote operation but is now planning for a hybrid approach in the future.

“I’ve always believed that getting people together in an office is really important for our

company's culture but also for people's wellbeing. Working from home since March 2020 has had no impact on our own performance though, so when the time is right we'll be offering options to staff about where they want to work from. I think this is going to become the norm for most businesses."

The use of cloud-based technology has seen its biggest rise in the enterprise and start up sectors and the SME market has been slower to adopt this technology. However, The HBP Group have already seen this trend beginning to shift and believe that it may take up to 10 years to see a radical change in this area.

Phil Denham commented,

"SMEs generally don't have anyone to answer to other than their customers and themselves, so all they care about when it comes to IT is that it works. It doesn't matter if it's in the Cloud or in the office, it only matters what the best solution is."

"The biggest challenge is the software they use to run their business, which they may have been using for 5 or 10 years, and at that time it would not have been designed for remote working. We launched our own data centre last year which has become one of our fastest growing services ever to help with this issue. So there's definitely the appetite to move to the Cloud but we just need more solutions which will do the job at the right price. However, this could take time as in our experience SMEs only change software when they really need to, sometimes this can be 10 or 15 years."

The HBP Group were established in 1991 and consists of HBP Systems Ltd, Kamarin Computers and Jugo Systems. They provide a range of IT support and IT solutions, and more information can be found at <https://it.thehbpgroup.co.uk>

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