

Monthly Newswire

Welcome to our monthly newswire. We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and find it useful.

May 2020

Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams is a collaboration platform that provides document sharing, online meetings and more to help your people to work together.

Most businesses use Microsoft Office. Microsoft Teams has been designed to work well within that ecosystem.

Microsoft Teams is user-friendly and helps to drive collaboration across different offices or between remote workers. The chat-based functionality helps teams of people to work together, share ideas and ask questions without clogging up their email inbox. The system lends itself to online meetings, document sharing and document storage (in SharePoint). Teams is also set up to facilitate online video calling, online meetings, screen sharing and even online training sessions. The Teams system is separated into four categories:

Teams – this is where you find and create channels which are effectively conversations or chats between teammates. You can also share files with colleagues.

Meetings – this is where you can view your meetings for the day or week ahead. Its calendar syncs with Outlook and you can also schedule a meeting from this part of the system.

Calls – users can make and receive phone calls using a headset or their computer's microphone and speakers. Calls to other Microsoft Teams (and Skype) users are free. If you want to be able to make calls to phone numbers, you can purchase a calling plan.

Activities – users can catch up on their messages, alerts and project updates in the Activities section.

There are two ways you can get a Microsoft Teams account. One is to sign up for a free account, (which requires a Microsoft account), and the other is to have a Microsoft Office 365 Business or Enterprise account, where the app is included.

To sign up for a free Teams account, users can have any kind of Microsoft account or ID, such as a login for Outlook.com.

Managing Your Wellbeing

How to manage your personal wellbeing during the Coronavirus lockdown.

Stay connected

Having a sense of connection with family and friends is important for our mental health. Ensure you schedule calls or video chats with your family and friends during lockdown. In addition, there are many online book clubs, virtual coffee groups and online workout challenge groups that you can join in order to avoid feeling isolated.

Routine is your friend

It can be easy to fall into bad habits. Set out a routine that clearly distinguishes between work time and home time/family time. For example, try to sit down at your desk for work between 9am and 6pm. Schedule regular breaks and a lunch hour, just like you would at the office. Schedule dinner for around 6pm so that you have a hard stop at the end of your day. You should also reward yourself with some family activity time or hobby time, at say, 7pm, etc.

If you have the space in your home to have a dedicated work area, try to use that part of your home for work and keep the rest of your home for family time/non-work time. The physical separation of your work area and non-work area helps you to create head space and can help you to avoid being over worked and becoming stressed.

Keep yourself active

Lockdown means you cannot go to the gym or a public swimming pool but it is important to stay active. Commit to a regular exercise routine and choose one or two activities that you like and that suit your physical capabilities. There are lots of free resources available online including exercise classes, Yoga, Pilates or tai chi lessons that you can follow. It is also important to keep your mind active by reading books, eBooks or the news (but perhaps limit the amount of Coronavirus -related news that you consume).

Focus on positivity

People across the entire world are dealing with uncertainty at the moment. There is no point focusing on the things that you cannot control. We can all control how we communicate and that can provide a sense of positivity during these uncertain times. Focus on the positive and talk about what you can do rather than what you can't do. If you maintain a positive outlook, you will tend to feel more positive, more of the time. This will also tend to have a positive impact on those around you and those that you interact with.



What is your post-lockdown strategy?

Now is the time to think about how you are going to grow your business, after the lockdown.

Set out your goals

The current disruption being experienced by businesses across the world is a huge challenge. However it may also be an opportunity for your firm. Start by thinking about your current market position, relative to your key competitors. Where would you like your firm to be in 12 months' time? Is there an opportunity to overtake a competitor? Take some time to set out your key business objectives for the next year including the key deliverables that you will need to focus on each month.

New opportunities

Is there an opportunity to make some changes to your business model? Perhaps your firm has the opportunity to embrace automation, take a new approach to its distribution model or expand into new markets. As businesses return to normal in the next few months, they will have to contend with various unknowns. The firms that succeed will be the ones that are agile enough to pivot their strategic focus, when the right opportunity presents itself.

Cultural change

Changing the culture of a business is a very difficult thing to do. However, the return to "business as usual" post-pandemic gives firms an opportunity to drive cultural change. Will your firm embrace remote working after the lockdown? How will this affect the culture of your firm? It's important to set out your vision for the firm and communicate that to everyone across the business. Your vision should set out the key attributes of the new culture. Managers should be prepared to lead by example and develop their teams through training, follow-up and feedback. Sharing success stories of individuals and teams across your business will help to influence others and drive cultural change.

Be prepared

Your firm will need to be ready to take on new projects, execute business development plans and drive change. Take some time to map out the key behaviours that you will need your people to adopt as you move forward, after the lockdown. If training is going to be needed, perhaps this could be provided, online, now. Doing as much pre-work as possible now will ensure that your team is ready to hit the ground running as the country emerges from lockdown. Be careful not to take on too many new projects at once. Regardless of the size of your business, resources are finite. Prioritise the key projects that are likely to have the biggest impact on your business.

Review the goals that you set out at the beginning of your strategic planning process and identify the projects that align with the achievement of those goals. Ensure that your management team are on board and that they understand the overarching objectives of the firm. This will help each team to move forward in a joined-up manner.



Leading a remote team during uncertain times

The uncertainty faced by businesses around the world will test even the greatest managers and leaders.

Communicate and then communicate some more

Uncertainty produces anxiety throughout your team, other employees, your firm's customers, suppliers and investors. Silence is not an option as that is often interpreted as bad news.

As such, it is essential to communicate and reinforce a clear perspective of what is happening, what that means for the firm and what you, as a leader, are doing to manage the situation. The best managers and business leaders embrace positivity. Focus on emphasizing the positive messages when communicating with your employees.

Establish regular catch-ups

Thanks to technology such as Skype, Facetime or Zoom, it's easy to have online face-to-face meetings with your remote workers. Create a structure that includes weekly or bi-weekly team meetings and regular one-to-one catch up meetings. You can augment this with other means of communication such as text messages, emails and calls. You don't want your people to feel like they are being micro-managed but you do need them to feel like they are part of a team, even when they are working from home.

Take time to understand the home-working circumstances of your team

Talk with individual staff about how their home circumstances may affect their ability to work. For example some of your team members may be sharing a dining table as a workspace or they may have limited access to the internet due to the standard of connectivity that is available where they live. Discuss how this might be managed during the transition to working at home and try to agree a framework to help them to manage their work-life balance.

Embrace your human side

Nobody expects you to have all the answers. It's ok to ask your people to share their ideas and opinions. Try to put yourself in their shoes – what projects would you want to get involved with if you were in their position? Be sensitive to the fear of change. Changes in circumstances tend to activate feelings of uncertainty among employees. Make your people part of the solution, encourage them to get involved, share your vision for success and give them the opportunity to contribute to that. After all, success is a team sport.