

The Remote Reality

Dealerships adapt to having at-home employees

by: Brent Hoskins, Office Technology Magazine

Some dealers are dead set against having remote employees. Some have allowed a few to work from home. Others have gone all in with the staffing approach. Where do you stand on this post-COVID-19 pandemic reality? Here are brief profiles of three BTA member dealerships that have adapted to largely remote workforces.

Atlantic, Tomorrow's Office

While there was a day when only a few Atlantic, Tomorrow's Office employees worked remote, the pandemic changed that, says Larry Weiss, chairman of the New York City-based dealership. "Today, 60% of our employees work fully remote," he says, emphasizing that remote work has gained in popularity due to increased flexibility, improved work/life balance and cost savings for employees by eliminating commuting costs, reducing clothing expenses, etc. "In addition, advancements in technology and communication tools have made remote collaboration more seamless and efficient."

Following the pandemic, there were efforts at Atlantic to bring employees back to the office, Weiss acknowledges, but he no longer sees that as feasible or necessary. "Every time we tried to come back there were objections and challenges, ranging from employees wanting to avoid riding the subway to mandates precluding unvaccinated workers from returning to work," he says. "So, we just kept kicking that can down the road."

Ultimately, Atlantic adopted an in-office/remote work mix that has been serving the dealership well, Weiss says. "Our admin employees work in the office each Wednesday," he says. "Sales and other customer-facing employees are in the office Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Our IT department [around 120 employees], service techs and dispatch personnel are all fully remote. Of course, we continue to allow all employees to work in the office every day if they wish, and some do."

Weiss says it is particularly important that Atlantic's sales team members work from the office three days a week. "The reason is they need to be in front of customers," he says.



"While I believe that every sales call should be in person, that is not practical. If the client says, 'There's no reason. We've done business forever. Let's just meet virtually,' that's OK because you want to follow their lead. But if it's a new client, you must insist that the first or second meeting is in person."

The sales rep "must be constantly asking for in-person meetings; that has to be the default," Weiss continues.

"If reps only worked from home, they would be less likely to go into the field, defaulting to virtual meetings. When it comes to new business, we have enough data to show that you will win more than you will lose when dealing with people in person."

For those company owners who are dead set against having remote employees, particularly to any great extent, Weiss offers two compelling reasons they should reconsider. "If you do not [allow employees to work remote], be prepared to lose good people," he says. "Somebody's going to walk into your office someday and say, 'I have accepted another job where they are allowing me to work remotely, giving me a better work/life balance.' Plus, if you require employees to come into the office, you are limiting your ability to attract top talent. We have hired people all over; these are smart people."

All over? Yes. "The majority of Atlantic's nearly 400 employees live in New York and New Jersey," Weiss says. "We also have employees who live in Massachusetts, Texas and South Carolina. [The dealership has offices in the five states noted.] In addition, we have remote employees in 13 other states."

For those company owners who assume that remote employees do not work as much, "don't think that, because they work more," Weiss adds. Given that these employees' offices are conveniently located in their homes, "they don't have a commute anymore. That results in more productivity."

GoodSuite

Twenty-eight years ago, CEO Dan Strull founded what is today GoodSuite, headquartered in Woodland Hills, California. He reminisces with fondness about the company culture

before the pandemic, when all employees worked from the office. “One of the things I loved about coming to work was seeing everybody,” he says. “Sometimes we would stop and play some wiffle ball; it was really fun. I would come in and greet everyone, goof and laugh. I would buy lunch all the time. We had this fourth-quarter tradition where every Friday we would do something fun.”

Today, two-thirds of the dealership’s approximately 60 employees and contractors work full-time from home; the rest — including Strull — are on a hybrid schedule, working from home a few days per week. What led to the change? “The pandemic was 100% the reason,” Strull says, noting that there were a few attempts early on to bring everyone back to the office. “Every time we tried to bring people back, [California Governor] Gavin Newsom sent them home. So, we just gave up.”

As it turns out, “people like it,” Strull says, noting that there is value in the improved quality of life that is inherent to working from home. “We have a lot of people who could easily come to the office and just don’t.”

Much has changed in recent years. Strull shares a look at GoodSuite’s new normal. Regarding the dealership’s four locations: “Two to three years ago I moved all of our office locations [to smaller spaces]. For example, we had a giant office in Fresno that was cavernous; we shut that down and moved to a location that is 10% the size.” Regarding the employees’ geographic locations: “We now have employees all over the United States. In fact, we have people all over the world — full-time contractors in Pakistan, South Africa and India serving in admin and IT roles. It took us a while to find quality people, but when we did, it became great.”

Strull reports that a key factor in the success of a remote workforce is accountability. “We make sure everybody has a number that they are focused on — their targets,” he says. “We have Teams meetings to review those numbers. Whether it’s the receptionist, billing person, salesperson or IT tech, everyone has a number for which they are responsible ... If they are hitting that number, then great. If not, then there is an issue and we work through it. We’re not remotely checking employees’ screens to make sure they are working; we’re checking to make sure they are getting their jobs done.”

Strull and GoodSuite management strive to keep the highest level of company culture and regular communication that is possible with a remote workforce. “Every Monday morning, we have what we call The Grapevine — 15 minutes

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Atlantic, Tomorrow's Office

with all employees for making announcements, staff recognition, talking about one of our core values, etc.,” he says. “Again, it’s also so important that our leaders bring their teams together (virtually) on a regular basis.”

In addition, GoodSuite continues to have in-person holiday parties (two last year; one in Woodland Hills, one in Fresno), an annual Monster Lobster contest with a lobster

dinner as the reward, and “we have a President’s Club that’s pretty big,” Strull says. “We went to Costa Rica a couple of months ago. We have a tech who has worked at GoodSuite for four years who is phenomenal. He lives in Alabama. I had never met him in person until the President’s Club trip.”

In this new normal for GoodSuite, Strull says there is recognition that collaboration is now largely driven by technology. He shares that when he is in the office, he meets with another senior leader — also in the office — via Teams. “We have what we call a ‘Same Page Meeting’ every week,” he says. “We do it online even though we are only about eight yards away from one another. We do that so we can transcribe the meeting, share screens to look at things, etc. That has become our culture.”

Looking forward, “we’re expanding our geography; we’re going to cover the entire state of California,” Strull says. “The question is: ‘Am I going to open an office in San Francisco? Or do I just have a warehouse and let everyone work from home?’ I think the answer is: ‘Let everyone work from home.’”

Strull may miss the old days, but has accepted the remote reality. “I don’t think we will all be back in the office again,” he says. “There is some benefit to having some of our team members be in person, but most can be remote ... We’re not going to be able to go back; we just need to make the best of it.”

Levifi

In 2002, Thomas Fimian founded DocuGraphics in Charleston, South Carolina, a small Xerox agency with just a few employees. Today, rebranded Levifi in 2024, the dealership has more than 80 employees, he says, with “10 strategically located branches” serving South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia.

At Levifi, where Fimian serves as CEO, utilizing remote workers is just the way business is done. “Roughly 80% of Levifi’s workforce operates remotely full time,” he says. “This approach predates the pandemic — it’s been part of our DNA for years due to our decentralized organizational structure and

Remote vs. In-Office Work

Days a Week in the Office

2021  2025    

100% of Time in Office

Enterprises 46%

Micro Companies 41%

Companies with >50 Full-Time Employees

	2023	2025
100% in Office	60%	32%
Hybrid	27%	63%
100% at Home	13%	5%

Source: Keypoint Intelligence Data

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geographically distributed branch network. COVID simply accelerated and validated the model we had already been using successfully."

One of the biggest drivers behind the decision to support full-time remote work is "access to a much larger talent pool," Fimian says. "This allows us to recruit team members who are not only highly skilled, but also aligned with our core values — no matter where they live. From our perspective, that's the greatest benefit — a stronger, values-driven team without geographic limits."

Fimian is quick to cite two examples to illustrate the focus on finding the right people, regardless of location. "Our chief revenue officer is in Florida and our sales admin is in Reno, Nevada," he says. "For certain jobs, it really doesn't matter where you're located, but you do have to adhere to our time zone, getting up early each day, if necessary. For our Reno-based support person, she loves that. It's perfect for her."

As noted, finding the right people is a priority at Levifi, Fimian says, emphasizing that the practice helps, in part, to address building company culture, something that some people may assume is missing in a largely remote workforce. "We want to become a forever company; I have no interest in being acquired by anybody," he says. "We're very keen on being debt-free, self-financing and building something that's bigger, better and going to be around long after I'm gone ... By hiring people who believe in that, who share those values and that kind of entrepreneurial spirit, that drives the culture."

Another driver of the company culture is Levifi's adherence to the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS), "which has been instrumental in putting the right people in the right seats and fostering a cohesive culture with minimal drama," Fimian says. "We measure productivity using EOS's Traction process, which sets clear, measurable goals, identifies and solves issues quickly, and assigns specific to-do's that team members are accountable for. Through regular 'Level 10 Meetings,' we track progress and ensure that every team member — regardless of location — is aligned, contributing and accountable. This

keeps the focus on results, not just hours worked.”

If a Levifi employee “struggles to meet his or her commitments, we see it as a deeper alignment or performance issue, not a remote work problem,” Fimian says. “We believe in giving second — and sometimes third and fourth — chances for honest mistakes. But if the root issues conflict with our core values, we address them quickly and help the individual find a role outside of Levifi that’s a better fit.”

In terms of the value of remote work from the perspective of Levifi’s employees, “they appreciate the flexibility, time savings and ability to work in environments that maximize their productivity,” Fimian says, citing the appeal of the flexibility benefit by way of the example of a parent needing to

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take a child to an afternoon doctor’s appointment. “As a remote employee, you can take the kid to the doctor and get your work done afterward. Returning to work at 7 p.m. or 8 p.m. in a home office makes that easy.”

At his forever company, Fimian sees remote work being a forever practice. “Remote work will remain a core part of Levifi’s culture and operations for the long term,” he

says. It is not adapting to a trend, but “a deliberate choice that supports growth, agility and employee satisfaction.” ■

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