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December 2020

The Effects of COVID-19 on Online Businesses

As many companies have resorted to coordinating their businesses remotely, workers across the world have been faced with the difficult task of adapting to working online. While at first the idea of staying in the comfort of your own home may have seemed like a dream come true, this never-ending quarantine has proven to be less than ideal.

The convenience of being able to work from home can be incredibly relaxing, especially without needing to travel everyday. A study by the U.S. Census Bureau showed that "the average American spends 4.35 hours a week commuting to work" (Herhold). Remote working has cut this time down to seconds - walking from one room to another. However, the majority of people don't realize that their home networks often lack basic antivirus programs and firewalls, with only "15% of respondents saying they know a great deal about how to protect themselves from harmful [online] activity" (Security Risks of Working from Home). While working from home is a comfortable alternative to driving to work everyday, it is necessary to understand how to keep important business information secure.

Not only is it essential to keep business files protected, it is crucial that we as humans are also staying safe from the pandemic. The call for many businesses to enforce mandatory work from home has been a great attempt to "stop the transmission of the virus [while trying] to continue business as usual" (Security Risks of Working from Home). Unfortunately, this extended period of isolation has had harmful effects. When surveyed about their biggest struggle

regarding working from home, nearly 1 in 5 employees responded with "loneliness" (Zeidner). Taking away the social aspect of work can pay a huge toll on the efficiency of a business and their overall performance.

One of the hardest aspects of working remotely is the process of conducting and managing a business. When workers are siloed, it can be very easy for communication to suffer. In one study, it was found that "a face-to-face request is 34 times more successful than an email" (Lowy). The productivity of employees varies greatly from person to person when working from home, with some employees "risking burnout when working remotely due to a lack of boundaries" (Bakken). Managing a virtual team can be challenging, but addressing and facing communication and productivity challenges head-on will result in a much more efficient business.

With COVID-19 causing businesses to shut down, I think the main way that Benton REA can help businesses start back up again is through PowerNET. With many companies now relying on technology, PowerNET could be expanded to provide assistance in helping companies with telecommunications through email services. Helping companies set up their own email in a secure, protected, and efficient way will help with business to business and business to customer communication. Additionally, by having their email set up through PowerNET's Security Configuration, companies will be more secure from cyber threats. Benton County is fortunate to have Benton REA during this global pandemic.

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