How COVID-19 changed the way people work

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The Kaspersky How COVID-19 changed the way people work report is a study into employees' attitudes towards working from home following the COVID-19 outbreak. The study was conducted by research agency Toluna in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Russia, Mexico, Brazil and Colombia, and survey responses were gathered from 9th to 18th April 2020. All respondents were employed full-time or part-time.

A total of **6,017** respondents were surveyed across the stated countries.

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has caused sudden, sweeping change around the world. The necessary social distancing measures, that include only leaving the house for essential reasons and no longer visiting each other's homes, are having an impact on all of us. The measures are thought to be so vital for humanity's safety during this time that Facebook has said it will **remove all negative social distancing posts**.

One large part of society that has been affected by these measures more than others is the employed. While direct customer facing businesses like restaurants and retailers have had to change their opening hours, adapt their business models or close their doors entirely, there are still millions of jobs that can be done at home, outside of the usual office working environment.

In fact, a new Kaspersky survey has revealed that **95%** of these people are now still working from home following the COVID-19 outbreak. As such, organizations need to adapt to meet employee needs and ensure they stay productive, motivated and secure. With so many of us being asked to work in new ways in order to stay connected to our colleagues and customers, it is important to remember both the professional and personal challenges working from home on a permanent basis can bring.

This report looks at how people are finding life away from the office, the ways their family relationships are changing, the difficulties they may be facing while working remotely and the importance of remaining secure online when doing their roles from home every day.

Key findings

55% say their employers have provided them with devices to work from home

26% of workers say they do not have separate rooms for all family members who need to work from home

33% of survey respondents have said there have been more conflicts with their children over internet usage limitations

51% of workers admit to watching adult content on devices they use for work purposes

73% of workers have not received any IT security awareness training from their employer since they transitioned to working from home

53% use a VPN when working from home

27% say they have received malicious emails that use COVID-19 as the main topic of interest

Organizing a home office

Preparing to work from home permanently is easier for some workers than others. Organizing a home office can be tough for those who are not used to working remotely, especially if their business has also relied on them coming to the same place every day to fulfil their roles.

The survey revealed that around half (**46%**) of respondents have never worked from home before. While some employees are allowed to work more flexibly and do tasks remotely, many of them have always been expected to head to an office or workspace on a daily basis. A third (**32%**) of employees say that they are now working in less comfortable conditions than was the case in their usual office environment. This may well be the case because they do not have the office furniture that they are usual provided with at work. For example, many people are suffering from back pain by **resorting to using kitchen stools or slouched on their sofas**.

Businesses are trying to help their staff work from home effectively and this is key to making sure the transition happens as smoothly as possible. In fact, more than half (**55%**) of those surveyed say their employers have provided specific devices to work from home – such as computers and mobiles. What's more, workers are familiar with the hardware they have been provided with, as **73%** say they are still using the same devices they worked with before. And while two-thirds (**68%**) of respondents have said that they are using their personal computer to do work for their employer, the majority of them (**48%** of all respondents) had done so in the past as well.

This preparation and familiarity have resulted in good news for employers, as most (**40%**) of the workers surveyed say they have not yet seen any changes in productivity since the COVID-19 outbreak began, and more than a quarter (**29%**) feel that they are even more productive.

Resolving family disputes

The majority of workers surveyed also stated that they live with other family members, with just **11%** living alone.

Living with others creates its own set of challenges, as everyone in a household needs to be able to work effectively and remain productive during working hours. Over half (**52%**) also have their partner working from home with them, and more than a fifth (**23%**) of the workers surveyed say other family members are working from home too apart partner.

This can put more strain on the family unit, as everyone tries to find a place where they can concentrate on work. It's not just parents who need a quiet space, older children living at home might be employed too and need their own space. The challenge of everyone having a usable and productive space is compounded by the fact that a quarter (**26%**) of the workers surveyed say they do not have separate rooms for family members who need to work from home. Additionally, the vast majority of workers (**84%**) say they allow other people in their household to access their personal computer that they use for work.

Furthermore, around a fifth (**21%**) say they have experienced family issues due to the need to work from home. This could affect both adults and children, with both parties becoming even more reliant on the internet for work, school and socializing.

While services like video streaming and gaming can keep youngsters entertained, at the moment some children may want to spend more time online. A third (**33%**) of survey respondents have said there have been more conflicts with their children over internet usage limitations, with **33%** also saying it is now much more difficult to regulate how much time their children spend online. When **parents need to focus on their professional tasks rather than play with their children**, finding the balance can sometimes be tricky.
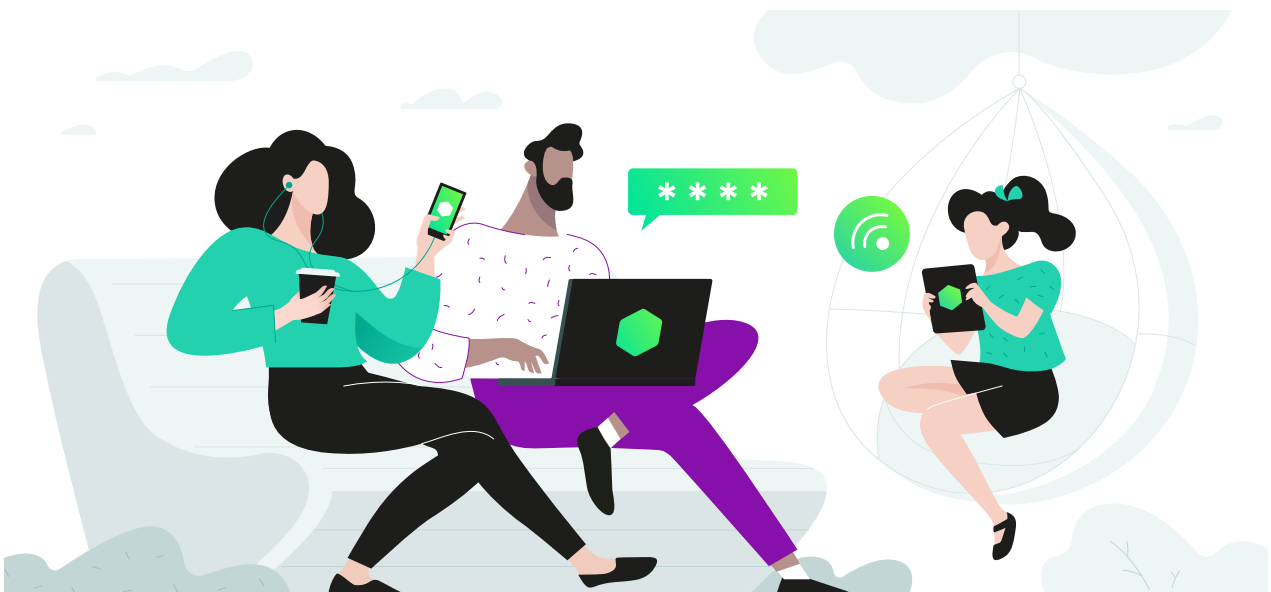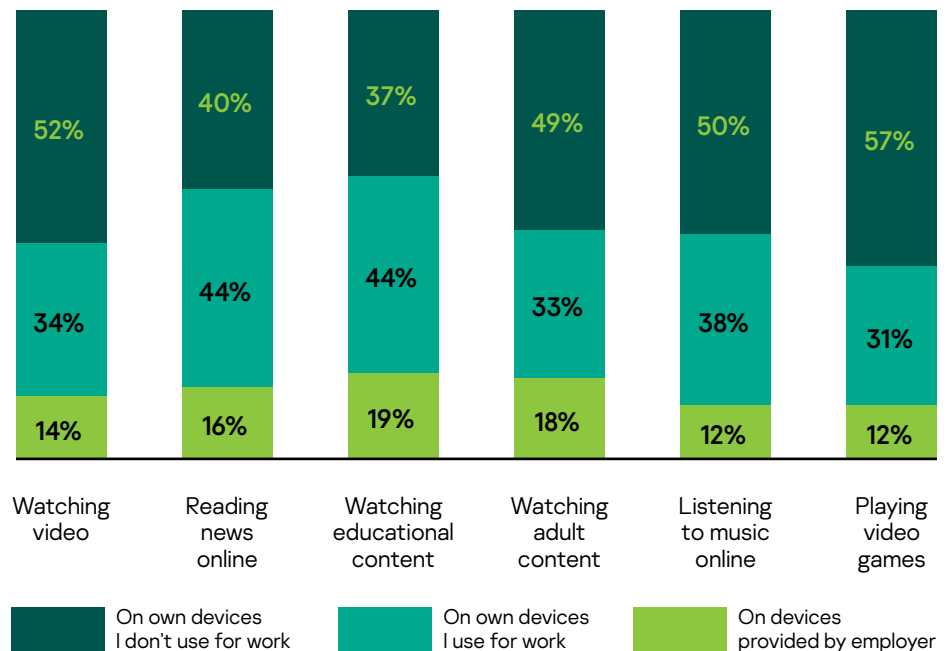
Maintaining a work-life balance

When a home needs to be transformed into an office, it can become hard to create a clear distinction between working life and personal life and remain productive.

While there is no universal answer for getting this perfect, it is important for everyone to feel like they are spending a fair amount of time both working and relaxing at home.

For instance, **31%** of workers say they have spent more time working since transitioning to working from home full-time. However, **46%** are now spending more time doing personal activities. This could well be down to no longer needing to commute to the office or travel for work-related reasons, like attending sales meetings or industry conferences.

Behavior is also changing, with workers understandably spending more time consuming content on their devices while they stay at home. For instance, **47%** have said they spend more time watching videos, with around one-in-two (**48%**) people doing so on devices they use for work. More unexpectedly though, half (**51%**) of workers who have started to watch more adult content, admit to watching it on work devices. Around a fifth (**18%**) do this on devices provided by their employer and **33%** use their own devices which they also use for work-related purposes. This activity might demonstrate how personal activity and working life can blur into one when spending so much time at home.

Chart 1.   Activities workers are spending more of their time doing

	Watching video	Reading news online	Watching educational content	Watching adult content	Listening to music online	Playing video games
On own devices I don't use for work	52%	40%	37%	49%	50%	57%
On own devices I use for work	34%	44%	44%	33%	38%	31%
On devices provided by employer	14%	16%	19%	18%	12%	12%

More than half (**55%**) of the workers surveyed say they are now reading more news than they were before they began working from home, **60%** of which is done on work devices. However, this is perhaps expected as many of us are keen to stay updated about the latest coronavirus developments.

How to adapt to working, and living from home

By Alena Reva, Vice President, Human Resources Americas, Kaspersky

With many of us working from home now, there is a lot of adjustment needed to balance our family life, our personal life and our work life.

When you are cramped in the same space with your family member, partner or a roommate it can be challenging for your anxiety and relationship. I would recommend setting up a designated space for work, maintaining a work-home routine, and clearly delineate work life from home life. Establish boundaries with your roommate or partner, and instead of talking all the time and brain dumping on each other, set up dedicated time to talk about your day.

Also, don't forget to set up a time tracker on your computer to see how much you really work and celebrate your productivity.

If you're under a 'shelter in place' order and can't leave your apartment, it can be quite draining. Studies of groups working in Antarctica for months show that eventually our brains turn on a so-called 'psychological hibernation' to cope with stress. If that's happening to you, maybe it's time to ask for some time off and have a week of self-care: expose yourself to sunlight, talk to your favorite people, read your favorite book, watch your favorite shows, do a workout routine that brings you joy, eat something you really enjoy. Also, don't forget about music and playing games!

For people in creative professions it can be hard to find inspiration at this time. My advice here would be to set up a routine to write or draw at least an hour a day with whatever comes to your mind just to turn on your imagination. There are many internet groups offering creative challenges you can join. Also, sometimes it helps to find a buddy you can email your ideas to, who can respond with how they make them feel.

Many workers have kids at home, and I hear a lot from parents who are not sleeping enough, because they are trying to maintain their productivity while working at night when their children are sleeping. I don't think that's healthy or sustainable.

Of course, every family and every child is different. I, myself, have an autistic eight year-old at home, who can barely tolerate any changes to his routine. My advice here would be to set up a structure. Most kids thrive in structure, so you just need to create one that works for your household.

If both you and your partner have to work, creating a schedule can help you both. I've heard a lot of good things about the Pomodoro Technique. Here, the first partner works for 25 minutes, while the second partner watches the kids. Then both partners have a five minute break while the kids watch themselves, then both parents switch.

Research shows that 25-minute work intervals are the best for productivity as this creates an appropriate sense of urgency to eliminate distractions and focus. Also, kids can tolerate focusing on something for 25 minutes. This technique is also recommended for children with ADHD.

Your structure should draw a line between home time and work time and provide a predictable rhythm for the whole family. It's also a good idea to give chores to your older children, like cleaning or helping to watch youngsters. You could even ask your kids to start creating a newspaper about your household life in quarantine – it can spike their imagination and keep them busy.

Many parents are afraid that kids could be held back in their education during this time and are trying to set up a home school environment. But remember that being a parent is a job in itself, and you have your regular job to manage, and then you are also trying to be a teacher and a principal. It's nearly impossible to do all three things well, so is helps to have your priorities in order.

Instead, maybe both you and your partner can take a week of vacation from work to form a routine in your household and find a way to design a home learning system for your children.

For some people the free Khan Academy is enough for education, while others may want to apply to a full-time online school. Remember that full-time online school is a commitment and your children probably won't be able to jump in and out.

Finally, it's important to discuss this situation with your manager and agree on expectations regarding your productivity. You can also become a champion of asynchronous communication in your team and teach people to be productive without non-stop real-time collaboration.

The role of cybersecurity when working from home

To say transitioning an entire workforce from working in an office space to working from home is a challenge would be an understatement.

There are many factors to be considered, from making sure staff have the right IT hardware to implementing a VPN to keep colleagues connected, and cybersecurity is no exception.

Securing large work environments takes a lot of resources and businesses need to consider how corporate devices are used remotely. There is also the issue of staff using their own devices when working from home to contend with. In fact, the survey revealed that half (**50%**) of companies that allow employees to conduct work from personal devices do not have policies in place to regulate how they are used.
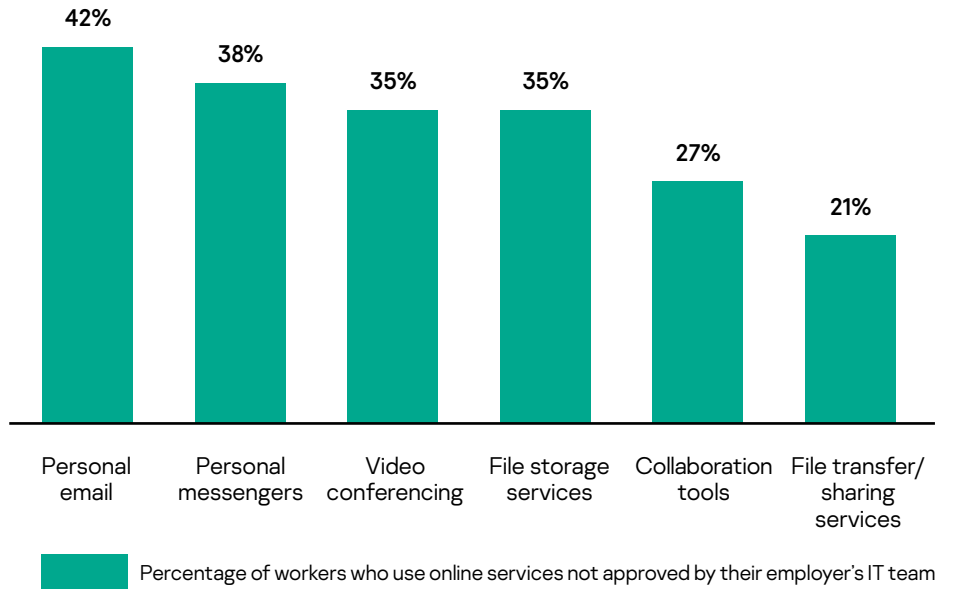
Employees may also feel unprepared to face cybersecurity issues that may arise when working from home. This is because nearly three-quarters (**73%**) of workers say they have not had any additional IT security awareness training after they switched to working from home full-time.

There are also questions to be asked around general security practices, only a third (**32%**) of businesses have provided their staff with antivirus software to use on personal devices for work purposes since the transition began. While **86%** of respondents say that have antivirus software installed on their personal computers, there is now more responsibility on employers to offer the right protection solutions. Additionally, just half (**53%**) of workers say they are using a VPN to access their employer's network when working from home. This could potentially be leaving corporate information and files vulnerable to cyberattacks, or accessible to people outside of the business.

Other causes of concern for workers include phishing scams and shadow IT. For instance, more than a quarter (**27%**) of survey respondents say they have received malicious emails related to COVID-19 while working from home – an activity which **Kaspersky's experts are paying strong attention to during the pandemic**. Scammers may be trying to prey on worried workers who want to learn more about the coronavirus pandemic, as well as potentially vulnerable corporate networks while staff are stuck at home.

Meanwhile, the adoption of video conferencing, file storage services, file sharing services and personal messaging apps are all on the rise as we rely on the internet to share information and keep in touch for work purposes. Some employees are not strictly only using their business accounts for work-related purposes.

Chart 2.   Most common shadow IT in use

| 42% | 38% | 35% | 35% | 27% | 21% |

Personal email | Personal messengers | Video conferencing | File storage services | Collaboration tools | File transfer/ sharing services

■ Percentage of workers who use online services not approved by their employer's IT team

For example, **42%** of workers say they are using personal email accounts for work and nearly half (**49%**) have admitted to increasing how often they do this. Additionally, **38%** use personal messengers for professional reasons, and **60%** say they now do this more often since working from home. File sharing services that have not been approved by IT departments are also being used a lot, with **53%** of respondents saying they use these more often for work-related purposes. Using such services has great benefits to keep staff connected but can come at a cost if one or more of them become a target for cybercriminals.

Conclusion and recommendations

It is very likely that working from home and doing professional tasks remotely will not only become more common **but transform how we think about the ways work can be done effectively**. Many of the workers surveyed have said they prefer working from home, and it is important to bear in mind that this was a preferred choice for a lot of staff even before the COVID-19 outbreak began.

With this in mind, Kaspersky is urging organizations to support their employees by providing the right equipment and information so they can securely work from home for the foreseeable future.

Here are some tips to help employers and businesses stay on top of any potential IT security issues and remain productive while staff are working from home:

- Ensure your employees have all they need to securely work from home and know who to contact if they face an IT or security issue.
- Schedule basic security awareness training for your employees. This can be done online and cover essential practices, such as account and password management, email security, endpoint security and web browsing. **Kaspersky and Area9 Lyceum have prepared a free course** to help staff work safely from home.
- Take key data protection measures including switching on password protection, encrypting work devices and ensuring data is backed up.
- Ensure devices, software, applications and services are kept updated with the latest patches.
- Install proven protection software, such as **Kaspersky Endpoint Security Cloud**, on all endpoints, including mobile devices, and switch on firewalls.
- Ensure you have access to the latest threat intelligence to bolster your protection solution. For example, Kaspersky offers **a free COVID-19 related threat data feed**.
- Double check the protection available on mobile devices. For example, it should enable anti-theft capabilities such as remote device location, locking and wiping of data, screen locking, passwords and biometric security features like Face ID or Touch ID, as well as enable application controls to ensure only approved applications are used by employees.

While there is a lot of responsibility on employers to keep corporate devices and networks secure, Kaspersky is also offering the following recommendations for consumers and workers during their time at home:

- Ensure your router supports and works smoothly when transmitting Wi-Fi to several devices simultaneously, even when multiple workers are online and there is heavy traffic (as is the case when using video conferencing).
- Regularly update your router to avoid potential security issues.
- Set up strong passwords for your router and Wi-Fi network.
- If you can, only do work on devices provided by your employer. Putting corporate information on your personal devices could lead to potential security and confidentiality issues.
- Do not share your work account details with anybody else, even if it seems a good idea at the time.
- Always feel able to speak to your employer's IT or IT security team if you have any concerns or issues when working from home.

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