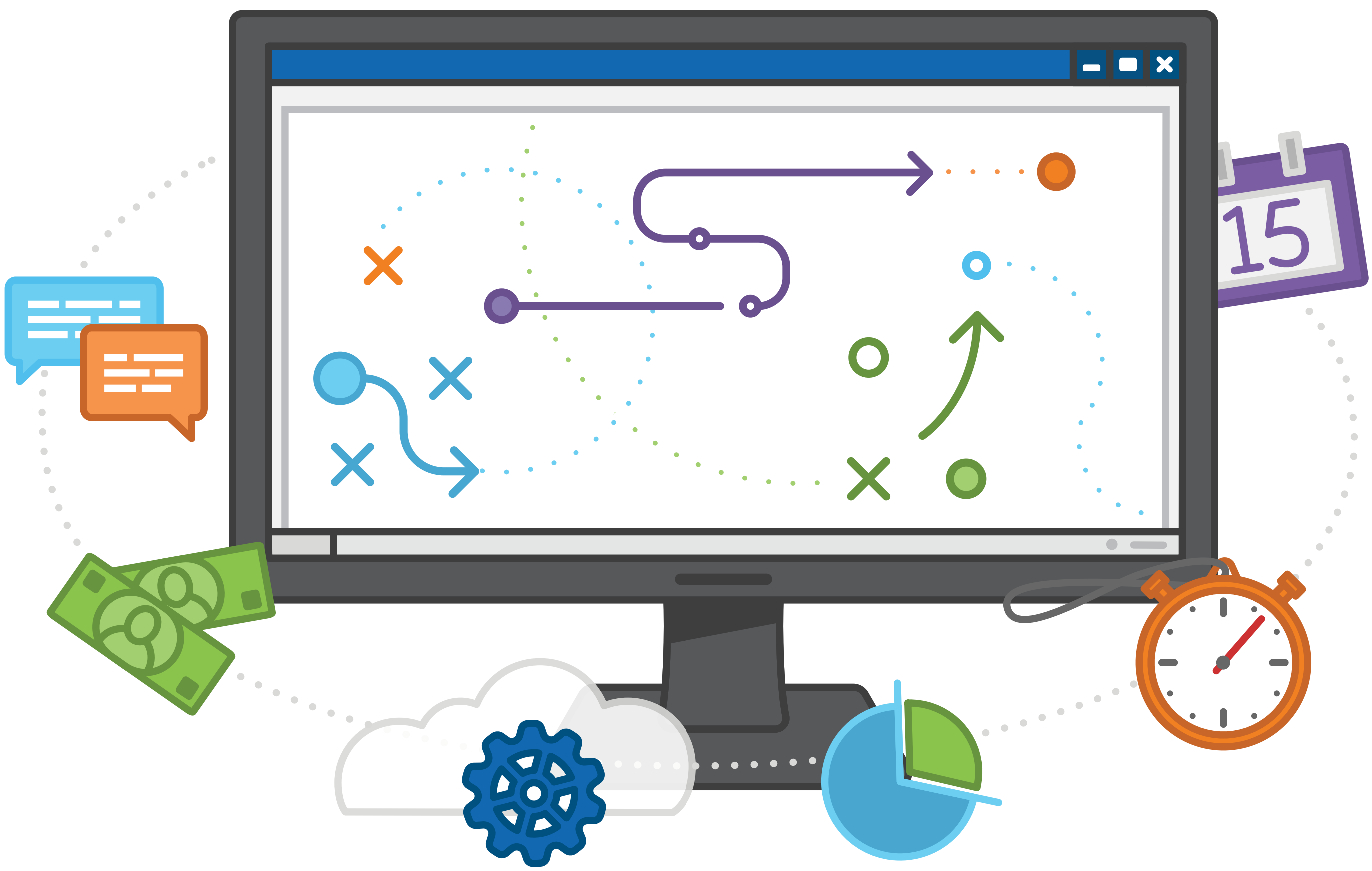
ConnectWise eBook Series

The MSP COVID-19 Playbook

A Step-by-Step Guide to Stabilize, Optimize, and Maximize During an Economic Downturn



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Introduction

As COVID-19 continues to create uncertainty around the world, there is a long list of things that need to be done for managed service providers (MSPs) to weather this storm. You may feel overwhelmed and not know where to start—that is completely normal. We've all been forced to learn together.

We've put together this step-by-step guide to outline **the things you can do today to stabilize your business, optimize for efficiency, and maximize the opportunity in front of you**. Having a clear understanding of your financial health, what your team needs to accomplish, and how a crisis can present business opportunities is the best ways to not only survive but thrive during these crazy times.

CHAPTER 1

ENABLING & OPTIMIZING
A REMOTE WORKFORCE

Chapter 1 Enabling & Optimizing a Remote Workforce

As the COVID-19 pandemic has forced your business and almost all your clients to go remote, **enabling and optimizing a remote workforce is key to ensuring everyone can continue to work.** Enabling a remote workforce has become an unexpected hero as many businesses and MSPs shift to working from home. Within this chapter, you'll find resources and tips to help you prepare for a fully remote workforce to limit the Silos of Chaos that may arise and **ensure you and your clients remain productive and profitable** through this crisis.

Throughout this chapter, you'll learn best practice processes for deploying, servicing, and optimizing a remote workforce to assist with:

- Managing multiple clients for a remote workforce
- Assisting clients in setting up a remote workforce
- Ensuring you are operating an efficient remote workforce
- Utilizing best practices for managing and connecting with your remote workforce
- Continual optimization as remote working becomes the new normal

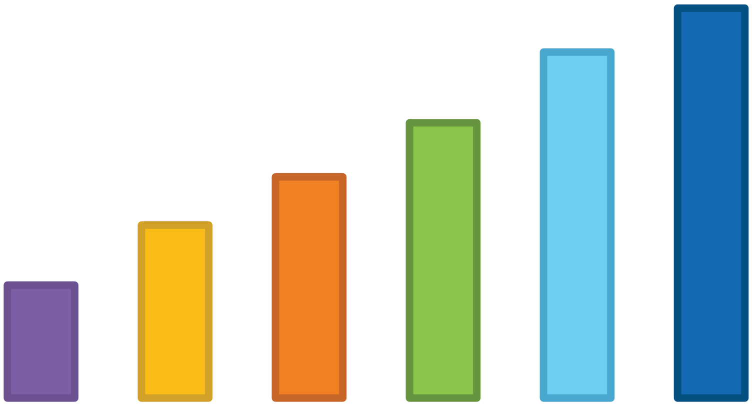
Chapter 1 Enabling & Optimizing a Remote Workforce

According to Gartner[1], "54% of HR leaders in our snap poll indicated that poor technology and/or infrastructure for remote working is the biggest barrier to effective remote working."

In fact[2], 88% of companies aren't fully ready for the impact of COVID-19 on field service delivery. Virtually all companies (98%) don't believe they can carry on as usual[3]. Businesses also need to prepare for limited capacity. 40% of companies expect to be impacted by absenteeism, including in customer support departments. According to a new LinkedIn survey, 44% of senior leaders are somewhat or very likely to make remote work policies permanent.

Based on an analysis by CoinDesk[4], some 48% of the $17.8 trillion of U.S. national income in 2019 came from industries where many jobs could conceivably be done remotely. (National income, or the value of all goods and services produced by U.S. businesses and individuals, is similar to gross domestic product (GDP))

A large number of jobs can be performed remotely, with 34% of jobs that can be done at home, representing 44% of all wages[5].



1 https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/with-coronavirus-in-mind-are-you-ready-for-remote-work

2 https://customerthink.com/the-covid-19-field-service-challenge-ensuring-business-continuity-with-remote-support/

3 https://techsee.me/resources/reports/business-continuity-in-customer-service-with-visual-assistance/

4 https://www.coindesk.com/remote-working-proves-unexpected-hero-as-half-of-us-economy-shifts-to-home-offices

5 https://bfi.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/BFI_White-Paper_Dingel_Neiman_3.2020.pdf

Chapter 1 Enabling & Optimizing a Remote Workforce

There are four key actions you can take to ensure you have the most efficient remote workforce setup and procedures in place.

1 Set Up a Remote Workforce and/or Offer a Remote Workforce Solution

As many employees and companies now must work remotely, standing up a solution to enable a remote workforce is crucial. During this time, it's key for employees to have access to their tools, for workers to be enabled to help clients, and for companies to have the ability to extend these services to clients. ConnectWise offers a robust remote workforce solution that allows for remote access to devices.

2 Utilize a Solution or Solutions That Allow You to Optimize the Process for Your Company and Clients

In this crucial period, time and ease of use is a necessity. You'll want to make sure the solution you choose has processes that are easy to adopt and can be replicated easily for others. Setup via ConnectWise Control® to allow for a quick and easy process that allows users to connect quickly. You'll also want to ensure the solutions you choose to enable your internal team allows them to complete their day-to-day tasks easily. In addition, they should also create accountability for them and supply your leadership team with the knowledge to make necessary business-critical decisions if needed.

3 Adjust Your Workforce and Processes for the Long Haul and Stay Prepared

Having the tools in place to continue business operations is key, but you don't want to lose sight of all critical business aspects during this time. It's imperative to stabilize, optimize, and maximize while your entire workforce transitions to a remote workforce. Here are 15 adjustments you'll need to consider during this transitional period.

4 Adjust Your Culture and Continue to Stay Connected

For many businesses, this is a huge cultural shift. Not only are your employees and customers having to move towards full remote work, but they are also dealing with a pandemic. It's important during this time to stay connected and not lose the culture and connectedness that your company has. In this eBook, we discuss how to build a top-notch remote workforce and how to get through this transition.

A remote workforce solution, such as ConnectWise Control, allows technicians to quickly and efficiently service clients through an enriched remote-control or remote access experience. Remote workers can solve problems faster and even collaborate with each other to simultaneously work on a single session. In addition, ConnectWise Control provides a powerful feature with ConnectWise View, a live streaming video session where you can resolve hardware issues remotely. You'll see what the cameraperson is seeing and be able to walk them through on-site issues effectively. Using ConnectWise Control for remote access provides a simple process for your remote workforce and enables them to work efficiently and securely.

Chapter 1 Enabling & Optimizing a Remote Workforce

As we navigate through this uncharted territory, ConnectWise is with you to provide resources and tips to help you **prepare and sustain a fully remote workforce**, both for your own business, and your clients. Here are some additional resources to help you enable and optimize a remote workforce during this unprecedented time:

Remote Workforce Hub

ConnectWise has developed a full Remote Workforce Hub dedicated to enabling and securing a remote workforce. Please visit for the latest and greatest content as we are updating the content daily.

Remote Workforce Tools

Enable or provide a remote workforce solution.

Remote Workforce Through ConnectWise

If you already have ConnectWise Control or ConnectWise Control through ConnectWise Automate®, you can get set up with a remote workforce right away with this on-demand how-to video. If you have Continuum Command®, a ConnectWise solution, you can also easily set up a remote workforce.

Chapter 1 Enabling & Optimizing a Remote Workforce

As everyone is getting set up remotely, this opens doors for many security vulnerabilities and massive remote work risks. In this crucial time, it's important to employ, enable, and educate your staff and customers on security best practices. Check out our next two chapters for steps to keep your business and your customers secure, as well as the rest of our playbook for tips for stabilizing, optimizing, and maximizing your practice during an economic downturn.

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CHAPTER 2

SECURING AN UNSECURE WORLD: **EMPLOYEE EDUCATION IS KEY**

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Chapter 2 Securing an Unsecure World: Employee Education Is Key

In February, Time magazine called the Coronavirus the **"World's Largest Work-From-Home Experiment."** And while the numbers aren't in yet, it's clear we've gone beyond the 3.2% of the workforce that normally comprise remote workers. As more employees have moved to work remotely, the safe perimeter established by their company's MSP or IT department has essentially dissolved. Combine that with the fact that threat actors are looking to capitalize on these new vulnerabilities, and it is clear **cybersecurity has never been more important**.

On March 6, 2020, the US Government issued an alert warning individuals to be vigilant to potential phishing or other cyberattacks. Indeed, when we look at cybersecurity risk mitigation, the most important components are people, processes, and tools. **It is critical to educate employees on the practices they must establish to be secure.** Cybersecurity culture MUST transcend the office walls to protect not only company data but the employee and their family as well.

Security is not a problem to be solved but a risk to be managed, and the move to a large remote workforce has created a lot of risks. As an MSP, you have a key role as your clients' trusted advisor to help them manage the uncertainty. In a recent study, we learned that:

- ✓ **89% of SMBs see cybersecurity as a top priority in their organization**
- ✓ **62% lack the skills in-house to deal with security issues**
- ✓ **84% of SMBs who do not use an MSP would consider using one if they offered the 'right' cybersecurity solution**
- ✓ **93% would MOVE to a new MSP for the right cybersecurity solution and on average be willing to pay them 25% more**

Chapter 2 Securing an Unsecure World: Employee Education Is Key

While most MSPs have focused on the tools side of the security conversation, **a huge opportunity to differentiate your practice** exists in helping your clients establish education and policies. The human element of cybersecurity is certainly at risk from today's cybercriminals, and their success is dependent upon establishing a cybersecurity culture. **Here are four things you can do right now to help your clients manage their increased security risk.**

1 Educate End Users on Best Practices and Expectations When Working from Home

Many employees do not understand the risk they've undertaken by working beyond the secure perimeter that has always been in place at their workplace. Simple actions that seem innocent, and under normal circumstances would be, can open them up to attacks. Some examples might include:

- Working on a computer with out-of-date software
- Clicking on an attachment about the local COVID-19 outbreak
- Downloading a local restaurant's takeout menu

You need to **provide clear training** on these and many other actions that could be problematic, as well as offer best practices for keeping their own environment secure.

> *Getting buy-in from end users is extremely important. When you make the process more cumbersome than it already is, through enhanced security like password policies and two-factor authentication, you get a lot of complaints. I've seen end users spend more time trying to circumvent a security practice rather than just adhere to it. But with cybersecurity trainings, once you show that a security penetration at the office could actually impact them at home, they start to care.* —ALEX JOY, *VP Operations, Network Coverage*

ConnectWise can help with this. We've developed a Security Awareness Training Kit that contains a sample recorded webinar, presentation deck, email template, and other resources you can use to offer this training.

2 Provide a Checklist that Employees Can Keep in Their Remote Workspace

As employees adjust to a remote work environment, it's not easy to think security first. And without the secure perimeter available in an office environment, employees may need to create that perimeter themselves manually. Having a **checklist available** will help them ensure they keep company data—and their home environment—secure. ConnectWise has developed a template you can use to get started. Our 18 Things to Make Your Remote Work Secure, Convenient, and Stress-Free checklist can help you develop your own list for your clients.

3 Provide Ongoing Training

Security is not a one-and-done practice. You need to offer **security awareness training** to your clients and their employees regularly. There is a reason pen testing and white hat hackers exist. They continually test the defenses to discover where holes exist. The same is true of education. You must regularly expose your end users to best practices and scenarios, so they'll be ready when the real threats hit. Consider offering webinars like the one above regularly. Or, create COVID-19 specific phishing email templates to gauge the resilience of your own staff and your end users and keep them on heightened alert during this time. You can also take advantage of an offer like Webroot's free 60 days of Security Awareness Training. Contact a member of the ConnectWise Security team to learn more. Whatever method you use to deploy the training, **it is critical that you do it on an ongoing basis.**

4 Get Your Own Skills Up to Date

A lot of MSPs have a skills gap when it comes to security. So, it's hard to provide training to your customers when you lack the confidence yourself. This is where The IT Nation comes in. Being a member of The IT Nation provides access to events like IT Nation Share and IT Nation Evolve, where you can learn first-hand about the security issues confronting our industry. And through our ConnectWise Certify program, you can learn about the foundations of security, including industry standards, best practices, and products.

Chapter 2 Securing an Unsecure World: Employee Education Is Key

While the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented and has resulted in a large remote workforce, there are **many reasons employees might have to work from home.** Natural disasters, sick dependents, and states of emergency will continue to make securing the remote workforce a necessity. These four tips will help you get your clients up to speed—and set your organization apart.

Check out the rest of our tips for stabilizing, optimizing, and maximizing your practice during an economic downturn.

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CHAPTER 3

SECURING YOUR COMPANY AND CLIENTS IN THIS NEW REMOTE ENVIRONMENT

ConnectWise

In a recent study, we learned that **74% of MSPs have suffered at least one cyberattack,** and a lack of skills and resources have left them ill-prepared to deal with attacks—either on their clients or themselves. And even if they were prepared yesterday, today's remote work environment has introduced new complexities. To continue in your role as a trusted advisor to your clients, **you MUST become more well-versed in cybersecurity**—particularly now as the secure perimeter you've maintained is dissolving and threat actors are increasing their activities. In addition to the security training we discussed in Chapter 2, MSPs must focus on processes and tools as well.

Much of cybersecurity protection has historically focused on defending the perimeter—ensuring that corporate devices had appropriate protection on them, preventing certain traffic from coming in or going outside the corporate firewall, and monitoring network traffic to identify anomalies. As employees are now working on their home networks, they are using personal machines that others are using as well and maybe accessing files via email. **MSPs need to examine the security measures they have in place**—understanding which of these protections were reliant on the user and their data residing inside the corporate 'perimeter' and how to provide additional protection where needed.

The reality is that your clients expect a certain level of security, and in this new work from home environment, you may no longer be living up to that expectation. MSPs need to quickly look at their overall security approach and identify the new security gaps that have emerged, both within their clients' environment as well as their own. Today, you can't simply go on-site during an event. Can you even get at backups right now? **Make sure you've examined all the services you currently offer under the new lens of remote working**—can you provide the same level of services?

Here are three ways to secure yourself and your customers:

1 Extend the Perimeter While Enabling Secure Data Access

Before COVID-19 stepped in and changed the way we all do business, where was your security practice headed? Were you just offering the tried and true antivirus, SPAM filtering, and firewall? Maybe you started to consider vulnerability scanning. In this new world where some protection technologies are less valuable, MSPs must offer more than antivirus and firewall protection. **You need to offer an advanced stack that includes endpoint detection and response, dark web monitoring, password policies, multi-factor authentication, and mobile device security.**

> One of the most powerful tools MSPs can deploy in this environment is Advanced Endpoint Detection and Response. As users move outside the perimeter, the endpoint becomes the top vector of attack—and the top vector MSPs should ensure is protected. Advanced Endpoint Detection and Response provides a powerful technology to avoid the impact of most potential security incidents and avoid the potential spread of those events. Check out ConnectWise Fortify®, formerly a Continuum solution, for Endpoint Security to learn how you can provide more oversight without adding technical headcount. Sign up today to receive 100 free licenses of ConnectWise Fortify for Endpoint Security until June 30.

While the users have left the perimeter, in most cases, the data has not. You need to ensure that corporate data stays where it is and benefits from the protections you have put in place. However, you still need to provide secure methods for people to access that data; otherwise, users will find other non-secure methods.

Finally, make sure you're enabling all the security controls available with the software products you use. For example, you can watch our webinar to learn how to secure your remote access software. Or you can find the security controls for ConnectWise products on ConnectWise University.

2 Understand Your Own Security Posture

Understanding your security posture is **critical to understanding what you need to put in place immediately** versus what can be more of a long-term goal. If you've been a part of The IT Nation for a while, you may be familiar with the entrepreneurial journey—how many MSPs move from a purely muscle and feel organization to managing to what good looks like and beyond. Well, there's also a security entrepreneurial journey that can help you understand where you are on the spectrum. Take our assessment and then check out our eBook, The Security Journey: 4 Phases to Becoming a Security-First Solution Provider, to learn how you can move from Clueless in Security to a Security-First Posture.

The next thing you can do is to **perform a risk assessment** on your own business to understand where you need to act first. A risk assessment will help you pinpoint vulnerabilities across your business and networks. Using this information is instrumental in **building a security strategy**. Putting this strategy into practice will reinforce your defenses and get you better prepared for when, not if, an attack comes your way. ConnectWise Identify provides a free trial where you can perform a risk assessment on your own business and on a customer.

> *Do a security audit on yourself, utilizing the security tools that you have. Document your findings, understand the process, and you will become a much more well-rounded organization. Your salespeople and internal staff will have the confidence to talk about it with clients and prospects. I promise you it will pay you dividends if you just take the time to go through that yourself.*
>
> —JUAN FERNANDEZ, *VP Managed IT Services, ImageNet*

All of the processes and technology you are putting in place for your clients, you should be first applying to your own organization to 'Protect Your House.' When we say, 'Protect Your House,' we're saying that you need to ensure you have proper internal security controls in place in your business. If your MSP practice suffers an attack, it could mean the end of your business. Protecting your house is self-preservation. You're responsible for more than just your networks and information. The tools you use, like your remote monitoring and management (RMM) tool, are the keys to your clients' infrastructures. If a criminal were to compromise your systems and get control of your RMM tool, they control your clients too.

Finally, make sure your strategy is secure. Our Daily Security Guidelines checklist can help you ensure you're following proper guidelines to inform and protect your clients.

3 Understand How to go to Market With These Solutions

The most successful companies can not only find ways to mitigate their risks in these situations but then **they leverage that stability to identify opportunity amongst the chaos.** How can you optimize your financials (see chapter 4) and be efficient with costs to provide additional services, even temporarily, to protect your clients?

Be cognizant of the concerns and behaviors of your clients. While COVID-19 may have precipitated this new remote workforce, some companies may want to be prepared for events that could drive work from home again. Others may embrace the new culture because of the cost savings it allows. It is imperative that you **learn from this situation** and put in the right tools and processes to ensure you are prepared moving forward.

The easiest way to begin when it comes to evaluating the security of your clients is to walk through the 15 Ways to Protect Your Business from a Cyberattack checklist with them. Check off the items you currently provide. Circle the items not included and walk through what they need immediately, what can be delayed, and what may not be necessary at all based on their environment. Check out our video where Jay Ryerse, ConnectWise VP of Cybersecurity Initiatives, walks you through the conversation you can have.

During this time of uncertainty, your clients are likely not able to absorb large additional costs. Their focus is going to largely be on survival. Their needs have changed, however, as has their willingness to consider opening up contracts to new vendors. You need to make sure you offer the right solutions to protect your clients, even if you need to absorb the costs temporarily. Prices will rise when your clients are back on their feet—and your **willingness to work with them will earn their loyalty**. Whatever your plan for passing along additional costs, make sure you are transparent with your clients, so they understand exactly what you are offering—and when those costs may go up. Check out our Pricing and Packaging video to learn about the different options for absorbing or passing along those costs.

ConnectWise can help! Expand your capabilities and extend your workforce with SOC, NOC, and Help Desk. You can even leverage a Dedicated Technician to handle level 1 and 2 support calls so your team can focus on the important projects.

The important thing is to make sure your **prospects and clients understand the risk**. Leverage dark web scanning to talk about how people working from home may have been in less protected environments. Show them their dark web activity and leverage that to open further security conversations. The important thing to remember is it's not about creating fear, uncertainty, and doubt. There's enough out there already. As their trusted advisor, **you're here to make them more secure—to be their superhero**.

When you're ready to learn more, ConnectWise can help. We've got tools to help you build out your security practice, have those difficult conversations with your clients, and market and sell your solutions.

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CHAPTER 4

MANAGING CASH FLOWS **DURING A CRISIS**

Chapter 4 Managing Cash Flows During a Crisis

The thing that keeps most business owners up at night is whether they have enough cash to pay their employees and their bills. According to Invoicera, 68.9% of business owners fear they'll lose their business due to a lack of available cash, and 58.2% identify slow-paying customers as their biggest challenge in managing cash flow. You never know what economic crisis is around the corner, so it's critical to **preserve cash and have a crystal-clear picture of your company's financial position day-to-day**.

This chapter will walk you through cash flow management best practices and offer tips and resources that will help you:

- Put the right tools and processes in place
- Make it easy to get paid consistently
- Gain visibility into your finances
- Cut expenses to build resiliency

Filled with uncertainty, many small businesses that MSPs support are closing their doors either temporarily or permanently. With that in mind, many MSPs have less than a month of cash reserves on hand and still have the responsibility to support their staff.

Add to that the newer obligation to their now 'remote clients' to provide the additional technology and hardware they need to be productive. MSPs are left dealing with the reality that even their most loyal clients may not be able to pay them on time to cover unexpected costs. **Here are a few things you can do to help stabilize your cash flows.**

1 Determine Your Cash Burn Rate

The first step is **understanding how much cash** you have on hand. Start with your cash and cash reserves in the bank, subtract any outstanding or pending checks, and add back pending deposits. This is how much fuel you have in your tank.

Next, determine how much cash **you spend each month**. This is your 'burn rate' and acts as a measuring stick for the time you have before you run out of money. If you didn't take in another dollar of revenue, how many months could you last? This is a key component in strategic decisions going forward.

2 Shed Operational Expenses

In a time when you need to conserve cash, it's **essential to reduce expenses everywhere you can**. Service businesses spend more on labor than any other area of their business, so cutting costs could, unfortunately, mean reducing your staff, but that doesn't have to be the case. It is important to review the existing tools you use for business and service delivery. Making a **prioritized list** of those that are mission-critical to business continuity could allow you to determine if any could be scaled down, utilized in more extensive ways, or dropped altogether.

This may mean more manual work for your team, but if time is freed up during this time, ensuring no unnecessary expenses are paid is critical. Determine if you have any cash equivalents, limit your inventory by reselling items, and review the items on your balance sheet that have the potential to be sold. Be sure to **consider all** expenses, including real estate, taxes, transportation, and office supplies.

3 Make It Easy to Get Paid

Many MSPs are worried about their **clients' ability to pay them on time**, or at all. Electronic payments are a must during a time when paper checks cannot be delivered or received, but accuracy here is key to ensure payments process correctly. Make the payment process as easy as possible for your customers. If possible, s**et your clients up on automatic payment plans**, so it's one less thing they need to think about or do. A bonus to automatic payment plans is that it makes paying their bill with you less of a choice and just an automatic process.

Creating a single place for clients to interact with you **creates a positive experience** for them. They know how to reach you and get all the important information they need in one space. They can also pay you more easily, shortening your accounts receivable time. The ConnectWise Customer Portal **allows MSPs to give their clients that single place** to see and enter tickets, as well as review and pay invoices online. Ultimately, nothing is more important to optimize your company's cash flow than your billing and invoicing process. The Customer Portal is just one way ConnectWise can help.

4 Leverage a System That Automates Your Finances

MSPs must leverage a system that **makes it simple** for billable resources to do their job and accurately pass the necessary billing details to finance. By **streamlining your process with AR automation**, you are not only eliminating direct costs by presenting invoices online but many of the indirect and hidden ones that sneak up on your cash flow. With the option to send a single invoice, the finance team receives fewer questions about what each individual invoice means. The clients love seeing all work completed and everything they owe all in one invoice.

The top business automation tools allow data entered by billable resources to automatically transfer to the finance team, so nothing falls through the cracks, and they can create accurate invoices with a single click.

Your cash flow can also be impacted if you're forced to reevaluate your offerings and projected goals during the COVID-19 crisis. Start first by adjusting and modifying your accounting and finance processes to fit the current situation. Consider these five questions:

1. Is your data in sync between your operational, financial, and accounting systems?
2. Do you manage expenses electronically?
3. Do you have a cash flow forecast?
4. Do you report profitability monthly?
5. What are the profit and gross margin of each line of business?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'no,' there's an immediate need to reevaluate your system and processes.

According to analysts, 90% of manual invoice processing costs stem from labor. On average, the cost to prepare an invoice can be as high as $11.50 or more per invoice. For a company producing 1000 invoices a month, that is $138,000 per year. With accounts receivable automation, you can bring the cost closer to the best level (Top – $0.71 per invoice). That's only $8,520 per year – 17x less costly.

5 Have a Single Pane-of-Glass View Into Finance Data

When looking at accounts payable vs accounts receivable, it's important to have **full visibility into all aspects of your financial data**. This includes unbilled goods/services, accounts receivables, effective rates, gross margins, ROI, etc.

Without the ability to accurately measure important financial metrics, you can't make the right business decisions or adjustment benchmarks and goals, especially when we're moving at record speed during these unprecedented times. Utilize our guide, *The Finance KPIs Top TSPs Rely on for Success and How to Use Them in Your Business*, to monitor your finance KPIs closely when they matter most.
Leave no room for surprises. Get in the habit today of a **regular reporting cadence** to ensure your leadership team stays ahead and can respond strategically to the data presented in a timely fashion.

6 Call in the Experts

If you find yourself continuing to struggle in any of these areas, call in the experts. Contact our Business Consulting Department. They're on standby to help you tackle any business challenges you're facing today.

Be sure to check out the rest of our tips and tricks to stabilize, optimize, and maximize your MSP practice during this unprecedented time.

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CHAPTER 5

OPTIMIZING OPERATIONAL **EFFICIENCY**

Chapter 5 Optimizing Operational Efficiency

During a crisis or economic downturn, the difference between floundering and flourishing, sleepless nights and resting easy, chaos and confidence is **preparation**.

It's critical to **invest your time, energy, and focus** into efforts that drive continuous improvement and optimization. Building on top of the best practices you've carefully put in place ensures you're running as efficiently as possible during a time of sweeping change.

In the previous chapters, we've extensively covered the ins and outs of a remote workforce, including how to set up, secure, and optimize it for your business and your customers' businesses. Then we covered strategies and tactics for managing cash flow in a crisis.

Now, let's take a look at how to **maximize operational efficiency** by establishing accountability within your team, managing to outcomes, and the consequences of not putting systems and processes in place that empower your employees to deliver excellent customer service no matter what's happening in the world.

The Inefficiency Pitfall

Studies show that more than half of MSPs today know there's room for operational improvement in their business. In fact, about 40% don't consider themselves anywhere near having optimal efficiencies in their organization.

The truth is, many MSPs hesitate to right the ship (even when they know it's sinking) because the solutions aren't simple to put in place, nor are they easy to switch out once you've standardized on one. It takes time and effort to implement the proper tools and build efficient processes to drive great results. It's a long-term play, and in the short-term, it can seem too costly and disruptive to be worthwhile. However, it's more critical than ever to ensure your **business is running at optimum levels** to drive efficiencies and maximize revenue and cash flow. And although it's probably the furthest thing from your mind today, it comes down to having the right tools.

Chapter 5 Optimizing Operational Efficiency

Here are a few steps (and tools) you can implement today to maximize your business efficiency.

1 Save Money by Eliminating Disparateness

Outside the walls of your business, it can be difficult for your staff to maintain steady levels of productivity. If you've been relying on your own two eyes to monitor performance, what will you do when your team is remote and the systems they use don't talk to each other? You need systems that give you the visibility to ensure your team stays productive and profitable.

Working with disparate systems creates an environment of inefficiency for your technicians. It could be that they're cherry-picking tasks, missing out on billable time, or creating duplicate data entries.

Statistically speaking:

- Duplicate data entry alone can cost you over **25%** of your revenue every year
- The cost of your employees' time to manage legacy systems can amount to **20%** of their day-to-day time and cost you over **$10,000 per employee**
- Industry research indicates that manual data entry and maintenance can incur over **$40,000 in annual costs** associated with human error

Now is the time to **shed unnecessary** operational expenses. Replacing disparate systems for one cohesive system enables you to scale and free resources tied up in managing legacy solutions. The costs saved from internal labor and software can amount to $255,151 in three years.

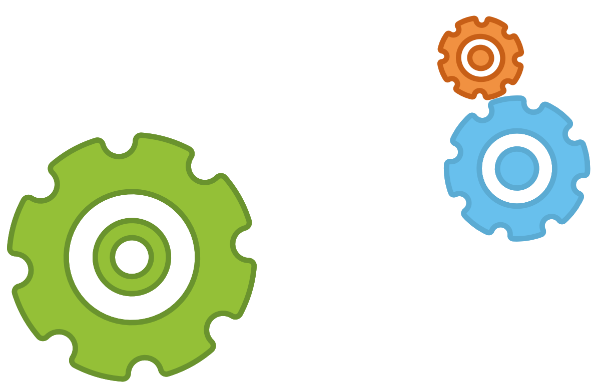
2 Automate Everything

Take a **long, critical look at the systems and processes you have in place** today and determine whether they're driving or hindering your operational efficiency. Be honest, even brutal, in your analysis. Start by looking for the biggest holes draining your business of cash. Ask yourself, are you leveraging automation in these areas?

- Quoting
- Time capture
- Routine device maintenance
- Common issue resolution
- Invoicing

Dealing with a lack of automation may have been sustainable when all employees were in the office, but with everyone working remotely, **it will severely impact your business.**

Let's begin with quoting. If your sales team is generating quotes manually instead of leveraging quote and proposal automation, it will become increasingly challenging to grow your existing business and bring on new business. According to an independent study by Forrester Consulting, customers averaging quote creation at two hours less per quote equates to a salesperson potentially saving 10 hours a week just creating five quotes. During times of crisis, it's important not only to make sure your technicians are operating efficiently. Don't forget about your sales representatives. When they're empowered to close deals quickly (particularly when times are tough), it will only benefit your cash flow.



Revenue is lost when **time isn't accurately accounted for**. A tech's time is best spent helping clients with technical issues. So, when a tech gets busy resolving multiple client requests, the last thing they think about is correctly tracking their time. A few minutes here and there might not seem like a lot, but at the end of the month, those minutes become several hours of unbillable time and lost revenue. The top business automation solutions **automate the tracking of every minute of your technicians' day**. Whether billable or non-billable hours, you'll have the insight on how techs spend their time—and time is seamlessly carried over to invoicing, so your clients get accurate, detailed invoices every month.

By automating routine maintenance and the resolution of common issues, organizations estimated that they shortened engineers' involvement by 60%, allowing them to **invest more time in high-values tasks**, and thus, increasing revenue. They easily average between 400-500 endpoints per technician, allowing them to take on more customers without hiring more personnel. By implementing automated maintenance and monitoring, they've decreased their per-seat cost and can command a higher price, allowing them to average more than 70% margin for their managed services.

> *With ConnectWise Manage and ConnectWise Automate, we can manage efficiency within .02%. Time is 100% accounted for, and utilization is up to 95%.* —GREG BAZAR, *President, Simpatico System*

It's obvious that investing in an RMM tool that fully automates the day-to-day tasks of your technicians is highly beneficial to you and your teams. However, it can be difficult throughout this time to pull someone away from their daily duties to invest this additional time in configuring and improving an additional tool. For this reason, there are ways to take advantage of machine learning and other MSPs utilizing an RMM tool to configure and manage your instance utilizing an outsourced approach. This allows you to **get all of the benefits** of a fully set up and managed RMM without having to invest the time.

3 Accurately Measure Resource Utilization

Resource utilization refers to how your company uses its human resources. How much time does your team spend on tasks that generate revenue compared to non-billable tasks? An average utilization rate for a typical MSP is 50 to 60%; however, best-in-class companies come closer to 80%—and 80% utilization can equate to an **additional $50,000 in revenue a year**. Take a few minutes to calculate the price you're paying by not having best-in-class utilization with our free calculator.

ConnectWise Manage® has the features you need to automate tasks, increase billable time, and improve your utilization rate. Whether you don't have an effective dispatch strategy, your techs are failing to track their time properly, or workers aren't taking thorough notes on jobs, ConnectWise Manage can help. With ConnectWise Manage, you can **easily and accurately track** where your techs are spending their time, rather than relying on them to tell you, ensuring you bill for every minute spent servicing customers.

How to Calculate Utilization

- ✓ Each month, track the amount of time your employees spend on billable vs. non-billable projects
- ✓ Record the number of clients your team handles, and the number of projects they complete, on a monthly basis
- ✓ Take your team's total utilized time (billable hours) and divide it by the total amount of time they worked

4 Hit Your SLAs

SLA compliance measures how often you hit your service level agreements (SLAs). The average rate for service requests that meet the SLA is 80% or more; best in class is an impressive 99.999%. You may feel the need to adjust your SLAs during this time; however, it's important to make sure you still meet client expectations.

Now isn't the time to rely on your gut to make major business decisions, yet that's where we find ourselves when we don't have complete visibility. **Without leveraging business analytics**, you could inadvertently steer your company in the wrong direction. Implementing a data management tool with your professional services automation (PSA) tool simplifies the tracking, analyzing, and reporting of KPIs, including SLA tracking. BrightGauge®, a ConnectWise solution, keeps a constant eye on your ConnectWise Manage KPIs through data dashboards with real-time updates that guide you in making data-driven decisions.

5 Scale Responsibly

The whole world is working remote, and not simply working, but juggling things during their workday that they're not used to. Spouses and partners are home, kids are learning virtually, animals need to be walked, the housekeeper isn't an 'essential service.' This change in workday pattern is causing workers to change their normal working schedule, starting work early, breaking during the day, and working late into the night. **Are you prepared to provide coverage outside of your normal 9-5 contract?**

In addition, ticket volume is up as clients try to connect to home printers, VPN into corporate networks, use remote desktop solutions, and more. One MSP said its ticket volume was up 45%! Most MSPs are struggling to handle the increased volume.

It's a tough time to bring on new resources, yet you don't want to burn out your current employees. When thinking through how you'll keep up with the increased volume and increased service hours, another option to consider outside of simply automation is partnering with an outsourced NOC and Help Desk. The true benefit to you and your team is the **ability to increase the number of endpoints each technician can manage and still maintain a typical day-to-day routine.**

As stated above, we don't want to inundate or burn out our techs. A typical NOC can increase the technician to endpoint ratio, on average, 50%. When compared to the outsourced help desk, it's double! When we consider the average technician today manages up to 300 endpoints, **that's over 600 endpoints with the help desk assistance.** This allows an MSP managing 2000 endpoints from seven techs down to four and saves over $180,000 annually ($60k average salary). This decrease in cost puts you in a much more financially stable situation and frees up extra cash for other demands.

6 Quickly Fulfill Customer Requests

In times of low product availability and the urgency of client requests, you need to be able to see the availability and price of products quickly. Quote and proposal automation solutions, such as ConnectWise Sell®, give you real-time access to product availability and pricing from top vendors—including Cisco, Dell, and HP—so you don't have to spend time calling every vendor and can be sure you're getting the lowest price.

Additionally, it's important to make the process as easy as possible for prospects. Electronic signature and ordering within ConnectWise Sell give clients a way to quickly sign off on the quote and lets you place orders directly with top distribution integration partners, like D&H, Ingram Micro, Tech Data, and Synex. You can also pull in serial numbers and tracking information right into ConnectWise Manage.

The quote is automatically generated and sent to the client, and when the client signs the quote, the info then flows back into the ConnectWise Manage opportunity. The workflow in ConnectWise Sell places the order, creates a PO with serial numbers and tracking information, and passes the information back to the procurement module in ConnectWise Manage, **saving hours of time.**

If you have the right systems and processes in place, that electronic approval will kick off the process of procurement, updating the system, and getting the right team members involved to service the client.

What's Next

COVID-19 will undoubtedly force the world to redefine 'normal,' which makes it even more important to take steps to **make your business as resilient as possible.** After all, your team is like an extension of your family, and we all want to protect our families, especially in difficult times. Following these steps to drive efficiencies and optimization in your business will help you be in a better financial position when challenging times like these arise.

Check out the rest of our tips for stabilizing, optimizing, and maximizing your practice during an economic downturn.

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CHAPTER 6

BUILDING STRONG CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

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The reality of today's environment is that your clients are actively looking at all expenses and cutting where they can. You're very likely doing the same in your business, so you understand. But how do you make sure you're not on the chopping block? By **demonstrating that you provide a service that's essential to the operations** of their business.

We all have a unique opportunity to go above and beyond to help our clients, prospects, and the industry as a whole through this difficult time. The following are five things you can do during this crisis to help ensure you come out on the other side with your client base intact.

1 Provide Training for the New Remote Workforce

For many clients and employees, this is their **first exposure to working from home**. They don't even know what VPN means, let alone how to use it to access their corporate network. Along with the security awareness training you're setting up (as discussed in Chapter 2), take some time to put together virtual training to help your customers get their employees up to speed fast, including:

- Remote desktop access
- Communication apps
- Video conferencing tools
- Accessing the corporate network
- How to submit a support ticket

Our 18 Things to Make Your Remote Work Secure checklist provides a takeaway that they can keep on hand to remind them of important to-dos.

2 Ensure Your Customers' Employees Have Everything They Need to Work Remotely

You're on the front lines of making sure your clients can continue to work, which means **ensuring they have the tools and equipment they need** to work remotely.

Take some time to review the equipment your clients have on hand. Is there anything missing? Are there machines close to warranty expiration that could cause a problem over the next 30 days? Could software be updated to make machines work more efficiently? As we discussed in Chapter 3, making sure software and operating systems are updated is key to ensuring a secure environment. ConnectWise Manage makes it simple to keep track of an accurate inventory for all your clients. **Go the extra mile** and ensure your customers are set up to successfully work from home—even on machines you may not have set up.

With your workforce transitioning to 100% remote, it's more important now than it ever was to ensure everyone on the team has access to the information they need to provide a seamless customer experience. The last thing you want to be doing is scrambling around for information and frustrating the client in the process. With proper documentation, an MSP can better manage client infrastructures, devices, applications, web services, passwords, knowledge base, and more. All techs can follow the same guidelines and rely on systems rather than individuals.

3 Keep Your Clients' Employees Productive

The best way to keep employees productive is to ensure their equipment always runs at peak performance. The right RMM tool can help.

The top RMM tools enable you to decrease client downtime, proactively monitoring the activity of the devices you manage so you can **resolve issues before they impact network or device performance**. Having an RMM tool that also allows you to automate the resolution of discovered issues creates even more value. You stop small issues before they become larger problems, and it's done without human intervention—a win-win for you and your clients.

Another important factor is **understanding all the devices connecting to your clients' networks**. With almost all your managed end users working remotely, the chances of Sally using her personal computer that hasn't seen an update in two years to access the network are high, especially after your stellar remote workforce training. An RMM tool like ConnectWise Automate allows you to discover new devices that access the network and automatically deploy agents to ensure those devices meet the network standards you've developed. And when you integrate ConnectWise Automate with ConnectWise Manage, that data is passed into ConnectWise Manage to automatically update your customer agreement with the new device, keeping your contracts and billing up to date.

Keep in mind that your clients are likely working longer hours while at home or working flexible hours to account for childcare. Are you accounting for additional coverage? In a time when it's hard to take on more staff, our help desk services can help pick up the slack with 24/7 coverage.

Finally, you must **keep systems secure**. Just because your clients are working from home doesn't mean those patches take care of themselves. In fact, effective patch management is even more critical than ever, with hackers actively targeting unpatched VPNs, according to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

With an RMM tool like ConnectWise Automate, you can easily manage patches across multiple machines, automate approvals, set policies for Microsoft® and third-party software, and more to keep your clients secure. Or, for a more hands-off approach, the entire patching process can be handed off to the ConnectWise Command®, formerly a Continuum solution, NOC Team to manage for you, allowing you to keep customers secure and invest time in higher ROI tasks.

> *Proactive monitoring leads to fewer systems experiencing issues or crashes, leading to a 20% reduction in the number of tickets*.*

**Commissioned Forrester Consulting Total Economic Impact Study*

4 Over Communicate

Now more than ever, **your clients need to hear from you**. Make time to call them and see how they're doing. And don't simply ask about their IT needs; get personal. Let them know that you're here to help them through this crisis, that you depend on them as much as they depend on you. **Now's the time to build relationships that will last.**

After you've spoken with every customer, keep in touch with them via email. Here are some ideas to help your messages stay relevant:

- Ensure they know how to get in touch with you (they can use the ConnectWise Customer Portal as their one-stop shop for all communications and even check on ticket statuses themselves), how to submit a ticket, and any temporary changes to your SLA
- Email how-to videos or other tips for remote work
- Send fun suggestions about how they can stay connected with each other during this time using technology

It's also important that you update the automated response that's sent when your clients submit a ticket. Don't have one? It's easy to set up in ConnectWise Manage. Are there changes to your hours or to the way you'll respond to tickets? What about SLAs? This is your chance to set expectations for the customer, especially if they're used to a certain level of service that in today's environment has shifted.

Finally, **be responsive**. Don't let an email or ticket go unanswered for any length of time. If something will take longer than normal, communicate that, so clients aren't left wondering if you're still around.

5 Don't Forget About Your Employees

As you take the necessary steps to ensure your clients are set up for success, don't forget to **check in with your team regularly**. We're all in this unfamiliar and stressful environment together. And while they may not need the same amount of care transitioning to remote work as your clients do, you should still take steps to make sure your employees also have the equipment and skills they need to navigate uncharted territory.

After all, they're on the front lines working with your customers directly. Take the time to **make sure their morale is high**. Try setting up virtual game nights or happy hours. If you've created a culture of responsibility and accountability and made sure your employees know you care about them too, that feeling of togetherness and confidence will ripple through their conversations with your customers and prospects, **resulting in stellar service delivery experiences** and lasting customer relationships.

Check out the other chapters for steps to keep your business and your customers secure, as well as the rest of our playbook for tips to stabilize, optimize, and maximize your practice during an economic downturn.

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CHAPTER 7

COVID-19 RESOURCES TO **HELP YOUR BUSINESS**

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Chapter 7 COVID-19 Resources to Help Your Business

As COVID-19 impacts business operations and influences government policies, we're here to help you navigate it all. Things are changing at a rapid pace, and we want to **ensure you have the most up-to-date information** to continue running your business, including information around:

- Small business relief assistance programs
- Legislative updates
- Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act (FMLA+)
- Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act
- Tax Credits for Paid Leave – Employer Benefits
- Small Business Association (SBA) Paycheck Protection Program

Check out our Legislative Hub, dedicated to providing regularly updated, educational information on legislative measures and how they might impact your business, as well as other resources aimed to support SMB operations.

Conclusion

We've given you a lot to think about in this playbook, and you may still feel overwhelmed. This virus has forced you into the deep end, but you are still here. We know you've probably had to make some tough choices to protect your business and will likely have to make some more before this is over.

You are fighting through the day-to-day, and **we are here to fight with you**. Stabilizing your business, optimizing for efficiency, and maximizing opportunity during an economic downturn is easier said than done. We will be posting new insights and resources on our COVID Resource Hub regularly. Be sure to take advantage of all these resources to help you through this time.

Another important thing to think of is **staying connected to the community**. There is a network of MSPs out there right now going through the same struggles are you are. Being able to come together (virtually, of course) to take advantage of the best practices that have been uncovered by other MSPs throughout this situation and brainstorm how to get through these times is essential.

If you are a ConnectWise partner, the Partner Success team is here to help you utilize the ConnectWise products to their fullest extent. Whether you want to discuss product best practices or work through elevating your business processes, the Partner Success team is available to help you.