

Communicating With Deskless Workforce



Introduction

The Present State of Deskless Workforce

Google estimated that up to 80 percent of the global workforce comprises of deskless workers however, they have far been overlooked by the technology industry both in terms of creating companies that can address their needs as well as funding for the purpose. This trend took seats for a very long time but, this is about to change (1).

Deskless workers are those rarely work in an office or at a computer and in place these workers spend most of their time travelling between different work sites. Industries having the most population of such employees include hospitality, construction, communications, transportation, and manufacturing. As a matter of fact, a vast majority of the workforce in the US today is deskless and this number is on the rise.

According to IDC, the number of mobile workers will account for approximately three-quarters (72.3%) of the total US workforce by 2020.

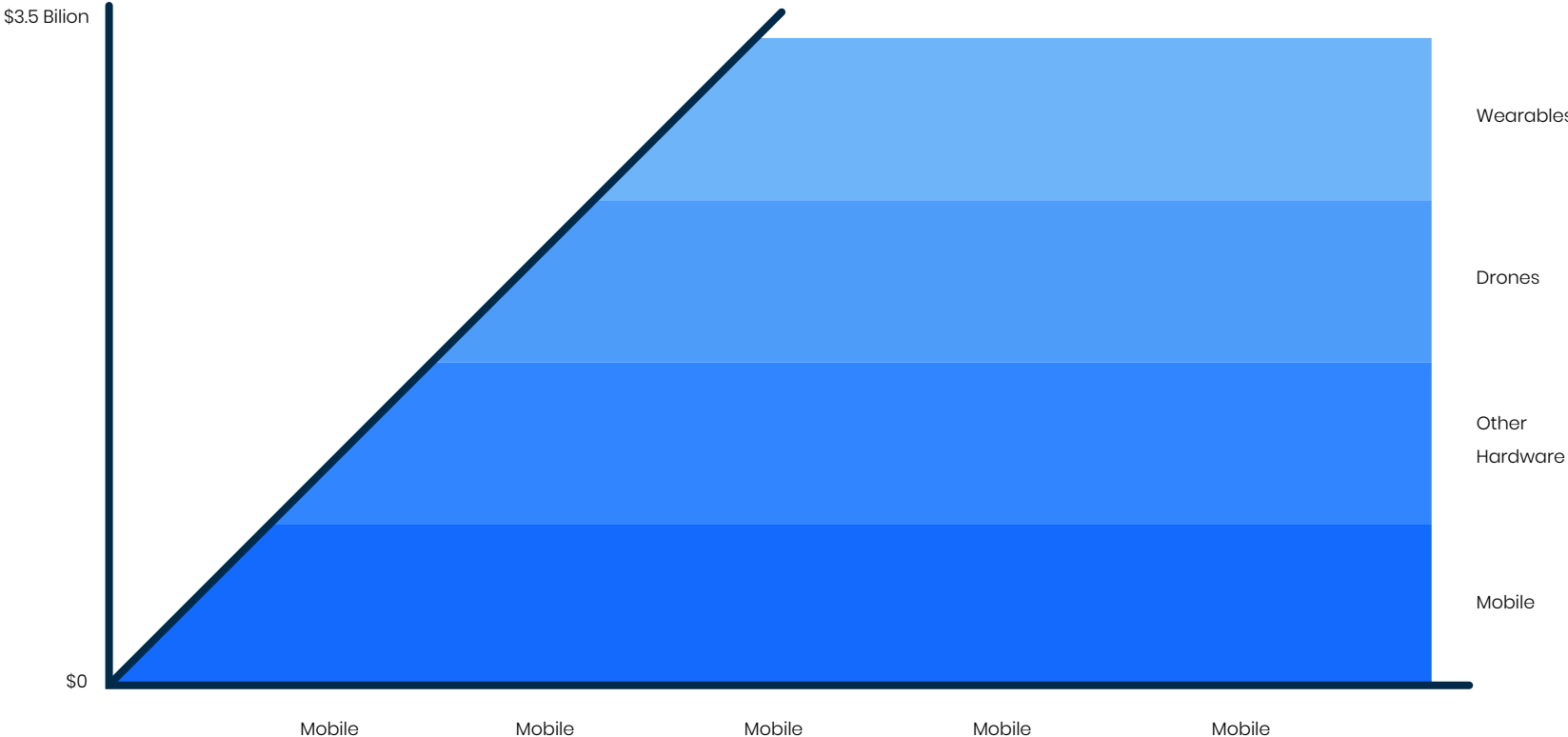
Deskless workforce seriously lacks the digital transformation strategy. Desk workers are equipped with ERP systems and CRM packages whereas, deskless workforce merely has a pen and paper. From the hefty amount which companies spend annually over software, a very small ratio is allocated to support deskless workers.

A significant majority of decision-makers have realized the real and increasing need to empower deskless workers through technology. As a matter of fact, nearly 100 percent transportation companies, 83 percent of retail companies and 91 percent of manufacturing companies are planning to increase expenditure over deskless technology to up to 31 percent. The purpose of this are mainly associated with increased productivity, improve employee experience as well as cost savings (1).

Introduction

Deskless Funding Starting to Gain Momentum

Deskless technology has captured multiple waves of venture funding as the category has evolved to take advantage of new platforms. It is still early, but we may be seeing an inflection point in the future.





Increased Investment Makes Way for Entrepreneurs

Existing and new technologies have been deployed in industries heavily relying over deskless workforce providing entrepreneurs the opportunity for developing solutions so that deskless workers can improve their way of working.

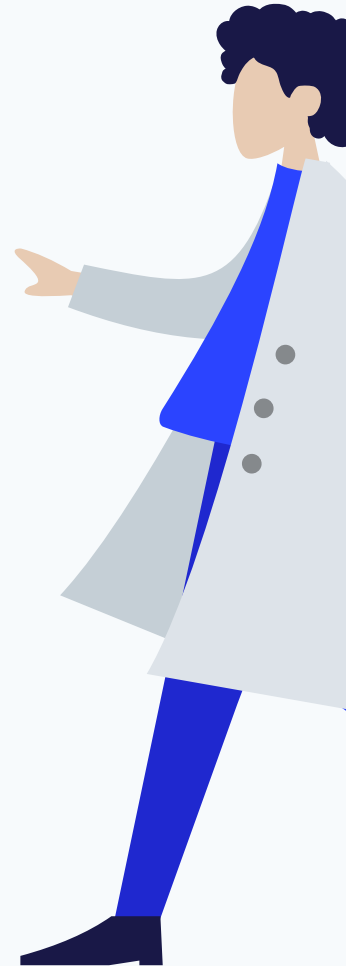
Although, only 1 percent of venture investment goes to companies that provide technology for deskless workers currently, however, this category has recently started to gain several waves of venture funding as it will benefit from the new platform like wearable or drones. In the recent few years, many US-based startups who have attractive offers for deskless workforce have nearly netted \$3.5 billion in funding (2).

How to Effectively Tackle This Opportunity

The opportunity to fulfill the unmet needs of deskless workers is most likely to be the largest to be in decades. If the size of the population is a worthy proxy, then the technology for deskless workers can be 4x the actual size of the current technology market which almost completely relied upon desk workers.

Entrepreneurs are quite eager to seize this opportunity;

however, prior to taking this challenge, they should be completely aware of the fact that creating a company for deskless workforce will be quite different from creating one which is for traditional desk workers. If you are an entrepreneur and is thinking to take this challenge up, following are some aspects that need to be considered closely (3).



Communication with Deskless Employees

Deskless workforce may not be working as traditional employees in offices however, they do have clear collaboration and communication needs similar to that of their counterpart workforce. Whether it is to assign tasks across teams, to relay any question back to the office or to coordinate with other deskless employees, communication is very important in order to carry operations efficiently and smoothly.

Deskless employees do not communicate in the same manner like employees working in a conventional office however, the ability to timely and reliably share information is as critical to their success as any other employee. As a matter of fact, the current technology is unable to effectively meet their needs of communication without a computer (4).

Deskless workers spent their entire day helping customers in stores or on the field, working over factory floors or are busy in making deliveries. On a particular day, these deskless employees may move from one place to another helping their co-workers and customers with different jobs.

Top reason for investing in Deskless Tehnology

As mobile technology is evolving on a rapid pace more and more organizations are investing in implementing creative ways through which deskless employees can communicate effectively and transfer information which keeps them engaged while at work. Since mobile devices are already in the workers' pockets companies have found a way through which deskless workers can communicate with each other over a global level. Many organizations across the world are increasingly leveraging mobile technology for engaging and paving effective ways of communication for deskless employees.

In this way, they are more connected with each other and are better aligned.



Increasing use of Mobile Amongst Workforce

Previously computers used to be almost the size of the room, if a factory worker or a cashier had a personal computer, it would make no sense; however, now there are many computers that are of the size of hands and perhaps, even smaller (2).



Whatsapp to Fight the Bulletin Board

The fact is that companies with a high share of mobile workers usually communicate in a very traditional way. They publish information from the top to the bottom, analogically and centrally. DECT telephones and flyers are almost as innovative as other tools such as the bulletin board or job schedules where corporate news is displayed centrally. Processes are ineffective and the dissemination of information and knowledge transfer are not guaranteed. It simply lacks a simple means of communication adapted to these cases.

But employees can help themselves: they bring their own devices and mobile apps to their workplace. The dangers of this Shadow IT for the company are well known. But such practices are also negative for users when conversations are scattered across different chat groups and channels and the boundary between private and professional life is blurred. The company has no opportunity to inform all employees because there is no central registry.

UCC solutions such as Skype for Business, Cisco UCC (Jabber) and Unify Openscape Fusion can provide knowledge workers with added value. But for employees who, because of their profession, are mobile and difficult to reach, these solutions are inadequate. They can be used on most devices but are mainly based on the use of a computer: they often require a business account and a professional email address and are more suitable for a large screen.

For non-desktop workers, many of these features are useless and are simply too expensive for the company. Solutions like Slack and Microsoft Teams also focus mainly on knowledge workers. There are also problems with Whatsapp, which offers an insufficient guarantee of strict security standards or applicable equal obligations. The flow of information is also difficult to control. Practice shows, for example, that former employees continue to receive confidential information because of negligence because no one controls the participants in the groups.

An Application Mobilizes Mobile Employees

CGE, a Swedish logistic company part of the Alwex group that runs Jetpack couriers and transportation faced a big challenge when they should reach their employees. The staff is spread over the Nordics and in constant move. The web based Intranet was not accessible and failed to reach the staff. One of the problems was that none of the employees had e-mails. CGE now relies on the mobile app platform from Nordic startup Teamvate.

90% of the information concerning sales figures, inventory, offers and anniversaries are distributed via the Teamvate Platform and have thus replaced the Intranet in many services. The platform gives CGE a branded app on iOS and Android that increases the employee branding and also made the on-boarding very easy. According to their own words, employees feel better informed and executives say they know better the needs of their employees and communicate in a more targeted way. What's more: CGE has clearly been able to increase its customer satisfaction in all divisions of the store because employees have been able to communicate quickly and easily between themselves and management via the branded employee app.

96%

Of executive cite a lack of colaboration or ineffective communication for workplace failures



Employees using social business tools, including mobile apps have seen a

96%

increase in connectedness



Only

11%

of businesses cite creating mobile apps for internal communications as a digital priority in 2014



In addition to Teamvate, other suppliers have discovered the segment of employees who are difficult to reach and put on the market a corresponding solution. The box below shows the current messaging solutions in their different forms.

1. Choice of solution:

The first step is a needs analysis: what are the challenges of internal communication, what is the target group and what goals do you want to achieve? The different messaging services stand out for different advantages. Beekeeper, for example, is suitable for employee engagement, Threema Work is suitable for particularly sensitive data, Team One is recommended for project management. Unify circuit can be used in combination with existing telephony solutions and Microsoft Staffhub integrates with O365, but is still primarily a planning tool for job scheduling.

2. Implementation of the devices:

Do employees have the appropriate infrastructure available? When private devices are used, companies should compensate employees financially. As an alternative, companies can offer their employees smartphones with offers such as Mobility for Work. Costs can be controlled and better distributed.

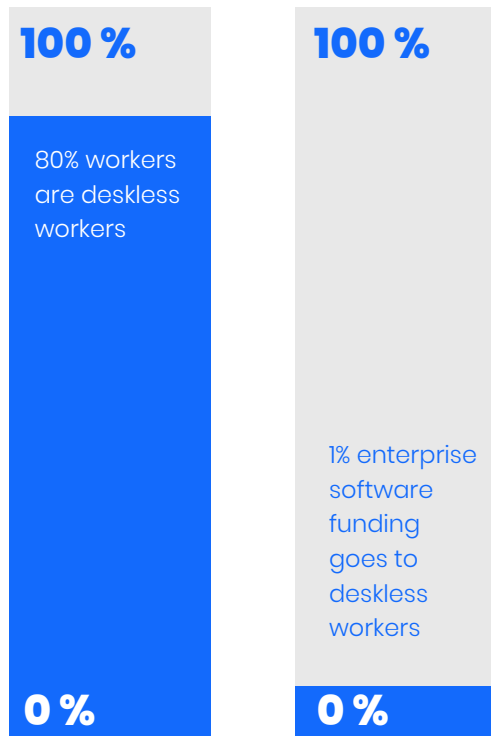
3. Introduction and implementation of the solution:

In order for the new tool to be really used by employees, it must be launched in a coherent way, for example, during a dedicated event and training. Relevant content and varied communication measures motivate employees to install the solution and use it actively. Access and use are evaluated for the first time after a few weeks and further action is taken if necessary.

4. New means of communication are changing the corporate culture.

The follow-up of this process by professional coaching is recommended as is the early involvement of HR and communication managers. A global approach allows the company to improve the collaboration and the level of information of its employees who are otherwise difficult to reach. It promotes their motivation, commitment and identification with the company.

80 % workforce are deskless workers who only get 1% enterprise software funding



Challenges of Communication for Deskless Employee Engagement

The current state of employee engagement for deskless employees is quite disappointing and weak internal strategies used for communicating have a very major role to play. According to a study conducted in 2018, only 10 percent employees develop a feeling of being truly connected with the organization whereas, 84 percent reported that the internal communication strategies are not enough and the information provided on part of the management is inadequate (5). As a result, organizations that use communication to facilitate employee engagement can face challenges including:

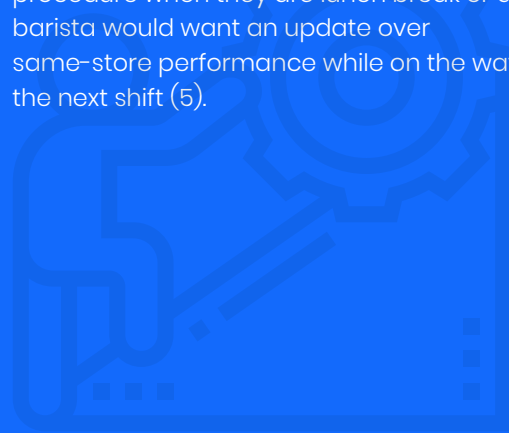
The one-size-fits-all model is not useful every time

Communication strategy implemented for on-site workers is different from that of deskless workforce. For example, email is a staple for all white-collar employees in a company whereas; blue-collar employees do not have a corporate email ID. Similar to this, employees who are on-field or deskless employees mainly in manufacturing or healthcare settings have limited access to email services and as such, organizations should look for other means of communication to get engaged with the non-desk workforce (5).



Mobile-based internal communication is challenging

Mobile is considered to be a magical device when it comes to communicating with remote employees. However, an off-the-shelf and non-customized application which is functioned to broadcast content at regular intervals is not enough. For example, floor employees would require an updates safety procedure when they are lunch break or a barista would want an update over same-store performance while on the way to the next shift (5).



Communication clutter can disrupt employee engagement

According to surveys, employees consider that management communicates only 'good news' which eventually means that there is a gap between the intent and the actual requirements of deskless workforce. Personal and intuitive communication is important where sense of care and value should be delivered effectively (5)

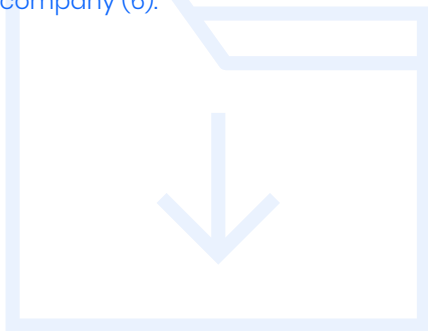
Effective Communication Strategies for Engaging Deskless Workforce



Create a digitized workplace with easy file sharing

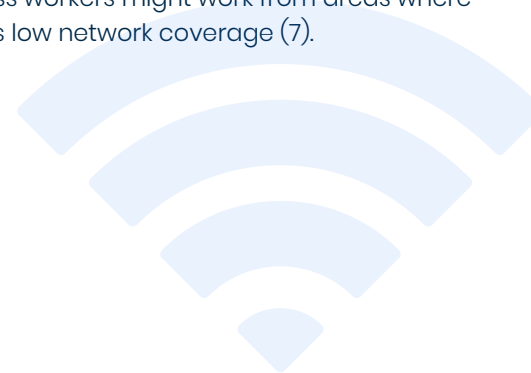
As mentioned previously, deskless workers do not have corporate email IDs which is why digitized workplaces are effective for organizations that are seeking ways to use internal communication strategies for employee engagement. There are several collaborative software like Workplace by Facebook, Microsoft Teams or Slack.

These applications are compatible with workers that are outside the organization. Additionally, these applications make file sharing an easy task and employees can share daily reports and other useful resources with the company (6).



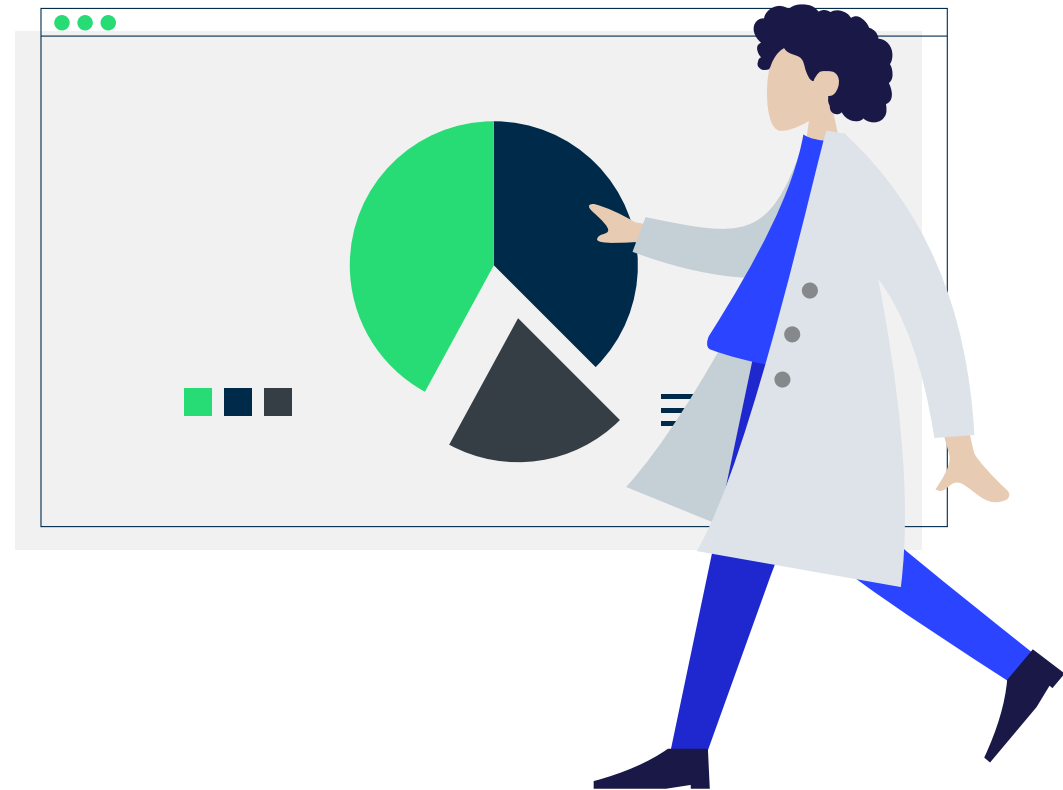
Develop an OS-agnostic mobile employee application with offline support

While, BYOD is rendered as the best practice in deskless employee experience, more often, these workers use their personal devices for professional reasons for scheduling meetings, creating checklists as well as sharing day-to-day queries. A mobile application which supports every OS or device will help employee, regardless of their location, the ability to communicate over the platform. Additionally, the offline support can help in drafting and scheduling messages as many deskless workers might work from areas where there is low network coverage (7).



Regular checks through surveys and one-on-one meetings

In order to determine whether a communication strategy for employee engagement is effective, it is important that its impact is reviewed constantly. There are many ways to get this done – through employee survey applications which allow deskless workforce to give in feedback related to workplace initiatives and video conferencing software which can initiate a direct line of communication (7).



Key Takeaways

Field staff can remain connected with the management

Helps in achieving better employee engagement via mobile

Receiving information anywhere and anytime directly from the remotest workplaces

Improves productivity of field service employees.

Frontline workers have updated information whenever they need.

Empowering deskless employees to share workplace expertise with their team

Ability to convert context to content in a meaningful way.



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