

World Report:

Your Essential Guide to Virtual Meetings and Distance Learning after Covid-19

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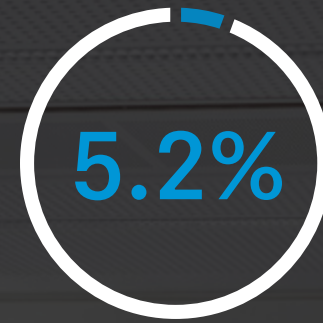
A World in Transition

Businesses and higher education institutions worldwide currently find themselves walking a unique tightrope. The COVID-19 pandemic rages in some regions and has calmed down in others, but all over, many such organisations are attempting to resume some version of standard operations.

With global GDP projected to contract 5.2% by 2020's end¹ – attributable to business closures and drops in both productivity and morale – companies and schools think they have no choice but to try partial or “phased” re-openings. But in doing so, they must respect the health concerns² and personal comfort of workers and students while also following pertinent regulations.

Sensible remote conferencing and distance learning practices – with support from state-of-the-art business communications tools – are essential to help ensure future success.

¹<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/08/the-global-economic-outlook-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-changed-world> | ²<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>



Global GDP is projected to contract 5.2% by 2020's end.

Trend Development Pre- and Post-COVID



Most if not all of the emerging trends and technological developments in remote conferencing existed before the pandemic, as did many of the problems they aimed to solve. Research from multiple sources suggests as much:^{3,4} Poorly organised meetings were often ineffective, costing budgets, resources and workers dearly.

Beyond that, the broader move toward increased globalisation in both the enterprise space and educational arena meant organisations were more spread out than ever before.

This only made technology allowing stable communication via remote conferencing – and reliably high-quality audio – that much more essential.

COVID-19's arrival made many quickly realise the **value of remote communication handled feasibly and at scale**. It's just as important to combating the emotional isolation and declining morale among workers and students as it is to improving any bottom-line key performance indicator.

³<https://www.bain.com/insights/books/time-talent-energy/> | ⁴<https://meeting-report.com/>

Shifting Norms

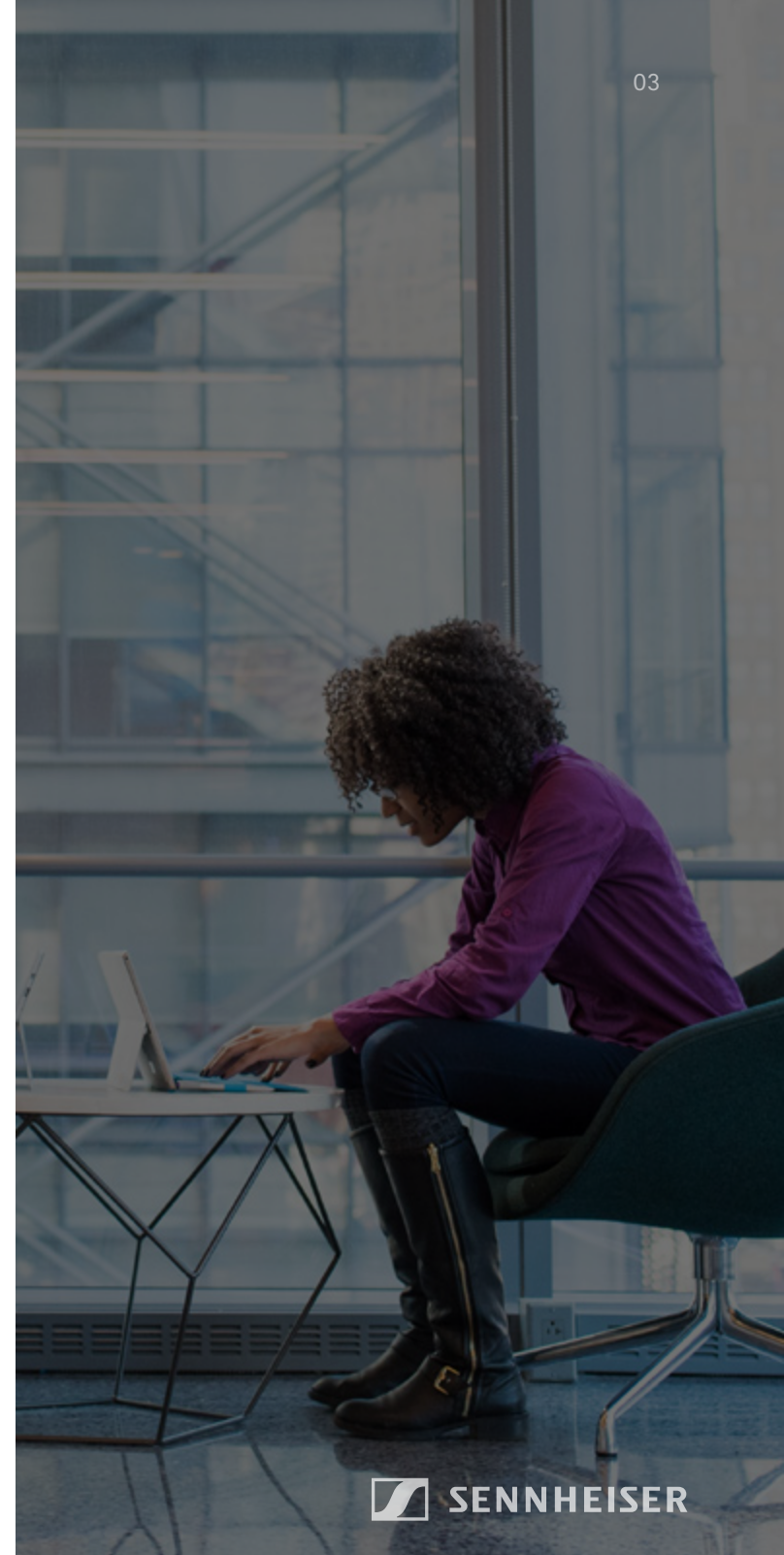
COVID-19 has fallen back in certain parts of the world while running newly rampant in others, keeping us in this uncertain in-between space.

Some businesses remain fully remote. Others alternate portions of staff for office-based and home work on different days. Certain companies have returned to work entirely, albeit while employees socially distance and don't travel as they typically would.

Colleges are a somewhat similar mix, though for obvious reasons they are proceeding with re-opening at a slower pace.

But even once campuses are partially or fully open again, the restrictions applicable to businesses will be even more important due to the high volume of human traffic.

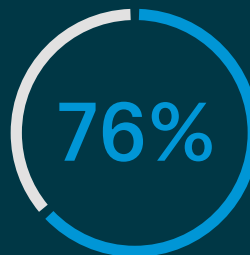
As such, **“blended learning” classes** where half of the students are on-campus and half participate remotely will be common for years to come.



“New Work” for a New World

Much of “working from home” stems from the “New Work” concept philosopher Frithjof Bergmann theorised in 1989.⁵ Bergmann believed productive workers deserved the freedom to arrange their professional obligations round their lifestyle (rather than the opposite).

But remote work isn't for everyone. As COVID-19 showed, forcing it (however justifiably, in this case) can cause significant stress. More pertinently, 76% of HR leaders said their organisations' employees feared productivity declines⁶ due to remote work. To best meet the challenges of such disconnection, it's critical to adopt **remote conferencing practices and tools** equally beneficial to all parties involved, with special attention paid to the primary space from which the conversation originates.



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⁵<https://en-us.sennheiser.com/businessblog-new-work-advantages-disadvantages> | ⁶<https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/with-coronavirus-in-mind-are-you-ready-for-remote-work/>

The Dawn of “New Learning”?

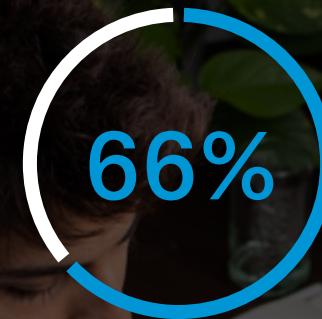
If work-from-home arrangements aren't everyone's cup of tea, it stands to reason distance learning would also have its opponents. And as previously mentioned, the sheer size of even small colleges means schools can't re-open as fast as businesses.

Blended and distance learning thus will be more necessary than ever even after there's been significant re-opening at universities. While this is partially because of likely budget constraints and travel restrictions,⁷ it also serves to accommodate students still wary of crowds.

A significant majority of universities and colleges (66%) planned to implement a combination of socially distant on-campus learning and online elements for those preferring distance education in the fall 2020 semester.⁸

Implementing new communication practices and tools, such as **reliably live-streamed, powerful-sounding conferences**, can adroitly bridge the gap between in-person and remote students to make this newly common classroom format as beneficial as possible for all.

⁷<https://er.educause.edu/blogs/2020/5/educause-covid-19-quickpoll-results-it-budgets-2020-2021> | ⁸Aforementioned Educause report



of universities plan to combine socially distanced on-campus learning with online elements in the fall 2020 semester.

Key Considerations for Business Conferencing

54% of HR leaders cited poor technology and IT infrastructure as barriers to effective remote or cross-office communication.⁹ Businesses must buck this trend to achieve success.

But even in countries where COVID-19 is on the decline and businesses are re-opening, such as New Zealand¹⁰ and Italy,¹¹ the disease hasn't disappeared and retains a case-fatality rate above 10% in multiple G7 economies (France, Italy, Spain, the U.S. and U.K.).¹²

With only **23% of businesses worldwide** planning to implement high-level disease tracing via contact tracing and/or workforce location tracking,¹³ proper hygiene is imperative, for common sense and compliance with health regulations.

This means limited contact with all surfaces tangential to in-office conferencing hardware and software, so a solution allowing this – i.e., a ceiling-mounted system – makes for an optimal workaround.

⁹Aforementioned Gartner report | ¹⁰<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/06/20/new-zealand-coronavirus-migrants-borders/> | ¹¹<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-italy/a-beautiful-day-in-italy-as-shops-and-bars-finally-reopen-idUSKBN22U11R> | ¹²<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality> | ¹³<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/crisis-solutions/covid-19/global-cfo-pulse.html>



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Key Considerations for Business Conferencing

With operational spending down for organisations worldwide,¹⁴ even partially re-opened businesses aren't travelling to visit partners or clients anytime soon.

This necessitates remote conferencing not only for functional reasons but also for relationship management. Maintaining these bonds between partners, longtime customers and personnel at satellite offices is critical to any organisation.

Regular conferences with reliable video and crystal-clear audio can help achieve this goal. Using microphone setups equipped with flexible beamforming technology can guarantee fidelity as team members speak from multiple zones of the room¹⁵ and move around. Compatibility with multiple video clients like Zoom and Microsoft Teams is also vital. If staff aren't worried about service quality, meetings will feel loose and authentic – as they should, to help spread team camaraderie regardless of where individual members are.

Classroom Conferencing Best Practices

Hygiene considerations for university classrooms are essentially identical to those of businesses, albeit even more serious. More people are going in and out of classrooms and other facilities than the average office building.

Even for schools doing blended learning with some students at home and others on campus (likely no more than 30 per class¹⁶), uniform practices must be implemented for safety, ranging from social distancing to limitation of contact with classroom surfaces. And for larger rooms, especially those being broadcast by streaming video, conventional hands-free microphones won't have the raw audio power or contactless safety achievable with a ceiling-mounted conference audio solution.



On-campus portions of blended-learning courses will likely have no more than **30** in-person students per class session.

¹⁶<https://campustechnology.com/articles/2020/05/11/11-considerations-for-resuming-in-person-instruction-in-the-covid-19-era.aspx>



Classroom Conferencing Best Practices

Professors must be dynamic in their presentation of curriculum material to truly captivate students and create meaningful learning experiences.

This requires personal dynamism – as well as technology that can capture live lecture audio at the highest quality while also adjusting constantly to sound in the room.

Conference audio solutions equipped with **flexible beamforming technology** not only follow professors as they move, but also effortlessly switch between instructors and students, as questions are asked and discussion grows.

Those attending remotely will not miss a word and feel just as connected to the classroom dialectic as the room's physical occupants – which will be essential for higher education to regain a modicum of normalcy in an eminently unpredictable world.

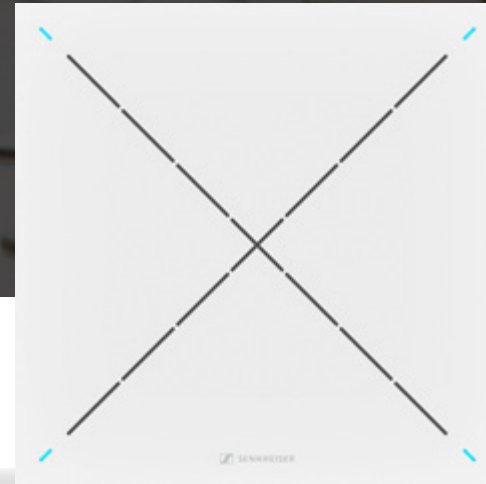


How Sennheiser Can Help

“COVID-19 seismically impacted people’s personal, professional and academic lives worldwide,” explains Sennheiser Business Director Ron Holtdijk.

“Sennheiser audio solutions can bring teams and classrooms together emotionally despite the crisis, bridging the gap between on-site and remote while meeting operational and instructional needs.”

Easily installed and effectively invisible due to its ceiling placement, TeamConnect Ceiling 2 (TCC2) captures audio impeccably to create a safety-conscious, appealing experience for all. The system’s integrated DANTE® digital audio networking solution ensures that output communication gaps are easily bridged. Dante’s award winning audio networking solution uses standard IP networks and affordable Ethernet cabling

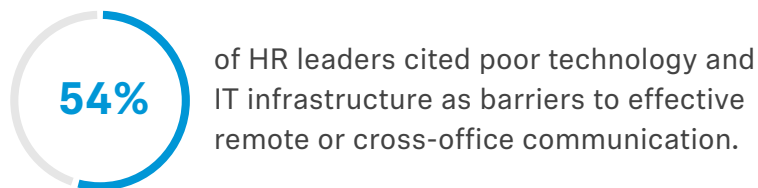


to help deliver world-class audio experiences for events, presentations, and communications. Additionally, Sennheiser Control Cockpit software offers administrators oversight of multiple microphones from one location, limiting physical contact with hardware and mitigating health risks.

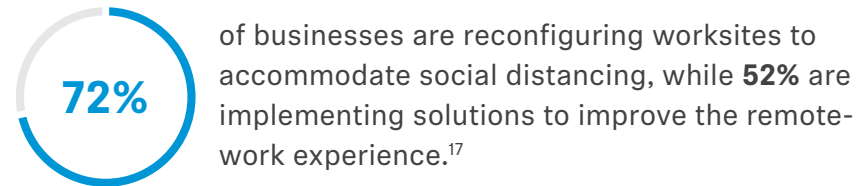
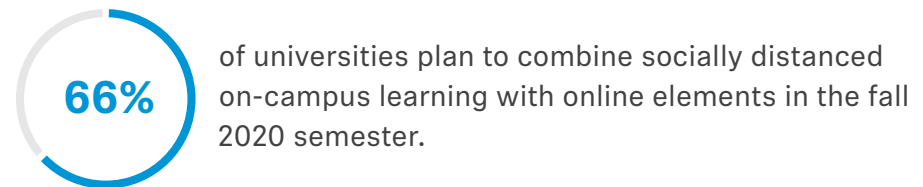
Remote conferences transcend location to bolster bottom-line productivity and effectiveness. But what TCC2 does best is even more important: It helps enterprises and university classes **retain the camaraderie, connection and rich exchange of ideas** that make these settings truly meaningful, memorable experiences.

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a globe-spanning shock to the system, with its tragic personal toll compounded by the economic upheaval it has produced. For many businesses and academic institutions, the shift to fully or partially remote operations has been necessary – and largely successful – but not without its complications:



These complexities have left organisations looking for a middle ground:



High-quality teleconferencing will be essential for ensuring that business plans and curriculum lessons alike are communicated effectively, no matter how far apart on-premise and remote attendees may be. Sennheiser offers both touchless and traditional IT-centric audio solutions to support our valued customers and keep our changing world connected.

¹⁷<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/crisis-solutions/covid-19/global-cfo-pulse.html>



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