LOAD SHEDDING
WRECKS
WORK FROM HOME
STRATEGIES

Across the world, 2020 will be remembered as the year when our way of life changed fundamentally as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Arguably the biggest transformation we have seen over the past six months has been the mass enablement of remote working by companies of all sizes in those sectors where work from home strategies were viable.

The move to a remote workforce proved to be less challenging than many organisations anticipated, partly as a result of the fact that most were already using tools such as video conferencing, and partly due to the speed with which they could transition their applications to the cloud. The biggest test most companies faced during the first few weeks of lockdown was ensuring that the more distributed corporate network was secure, and that staff had access to the connectivity they needed to work.

Fortunately, security has long been a concern for companies, and many already had extensive security solutions in place. Fibre to the Home (FTTH) rollouts, combined with stable mobile data solutions, ensured that connectivity challenges were minimal in most cases. Unfortunately, as lockdown was extended from weeks to months, organisations had to deal with work interruptions as a result of load shedding.

Load shedding is not a new challenge for South African companies, costing the country's economy approximately R60-billion last year according to the CSIR. However, while most organisations have invested in backup power solutions such as generators to ensure that their business can continue to operate when the power goes off, these solutions were implemented in corporate offices, and very few individuals have access to generators or inverters at their homes.

In addition to the frustration of having to try and manage teams and projects spread across different load shedding schedules, companies have had to deal with the fact that load shedding essentially destroys the network.

COSTING
THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY
APPROXIMATELY
R60-BILLION

With employees spread across different geographic locations, using different connectivity solutions, loss of power in one area has a knock-on effect in many others.

Employees using fibre or VDSL connections would need to switch to data connections during load shedding, which could have an impact on security protocols such as signing into the corporate network with a VPN. There would also be an additional cost associated with data usage, which many employees may not be able to accommodate. In some areas, battery theft at cellphone towers is a recurring problem, so people relying on 3G or 4G networks may not be able to access any connectivity during load shedding.

Even if staff are able to connect to the internet, there is no guarantee that they will be able to connect to company data and applications. Many companies use VPNs and IP address configurations as a security measure, which could result in people being shut out of the servers they need to reach. Also, if they don't have high speed connections, people may find that they are unable to save or upload their work, or even get to the documents they need to.

At a time when the majority of the country's knowledge workers are working from home, load shedding has arguably had a more negative effect on productivity than even the initial move to lockdown. As companies look to implement remote working as a more permanent strategy, they are finding that their biggest obstacle is not technology, but access to electricity.

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