Making socially distanced workplaces safe and effective requires use of technology to adapt

At their most basic, workspaces and offices are commercial buildings that provide space for employees to carry out the work that affords them their salary.

However, if we look at the role of offices holistically, then they are so much more than that. They are a place where people feel comfortable and safe to carry out our roles to the best of their abilities, and for the vast majority, there is aspect of social inclusion and belonging afforded within the office.

But with the pandemic still gripping the world, offices have had to adapt. Many have tried to remain open to an extent – some to maintain critical continuity, and in many other cases, to support the metal health of their employees, enabling social interaction, all be it in a reduced and socially distanced capacity. To do this, HR, facilities teams, and office managers across the globe have had to take the social distancing regulations of their respective governments and implements them into an office context.

And this has been no easy feat

The disruption social distancing has caused to our usual office conduct has been considerable. Simple actions we once took for granted, such as making a coffee or collecting a document from the printer are now more complex and require consideration from those overseeing office safety and equipment use.

These concerns are echoed by employees. A recent study from Epson, looking at technology expectations, found that 3 in 5 employees expect that the use of shared devices will need to adapt in post-COVID 19 environments [1], suggesting that these expectations may not be short lived and that what initially looked like temporary adjustments may very well need to be more permanent.

Epson and Green Office Technology have the solution

Fortunately, technology has kept pace with the rapidly changing expectations of our society. Amid this new need to distance, technology has come to the fore to help facilitate a new normal.

One such development is touchless print. Since the birth of the modern office, printers have been a cornerstone of the workplace. In many cases, they act as informal meeting points, much like the watercooler, and have been a place where people discuss and share ideas with colleagues.

But with office protocols rewritten, gathering at a shared printer, and then touching communal surfaces to release a print job have become far from ideal.

Touchless printing technology

Epson's touchless as part of its Epson Print Admin software, allows users to send and release print jobs without having any physical contact with the printer. The printer will authenticate the individual, find the document in the secure queue and then release the user's documents. By using a card to release a print job, it enables users to print their documents only when they are physically in front of the printer – reducing prints left un-retrieved and further reducing touchpoints created by having to search through discarded print outs to find the one required. Confidential information remains secure, costs are reduced, and your organization remains in compliance.

As is often the case with the best technology, it can be adapted when the need arises. Initially developed to help employees with visual disabilities, this touchless solution is now being rolled out to help address the concerns and requirements of the ongoing pandemic. But it is this type of technology that will help us continue to be productive and work safely in shared spaces. And if everyone can be sensible and socially distance themselves, even the causal chats and ideas sharing can still take place around (or at least near to) the printer.

[1] Eco-Values Research, A Research Report for Epson & IRIS