

Asamer Baustoffe quickly adapts to COVID-19

Asamer Baustoffe relies on Citrix during the pandemic

Asamer Baustoffe AG (ABAG) set up home office workspaces for around 250 employees in 48 hours

The setup allowed the building materials manufacturer to keep its business operations going without interruption even after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. With Citrix technologies, employees have access to all applications and data from home and are always available to customers.

The ABAG Group (Asamer Baustoffe AG Gruppe) specialises in high-quality raw and building material solutions with core competencies in concrete and cement. The group now comprises eleven companies with a total of around 450 employees in the core countries of Austria, Slovakia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as adjacent markets.

The main companies are Transportbeton Gesellschaft m.b.H. & Co. Komm. Ges. in Vienna, cement producer CEMMAC a.s. in Slovakia and cement and concrete producer Fabrika cementa Lukavac d.d. in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Asamer Baustoffe AG (ABAG), which is based in Ohlsdorf in Upper Austria, acts as an operational management company and offers shared services to all subsidiaries.

The ABAG Group has decades of experience extracting natural raw materials and manufacturing important building materials. Whether it be tunnelling, building construction, civil engineering or road construction, the company delivers the right concrete or cement of the highest quality for every project.

The challenge: ensuring business continuity

When strict lockdown restrictions took effect in Austria in March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this also impacted business for the ABAG Group. However, work on many construction sites was able to continue in compliance with the relevant distancing and hygiene regulations. Even so, the company was obliged to enable all office employees to work from home as far as possible.



Industry

Construction

Location

Austria

Citrix products

- Citrix Workspace Service

Key Benefits

- ABAG set up home office workspaces for 250 users in 48 hours
- Users have access to all applications and services from home in their digital workspaces
- Sensitive company data is reliably protected by a multi-level security concept
- Provides ability to adjust during disasters, and if issues arise day-to-day
- The company was able to keep its business operations running after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and was always available to customers

“We took the health of our colleagues and customers very seriously from the beginning,” says Christian Katterl, Technical IT Team Leader for ABAG. “We immediately started implementing a workable home office solution. Our goal was to enable all colleagues to keep working as safely and productively as possible.”

The solution: ABAG partners with Citrix Workspace to provide digital workstations

From a technical perspective, the new situation wasn't such a big deal for the IT department. ABAG had been using a Citrix infrastructure for several years to virtually operate desktops and applications in the data centre. The majority of office users had upgraded from PCs to thin clients – business applications like the office software and ERP system were centrally accessible to users by Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops.

“We already had a number of users who used the Citrix solution to access their workspace remotely from home or on the move,” explains Christian Katterl. “What was new to us, though, was the need for almost all of our colleagues to work from home offices – and some of them from private devices.”

Citrix technologies meant the new requirements could be met very quickly. Employees with a private PC or laptop at home just installed the Citrix Workspace app on their end device. A one-off registration gave them immediate access to their digital workspace. The IT department made company notebooks or thin clients accessible to all other employees. They were preconfigured to automatically connect to the Citrix environment.

Home office access to internal IT resources is secured in a number of ways. Citrix Gateway Appliances in the ABAG data centre encrypt all communication. What's more, access is protected by a two-factor authentication based on Google Authenticator. “Here, too, we were able to benefit from the existing Citrix infrastructure,” comments Christian Katterl. “Citrix Gateway provides ‘out of the box’ support for logging in with one-time passwords from Google Authenticator.”

Quick switch to home office

The IT department only needed two days to get 250 colleagues set up with home office workspaces. There was no need to source any additional PCs or notebooks in the process: existing company computers and private end devices completely met the demand.

“It wasn't even necessary to invest in more network bandwidth or hardware in the data centre,” reports Christian Katterl. ABAG had already set up the Citrix infrastructure in such a way that almost all employees could work on the servers at once. Beyond that, the environment was laid out in a fully redundant way and connected to the internet via two different carriers. This meant the additional load caused by the increase in remote access could be easily offset.

“From an administrator's perspective, the fact that we hadn't opted for classic VPN technology was definitely a big advantage,” elaborated Katterl. “It saved us from the time-consuming installation of VPN clients on end devices. At the same time, we were able to avoid the high latencies that often occur when accessing internal resources via VPN.”

“We've struck the right balance between security and user comfort level with the Citrix solution. That's why I'm convinced the work-from-home model will continue to play an important role for our company as time goes on.”

**Christian Katterl
Technical IT Team Leader
Asamer Baustoffe AG**

Users benefit from a reliable user experience

With the Citrix solution, the IT department made sure that users could also work from home in their familiar desktop environment and use all applications and resources as normal. For example, access to network drives is just as efficient and reliable as in the office. With Citrix Files, a component of Citrix Workspace, network drives can be seamlessly integrated into the local desktop without sensitive data leaving the data centre. “Citrix also allows for secure printing in a home office,” points out Christian Katterl. “With a VPN solution, we would not have been able to integrate private network printers without risking a security breach.”

The ABAG Group employees were ready to work productively and handle all upcoming tasks and customer requests promptly from day one. Thanks to unrestricted access to all IT resources, projects could continue as planned. Video calls via Microsoft Teams are now scheduled for meetings and conferences. “Colleagues who haven’t worked in a home office before are particularly surprised by how well everything works,” explains the Technical IT Team Leader. “The Citrix solution has a lot to do with that since there aren’t any dips in performance. Real-time applications like video chats are also smoothly displayed on the virtual desktop without the need for very high bandwidth requirements.”

Users benefit from a reliable user experience

Senior managers at the ABAG Group ultimately don’t have to worry that the home office strategy comes at the expense of data security. Since users only work with virtual applications and desktops, sensitive company data always stays on the servers in the data centre. The data there is automatically backed up on an ongoing basis. The upshot is that defective end devices cannot cause any unintentional data loss. Remote access with multiple types of security also protects the internal environment from potential malware on an end device.

“We’ve struck the right balance between security and user comfort level with the Citrix solution,” recaps Christian Katterl. “My colleagues are very happy they can still work during this exceptional situation and have showered us with positive feedback. Our management has also recognised that we had the right strategy and the right partner. That’s why I’m convinced the work-from-home model will continue to play an important role for our company as time goes on.”

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