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Public
Sector

Case Study

Tapping into the Potential of a Remote Workforce

City of Corona works to empower government on-demand.



California's City of Corona is a full-service city southeast of Los Angeles. Corona serves over 168,000 residents with 22 departments. Each boasts a diverse portfolio of citizen services, including utilities and public safety. Corona's Information Technology (IT) Department must provide reliable and cost-effective systems to support the City's function and objectives – even through disaster or pandemic.

Southern California is prone to natural disasters, including earthquakes and forest fires. Corona sits on the Elsinore Fault Zone near the San Andreas Fault line, in wildfire territory. The City must keep citizens safe and operations strong not only in the event of an emergency but 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Business continuity is critical to providing residents a first-rate quality of life. As such, The City wanted to improve IT services to minimize disruption and improve response and user experience.

Four years ago, City departments did not have the capability or IT infrastructure to manage operations remotely. At the time, they stored data in a physical facility just two miles away. And, many departments used special applications available only on-prem. If a natural disaster damaged on-site facilities, there would be no way to access them. And if employees could no longer access resources or data, business would come to a pause.

Shortly after, this problem became a reality. A forest fire blazed near the City while the IT team was away doing business on the East Coast. IT had to run the City's emergency operations center from a remote location.

Clearly, it was time for a change.

Moving to the Cloud to Create Business Continuity

The City of Corona needed a plan for remote access to avoid future security, reliability, and continuity risks. Corona's IT Department began to develop a cloud-first strategy to give employees an application and desktop experience for success. They needed a solution that could be accessed on any device, at any time of day, or in the case of disruption.

"We knew that was one way in which we could leverage technology to create business continuity," said Chris McMasters, Chief Information Officer, City of Corona. McMasters says his priority was ensuring the solution worked for employees.

First, the City focused on migrating its servers and core infrastructure to the cloud. In February 2017, they started by using Microsoft Azure and also committed to Office 365.

"Once we secured about 80 to 90 percent of our on-premises server infrastructure and active directory into the cloud, the next logical step was to update the desktop infrastructure," explained McMasters.

In October 2018, the City piloted Citrix Workspace. The platform serves as an interface between legacy, on-prem, and SaaS systems. It includes endpoint management, content collaboration, access control, virtual apps and desktops, workspace intelligence, and analytics.

This change provided business continuity as the City worked to strengthen disaster recovery.

Still, the City needed to ensure that users remained productive while IT maintained the necessary level of security and control over user access to corporate resources. Workspace provides a high-definition virtual desktop infrastructure experience, enabling seamless workforce productivity. The solution gives employees the flexibility to work from anywhere while keeping apps and information secure.

Keeping Government Connected, Protected, and Productive

The City of Corona's modernization efforts were particularly critical through the COVID-19 pandemic. City employees needed to be able to work remotely in a secure environment.

"We were so far into the pilot that it was easy for us to turn it into a full-blown project," said Kyle Edgeworth, Deputy Chief Information Officer, City of Corona. Within the first week, the City had almost 200 users working from home, on their own devices.

“We received the stay-at-home orders on a Thursday, and by the next morning, we doubled our servers with a few clicks. We could scale as needed to reduce costs and our footprint in the cloud. What could have taken us months, literally took us hours to deploy.”

Workspace provided the flexibility for Departments to access applications securely from anywhere and maintain productivity. “The performance issues that people normally associate with remote work were completely diminished and, in fact, they performed better in some cases than when on-premises,” shared Edgeworth. And, the remote capability reduced the risk of spreading COVID-19 among employees who would typically be in the office, like the Corona Police Department.

As essential employees, detectives still have to work through the pandemic. McMasters shared the City has been cognizant of making sure frontline workers can continue their job in a safe manner and if possible, remotely.

Another department, Community Development, had concerns about continuing in-person operations in a remote environment. For example, residents who need to turn in construction plans for approval or applications for permits would need to do so online.

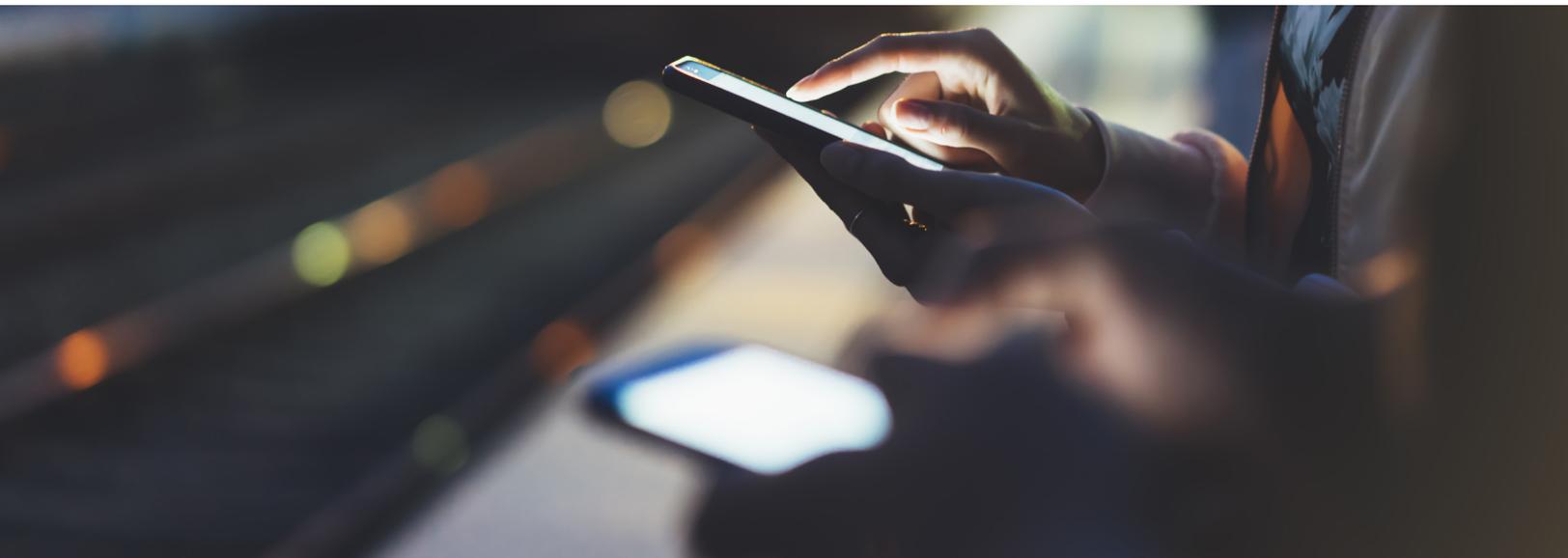
“Luckily, we did have a product in place that allowed citizens to upload documents remotely, and enabled our team to review and send back in a timely manner,” said McMasters. Further, Workspace allowed team members to access internal resources needed for these approvals.

Finally, the platform provided a way to host remote call centers. This capability allowed multiple departments—Community Development and Water and Power—to serve citizens from anywhere.

The Department of Water and Power previously used applications that were only on-premises. With the help of Citrix and Microsoft Teams, employees could still take billing, process claims, and complete other critical tasks from home.

In the process of building out the call centers, the City even created a unique center for COVID-19 calls.

“We’ve been able to keep everyone in our City employed, adding value back to the City. There was no pause in the City’s mission, and it was all because of our business continuity strategy and the ability to deploy that strategy all the way down to the desktop level.”



Harnessing Government Flexibility On-Demand

“As a city, we’re looking at the idea of government ondemand,” said Edgeworth. “Why shouldn’t we be able to tap into a workforce that works from home? We want to enable employees to do things, like process a permit for a patio extension after six in the evening, so that by five in the morning, it’s done.”

From pilot to full implementation, Corona’s IT Department learned a few lessons from building out a Citrix Workspace.

“We have seen public sector employees embrace the flexibility of a remote work schedule, and have watched productivity skyrocket,” said Edgeworth. “Employees are leveraging the new work schedule as well as Citrix Workspace to utilize virtual desktops at their cadence.”

“We’re also learning what applications are necessary for their work, and have been able to minimize application sprawl,” added Edgeworth. The IT Department did an assessment with Microsoft and found over 32,000 unique applications among employee devices. Workspace has allowed IT to understand what applications are actually required for core business. “The technology allows us to consolidate those applications that we previously had to support, into the essential ones – and to manage and upgrade when necessary.”

Building a Strong Future

McMasters’ key takeaway is for other agencies to have a plan for continuity to keep operations flowing regardless of any incident.

Key Benefits:

- Provided a plan for remote access to avoid future security, reliability, and continuity risks
- Scaled to reduce costs and footprint in the cloud
- Enabled departments to access applications securely from anywhere and maintain productivity
- Allowed departments to serve citizens remotely by providing a way to host remote call centers during COVID-19
- Minimized application sprawl

“As we reflect on how we could have improved, the answer is for IT teams to meet with public safety teams and high-level city teams, to look at how IT is affected in disruption of business continuity,” said McMasters.

The City’s IT team is producing a long-term business continuity plan that supports the City’s needs for the interim and the future.

“What we got out of this project was flexibility, allowing our employees to be able to work how and where they want,” shared Edgeworth. “And, in a time like now, the only way you can continue to not only survive but thrive in this environment, is to have a product that allows you to be that flexible, and Citrix has really done that for us.”



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