

New ways of working: what Covid-19 work from home policies have meant for large corporates such as Shoprite

Covid-19 and the pandemic's subsequent lockdowns forced the Shoprite Group, with more than 147 000 employees, to implement a work from home environment almost overnight, rapidly facilitating thousands of virtual meetings per day in order to keep operations running smoothly.

As Africa's largest food retailer, many of the Group's employees continued to report to work on shop floors around the country - but those whose jobs didn't necessitate visiting a physical store, distribution centre or office, made the change to working from home.

"Shoprite immediately made the move towards a comprehensive work from home policy as soon as government mandated it," explains David Cohn, General Manager: IT for the Group. "And it's been remarkably successful - within 3 days we enabled over 2,000 people to work from home; making new tools and resources available and increasing cyber security quite significantly.

"At last count, we have approximately **2,384** scheduled virtual meetings each day. Informal online meetings are even more popular - with more than **135 874** taking place since the start of lockdown.

"At present, over **3,700** Shoprite employees actively participate in online meetings - and the total number of virtual meetings sits at more than **124,000** for the lockdown period," says Cohn.

Implementing these changes required a comprehensive IT policy that Cohn says was complex but rewarding to integrate into daily work practices.

"As most South African businesses, we'd never considered having such a rapid and complete shift to a virtual working environment, and doing so came as a shock to the system. But, as an organisation with such an agile and resilient IT department we were more than up for the challenge," Cohn continues.

"What has been uplifting is seeing how the level of connection between our employees has remained intact. By so quickly and painlessly enabling our staff to work remotely, they've been able to carry on seamlessly.

"It's certainly not been without its challenges," says Cohn. "But employees have taken to the concept with remarkable spirit and tenacity, and together we've managed to keep the Group fully focused, ensuring seamless operation for the thousands of customers who depend on us daily."