In late 2019 and early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread across the globe. Publishers were still circulating the conference circuit and carrying on with the business of knowledge dissemination unaware and unprepared for the manner in which rising case counts would disrupt business as usual, causing slowdowns and pauses in work.

As a partner to more than 500 publishers, educational institutions, and corporates across industries, MPS brands were in the same position as before the pandemic. While emergency back-up plans or disaster recovery plans are standard operating procedures for content services organizations and platform service providers, a global stress test of this magnitude was unprecedented.

This case study examines MPS’ rapid response to pandemic challenges impacting our workforce, solutions implemented, KPIs tracked, outcomes observed, and lessons learned.

When the world witnessed the first case of COVID-19, business continued as usual due to the lack of awareness around the magnitude of the pandemic. While the world kept a close watch on the surge of cases in China, work proceeded along typical, established patterns.

At the end of January, as the spread of Coronavirus surged, many countries were still struggling to calculate the effects it would have on them. In March, many governments across the globe announced at least two weeks of full lockdown. Even before the onset of the first COVID-19 wave, MPS transitioned in March 2020 to a complete work-from-home (WFH) setup.
The arrangements were made for around **2,200 employees working across six locations in India**; these employees adopted a complete WFH environment within 72 hours. The company quickly outfitted all employees with the necessary infrastructure, such as data cards and systems at home.

**MPS** management also released work-from-home guidelines for employees allowing all employees (except minimal staff required for office maintenance) to work from home. Our IT team immediately made arrangements for the security of the network and strengthened the linkages with firewalls and VPN connectivity.

In July 2020, employees were allowed to return to the office but with restrictions. The company brought employees back into the office as per the government’s guidelines and communicated the requisite restrictions.

India was struck with the second wave of **COVID-19**. This time the effect was more severe due to the spread of the Delta variant. Employees working in India-based locations returned home for the second time, and a work-from-home policy was implemented. This time, the company was prepared, in a much more effective way, to support and facilitate the shift. The teams at **MPS** moved to **90 percent WFH** from **55 percent in April-21**.

A detailed plan was charted at the department-level. This plan assured continuous customer support and services while allowing employees a more flexible work-at-home schedule. Our **CEO, Rahul Arora**, once again showed his true mettle by implementing daily calls focused on a business continuity plan (BCP).

**BCP DISCUSSIONS WERE FOCUSED ON THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**

**PRODUCTION**
- Regular client and process level meetings with the teams.

**INFRASTRUCTURE**
- Ensure that all the resources are equipped with the necessary data cards and systems.

**EMPLOYEE**
- Solicit regular updates on the health; continuous monitoring of the infected employees as well as their families.

**LOCATION SUPPORT**
- Mobilize local human resources (HR) departments to create a supportive structure for employees.

This push for business continuity came in addition to frequent stand-up meetings run at the team level. As the situation has improved, the calls are now weekly.
COVID Measures in the Office

1. Thermal scanning of body temperature and other COVID-like symptoms at the entrance and during office hours (continuous monitoring)

2. Adopted best practices for personal hygiene; hand sanitization and cleaning of touchpoints and work stations in office premises every two hours

3. Wearing a face mask has been made mandatory

4. Teams were called on alternate days to maintain social distancing

5. Cafeteria hours were staggered

6. Opted for staggered work schedule

7. Physical meetings were replaced with virtual meetings

8. Regular communication on COVID prevention and appropriate behavior
Hiring and Recruitment

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, recruitment, hiring, and communication posed an unprecedented challenge. The blueprint was laid out and an efficient process was defined to meet all necessary guidelines for sourcing and on boarding.

The HR department opted for digital/virtual methods of evaluation for screening of candidates for hire. The onboarding process was overhauled. A virtual onboarding process was introduced where digital mediums were utilized to share personal information and conduct meetings.

Employee-Centric Initiatives

MPS Limited initiated a program to monitor employees' physical and mental wellbeing on a real-time basis that offered support as needed. The frequency of meetings between the team leads and their teams increased. Similarly, senior management also established daily connects to monitor the teams. A special support line was set up to help the employees who needed additional support.

Other engagement initiatives included online counseling and sessions on spirituality, yoga, and meditation. To spread awareness of the COVID-19 vaccination and eliminate vaccine hesitancy, the company organized webinar sessions by experienced doctors on various topics including "Awareness about COVID-19 and the Role of the Vaccination."

To keep the employee activities going and to make employees feel more connected, the HR department has continuously organized various online engagements and fun social activities. Regular communication was initiated to reduce rumors or panic due to COVID, spread awareness, and follow best practices to manage work and work from home situations.
To ensure the safety of our employees, MPS initiated a corporate vaccination program against COVID-19. Among the 2,481 employees of MPS Limited and MPS Interactive across India locations, 2053 employees are now fully vaccinated. As of January 15, 2022, nearly 85% of MPS Limited employees have received both doses of the vaccine.

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In June 2021, the Indian government announced that it will keep 75% of all vaccines made for use in India and the rest will be reserved for private hospitals. The government of India is distributing COVID vaccines for free; any eligible Indian citizen can get inoculated at government-operated healthcare centers. Meanwhile, citizens were also given the choice to get vaccinated at any private hospital by paying the price of the vaccine. Corporations and companies of any size were given the option to connect with private hospitals to conduct vaccination drives in the office or in the hospital for their employees.

Vaccination in India: Public vs Private Vaccination Model

From the CEO’s Desk

Our priorities are everyone’s welfare and to ensure MPS continues to function effectively without any disruptions to our commitments. Our business continuity plan is robust. We exhibited strength in 2020 and differentiated ourselves in the marketplace and we will carry forward the same relentless spirit in the coming months. We will relook at the WFH situation once 100% of our employees are fully vaccinated.

Rahul Arora, CEO, MPS Limited
Testimonials

“I wanted to take a few minutes to recognize the excellent work of the highly professional MPS team. In the last several months, we’ve faced many changes and unexpected issues particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We know it has been a tough time and despite all the challenges, the E2E program seems to be running smoothly and the new VCMs, even on titles they’ve taken over from someone else, are doing a good job.

I appreciate this commitment to the program and how much it has helped the program succeed in this last year and a half.”

Jennifer Ziegler, Cengage

“We were impressed at how MPS quickly adapted to the rapidly changing situation at the start of the pandemic with minimal disruption to our service throughout. Communication has been very good all the way through giving us added confidence.”

Scott Galliflent-Holmes, Royal Society of Chemistry

“I wish you and all your team a happy and healthy New Year, and thank you all for your hard work and professionalism in 2020. I’m sure it would have been extremely difficult to keep up the good service with all the problems of lockdown, but you have managed it all with no discernible difference in performance. A fantastic achievement!”

Chris Benson, IOP Publishing
“What a great way to close another year of commitment, hard work, determination, resilience, customer support and exuberance. We are very happy to let you know that we have achieved our important milestone of meeting the EW cut-off date well in advance for all the titles. Without your support, this is impossible; your team’s effort is highly appreciable. You were on-time in your responses, you were chasing us for the author queries and your continuous red flag alerts helped us to meet the delivery target. We appreciate your flexibility in accommodating our requests.”

Malini Murugeshan, ELSEVIER

“I wanted to pass on my thanks and huge appreciation to you and the rest of the books team. We published 111 books and beat our target for 2021! I am aware that the timing of the books this year was particularly challenging, which makes it all the more amazing that we made the target (even at the start of December, I did not think this would be possible).”

Liz Martin, IOP Publishing