

How Covid-19 has forced designers to reimagine the work experience

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Participating in our annual #BizTrends2021 feature, Anthony Orelowitz, director at Paragon Group, shares his insights on how Covid-19 has and will impact the future of the workplace, and how architects and designers are going to have to design buildings and workspaces that entice people back into the office. He also shares with us his top five trends for 2021.

■ **Norman Foster, founder and executive chairman of Foster + Partners, recently said that he believes the Covid-19 pandemic "will not change cities in the long term, but it could accelerate more sustainable and equitable trends". What are your thoughts on the short- and long-term impacts of Covid-19 on our cities? Do you agree with Foster's sentiments?**



Anthony Orelowitz, director at Paragon Group

Anthony Orelowitz: I agree with his sentiments. In the short term we are learning that working and meeting remotely for certain ways of working can be extremely efficient and mostly productive. It raises opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint and may give people greater opportunities with regards to establishing their own work/life balance.

On the other hand, many people's livelihoods are under extreme pressure. The fabric of the micro economy is being changed and small businesses and restaurants are failing at a rate which is unparalleled. All of this is exacerbated by our growing dependence on companies like Amazon and Takealot.

So in the short term, our cities are under immense pressure and we are going to have to adapt our ways of working and trading to meet these short-term challenges. Covid is testing our cities and it is fascinating watching how some people are adapting to meet these challenges. Unfortunately, many people will find it difficult to meet these challenges either because they or

their businesses are unable to adapt.

In the long term, however, I expect that things will normalise, however the effects of remote working will be here to stay. We are going to have to work with a new blended model of work-from-home vs working from the office. There are issues which I believe will have to be addressed in this hybrid model. We are finding that remote working inhibits the ability to mentor staff, it impedes the collective creative process, it limits the ability to grow and foster organisational culture and we are finding that some people are getting depressed by the lack of meaningful work/social connection. So these are some of the challenges we will have to deal with in the future. The resolution of these issues, however, is filled with the promise of a better quality of life for us all.

■ **What trends do you foresee Covid-19 accelerating?**

Orelowitz: The most significant long-term trend/effect of Covid is going to be issues stemming from flexible working. In the long term, we are going to have to find the balance between working from home and the office. We are going to find that our current response to Covid and working from home has many unanticipated pitfalls and that the trends of the future are going to have to address this issue.

▣ **How will Covid-19 impact the role of the architecture and design?**

Orelowitz: As architects and designers, we are going to have to design spaces which address the impact of remote working. We are going to have to design buildings and workspaces which entice people back into the office - spaces which enhance culture, connections and workflows. We are going to have to reimagine what the working experience can be. Covid has accelerated the dialogue around culture and new ways of working. This is a very exciting time to be a designer.

▣ **List for us your top five trends for 2021 in the building/interior design space.**

Orelowitz:

1. Where people can afford it, the upgrading of work from home spaces.
2. Repurposing of brownfield sites.
3. Redeveloping workspaces which are driven around communal working and lifestyle.
4. The emergence of workspaces/office furniture which augments the workspace experiences.
5. Software to drive remote working and meetings is going to become a new battle ground. Companies which can address many of the shortcomings of remote working, and there are many, will find an untapped market.

▣ **Your general outlook for 2021 – what are your expectations from the year ahead?**

Orelowitz: From an architect/developer's point of view, we are headed for an extremely difficult period. This difficulty is going to run way further than 2021 -perhaps to 2024/5. This relates primarily to the commercial, retail and hospitality sectors. One of the consequences of this is that developers are focusing on other sectors, such as more affordable residential units and student accommodation, however even these sectors have a limited capacity, so in the mid term, we could find that things get ever harder.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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